

THE SPLENDID ISOLATION OF PHYLLIS WEBB



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to the season's art and gift books
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Brian Moore, and Charles Ritchie

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Post, journalist, and broadcaster Mark Abley recently moved from England to Montreal. Drawings by Toronto artist Barbara McGill Balfour appear throughout the issue. John Bell is a freelance writer in Ottawa Bob Blackburn writes frequently about English usage in these pages. Anthony Euliano surveys the short-story scene from Superior, Wisconsin. Anne Collins also reviews books for *Maclean's*. Susan Crean is a Toronto art historian and freelance writer. Poet and freelance writer Judith Fitzgerald teaches CanLit at York University's Glendon College. George Gall is a freelance writer in Napanee, Ont. Keith Garebian is a critic and teacher in Bramalea, Ont. Terry Goldie teaches English at Memorial University. Geoff Hancock is editor of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. Douglas Hill is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. Alberto Manguel's anthology of fantastic literature is to be published shortly by Lester & Orpen Dennys. Elwin Moore is a short-story writer in Eganville, Ont. A new collection of John Oughton's poetry is to be published shortly by Mosaic Press. Eleanor Wachtel of Vancouver is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. Paul Wilson is a Toronto translator and freelance writer. Morris Wolfe teaches film history at the Ontario College of Art.

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Three-day wonders: can the world be ready for Canada's gift to literature?

A novel occasion

WHEN YOU TRY to imagine the sixth annual Three-Day Novel Writing contest, held all across Canada this Labour Day weekend, the picture that emerges is both absurd and a little awe-inspiring. Starting at Friday midnight, more than 400 people — waitresses, actors, pipe-fitters, poets, travellers, musicians, painters, journalists, seasoned novelists and novice writers, teenagers and senior citizens — were holed up in bedrooms, studies, backwoods cabins, laundromats, book stores, and hotel moms from Arnold's Cove in Newfoundland to the abandoned mining town of Cumberland on Vancouver Island, each of them writing a novel, racing against the clock to complete it before midnight on Labour Day. Some of them would give up before they finished; others, well over 200, would hand in a more or less finished piece of work in the hope of winning the grand prize — in fact the only prize in the contest: publication of their work by the main sponsors of the event, Arsenal Pulp Press in Vancouver.

The idea of writing fiction to a tight deadline first came up in a bar in Vancouver back in 1973 when book-seller Bill Hoffer and Pulp Press manager Steve Osborne challenged each other to a literary duel. One source of inspiration was Voltaire's *Candide*, possibly the first and most famous three-day novel, but the immediate goad, one suspects, was the new seal Books award, with its colossal \$50,000 prize for the best first novel. On Easter Weekend that year, the two men — the sole contestants — squared off. No winner was declared, but the idea was rolling.

Next year the event, still more or less localized in Vancouver, was shifted to Dominion Day weekend, and out of a field of eight came the first bona fide winner, Tom Walmsley's *Doctor Tin*, a racy romp through violence, perversion and nihilism that is now into a second edition and is something of an underground classic, in Toronto at least.

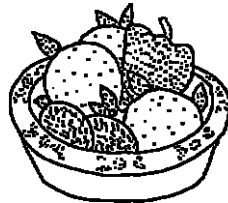
There was no winner in 1980, although a novel submitted by a young Toronto writer, Stuart Ross, called *Father, the Cowboys Are Ready to Come Down from the Attic*, was later

published with an introduction by Walmsley declaring that it should have won. That year too, the contest settled on Labour Day weekend, where it has been a fixture ever since.

Winnipeg author Bay Serwylo won in 1981 with a story called *Accordion Lessons*. A keen student of W.O. Mitchell's summer courses at Banff, Serwylo spent his three days spinning a skilfully conceived and gently written tale of a man who leads a double life and rediscovers himself by reconstructing his childhood through the accordion lessons he once took as a kid. By this time, the competition had become a national event.

Last year's winner, bp Nichol, cawed something of a crisis of conscience among the sponsors, who had come to see the event as an occasion, as they put it, to "seed new writers." Nichol, already an accomplished and widely published author, produced a polished and highly formal prose work called *Still*. In awarding him the prize, the judges felt compelled to clarify their priorities. A draft statement announcing this year's contest declared: "Still raises precisely the questions that the contest was, from the beginning, meant to raise. . . . It is a fully considered, thoughtfully designed novel and not just an excuse to get through the Labour Day weekend."

This year the contest spread its net tide. There are temporary contest headquarters in 13 book stores, at least one in each province and two in Ontario,



Quebec, and Alberta. The stores register the applicants, receive the completed manuscripts and affidavits (each entry must be accompanied by a sworn and witnessed statement that the manuscript was written within the three-day time limit), and then sift through the entries, forwarding a short list to Vancouver, where a final winner is chosen by a jury representing a wide cross-section of taste and literary experience. No runners-up

are chosen, but no one has ever complained. The real prize, evidently, is the manuscript itself.

When the contest was well into its first day, I phoned selected locations across the country to see how the event was proceeding. At Octopus Books East in Vancouver, there was a great deal of excitement in the background as I talked to Frances Eger, an active promoter of the event and herself a contestant. Eger was writing at a table set up outside the store (as she had the year before) and said that although she usually writes in the seclusion of her home, she found the street stimulating. "I pick up a lot from the environment as I write," she said. "Last year, passers-by would stop and ask me what I was doing, and I'd get them to help me with certain problems that arose. It's a beautiful thing."

Out in St. John's things were slow. Winston Wayne of Macy's Books said he hadn't received the publicity material until it was too late to do anything about it, and it was only after a TV appearance by bp Nichol that 13 people registered. When it was over, only four completed manuscripts were submitted from the Rack, a slightly higher attrition rate than the national average, which is about 50 per cent.

Saskatchewan had only one contestant. When I asked Louise McCartney, who helps run Brian's Books in Saskatoon, why that was, she echoed Wayne's complaint: that there had been a lot of interest but too little promotion. The only entrant she knew about for sure was her own grandson, Andrew Middleton, who is "12 going on 35," and Andrew had registered in Alberta, where he lives. Andrew spends each summer helping his grandparents out in the book store. His imagination was fired when he saw a flyer advertising the contest, and for several weeks before the contest he filled scribbler after scribbler with notes, since contestants are advised to prepare an outline beforehand. It wasn't hard to get to the bottom of young Andrew's interest in writing. "Of all the toys a grandmother could provide for a boy to play with," Mrs. McCartney said, "you can't beat a book store."

Partly because of Serwylo's win, Manitoba has become an enthusiastic

three-day novel-writing centre. This year there were more than 30 entrants, and Sig Laser, who is paid coordinator of Liberation Books in Winnipeg ("serious academic backlists, Canadiana, and a strong feminist section") told me, over the vociferous protests of a four-month old baby, that the contest brings out "all kinds of interesting, underclass, underground writers." He has seen it change from an "off-the-wall event" to a serious literary competition. "If you look at the winners, they show a form that you might say is unique to the three-day novel. There's a white-heat quality to them. They're not just formless stream-of-consciousness and it's obvious that the winners had a conception." Laser has taken to holding a party at his store at midnight on the closing day of the contest, serving beer, coffee, and pizza and "giving the lunatics a chance to get together: In an effort to steer contestants away from the more frivolous or perverse approaches that the contest sometimes inspires, Liberation Books is also offering a special award called the Emile Zola Prize to the best effort at realism from Manitoba entrants.

In Toronto contest headquarters are located in a book store called This Ain't The Rosedale Library on Queen Street

East. Proprietor Charlie Huisken specializes in small-press books and baseball literature., and is one of the contest's longest standing boosters. This year there were 75 entrants from Toronto, and the contests produced about 35 manuscripts, including an illustrated manuscript by poet Robert Zend and a "post-Calvino mystical meditation" barely 15 pages long. Like Sig Laser, Huisken believes that a definite "esthetic" is emerging, in which innovation is a prime factor. "Anything that goes for formula is oat. And then the novels have to have — what's the noun from 'sustain'? — sustenance? Actually, that's a good word for it. A lot of them start off flashy and bold, and then about three-quarters of the way through the contestant panics. Some are consistently written, but the premise they start with is just not interesting enough."

For everyone involved, the heart of the event is still the act of creation. On a cross-country journey to promote the contest, bp Nichol discovered that while many people found it hard to treat the event as much more than an inspired joke, writers had no difficulty taking it seriously. For Nichol, writing a three-day novel was an occasion to continue his own explorations into the notion of inspiration, which he has come to

believe is a matter of getting oneself into a state of mind appropriate to writing, rather than waiting for the Muse to descend. "Conceptually," he says, "writing a three-day novel is not much different from improvising a piece of music, and if a musical performance is a legitimate work of art, there's no reason why a piece of writing produced under similar circumstances shouldn't be treated just as seriously."

The Three-Day Novel Writing contest appears to have a great future ahead of it. Each year, the number of contestants increases geometrically, and more and more areas of the country and sections of the population are drawn into its orbit. A big breakthrough this year came when two novels were submitted in French (they were not, disappointingly, from francophone Canadians but from two Parisian writers on their way through Vancouver to South America) and in New York recently, Frances Eger discovered publishers who were surprised, fascinated, and eager to distribute the winners and promote the idea. Next year, she says, there will probably be branch-plant events in New York, and possibly Atlanta and Seattle. The three-day novel may yet become Canada's gift to the world.

— PAUL WILSON

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Sunrise in Guelph

THE COMMONWEALTH is not the most pressing matter in the lives of most people. At best it seems an exercise in nostalgia, a memory of the days of Empire when the sun never set on all those pink blotches on the map. But there are a few people for whom the Commonwealth is very much a living thing. And not just your geriatric monarchists either. In each country of the English-speaking, ex-colonial world, there are writers and critics who are anxious to see their national literatures in larger, comparative contexts.

Thus the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS), which recently held their sixth triennial conference at the University of Guelph. Since the last such meeting was held at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, Guelph might seem to the average Canadian mind a rather dull choice, but more than 150 people found enough attractions to draw them from around the world.

One surprise for anyone attending would be the relatively small number of critics of Canadian literature. Those

who know only Australian or Sri Lankan literature don't seem to have much problem with placing themselves in the Commonwealth context, but Canadians do. I would guess that the vast majority of Canadians at the conference were not Canadianists but academics who originally emigrated to Canada from another Commonwealth country and have maintained their interest in their native literatures.

But when a local did deign to attend he found it quite exciting. One Canadianist new to the Commonwealth context was Gerry Noonan. The paper he delivered was about as down-home as you can get in that its subject was that epitome of southern Ontario, Alice Munro. And although he admitted that one of his primary reasons for attendance at the conference was its proximity to his own campus at Sir Wilfrid Laurier, by the time he talked to me at the closing banquet he had become a believer. He was fascinated by the way other "new literatures in English" reflected the Canadian experience. And he was more than ready to venture further afield to get to another Commonwealth gathering in the future.

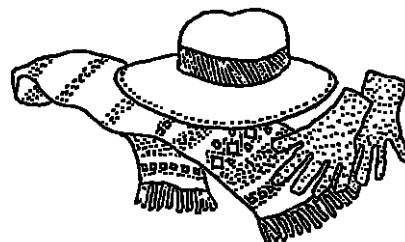
The use of a term like "believer" seems quiet appropriate in this context, as can be seen in the words of another attendant. Michele Leggott is a New Zealander now writing her doctoral dissertation on American poetry at the University of British Columbia. But she retains enough interest in her home literature to pay her own way to the conference and give a paper on New Zealand poetry in the 1980s. She told me that the whole experience was worth both the time and money. As she laughingly expressed it, "I've reasserted my devotion to the cause."

It begins to sound a bit like an evangelical meeting. And at times that wasn't far off. At the final session, in which the presidents of the association's regional executives provided their wrap-ups, one of them, another New Zealander, Peter Simpson of the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, strayed a bit into autobiography. He told the audience that this conference represented a return for him. Many years before he had come to the University of Toronto to study "the Great Tradition." Then when he took a job at Carleton University he came into contact with people like Robin Mathews, who were extolling the virtues of Canadian literature with messianic zeal. When he went back to New Zealand he applied what he had learned to his colleagues and students, one of whom was Leggott. The torch passes on.

Another comment at the final session came from Anna Rutherford, an ex-

patriate Australian who teaches at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. She is editor of *Kunapipi*, one of the major journals of Commonwealth literature, and also a publisher with Dangaroo Press. Her call was to the academics to take more notice of the younger writers in their presentations. This reflects her own practice, as *Kunapipi* divides its space quite evenly between critical and creative writing, with most of the latter devoted to new writers.

But her comment represents much



more than personal preference. At Canadian literature conferences the writers are the objects of study but are seldom a real part of the action. They come in and do their readings, carefully selected, almost like the floor show. At Commonwealth gatherings, however, relationships are never so circumspect. The Guelph conference presented five group readings, two in Guelph and three at Harbourfront in Toronto. Each had as many as 10 writers participating. As well, there were many individual readings.

Somehow the Commonwealth people seem to have developed the idea that writers are just as important as academics. In a number of cases, of course, they are both, as in the splendid examples of the West Indian, John Figueroa, and the Australian, Judith Rodriguez. But most are more "pure" creative writers. But then again perhaps a bit less "pure" than we are used to. Poets and novelists seemed as involved in the non-reading side of the conference as were the academics. The West Indian writers, Michael Anthony and Sam Selvon, were a constant presence, often voicing their concerns. Selvon, now living in Calgary, spoke at length in one session on Canada's failure to recognize its own black writers.

But similarly faithful were the Australian-Canadian novelist Janette Turner Hospital, author of *The Ivory Swing*, and the Australian novelist Chris Koch, author of *The Year of Living Dangerously*. They seldom spoke out in sessions but were always there. When I asked why, their answers were simple and even off-hand: they came to the papers that seemed interesting. But there must somehow be more. At a Common-

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wealth conference in Montreal a few years ago Margaret Laurence and Rudy Wiebe were similarly there. It's as if "we're all in it together."

Some would make that "all" even larger. John Agard, a Guyanese poet now living in Britain, gave a wonderful performance in Guelph one evening of his rhythmic, dancing recitations to steel band accompaniment. Thea the next day at a session he presented his other hat when he called for more librarians at such conferences: "After all," he said, "it is they who push the books."

Cynics see Commonwealth Conferences as mainly an excuse for nationalists to get outside the country. And it must be admitted that while Guelph itself may not have been a major attraction for the academic explorers, that does not mean they had no touristic inclinations. Most seemed to be getting at least a brief look at Niagara Falls. And then there were the extraneous joys at the conference itself, elements like a barbecue with steel band, organized by the creative team of Doug Killam, chairman of ACLALS and of the Guelph

English Department; Leslie Monkman, a professor in the department and vice chairman of ACLALS; and their ubiquitous administrative assistant, Ruth Happy.

Yet there really is an important substance behind it all that ties things together when on the surface there seems to be so little in common. Two white South African academics, Michael Green and Ian Steadman, gave highly politicized, anti-racist papers about the literature of their country. It would seem that there could be little connection between their efforts and those of a Canadian researching the image of the beaver in 19th-century poetry. But they drew a large, disparate, and highly interested audience. Far beyond the usual concerns of academic politics and publish-or-perish, the participants at Guelph all seemed to know what they were there for. All were trying to make sense of the racism, language difficulties, and the general cultural conflicts of living in an ex-colonial world. Fijians and Kenyans, scholars and poets, they are all part of the cause.

-TERRY GOLDIE

expect anyone else to be able to?

Whether by coincidence or as the result of some conspiracy, two of the people who asked for a persuade-convince encore also requested some thoughts on the confusion of may and might. My thoughts are that it is a subject that terrifies me, and that I'd rather eat broccoli than attempt to deal with this. Many people have difficulty enough with may and can, despite the fact that grad&school teachers drum the simple distinction into generation after generation of ears: can has to do with the ability or power to do something; may involves permission. to do it. (Historically, may once meant what can now means under this rule, but for God's sake don't tell anybody anything about that!)

There is no easy distinction between may and might. There is a simple grammatical distinction — might is the past tense of may — but that's really not all you need to know. It tells you that the correct construction would be, "Yesterday I thought I might kill myself; today I think I may not." But if you ask me, "Are you going to the hockey game tonight?" I may say "I might go," or I might say "I may go," or I might (or may) tell you to mind your own business. Were you to repeat the question, I might (but definitely not may) give you a civil answer. Think about it.

Sometimes the two words can be interchanged with no loss of clarity; sometimes not. Eugene Forsey, that grand and tireless champion of pmpw usage, wrote the Globe and Mail au irate letter about a report on an airline disaster. The reporter had written that a certain safety measure "may have saved hundreds of lives." That implied that hundreds of lives were saved by the measure, when, in fact, no lives were saved. Some might have been, had the measure been implemented, but it was not.

In other constructions, it's good to bear in mind that may suggests a greater degree of possibility than does might. It's not much help to go to the dictionary with this problem. A sense of idiom is what's needed, and the writer who does not have that might (or even may) be well advised to seek other employment.

May I suggest something to titers faced simultaneously by such quandaries and by imminent deadlines? There is more than one way to skin a cat. For example, most writers of the past decade or so, cowed by the feminist movement, have been driven to such abominations as: "If a person wants to do something badly, they will find a way." Well, I suggest that anyone who wants to do something well will find a way.

There, kids, wasn't that easy? □

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Friendly persuasions: I may do this;
then again, I might do that. I won't say I will
until you convince me you're right

By BOB BLACKBURN

*I wish I may,
I wish I might,
Have the wish
I wish tonight.*

THAT WISH is that people will stop trying to persuade me to discuss may and might, because I am convinced that there is no more point in discussing may and might than there is in discussing persuade and convince.

I don't know the origin of the bit of doggerel that concludes with those lines, but it's apparent that the petitioner is an experienced wheedler who knows enough to touch all the bases. It's a common trick. If you don't know which of two words is the appropriate one, use them both. You just might get your meaning across.

Winston Churchill, discussing how the war-time policies of Roosevelt and Stalin differed from his, wrote: "They could order; I had to convince and persuade." Theodore Bernstein uses this

quotation in *The Careful Writer* after a brief tussle with the problem. It helps.

Bernstein writes: "Convince has the meaning of to satisfy beyond doubt by argument or evidence appealing to the reason. Persuade has the meaning of to induce or win over by argument or entreaty appealing to the reason and feeling." He points out that persuade implies a shift of position and the probability of action to come; convince does not. Human nature being what it is, I might convince you that my advice is right but fail, nevertheless, to persuade you to follow it. Churchill was not touching bases; he was using both words precisely. Both were needed;

People say "I persuaded him that I was right" and "I convinced him to do as I do." Both uses are wrong. This matter has been dealt with in the space previously, but I've been asked to reopen it. And since I can't remember what I said the first time, how can I

INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY

Once threatened by 'the terrible abyss of despair,' Phyllis Webb has moved beyond mysticism and anarchy to a curiously domestic isolation

By ELEANOR WACHTEL

Neither do I want happiness without vision. ("I Daniel")

LAST YEAR, when Phyllis Webb's new book of poetry, *Wilson's Bowl*, did not win a Governor General's Award, was not even nominated, a group calling itself the Writers' Network, spearheaded by Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, bp Nichol, and P.K. Page, sent Webb a cheque for 82,300, a bouquet of flowers, and a card: "All of us felt that your poetry has meant a great deal to us. . . [and] continues to move us and surprise us with its heart and craft. We want to emphasize that this gesture is a response to your whole body of work as well as to your presence as a touchstone of true, good writing in Canada, which we all know is beyond awards and prizes." This year, in what could be called a fitting anticlimax, she was given the Governor General's Award for a selection of her poetry, *The Vision Tree*.

Phyllis Webb is standing in a drizzling rain in front of La Québécoise Restaurant in Vancouver. Grey hair cut modishly short in front, tucked into a ponytail at her neck, she looks elegant in tweeds — sweater and skirt — and dark boots. There's an impression of textures — silver jewellery nestled amidst layers of wool. She's in town to buy a rain cape.



Phyllis Webb

something with flair, and presents for friends whose birthdays cluster in September: "All these Virgos."

Sliding into a booth, she breathes, "I need a cigarette." She finds her lighter. "Do you mind if I smoke?" she asks, smiling at the perfunctory politeness and hedges, "Sometimes I don't, if it bothers people." Webb is teaching creative writing one day a week now at the University of Victoria, an easy commute from her Salt Spring Island home, "but mainly I've been having anxiety attacks and panics." When the Governor General's Award has proven troubling. "Success is very threatening to me, and to a lot of women. When it hits, you're really scored that (a) I didn't deserve it, and (b) now they'll get me." She laughs at her discomfort. "When I was made executive producer of CBC's *Ideas* in the '60s and got a \$1,000 raise, I went into a severe depression. Then I read an article in *Time* that this was quite a normal reaction. Pathetic, isn't it, that

women aren't taught how to handle success."

The summer has been less productive than she'd hoped. After more than 30 years of writing some of the finest and most individual poetry in the country, she still feels apologetic about her output, impatient with her own intimately understood pace. "I feel such a phony as a writer sometimes, because I don't have the professional discipline to churn out all the time, but that's because I'm a pressure-cooker writer. I have to let the psychic pressure build up until it's almost unbearable — which is what it is now." She writes quickly, in bursts, after long silences. "The artist must totally possess his subject, even if it has to be cycled and recycled through years of apparent meaninglessness," she said in a radio script on Proust in 1970. "The psychic alarm clock has its own tick and its own tock. It will go off in its own sweet time." Although this is a fallow period, Webb is perhaps more productive than she herself acknowledges, especially as she moves increasingly away from a preoccupation with delineating loss and toward subjects that are essentially more nourishing to the creative self.

PHYLLIS WEBB was born in Victoria, besides the sea, on April 8, 1927. An Aries. "Fiery, difficult," she declaims in her husky, poetic voice. "Aries

like to be in the spotlight. We're a bit bossy. Supposed to be creative and" — in a hush — "sensitive. It's a hard sign," she says twice. "But astrologers just tell you what you already know about yourself." There's a sense that she does know. Difficult, but not self-deluding.

The family moved to Vancouver briefly, when Phyllis was seven, a time when her parents decided to divorce. Back again to Victoria, where Phyllis and two older brothers were raised by her mother. After elementary school, she was sent to St. Margaret's Girls' School — a mixed experience. "I had a terrifying teacher who hated me in math, because I couldn't do it, and loved me in English. I went to doctors with psychosomatic ulcer symptoms — I had emotional blocks — but she was a good teacher who helped me. I don't think I would have made it at a regular school." She won the history prize when she graduated, though she coveted the English prize. "but I always

PHOTOGRAPH, INCLUDING COVER, BY ELEANOR WACHTEL

felt inadequate, stupid, inferior. There was always some subject that baffled me, like science."

It was at St. Margaret's that she came to love poetry and to write her own for school magazines. "I guess the unconscious subject matter was junior erotica. I've never gotten around to senior erotica," she says. "I'm a chaste writer really." She never thought of poetry as a vocation — or, for a while, of any future.

"I began being suicidal in my early teens." She stops. "I don't suppose we want any more of Phyllis Webb's suicidal obsessions. It's been done." Because of her extensive psychiatric experience over the years, Webb is quite candid about this; she can talk about herself as a case, because that isn't where her vulnerability lies. Certainly critics have treated her as a suicidal poet, a "goddess of gloom." But what hasn't yet been "done," or at least done justice in the mass media, is a clear distinction between the poet and her work. Webb's poetic persona is a construct, an artifact of her own making which, in its craft, shows just how much the writing has always been controlled and intellectual. Dark passion and explosive ideas are there, but it is an erudite intelligence that reveals them. A poet's poet, she assumes a literate audience.

From the first, Webb wrote about "big" themes — time, love, death, entropy, history — often expressed in extremes or paradox reminiscent of the complex verbal precision of the metaphysical poets. Her images evoked an exterior landscape of the sea, sky, stones, matched by an interior one of brittle glass, bones, and nakedness.

*The glass castle is my image for the mind
that if outmoded has its public beauty*
("The Glass Castle")

Permeating much of the work was a consciousness of pain and futility, and a relentless questioning of life's purpose.

*Oh, my darling, tell me, what can love mean in such a world,
and what can we or any lovers hold in this immensity
of hate and broken things?*

("And la Our Time")

*Knowing that everything is wrong,
how can we go on giving birth
either to poems or the troublesome lie,
to children, most of all, who sense
the stress in our distracted wonder
the instant of their entry with their cry?*

("Lament")

*What are we whole or beautiful or good for
but to be absolutely broken?*

("Breaking")

Bleak questions — but her asking of them is an affirmation of a philosophic as well as poetic stance, a commitment to probing as something of an answer in itself. Suicide, from this perspective, was simply one of the subjects she meditated on. Reviewers dismissed her world/work (the two were equated) as solipsistic and self-indulgent. Even a champion of her poetry, John Hulcoop, editor of her first *Selected Poems 1954-1965*, talked about purple rhetoric and self-pity. But most devastating to Webb was a cruel 25-page attack by John Bentley *Mays* in *Open Letter* in 1973. The string of vicious epithets — vain, distorted by lusts, a writer of tacky theatricality — formed the core of Frank Davey's more damaging (because more widely circulated) depiction of Webb in *From Here to There* (1974) as utterly desolate, despairing, despondent.

To label the poetry, like the poet, neurotic is simplistic and one-sided, because it ignores a steady current of humour, self-mockery, and bony. The famous "To Friends Who Have Also Considered Suicide" is drenched in wit:

*It's still a good idea.
Its exercise is discipline:*

*to remember to cross the street without looking,
to remember not to jump when the cars side-swipe,
to remember not to bother to have clothes cleaned,
to remember not to eat or want to eat, . . .
And consider the drama! It's better than a whole season
at Stratford . . .*

To hold the possibility of death in your mind is to make you value what is. The sense of mortality is what imparts the liveliness.

Webb was always acutely conscious of her persona and prepared to Rout it — to mock not death but morbiidity.

*I am sorry to speak of death again
(some say I'll have a long life)*
("Poetics Against the Angel of Death")

*I have given up
complaining*

*but nobody
notices*

("Naked Poems")

*So Ice Virgin, Stone Angel, Paralyzed Artist
and repentant Hecate (I deceive you only a little) got off her couch
and wrote some 'Letters to Margaret Atwood from Phyllis Webb.'*
("Letters to Margaret Atwood")

Like Atwood, Webb hasn't flinched from taking a hard look at reality and then writing about it. She didn't invent the world she describes, nor does she take personal credit for death.

*The poet in his tree of hell
will see life steadily and see it well.*

("Two Versions: In Situ")

But this vision has had a high price. "The way I dealt with depression was to think about the meaning of life and I could never find any. That became a major problem" — her voice flattens with boredom — "so I've had many psychiatrists."

*The error lies in
the state of desire
In wanting the answers*

("A Question of Questions")

It wasn't until the mid-1970s, when some physiological symptoms (hypoglycemia, thyroid) were diagnosed and treated, that "the terrible abyss of despair" receded. When friend and former UBC colleague Jane Rule first knew her in the late 1950s, "the pressure on Phyllis — physical and psychological — was so intense that I think a person with less profound will and courage would either have died of it or would have tried to live away from the demands of being a poet, to simply have decided that the creative strain was more than the body or the temperament could bear." But Rule rejects the image of a fragile Phyllis Webb as "phony." "She's been dealt with much more as a poet of mood than she should be. Her psychiatric stance is accessible and makes popular reading."

Following her medical recovery, Webb described herself as much changed. "I have inner personal buoyancy I never had before and a kind of solidity that I could never count on. It's allowed me more freedom in the poetry, to flash around, out of a different personality. It's a much more cheerful, jolly personality; I can be pleasant almost on demand." Webb sighs loudly. "It's a social achievement, useful for getting around in the world, but it's superficial, it doesn't present a very whole person." Intellectually, Webb is no less a pessimist than ever. "especially about the world. I have a very apocalyptic view of life in the 20th century."

PHYLLIS WEBB was 18 when the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A student of English and philosophy at the University of British Columbia, on the fringe of Earle

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Birney's off-campus writing group, she became so politicized that the yearbook predicted she would be the first female prime minister of Canada (and, given the times, that she'd put chintz curtains in the House of Commons). At 22, when she ran for the CCF for provincial office, she became the youngest candidate in the Commonwealth. ("I was naive enough to think that maybe I could do something.") She lost, but a political thread runs through her work. She's written about Treblinka and Eichmann, bomb shelters and Three Mile Island, Chile and Chad, Jacobo Timerman and Iraq.

The motif of prison and prisoner is a natural metaphor for someone who has felt imprisoned herself, has felt that there is something locked inside that can't get out. So alongside her support of the anti-nuclear movement ("I didn't wear my 'cat-lovers against-the-bomb' button today") is a long-time interest in civil liberties and, more recently, work with Amnesty International. "I decided early on that this was not an indulgence of my masochism. This was to overcome my masochism. I've learnt how to surmount the horror. My hope was that I'd never write another prison poem" - she pauses - "and then I wrote Timerman." She'd met him in Toronto at the Writer and Human Rights conference in 1981 and concluded that Amnesty could be effective. "I thought, I'm doing something about it, not just feeling about it. I'm doing something very small, tiny, but it has nothing to do with my ego or the literary life. Also, the old assuagement of guilt. It's an archetypal thing. It was wry healthy forma and terribly terribly gruelling. But it's a new stage in my development. I'm an unliberated person, and that's the analogue for it."

The eye of Jacobo Timerman looks through the hole and sees another eye looking through a hole.

...
*An eye, a nose, a cheek resting against a steel door
In the middle of the dark night.*

*These are parts of bodies, parts of speech,
saying,
I am with you.*

("Prison Report")

In 1950, Webb moved to Montreal as a part-time secretary, student, and poet. The writing circle that revolved around the literary magazines and such poets as F.R. Scott, Louis Dudek, John Sutherland, A.J.M. Smith, Eli Mandel, Irving Layton, and the young Leonard Cohen accepted her into their ranks. Their impact was profound. For the first time, Webb understood how literature, and poetry in particular, mattered in people's lives. It sat her course, locating her in her time as a contemporary writer. "Frank Scott influenced my life enormously. He was a socialist when I was. he had a broad knowledge - a Renaissance man they used to call him." Dudek's Contact Press published Webb's first work in a collection (with Eli Mandel and Gael Turnbull) called Trio. Layton was characteristically ebullient. He wrote "For Phyllis Who Snatched Her Poem in Anger." which begins: "What, Phyllis, what, what - /You show me the Muse and her naked twat." Webb recites this in mock heroic style. It used to embarrass her terribly, but now it's amusing.

As her interest in the CCF declined, her attraction to Buddhism increased. "I actually made this real decision about whether or not to become a Buddhist. I was living on University Avenue, in an awful, beastly room. I read Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, which produced the need for a decision. I concluded that I was too much a North American, that I really believed in conflict and suffering for growth. I was too much of a materialist - the rational, socialist world brought me back." But Buddhist ideas continue to surface in her work and in her life, her need to withdraw from the world. "It's an attitude of transcendence and trying to rise above."

*The degree of nothingness
is important:*

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*to sit empty
in the sun
receiving fire
that is the way
to mend
an extraordinary world
sitting perfectly
still
and only
remotely human.*

(“Sitting”)

In the mid-1950s Webb won a government overseas award and lived in London and Paris — around the corner from Jean-Paul Sartre, whom she would spot at les Deux Magots. The stay abroad was a symbolic move too; in response to a kinship she felt with the European philosophers who'd had so much influence on her thinking. Allusions to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Rilke infiltrate her work. Paris reinforced her sense of “intuitive existentialism.” During this time Even Your Right Eye (1956) and The Sea Is Also a Garden (1962) were published. In 1959 she returned to Canada to write for the CBC and teach at UBC. Eventually the radio work expanded, until in the mid-1960s she moved to Toronto to take up a full-time job in the CBC's public affairs department.

The Naked Poems were just being completed, marking a bold move toward imagist simplicity. The poems were arranged on the page by the book's printer, artist Takao Tanabe.

*The sun comes through
plum curtains.*

*I said
the sun is gold
in your eyes.*

*It isn't the sun
you said.*

In Toronto Webb hosted a television series, interviewing 26 Canadian poets in all. As executive producer of Ideas she researched and “used” R.D. Laing, Paul Goodman, a range of thinkers she eventually wrote about. She began work on a book “with great long lines — great long poems” that were to become The Kropotkin Poems. However, during five years at the CBC she managed to write almost nothing. Midway in this period, in 1967, she took six months' leave and retreated to Salt Spring Island for the first time. Thea, like Rilke — a lifelong model of the literary quest — she visited Russia. It was the 50th anniversary of the revolution, and where Rilke returned with verse-meditations of a Russian monk (The Book of Hours), Webb investigated Kropotkin's anarchist utopia.

*Away from everything, alone with a road
map of Salt Spring Island
I drive spitting dust with a map.
of the U.S.S.R. In my head. Too big
for my head. . . .*

*Back home in front of the fireplace I wonder
Russia, Suicide or France? I am aware.
Darkness pulls over the islands.
Russia, Suicide or France. Islands, places
on a map. Nowhere.*

(“Poems of Failure” v)

“SALT SPRING ISLAND on the west coast is a good place for stargazing and navel-gazing,” Webb wrote in Maclean's in 1971, “a nice shy corner of the universe which doesn't clamour for recognition or glory. A good place, maybe, for getting a perspective on life and times.” Phyllis Webb resigned from the CBC in 1969 and moved to Salt Spring the next year. Her house faces south on Morningside Road, overlooking Fulford Harbour and the ferry that shuttles to Vancouver Island.

Webb is outside on the porch, cajoling a delicately veined flowering maple into erectness. She wears green velvet pants and purple turtleneck under a multi-coloured jerkin. There are

flowers everywhere, inside and out. tomatoes ripening on the windowsill of the sunlit litchen. The wicker-topped table is positioned between two windows — one looking out on the garden and the other facing the harbour, toward which Webb gestures with long expressive fingers when referring to her Victoria childhood.

Lunch is a shrimp salad with butter lettuce, artichokes, and avocados. For dessert, homemade plum tart with yogurt. I remind her of a late '50s newspaper story that talked about how she could "tutu out a well-seasoned dish with no effort at all." Pictured like Audrey Hepburn, she was described as a feline, Egyptian goddess: "She handles her wardrobe like her adjectives, with great discrimination." (Articles in the early '70s dubbed her everything from Mother Courage to a medieval wanderer.) Webb seems to invite exotic speculation. She's wearing a Mexican ring that she originally bought for her mother; it is a frog holding a tiny compass. "I should be able to know where I am," she laughs.

She sits facing the water. Her cats, Leo and Isobel, pad in and out of the kitchen in the course of the afternoon. She feels, if not exactly comfortable, then at home. "I'm profoundly drawn to this environment. I think the landscape and seascape are very important to me — it sounds very corny, but the fact that things grow here all year around. There's always something popping up — violet or primrose — and the shades of green are so varied. I think that because I don't have any deep personal connections, my connection with the earth is really quite profound, and that's why I don't want an urban landscape any more. This nourishes me and somehow keeps me here. I really depend on beauty."

The quiet of the island, attention to its night sounds, have sharpened her natural gifts, her ear for rhythm and lyricism. When she returned to Vancouver, she found its cacophony dreadful; it forced her to blunt her perceptions.

Like Rilke, Webb sees parallels between the poetic search and a religious search. The poetry will lead her to the way to live her life; it's a paradigm of a religious life, a spiritual adventure. In early poems, this was depicted almost literally:

*I am promised
I have taken the veil
I have made my obeisances
I have walked on words of nails
to knock on silences*

("Poet")

Then Christian mysticism and Buddhism provided metaphors for poetic expression. Now she feels it's time to pullback again and retreat. "Hard times are a-coming and I have to go deeper. I can't do that the way I'm living now, but I'm not sure how." Despite the rural setting she feels to be impinged upon by the world.

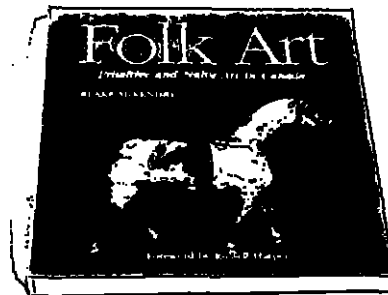
*... But you had to leave
everyone once, one at least. That was your
hardness*

("Rilke")

Religion as other than symbol holds no further interest. "My antagonism toward conventional religious of all kinds is focused on the patriarchal structure. I don't want to become more involved with that, thank you. I want to become less involved. The Kropotkin utopia enchanted me for a while until I saw that was yet another male imaginative structure for a new society. It would probably not have changed male-female relations."

Webb says she has been an "intuitive feminist" since the 1950s. Early on, she rejected marriage as an oppressive institution, was appalled by the notion of giving up her name or identity, and quickly realized that she would have to make her own way in the world. "But I never questioned the patriarchal order when I was at the beginning of my writing life. I was surrounded by all these super-brilliant men and they allowed me

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in. It didn't feel sexist at the time. But now when I look back on the way that the history of Canadian literature has been written, it's been documented mainly by Prank Scott and A.J.M. Smith themselves and they have created their own little history." She acknowledges that her own search for mentors led her naturally to men. "I lost my father through divorce at an early age so I gravitated to men, to fatherly figures."

Enhanced consciousness came in the '70s when Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* expanded Webb's social analysis from a Marxist-anarchist perspective to a feminist one. The subversive position of women everywhere was suddenly manifestly clear. This occurred at a time when Webb lost the inspiration to write the long-lined Kropotkin poems — a "failure" that John Hulcoop ascribes to her emerging feminist thinking, "the most important political event in Phyllis' life." In Webb's essay "On the Line" (in *Talking*) she writes: "The long line (in English) is aggressive, with much 'voice.' Assertive, at least. It comes from assurance . . . big-mouthed Whitman, yawp, yawp, and Ginsberg — howling. Male..". On the contrary, regarding Dickinson:

— Emily — those gasps, those inarticulate dashes — those incitements — hiding what unspeakable — foul breath? But not revolting; subversive. Female. Hiding yourself — Emily — no, compressing yourself, even singing yourself — tinnily — with compacted passion — a violet storm —

In the foreword to *Wilson's Bowl*, Webb apologizes for the prevalence of male figures. "They signify the domination of a male power culture in my educational formation so overpowering that I have, up to now, been denied access to inspiration from the female figures of my intellectual life, my heart, my imagination." These unwritten poems about women are "the real 'poems of failure.'"

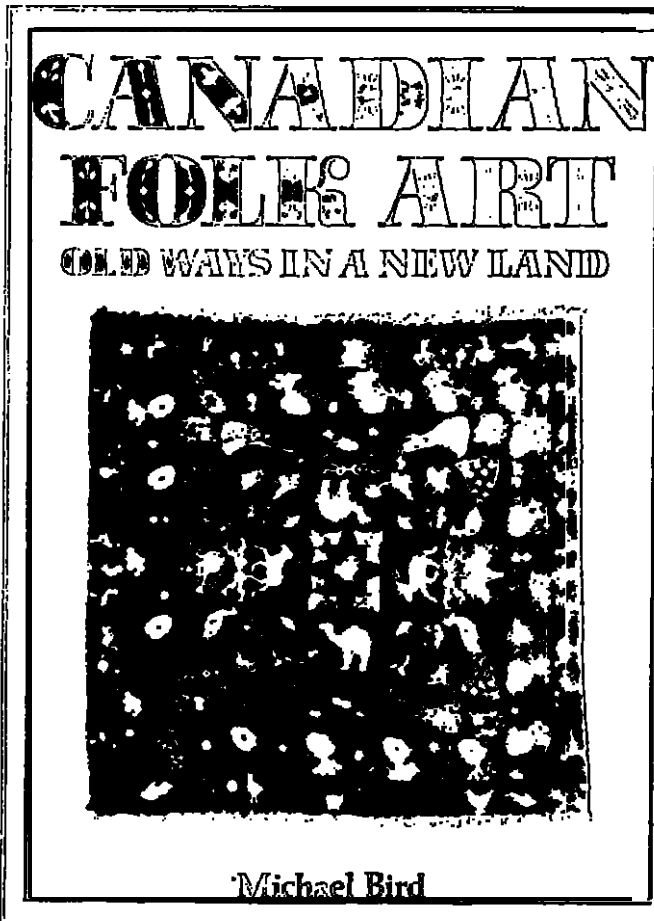
Webb spoke about the Muse at last July's Women and

Words conference in Vancouver. According to Robert Graves, the Muse is anti-domestic, the perpetual "other woman." "Right away," remarked Webb, "you can see the problem she poses to the contemporary woman poet/writer, who herself may be anti-domestic, even 'the other woman,' . . . the angel/devil who refuses to live in the house."

Curiously, Webb has become somewhat more domestic recently, admitting more of the local and the daily into her writing. After the 15-year hiatus between *Naked Poems* and *Wilson's Bowl*, last year Webb produced not only her award-winning selected poems and the prose collection, *Talking*, but also a small, self-contained book in a new form. *Sunday Water: Thirteen Anti-Ghazals* (and seven more in a recent issue of *The Malahat Review*).

The ghazal is an ancient Persian love song usually written in a series of five couplets that are not necessarily logically connected. The poem is not a narrative, but it has an internal order that subverts logic to produce a poetic effect. Webb discovered John Thompson's ghazals and decided to adapt them to her own purposes. "I wanted something to subvert my own rational mind, to get more free flow of images and a little wilder in content, to liberate my psyche a bit." Webb mastered the form very quickly and often deliberately broke with it. Writing anti-ghazals, not only in terms of the range of subjects, which include the Salt Spring Fall Fair and friendly neighbours, but also defying the form itself. "I think they're a transitional thing for me. A little bit superficial perhaps. Before I go into the cave again for the big spiritual staff."

It began as an exercise. Webb would sit at her kitchen table every morning to work, writing the poems on fde cards. She pulls out a green plastic recipe box, her ghazal box, to show me the drafts paperclipped together. Hulcoop sees the ghazals as



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freeing Webb to be *herself* rather than the ambiguous poet, to discover new significance in a domestic world she was afraid of being trapped in because it was feminine.

*The women writers, their heads bent under the light,
work: late at their kitchen tables.*

*Winter breathes in the wings of the last hummingbird.
I have lost my passion, I am Ms. Prufrock.*

"I was thinking today, why do I write here? It's the brightest room for writing and I do have a view of the harbour. But I was also thinking more, do I feel particularly comfortable where I cook and wash the dishes? Open and close the refrigerator?" We're sipping almond tee in the dusk. Ferry

schedules have been double-checked. "I feel safe on an island, not isolated."

*Shall I tell you what I do to pass the time
here on the island at night?
There is red velvet and purple velvet.
I cut out diamonds from a pattern piece
by piece. I sew two pieces, one purple
one red, together, attach another making designs
as I go. Mapping it into some kind of crazy
poncho. I am absorbed in the fitting together
of pieces. Troika the white cat watches.
Red velvet on purple purple on red colours
of the mystic and the revolutionary*

(*"Poems of Failure" IV*) □

FEATURE REVIEW

Beyond belief

Though the hand of God is everywhere in his new novel, Brian Moore makes the miraculous seem normal and unspectacular

By **MARK ABLEY**

Cold Heaven, by Brian Moore, McClelland & Stewart, 256 pages, X.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 6441 1).

"WE HAVE before us the modern mind, intelligent, skeptical, ironical, splendidly trained for the great game of pretending that the world it comprehends in sterilized sobriety is the only and ultimate reality there is — yet a mind living in sin with the soul of Abraham." The German critic Erich Heller wrote those words with reference to Kafka, whose fiction shows both the necessity and the impossibility of religious faith, but they could also be applied to Brian Moore. In *Cold Heaven*, as in *Catholics*, as in *The Mangan Inheritance*, he takes seriously ideas and intuitions that we skeptical, ironical moderns are supposed to have passed beyond. He uses his intelligence to subvert our limited awareness of intelligence.

Cold Heaven begins with a death: Alex Davenport, a dedicated medical researcher, is bit by a powerboat while swimming off Nice and dies of massive herd injuries a few hours later. His wife Marie, who had been planning to leave him for another doctor called Daniel, less brilliant than Alex but more humane, survives the accident unhurt. She begins to grieve — but then Alex's body disappears from the morgue of the local hospital; his passport and air ticket

disappear from the hotel room; and when Marie has flown back to New York she finds a notepad with a message in Alex's handwriting beside the telephone in their apartment. Her husband has been resurrected, and has fled from her. AU tbi is only a prelude.

Moore suspends our disbelief in Alex's return to life so completely that everything that follows begins to seem normal and unspectacular by comparison. The doctor died on the first anniversary of the day on which his wife, walking alone on the cliffs above Carmel Bay in California, saw and heard an apparition of the virgin Mary. An unbeliever, though educated by nuns, Marie had done notbi about the Virgin's instruction to "tell the priests" that "this rock must be a place of pilgrimage." Now, desperate for company and affection, she agrees to meet her lover in the same motel at Carmel where she had stayed a year earlier. The motel happens to be near a convent of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, one of whose elderly members has been experiencing recurrent dreams of the Virgin Mary. . . . To give away more would be unfair. Moore is unafraid to use the devices and modes of a thriller in a novel intended as "serious" art. He is, after all, a former screenplay-writer for Alfred Hitchcock.

One of the difficulties that many

novelists face when arranging their plots is that 'of coincidence; incompetent writers (and, occasionally, Dickens) make us worry that their strange collection of events could never just have happened to occur that way. Brian Moore defies coincidence by denying coincidence; in the world of *Cold Heaven*, nothing is accidental. A bolt of lightning, a repeated dream, the lyrics of an old song, a fat man exercising his poodles near the sea — everything carries a secret meaning. The hand of God, or His agents, or destiny is everywhere. Or at least: it is everywhere in the mind of the central character, who may or may not be deluded. For a novelist — though not for his more thoughtful characters — if God is alive, everything is permitted. The danger is that when a writer chooses to shun probability, leaving his characters at the mercy of an interfering fate, his people may turn into puppets, jerked to and fro on transcendent strings.

Moore gets around this by some clever use of theology. "God doesn't reveal Himself to us in an unmistakable way," a worldly monsignor tells Marie. "And the Church teaches that we're none of us obliged to believe in miracles or miraculous apparitions." (Some of what the Roman Catholic Church does oblige its adherents to believe may well be more incredible to us skeptical moderns than

the occasional **miraculous** apparition; how many **writers** have **turned** their pens to the **Immaculate** Conception or the Assumption?) For most of the novel **Marie** has felt helpless before the **invisible** supernatural forces that seem to control her life. In the last few pages she **accepts** that she has free **will**. Whether she **chooses** to stay with Alex or to leave hi for Daniel is **entirely** up to **her**. In the **same way**, every reader of **Cold Heaven** is free to **dismiss** the book as the **windy nonsense** of a" expatriate **Irishman** nostalgic for the **certainties** of his old faith. **Yet** for **anyone** who takes the novel as more than a **jeu d'esprit**, its vision of the supernatural is terrifying: a **brutal energy** that mocks our pretensions and transcends **our** ideas of good and **evil**. Alex's **resurrection** is little more than a **sign** from heaven to Marie. The **Yeatsian** title is apt and **well-earned**.

Behind the speedy plot and the material **wealth** of many of its characters, **Cold Heaven** displays a sad and terrible sense of **rootlessness**, of **homelessness**. I" **this**, as well as its **interest** in extramarital affairs, the novel is **characteristic** of **Moore**. The Davenports don't have a home: they **exist** in a borrowed apartment in **Manhattan**, protected by a" intricate system of **burglar alarms**, down the corridor **from** a" old lady "who

waited behind her door **until** she heard passing **footsteps**, then **came out** to talk . . . **with the relentless discursiveness** of the **true solitary** for whom such **encounters** are the high point of a silent day." **Friends** are scarce in **Cold Heaven**, and **families** are **distant** I" every sense of the word. **Only the Sisters** of **Mary Immaculate**, whose numbers **shrink** with every **death**, enjoy a real sense of **community**. Moore writes of **these nuns** with the **same** love and understanding that he showed toward the old Irish monks in **Catholics** a decade ago. (At the end of that book, it might be **remembered**, the doubting abbot **tells** his **angry brothers**, "Prayer Is the **only** miracle.") Perhaps, **like many** other **writers**, Moore is **a monk manqué**. **Echoing T.S. Eliot**, he calls **New York** an "unreal city." He would **never** call a convent or a monastery **unreal**.

Before **everything else**, however, he is a wonderful story-teller. **His** books are **never** dreary and **rarely** untidy; their excitement is poised, almost **serene**. Anyone who intends to **write** a novel for the **first or second time** could do no **better** than to **examine** the **style and structure** of his fiction, along with that of **Graham Greene** — fmm whom Moore has learned, or **taken**, a good deal. **The two** priests in **Cold Heaven** are

American versions of types that Greene has made famous. At **several** points **this** novel **recalls** one of Greene's most **intriguing** works. **The End of the Affair**, which also deals with miracles, **Catholicism**, adultery, death, and a **refusal to believe**. Furthermore, the **final** words of **Greene's narrator** almost sum up Marie's **feelings** in **Cold Heaven**: "You're a devil, God, tempting us to leap. But I don't want **Your** peace and I don't want **Your** love. . . . **With Your** great schemes **You ruin** our happiness **like a harvester ruins a moose's nest**. . . . **O God**, You've **done** enough, You've robbed me of **enough**. . . **leave me alone** for aver." But unlike Greene's narrator, Marie is not "too tired and old to learn to love." The **coldness** of Moore's heaven **is balanced** by the **warmth** he still **finds** possible on earth. In short, he dares to hope.

Nonetheless, the novel **subverts** our expectations even at the **end**. In spiritual terms, enough is **resolved**; I" **everyday terms**, **Cold Heaven** builds toward a climax that **never** occurs. a scene Moore **chose not to write**. **This can't** be **offered** as a **criticism except** by those who are so **total4 out** of sympathy with his **preoccupations**, or **simply** with his **refusal** to dismiss **religion** as absurd, that the whole book **will** seem a" **outlandish** failure. The main criticisms I **would** **make** are that I" the second half of the book the **narrative** is somewhat **breathless**, as if Moore **were** losing **patience** with the **mechanics** of his plot, and **also** that his **language** occasionally lets hb" **down**. "Her mind fell a&al" Into the pit of that **ineluctable** question": there are a few too **many strained** phrases like that for the good of **Cold Heaven**.

Finally, I'd like to **advise** any **readers** of this review, and other **reviews**, who decide to **try Cold Heaven** for **themselves** (and I hope there are many such), to forget **everything** they've read about the book **before** they **begin** the **first** chapter. Anyone who **approaches** the book knowing that it **concerns** miracles, faith, and visions of the **Vii Mary** will miss the **subtlety** of **Moore's** technique. **He** takes enormous care to hook **his** audience on **secular bait**; he has no interest in **preaching** to the converted, or in **preaching** of my sort. He **merely** wants to **reopen** our sense of the possible. And even if Brian Moore does **play** a great **game** of **pretending**, eve" if he does ask us to **believe** as many as **six** impossible things before breakfast, he knows that **eyes** of **sterilized sobriety** see **nothing**. **Nothing** at all. □



THE DEPTFORD TRILOGY
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An annual guide to art and gift books

Words and pictures

The downs and ups of picture books:
from the undersea gardens of the Pacific to
flight in the shadow of Jupiter

By JOHN OUGHTON

IF NUMBERED, limited-edition books are the Rolls-Royces of the literary trade, then gift books are the Cadillacs. The new models come out each fall. They may be oversized (add a few legs, and presto: your coffee table book is a coffee cable) and, in the case of some models, more flashy than useful. But they impress with their sheer bulk as the heavyweight presents under the Christmas tree, the glossy monoliths addii another degree of sag to the bookshelf.

Like an air-conditioned Fleetwood, they can be a great way to flee the austerities of a Canadian winter. open the door to powerful photographs and lushly upholstered text and the on-shoveled sidewalk and straight-from-the-Arctic gale recede in the smooth flow of word and image. The glories of Greece, the excitement of the Klondike gold rush, or the faces of the famous become the scenery for the armchair traveller. And, given the cost, stress, and climate of our winter holiday season, such an escape is a gift indeed.

Let's begin with entries by two of the heavyweights in Canadian photography: Yousuf Karsh and Roloff Beny. These are probably the best-known Canadian lensmen internationally, Karsh for his portraits of the great and/or famous, Beny for his work on classical art, ruins, and the Canadian landscape. The handsomely designed Karsh: A Fifty-year Retrospective (University of Toronto Press, 192 pages, \$47.50 cloth) is intended as a monument to the 75-year-old photographer, whose depictions of artists and statesmen have often become the public image of the subject. It contains 176 exquisitely reproduced duotones and anecdotal accounts of the challenges and pleasures Karsh experienced in making the pictures.

All of Karsh's most famous portraits are here except for the one of Jacques Cousteau, reproduced on the back cover

as part of a self-portrait. He is unsurpassed in sheer technique: the prints can be appreciated by anyone interested in lighting, composition, and fine exposure control. In an era when 35-mm cameras, the street photography "shoot-and-run" style of Robert Frank, and the anti-glamour work of Americans like Diane

adapting his approach to catch their comic chaos, he finally did freeze them, showing us three middle-aged men looking serious. Since high-set lighting constantly ennobles Karsh's subjects, one wonders if his technique might not be capable of making, say, Robert Vesco look like an honest, far-seeking prince



Marie-Claire Blais, Montreal, 1978. From *A Certain Identity: A Book of Portraits*, by Sam Tata, Deneau Publishers, 96 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88879 089 9)

Arbus and Richard Avedon have been major influences on portrait photography. Karsh's large-format camera, studio lighting, and highly posed look seem a little out of date.

The firm hand of the artist alternately produces memorable images, like the defiant Churchill (who has just had his cigar snatched away), and ones as wrong-headed as that of the Marx Brothers. Karsh complains that their constant motion and pranks pushed him "to the limits of sanity," but instead of

of commerce, or the mek group Lover-boy tortured artists.

The inhabitants of Mount Olympus are celebrated in Beny's *The Gods of Greece* (McClelland & Stewart, 216 pages, \$34.95 cloth). Arianna Stassinopoulos contributed the text, a blend of literary quotations and meditations on the relevance of the gods to modern mortals. Like a good student of Jung, she writes: When myth has become practically a synonym for falsehood and dry rationality reigns supreme, the

Greek gods can guide us to forgotten dimensions of our lives and ourselves."

Beny's images of statues; ruins, coins, and landscapes are strong. Several colour plates provide variety from the black-and-whites (not duotones here). This is a handsome book with more content than many gin tomes. Its flaw is over-seriousness: the one thing that distinguishes the Greek gods from other deities is their love of a good time, but here even Dionysus and Zeus seem more ready for a Socratic discussion than a romp in the vineyard.

Instead of gods and great men, John Paskievich, a documentary film-maker, turned his lens on ordinary people in *A Voiceless Song: Photographs of the Slavic Lands* (Lester & Orpen Dennys/National Fib" Board of Canada, 96 pages, \$17.95 paper). It's startling to look at these images from behind the Iron Curtain and realize that we usually see more coverage of China than we do of countries like Russia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, with which many Canadians have more in common culturally. Paskievich's black-and-white pictures present everyday scenes in countries little known to us. They are both art and document.

As Martha Langford says in the foreword, Paskievich's greatest influence is probably Cartier-Bresson, with whom he shares the ability to capture the "decisive moment" in a street scene. A subtle tension or incongruity often appears: one man smirking for the camera while his friend applies a foot to the rear of a horse; an old man trudging along a path toward an equally tired pair of empty boots. The book includes a thoughtful introduction by Josef Skvorecky.

Almost as exotic to most Canadians (although more frequently seen in photographs) are the lands north of the 60th parallel shown in *The Magnetic North* (Oxford, 1% pages, \$24.95 cloth). Despite his age (27), photographer Mike Beedell has already managed to spend much of his time canoeing, climbing, and hiking through the Yukon and Northwest Territories. The photographs are generally strong, sombre compositions that reveal what the author calls "the unique quality of light in the north."

To his credit, Beedell does not show only Arctic clichés. His photographs of polar bears, caribou migrations, nobly lined old Inuit faces, and northern sunsets are effective, but he also includes shots of the new North: artificial oil-exploration islands, snowmobiles, settle-

ments of prefab houses, and colourfully painted DC-3s.

His photographs of natives manage to be both dignified and informal; he is particularly good at catching children in unguarded moments. His captions sometimes stray into overwriting — we shouldn't have to be told that a "iceberg resembles "the Winged Victory" — but most of the text transmits his delight in the North and the adventures involved in photographing it. The colour reproductions are generally good, although small printing imperfections are evident in several plates.

The Inuit are the focus of Stephen Williams's collection of black-and-white photographs, *The Middle: The Inuit Today* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, unpaginated, \$12.95 paper). His theme is that their culture is of unusually "extreme conflict between past and present. . . . The Inuit live, in a sense, directly in between their two worlds." Appropriately, the book is bilingual, in English and Inuit syllabics, and includes an introduction by the fascinating writer/anthropologist Edmund Carpenter that expands on the importance of Inuit myths and art to our own imaginations.

As well as portraying the white spaces of the wintry North, Williams does suc-

ceed in capturing images of the conflict between a traditional hunting-based culture and modern technology. A woman working in her kitchen is surrounded by a tea-kettle, a pair of plastic boots warming on the stove, and an Arctic fox pelt drying on the clothesline. What seems to be a dead Husky lies in the track of a snowmobile. A traditional kamotik sled bears both caribou parts and gas cans.

composition with a compassion for the subject. They probably give a slightly romanticized version of Arctic life, but do deserve the fine duotone reproduction. The back cover classifies *In the Middle* as "photography/anthropology," a claim it largely fulfils. It's a long way from the land of the Northern Lights back to Toronto. That's the subject of veteran photographer John de Visser's *City Light: A Portrait of Toronto* (Oxford, 128 pages, \$24.95 cloth). Considering the general excellence of de Visser's work, this collection is something of a disappointment. Its 96 colour plates certainly convey the virtues that U.S. visitors appreciate — Toronto's relative cleanliness, efficiency, and cosmopolitanism without notable racial tensions — but it fails to show much more than the downtown core and a few parks and ravines.

Granted, no one can deliver a comprehensive view of a metropolis in just 96 plates. As de Visser notes, "the great problem always is which [photos] to include and even more which to reject." But the Toronto he depicts is one where relatively few people work (certainly not in factories), where the suburbs & best left unseen (largely true in Toronto's



CPR pavilion at the Panama-Pacific Exhibition, 1915. From *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginning of Canadian Tourism*, by E.J. Hart, Altitude Publishing, 180 pages, \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0 919381 09 X)

ceed in capturing images of the conflict between a traditional hunting-based culture and modern technology. A woman working in her kitchen is surrounded by a tea-kettle, a pair of plastic boots warming on the stove, and an Arctic fox pelt drying on the clothesline. What seems to be a dead Husky lies in the track of a snowmobile. A traditional kamotik sled bears both caribou parts and gas cans.

The photographs combine effective

case, but there must be some good photographs north of Eglinton Avenue), and where policemen, fire trucks, and derelicts "ever tread. If you know anyone who wants a glamour treatment of Toronto, the" the book certainly has "writs: there are stunning shots of the Eaton Centre, City Hall, the Caribana Festival, and Casa Loma, but few real surprises in subject or treatment.

The Algonquin (Oxford, 108 pages, \$24.95 cloth) William Reynolds and Ted

Dylke preserve more wildlife than most visitors see on a week-long canoe trip in Ontario's Algonquin Park. Reynolds spent "the better part of two years" wandering the park and collecting these images (of the 95 colour plates only 11 are by Dylke). Reynolds is known as a painter as well as a photographer: he shows an artist's eye in isolating single animals and plants so that they stand out cleanly, and in the soft wash of light in landscapes taken in dim natural conditions.

The colours here are luminous; one can almost smell the pines and feel the mist. The format is square, allowing the use of both vertical and horizontal photos. However, designer Fortunato Aglinoro kept them to a uniform size, leaving considerable white space. Some images could stand a larger size or a bleed. One other minor caveat: it's a landscape photography cliché to take long exposures on running water, producing a smooth white flow. Several photos here use that effect; the viewer thirsts for the sparkle and spray of water shot at a higher speed.

The text is oriented toward the amateur naturalist, and is informative and generally free of lyrical excesses. Sometimes it tends to be too formal. Is it unkind to suggest the beaver "swims with webbed hind feet" for "employs its webbed hind feet to propel itself through its watery domain"?

The incredible forms and colours of another watery domain are the subject of *Treasures of the Sea: Marine Life of the Pacific Northwest* (Oxford, 128 pages, \$24.95 cloth). James Cribb has been diving since the age of 10, and has spent four years exploring and photographing the undersea life along the coast from Vancouver to Alaska. His brilliant images should fascinate anyone with a love of the visual arts. Isolated by the flash against a black background, the coral and anemones become richly suggestive of other forms: cauliflower, the structure of the brain, the flame from a gas burner, chrysanthemums.

In the opening plate a backlit diver peers through swirling strands of kelp, making it difficult to tell where human ends and seaweed begins. There is a similar visionary quality to many of these photographs, all 96 of them magnificently reproduced. This gift book bears more than one reading.

Part of *the Main: An Illustrated History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (203 pages, \$35.00 cloth) is Breakwater Books' tribute to the 400th anniversary of Newfoundland's annexation by Sir Humphrey Gilbert in the name of Queen Elizabeth I. Two professors, Peter Heary of the University of Western Ontario and Patrick O'Flaherty from

Memorial University, are responsible for the text and picture selection. Both are native Newfoundlanders, so there should be no mainland bias in this comprehensive history of Canada's youngest province.

It is intended to serve more as a useful history — with maps, drawings, press clippings, and documents — than a coffee-table book. The photographs reproduced here are from many sources in seven countries, and in many cases neither the originals nor the reproductions are impressive on their own. But as part of this history they work. There's a delightful parody of the famous Robert Harris portrait. This one, titled "The Living Fathers of Confederation," displays Joey Smallwood's head on each body.

Part of *the Main* gives a vivid sense of the conflict between tradition and development that has accompanied most of Newfoundland's written history. Although the text inevitably tends toward the academic, the lively and nostalgic photographs give a more human tone.

Less ambitious, but in its way no less intriguing, *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures 1940-1960* (Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the University College of Cape Breton Press, 290 pages, \$25.00 cloth) is selected from the archives of Leslie Shedden, proprietor of Shedden Studio and chronicler of the Cape Breton town of Glace Bay. As well as taking commissions for local merchants, weddings, and other standard assignments, Shedden acted since the 1940s as the on-site photographer for Dominion Steel and Coal.

This black-and-white collection is of both photographic and anthropological interest. Shedden covered an era that began with pit ponies and picks and shovels and ended with a new generation of mining machinery. Susan Sontag has made the point that, after a few decades, any photograph of people becomes interesting, regardless of the artistic intent (or lack of it) behind the original impulse. This is to some extent true of Shedden's work; his is the product of a good craftsman rather than an inspired artist. But the temporal range of his work, restricted to one locality, adds depth.

The selection of photographs is good, with some haunting images: Fraser, the last pit pony, grazing a meadow after a lifetime in the mines; a black man, arrested for "vagrancy," staring into the lens with equal parts of pride and despair; and five unidentified brothers from 1940-41, their different-but-similar faces showing the range of types in one family — the dreamers and the prag-

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matists. Too many photos are included for the size of the book, with four sometimes squeezed onto a none-too-large page, when one of them should have been blown up. Two essays accompany the pictures: Don Macgillivray on labour and local history, Allan Sekula on the relationship between industrial and other "non-art" photography and art.

Pierre Berton's 39th book, *The Klondike Quest: A Photographic Essay, 1897-98* (McClelland & Stewart, 240 pages, \$50.00 cloth), is a sequel to his classic *Klondike*. As the most-photographed event of the turn of the century, the Klondike gold rush provides a wealth of potential images. Wisely, designer Frank Newfeld has given these duotones the space they require, devoting two-page spreads to some pictures.

Berton's writing is, as usual, colourful and engrossing. There are good descriptions of the arduous journeys to the gold field, the boom-and-bust cycles of Dawson, and the characters from all over the world who congregated there. He offers this explanation for the sudden end of gold fever: "Gold had been an excuse. For months they had talked of nothing else. But the adventure was that they really hungered for, and that they had found."

How the CPR shaped Canada is the theme of 'Emit of Iron: *The CPR and the Birth of the West, 1850-1930* (Glenbow-Alberta Institute/Douglas & McIntyre, 192 pages, \$29.95 cloth). Bii McKee and Georgeen Klassen assembled the book after an exhibition at the Glenbow Institute on the same subject. In a sense, this is a photographic sequel to another Berton book: *The Last Spike*. Here is the visual evidence of the back-breaking and mind-boggling construction problems overcome during the building of the railway.

The book examines the influence of the CPR as a whole on Western Canada, going beyond the railroad's well-known unifying effect. The promotional efforts of the CPR to attract immigrants to settle its 25 million acres of land resulted in some charming posters reproduced in colour here. There are also images of the CPR's steamship service to the Orient, which for years carried Britain's Royal Mail. tea, silk, and thousands of passengers in accommodations ranging from steerage to sumptuous. Other company steamers served the B.C.-Alaska coastal route.

Another way to look at the West is presented in *The Canadian West*

Discovered (Glenbow Museum, 76 pages, 914.95 paper), also the result of a Glenbow show, this time of printed maps from the 16th to early 20th centuries. A map librarian Mary Javorski edited the collection and supplied the annotations.

There is always some fascination in historical maps (especially those early ones that portray more the explorers' fears than discoveries, with statements like "Here Bee Dragons"). However, only six of the plates in this book are in colour. The result is a volume of less general interest than Klassen and McKee's. Those with serious interest in historical cartography or the exploration of the West form the most likely market. The size of the volume does not allow the larger-scale maps to be reproduced with complete legibility.

The last four volumes covered in this campaign deal, at least in part, with Canada's military history. The *Loyal Americans*, edited by Robert S. Allen and produced by the Canadian War Museum (National Museums of Canada, 128 pages, \$19.50 paper), examines "The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and Their Settlement in British North America, 1775-1784." As the book points out, the Loyalists who elected to oppose the American Revolution have been given a rather unfortunate reputation, thanks to the omnipresent influence of the U.S. mass media in Canada. One rebel summation of a Loyalist was "a thing whose head is in England, and its body in America, and its neck ought to be twisted." The rebels won, and the winners wrote the histories.

This history, which intends to correct our image of the losers, is a collection of scholarly essays accompanied by sepia-toned photographs of their weapons, tools, homes, and other artifacts. Although the reproductions are often small, the book is cleanly designed, readable, and just the thing to give the monarchist — or nationalist — in your family.

Speaking of monarchists, HRH Prince Philip contributed the foreword to the next tome. As colonel-in-chief, he does have a 30-year association with the Royal Canadian Regiment, whose centennial is commemorated in *100 Years: The Royal Canadian Regiment 1883-1983* (Collier Macmillan, 184 pages, \$29.95 cloth). This is a collaboration between two well-known soldier-authors: C.P. Stacey contributed the text, and Ken Bell edited the photographs.

Sepia photographs recall the misery, boredom, drama, and heroism of the regiment's involvement in the North West Rebellion, the Boer War, both world wars, and Korea. A small colour portfolio of recent photographs completes the book, closing with an ominous shot of two soldiers with gas masks and carbines over the caption, "Where it is needed, there it will be." *Pride in Canada's military forces* has declined considerably over the last decade. This collection may help rekindle it.

The Maple Leaf Route: Caen (Maple Leaf Route, 124 pages, \$19.95 cloth) is the first of a six-part series that will examine one era of Canadian military history in considerable detail: the campaign in Northwest Europe during the last two years of the Second World War. Historians Terry Copp and Robert Vogel relate the planning of Operation Overlord (which put Allied military forces back into Hitler-held Europe) and the first few months of the Canadian campaign.

Vogel's command of German has added a valuable section on the German strategy of the time. Although the reproductions are not high in quality, the maps, photographs, and military art are well-chosen. One follows the Canadian soldiers' painful advance almost mile-by-mile through war-ravaged France. Excerpts from war diaries kept by Canadian troops add a dimension of urgency that not even the best historian could convey: "The bombardment having failed to kill a single German or silence a single one weapon these companies had to storm their positions 'cold' and did so without hesitation," wrote one member of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles about their D-Day landing. When complete, this series will greatly expand the material generally available on the major role played by Canadian troops in liberating northern Europe.

The last book to consider is an odd bii — a cross between a "how-to" art book and a coffee-table aviation book. *Painting Planes: The Aviation Art* of Don Connolly (Canada's Wings, 76 pages, \$27.95 cloth) contains reproductions of Connolly's paintings of aircraft, most of them in a Canadian setting. Connolly is gifted at creating backgrounds (land or sky-scapes) so that his beloved planes, whether military or civilian, are shown in context, not just empty space.

His text offers both an essay on the challenges of aviation art, with suggestions for exercises to improve technique, and descriptions of planes as different as

a dirigible and the Wapiti 508, a ski-equipped trainer so ugly that pilots dubbed it the "What-a-Pity." This collection naturally has rather specialist appeal, but Connolly's art does go beyond technical correctness. The only work in which he seems to lose touch with his subject is "Conjunction," showing Voyager I's fly-by of Jupiter. Away from Earth and wings, Connolly's technique no longer keeps him aloft.

Potential recipients include former bush pilots, currently active aviators, and any men who continue their childhood habit of drawing airplanes in the margins of their reading matter — as well as artists who can use a book of useful tip: on painting aircraft as part of their reference collection. □

REVIEW

Beauty and the beast

By DOUGLAS HILL

Whales: A Celebration, edited by Greg Gatenby, Prentice-Hall/Lester & Orpen Dennys, illustrated, 233 pages, \$55.00 cloth before December 31, \$65.00 thereafter (ISBN 013 951723 5).

NATURE CAN shake man's foundations of wonder no more profoundly, no more urgently, than through the mystery of whales. In their element whales great (fin, blue, humpback) and small (pilot, dolphin, porpoise) offer us images of unfathomable power and grace and possibilities of sudden spiritual connection to a time before ourselves, to a bluegreen world of water and light before all the cities and the waste. Watch a whale feed or play: obviously he belongs on this planet, is one with it; we've come late, with greed and menace. Yet it's all in our hands now. If we want that whale next year we must save him today.

So *Whales: A Celebration* is timely. On intention alone — to merge a massive choral "single voice" announcing "that the world wants an end to the commercial killing of whales" — the book is a triumph. In execution it's a delight. This is not a volume to swallow

whole, as a reviewer must, but to test and savour and hoard. Greg Gatenby and his friends deserve thanks.

The design of the anthology unobtrusively displays its riches. There are six sections, with material arranged under headings such as "A Famous Story" (Jonah), "The Hunting," "The End of Life." What the work lacks in narrative coherence or singleness of vision is more than offset by its variety and profusion. The cumulative effect is like a glorious day on salt water: you know by the end of it you've been opened, been given a vital gift of elements, and any conceivable contribution of your own to that enormous experience is puny and not for the moment to be bothered with. Whales, like the oceans they define, do wonders for the ego.

The book rewards both eye and ear. Reproductions of frescos, stained glass, manuscript illuminations, and artifacts balance paragraphs of text. The range of their historical and geographical sources is wide; the works, included are sometimes ingenious or fantastic, sometimes spare or utilitarian, always admirable. The contemporary paintings and graphics, a high proportion printed in colour, tend to abstraction, away from realism. Some of these seem difficult to justify in the context of a specific chapter, but as expressions of energy and massed force, as personal responses occasionally whimsical or lighthearted to whaleness, they work well separately and together. Turner ("The Whale") follows Rauschenberg ("Narwhal"): juxtaposition as an organizing principle finds here a congenial subject.

Writers like Pliny and Melville and Robert Lowell are present, of course. So are Margaret Atwood, with a sharp child-ling fable ("The Afterlife of Ishmael"); Hubert Selby, in a song of love and memory ("Of whales and Dreams"); and John Fowles ("Voices from the Deep"), who observes that "history will one day whale for us, and we shall deserve every barbed anathema it sinks into our selfish little monkey skulls." Joel Oppenheimer's short poem, "Moratorium," putting the case as clearly as one would wish, ends:

they
are killing the whales so fast that
the fleets come back half-full ahead
of time — and a male blue whale
can swim his whole life without ever
finding a mate. this should tell us
what sort of a beast we are, how we've
learned to draw leviathan forth from
the sea, and kill him. from the
beginning we knew how to kill
ourselves.

For this book is not just a gorgeous potpourri of pictures and print; it's a considered, uncompromising, hopeful political act. Fortunately the work Gatenby has assembled is seldom blatant or solipsistic. When it is, it's predictably weak and amateurish. Whales and their plight seem to bring out the nervous "I" in painters and writers, as if all that otherness had somehow isolated the creative self against a vast backdrop of eternity. Passion alone can't do the job, though one is certainly sympathetic to all those who wish it could.

There's an instructive chronological watershed in *Whales: A Celebration*. For artists until a decade ago, the whale was only (and magnificently) a fact of the world. Now the whale's extinction is the issue, patent or implicit. Herman Melville rested, when he could, in the assurance that the whale was "immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality." Not so today. And thus we need a book that celebrates whales, but salutes as well man's impulse, a thrust towards light like the whale's rising, to recognize and rescue himself. □

HEATHER ROBERTSON

Willie
A Romance

VOLUME I OF THE KINGYEA AGE

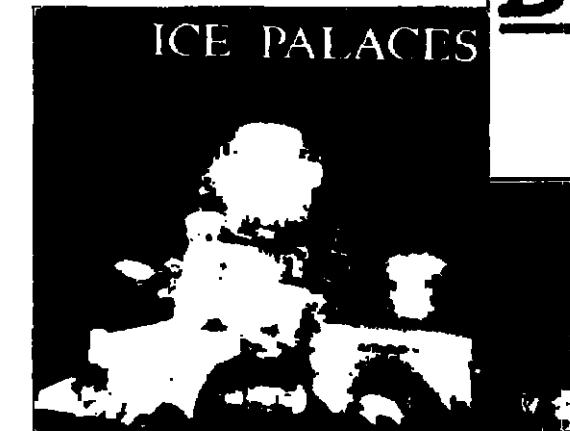
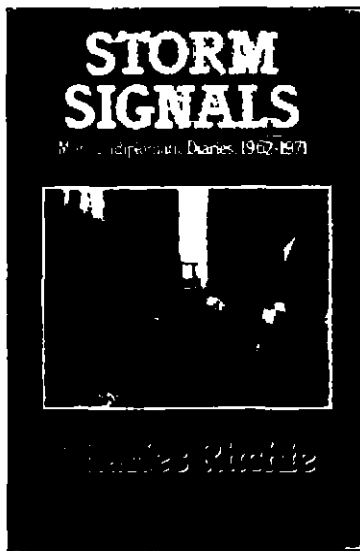
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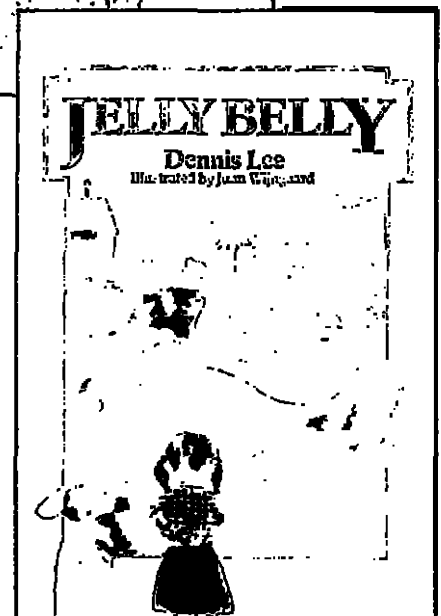
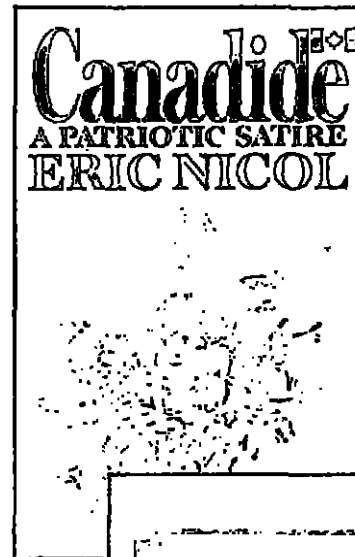
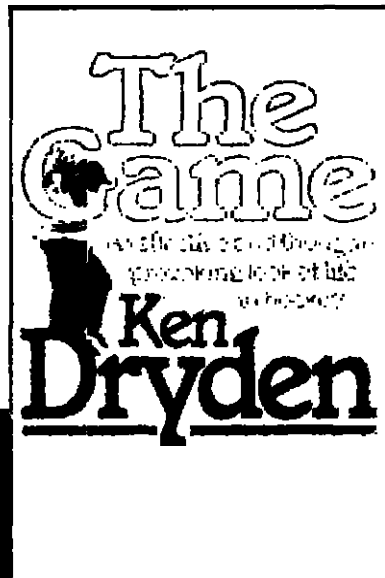
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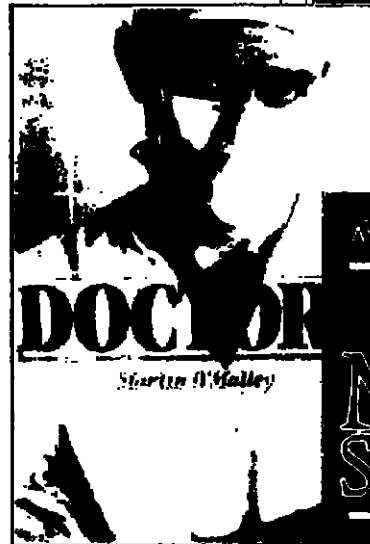
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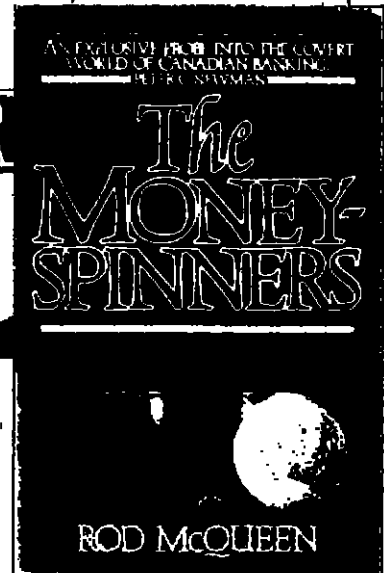


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For art's sake

Though exhibition catalogues make potentially good art books, translating the scholarship for general readers has proven a **difficult** task

By **SUSAN CREAN**

THERE ARE two prestige artbooks out this season, easy to spot by the **price and the packaging**. A.J. Casson's *My Favourite Watercolours* 19194957 (Prentice-Hall, 144 pages, \$50.00 cloth) is not so much a book as a collection of **high-quality reproductions** in book form, in collaboration with Paul Duval. It is a **good example** of a relatively recent phenomenon in art marketing, the **fine art book**: as an extension of the art print market. Based on a limited (60) edition portfolio that came out a couple of years ago and sold out at \$18,000, you could regard this latest production by Canada's "most beloved" artist and last living member of the Group of Seven as a cheap edition. Certainly it's a **cheap investment** at the price (\$1.60 vs. \$439 per reproduction) and, given the market, likely a **good one**. Signed copies of Casson's *A Tribute*, which sold in 1980 for \$75, now are going for \$150, and *Watercolours*' portfolio is **fetching** as much as \$30,000 on resale, with prices rising.

The book's format is therefore a **merchandising technique**, a way of crossing art with art books and selling them as collector's items. In trade terms, however, the book is **expensive** and it looks it. Lavish is the word. Like a Raymond Moriyama building, **everything is designed**: gold monogram of the artist's initials embossed on thick **moroccanized cover**; black-and-white photographs printed in sepia on the page preceding each plate; an **emblem** in mauve of a **jackpine heading** the artist's comments about each plate. It's designed with **Holt Renfrew tastes in mind**, in a Group of Seven-oid style **reminiscent of the 1920s**.

Colville, by David Burnett (McClelland & Stewart, 304 pages, \$60.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper), is a different species, though it too is aimed at the art collector of modest means. It is more than a book of prints. First, it is the **catalogue to the retrospective of Alex Colville** that opened at the Art Gallery of Ontario this summer and is slated to

tour Germany and Canada over the next year. Second, it is a **monograph complete with catalogue raisonnée** of the artist's *oeuvre* (translation: a study for scholars with an **exhaustive list** of the artist's work). Finally, it is a trade book co-published by the AGO and M&S.

This is not the first time such a feat has been attempted. Many people, including a few adventurous publishers, **have recognized that there is a potential profit in exhibition catalogues**, especially those of **well-known and popular** artists, and have lamented the **resources wasted on poor production and distribution by institutions** that, after all, aren't publishers. But capitalizing on the **opportunity** has been tougher than you'd think and *Colville* illustrates the reasons.

Although it was available on time when the exhibition opened (**don't laugh** it is common for catalogues to appear after the show has closed, because of **agonizing delays in arranging loans**, getting copyright clearance, and finalizing the installation), it still is **not clear** that the book really wants to be a trade book. True, the art-historical details are relegated to the back in **small type**, and, as promised, it is abundantly illustrated with **200 black-and-white and 85 colour plates**. But the layout is **uninteresting and rather cumbersome**, evidently not catering to **browsers or readers primarily interested in looking at the artist's work**.

The text — which you're expected to read — is the **weak link**. The kind thing would be to excuse it on grounds that curators are academics, **not writers** (Burnett is a curator at the AGG and organized the exhibition), but I can't see why some editorial help couldn't have been provided — or, if necessary, a **writer hired to sharpen** the prose. That, however, would have **eliminated an essential ingredient**: the scholarly authority that traditionally takes precedence over **everything else**. The **arrangement of the illustrations more or less follows the order in which they're**

mentioned in Burnett's **long essay**, and there are occasional bursts in the first person, but mostly he writes formally, for an **in-crowd of collectors and other art historians**.

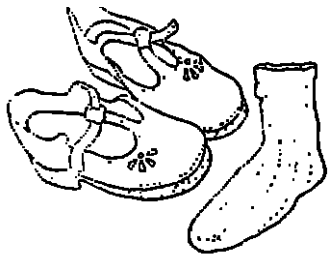
On that score, Burnett goes to **careful lengths** to demonstrate that *Colville's* work has **nothing whatsoever** to do with Canada, **Canadian art**, or the **creative imagination** of anyone living here. He even is reluctant (embarrassed?) to admit the artist has had much to do with the **tradition of realist painting** that has emerged in the **Atlantic region** (Mary and Christopher Pratt, Tom Forrestall). By Burnett's lights *Colville* is basically an **American artist, with affinities** for the American **Regionalist and Social Realist painting** traditions, who by **happenstance** has lived most of his life in Nova Scotia.

He seems to be making an **argument against interpretations** — "Stigmas" — of *Colville's* work as **regionalist or realist**. The artist, we're told, **rises above both descriptions**. His images may be realistic, but they don't tell a story; the figures may be **modelled on real people, including himself**, but they are not portraits, and they are not meant to represent **personalities reacting to anything**. This is **Great International Art**, and Burnett doesn't hesitate to drop in quotes from **Eliot, Rilke, and Joyce**, nor to make **favourable comparisons to such certified Old Masters as Caspar David Freidrich, Nicholas Poussin, and Sir Henry Raeburn**. August company — though it begins to read like art history by association after a while, and I regret that **Burnett doesn't grapple with that bleak, inert, vaguely threatening vision** of the world that so many see in *Colville's* art, which **fascinates some and repels others**.

A more **promising candidate** for book treatment, I would have thought, is *Pi Théberge's* catalogue for the National Gallery's retrospective of London artist **Greg Curnoe**. Curnoe is also a **realist and a regionalist, and relishes**

both titles. **Théberge**, who doesn't aspire to writing a "definitive study" explores these aspects of the artist's life and work in a text that's interesting and well-turned in both official languages. The reader is treated to anecdotes and insights into this particular artist's imagination, his relationship to the community he lives in, the connection between everyday life, the objects he discovers and the objects he makes. There is a section on ideology — regionalism, nationalism, music, hockey, comics, bicycles, and friends — and another examining the critical context, how **Curnoe's** work has been viewed so far by reviewers. The pity is that money ran out, and no colour plates were included. The black-and-white photos are a great disappointment, the more so because **Curnoe** is one of our most daring and electrifying colourists, even in watercolour.

Another exhibition catalogue, **Dorothy Knowles Paintings 1964-82** by Terry Fenton, just published by the Edmonton Art Gallery (35 pages, \$12.00 paper), features the work of a wonderful colourist and landscape artist. It also accompanies a touring exhibition that is on view in London now and will be moving to the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal in December. This catalogue makes excellent advertising. It is a slim volume with a short, undistinguished text and 21 glorious colour plates, and though pro-



bably not intended for a general audience, it does stir the imagination, all over again, about such possibilities.

Museums by Artists (287 pages, \$20.00 paper) is a curious collection of essays, statements, and documents by artists and critics about museums and their relationship to contemporary art. It belongs to a developing genre of art books by artists, distributed and promoted by Art Metropole in Toronto, one of a network of artist-run centres involved in avant-garde art/video/performance — and, as this volume shows, art theory as well.

The contributors are (apparently) drawn from a substratum of the international world, with connections in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and the U.S. The text — which runs in double columns of closely packed prose, some of it translations from German —

is dense and often difficult. This is not for the casual or the curious. Co-editors **AA Bronson** and **Peggy Gale** don't provide any orientation for the uninitiated. So better approach with patience and a developed sense of the bit.

The contributions, which covet artists' critiques of museums going back to Marcel Duchamp's museum-in-a-suitcase, describe and discuss a number of serious, tongue-in-cheek proposals by artists for alternative museums: **Claes Oldenburg's** Mouse Museum, **Robert Filliou's** Frozen Exhibition, which he opens in his hat. **Les Levine's** Museum of Mott Art, **Marcel Broodthaers's** Eagle Museum, and **Vera Frenkel's** Cornelia Lumsden Archives. Along with the concepts, many of which became exhibitions in their own right, comes some often (but not always) cogent analysis of the nature and politics of museums as institutions. Two of the best pieces in the collection are **Bronson's** zany history of artist-run centres in Canada and U.S. sculptor **Do Judd's** apologia for permanent installations of artists' work.

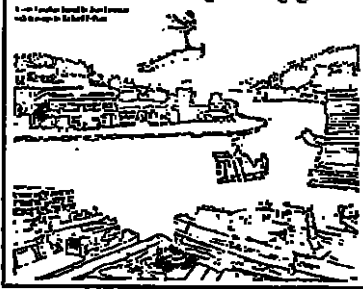
Finally, a little gem from Coach House Press, **David Milne and the Modern Tradition of Painting**, by **John O'Brian** (144 pages, \$12.00 paper). An excellent example of how art history can be written and presented for a general readership, the book is a study of the sources of **Milne's** art and his relationship to the burgeoning modernist tradition that eschewed the importance of subject matter in painting. It is also a major reassessment of **Milne's** work that goes beyond the formalist theory so fervently embraced by the artist — and for that matter by the deans of art history ever since.

Not since **Barry Lord** took off the rose-coloured glasses to write his *History of Painting in Canada* have we had such a fresh and inventive study, which attempts to discuss artists' work in the context of their time and the cultural history of their country. **Milne** may have allied himself to movements happening elsewhere, leaving Canada for long years, but **O'Brian** asks the question others have not: "What did it mean for **Milne** to be a Canadian, trained in the United States, and working from artistic premises established in France?"

His answer is an object lesson for **David Burnett**: how not to be blinkered by what an artist says about his own work, and its particular how not to be captured by the aesthetic biases of American formalism. There are many startling and intriguing parallels between **Milne's** career and **Colville's** that **Burnett** might have considered. We'll just have to wait for someone interested in writing Canadian art history like **O'Brian** to take on the challenge. □

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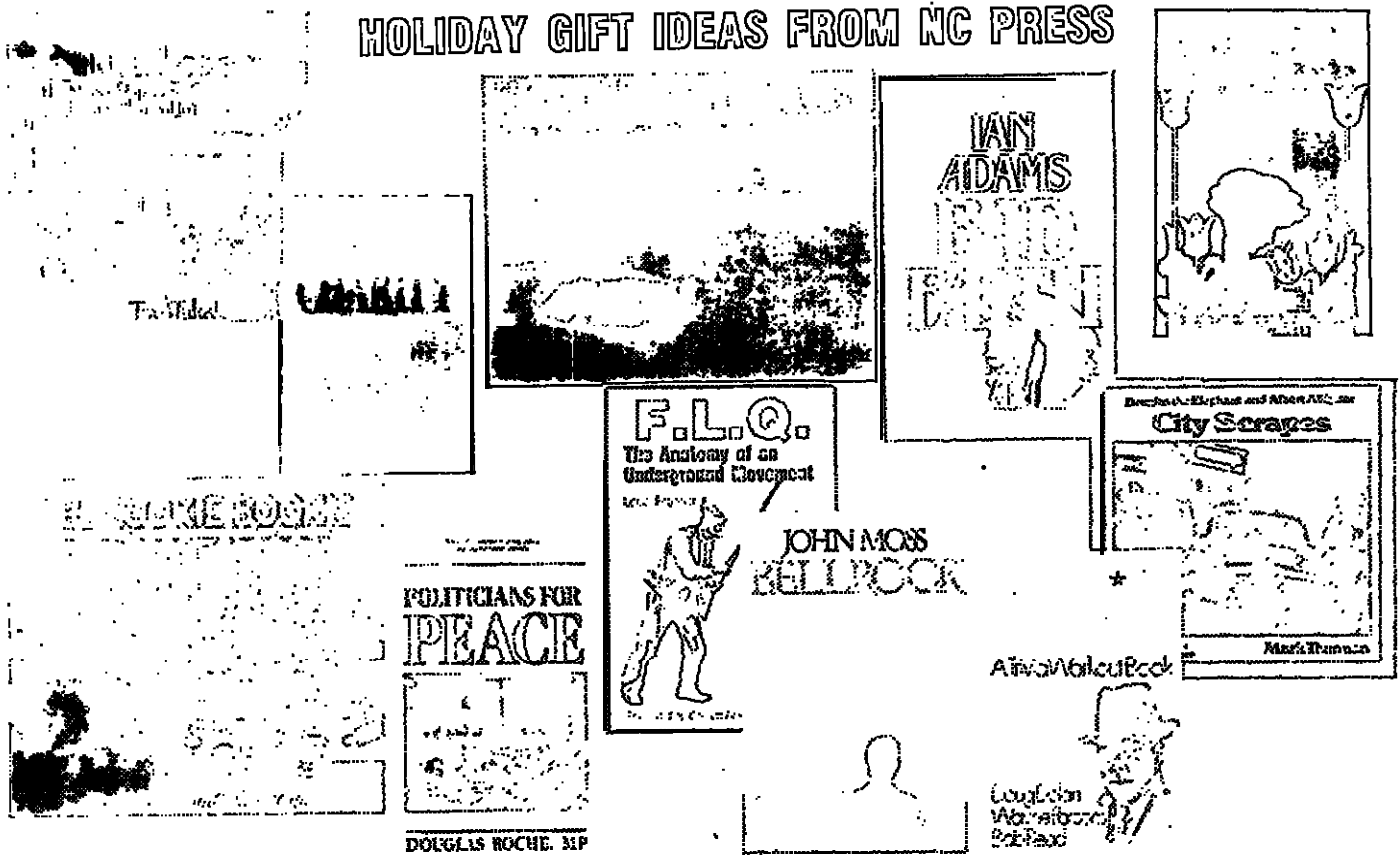


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Just folks

By GEOFF HANCOCK

Folk Art: Primitive and Naive Art in Canada, by Blake McKendry, Methuen, illustrated, 280 pages, \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0 87196 903 3).

From the Heart: Folk Art in Canada, National Museum of Man and Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, McClelland & Stewart, illustrated, 256 pages, \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 9021 8).

Canadian Folk Art: Old Ways in a New Land, by Michael Bird, Oxford, illustrated, 121 pages, 519.95 cloth before December 31, 524.95 thereafter (ISBN 0 19 540424 6).

The Canadian Heritage Label Collection, by Ted Herriot, Purpleville Publishing, illustrated, 107 pages, \$29.95 cloth (no ISBN).

AS CANADIANS, we are still reclaiming our history. We have learned that cultural democracy is a right, and are now learning respect for ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. But there are so many gaps. One area almost ignored by "high culture" has been the populist voice. At one time, anybody could be a" artist. People were encouraged to speak for themselves. The personal reaction to situation or event was a way to understand the world. But popular or "low culture" had a rough edge, disrespect, and graphic energy that was not recognized as art by mainstream cultural critics. The positive energy of the folk artists of Canada was excluded from the mainstream, and even the power of their images was questioned. As Blake McKendry points out, the significance of folk art was recognized by some critics as early as 1932, but the most important professional shows promoting this misunderstood subject have occurred only in the past dozen years.

Part of the problem for critics is an exact definition of "folk art." McKendry subdivides the subject into primitive, naive, provincial, ethnic, and folk-culture artifacts. The Museum of Man catalogue sees full: art as an extension of social traditions, subdivided into such themes as reflection on past traditions, social or religious commitment, and a

whimsical or fantastic treatment. Michael Bii sees two main tendencies. One is idiosyncratic or individual-centred, and the other is ethnosyncratic, or ethnically centred. The first is based on individual freedom of expression, while the second draws inspiration from a cultural context — the work of the Germans, or the Poles, or the Ukrainians, for example. All these attempts at categorization show how wide the subject is, and how something essential glows in the spirit of folk art.

We must be grateful these splendidly illustrated volumes exist. The reproductions are generally first-rate; the captions are usually enlightening; and the authors' educative spirit laudable. But some critical problems troubled me. Folk art usually radiates an exuberance. Anything can be a work of art: mailboxes, quilts, weathervanes, decoys, old wheels, stumps, fences, and window-ledge. Yet these volumes reduce art to object. For me, the essence of the art is taken out of context. The texts only allude to the creators, while the works float in isolation.

My favourite book on folk art is *Les peintures du Québec (Parti pris, 1978)*, by Louise de Grosbois, Raymonde Lamothé, and Lise Nantel, which none of these volumes includes in its bibliography. The book is poorly printed, yet it is astonishingly rich and authentic book. With maps of Quebec villages, photos of the artists at work, or posing happily with their creations, their homes, barns, fences, or backyards thick with folk objects, it's an instant lesson in what folk art really means. The authors include ice sculptures, posts, tires, wagon wheels, sides of barns, flowerboxes, statues of immense size, and an endless variety of small objects in their cheerful description of contemporary folk art in Quebec. Not all folk artists were bum at the turn of the century either — some are young men and women not yet in their 30s.

Blake McKendry's *Folk Art: Primitive and Naive Art in Canada* is an ambitious volume. His text is challenging, with many contentious statements suggesting awkward linkages between major European painters such as Gauguin, Van Gogh, Picasso, Rousseau, and the little-known Canadian painters of the period. He looks for the bonding between primitive art, with its magic and ceremony, and the power we find in folk art today. He is especially generous toward the art of the native peoples, who are not usually considered as folk artists. His text is occasionally

jumpy. Written in a depersonalized, descriptive manner, it doesn't always make the connections between primitive art and artists working today. But he does make an important step forward in defining what folk art is about. His illustrations are splendid and well organized, often in pairs as he traces the emergence of folk art.

McKendry keeps a polite distance from most living folk artists, but he intersperses his text with letters from the Ontario carver, George Cockayne. One of the carvings referred to is reproduced in *From the Heart: Folk Art in Canada*. Indeed, if these two volumes could have been made one, it would stand as the best work on the subject. *From the Heart* is a forceful and comprehensive book with some vibrant and delightful illustrations. Butter molds, crucifixes, lodgechairs, weathervanes, paintings, birds, dancing cats, violins, wagons, and sleighs cram the pages. Because the book is a catalogue for a touring show, its captions are simple, one-paragraph descriptions. Indeed, two forewords, a preface, and an introduction make less than a dozen pages. I didn't care for the title. *From the Heart* implies too much a lack of awareness, with no intellectualization. The work might be primitive in performance, but certainly not in intention.

Michael Bird's *Canadian Folk Art: Old Ways in a New Land* takes a different approach. In his four-page introduction he explains what he sees as the difference between the individual maker (often with an eccentric vision), and the distinctive art of a particular folk. He also makes a critical distinction between folk art interpreted in comparison with high art (say of major European naive painters) and in comparison with traditional crafts. He sees folk art as a way of strengthening the community. His caption descriptions of paper cutouts, furniture, boxes, household articles, religious artifacts, and toys are short and simple. He points out a detail, or a motif, with perhaps a line or two about the origins of the piece. He also includes grave markers. But because he focuses on the 19th century, the book has a lifeless, museum quality about it. Everything seems to be enclosed, and the book lacks any real excitement.

An eager collector will collect just about anything, and Ted Herriot, a Toronto ad-man, has put together an enthusiastic collection of labels from turn-of-the-century tomato cans, canned peaches, salmon, berries, pears, plums, and peas. The Canadian Heritage Label

Collection, located 5 the Ontario Agricultural Museum in Milton, Ont. has a comprehensive collection of designer labels from the first canned goods in Canada. In his short text Herriot gives the early history of advertising in Canada and the history of tin cans (first patented in 1810 in England); he also provides a short history of canneries in Europe and America. He has amusing anecdotes about the Libby family of Chicago, Harley Procter of Procter and Gamble (he named his floating soap Ivory after seeing the word in the Book of Psalms), and Mr. Heinz. He also describes succinctly how the first salmon canneries in New Westminster, B.C., led to fish hatcheries, unionization, and new managerial organization. The labels themselves, in colour, with their succulent fruits, fish, or vegetables, are enriched with pastoral scenes, lions, bison, healthy fanners, or even, in patriotic Canada of those days, a stem Queen Victoria, perhaps admonishing us to empty the can into a dish as soon as possible. □

REVIEW

Bruised love and burial plots

By ELWIN MOORE

83: *Best Canadian Stories*, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon Press, 216 pages, 523.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 488 4) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 489 2).

Coming *Attractions*, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon Press, 138 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 496 5) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 497 3).

WHY DO Canadian writers take so readily to the short story? Maybe it's climate, harsh air making a virtue of quick looks, short breaths. Maybe the crabbed ghosts of crofters and Calvinists still lurch and mutter in the national psyche, urging restraint. Maybe we leave the expansive, the epic, to those practised old imperialists the British, or to those innocent new imperialists, those good-hearted braggarts, the Americans.

Or maybe — I offer this with some

hesitance — it's housework. A lot of Canada's best writers are women. A lot of women start their literary careers while raising children, making meals, trying to remember what it is that gets out mustard stains. In such circumstances, a short story seems at least finishable.

Out comes Oberon, at any rate, with these two collections of short stories, mm of them good, a few outstandingly good, and 12 of the 17 authors are women.

David Helwig and Sandra Martin are the editors for this year's edition, the 13th, of *Best Canadian Stories*. They have let in several pieces that are as much essay as story. They have opted, much more than last year's editors John Metcalf and Leon Rooke, for writers not particularly well known.

Gertrude Story, for example, whom I've never read before, contributes what is for me the best thing in the book: a tale of a long-ago Christmas concert, an eager-to-please sister, a tyrannical father. The story is enhanced by the deceptively plain, German-tinged English of the narrator, a middle-aged woman remembering. The style is lyrical, the tone passionate. We hear the true, bard voice of hurt love, of family bitterness — bitterness of the sort that runs through a life the way a seam of colour runs through a rock, and lasts forever. I will be looking now for Story's recently published first collection, *The Way to Always Dam?*

I hadn't read Margaret Hollingsworth, either. She has a wry, witty story about a modern triangle: a tall, uncomfortable man is being courted simultaneously by his wife and by a male lover who sends weekly flowers. Hollingsworth writes a little like Penelope Gilliatt, without Gilliatt's tendency toward preciousness. She seems to have a similar quickness, a similar light touch, a similar sympathy for eccentrics.

David McFadden and Elizabeth Spencer, two of this collection's more established writers, both spin tension from the pursuit of meaning.

McFadden gives us the same encounter from different witnesses: a man who identifies with a boy fishing and a woman who identifies with the boy's victims, the fish. Shrewdly chivalrous, McFadden allots the more honest account to the woman, the more triumphant account to the man.

Here, as elsewhere, McFadden's work has a sneaky deadpan charm, part of which lies in the unannounced struggle between his narrator and the universe. A likable show-off, a ceaseless explainer, McFadden's narrator manoeuvres to transform the mundane and mildly threatening exterior world — the world

of other people — into an interior world made deep, significant, pleasurable, and safe — the world of the self.

Spencer undertakes something unusual and perilous: a meditation on the approach of joy. She carries it off, too. She's artfully brief; she artfully refers to things easier to imagine than an intimation of joy — gulls, for example, and Montreal pedestrians, and a high-drifting Mississippi buzzard.

A bad thing happens to Mike Mason's prose during "All I Know About Incest." This is a brave, confess-and-be-damned essay that might also have been titled "All I Know Or Can Theorize About Incest." Mason starts off relaxed and confident, engaged and engaging, his language a nice mixture of poetic exactitude and colloquial roughness. When he moves from the personal to the universal, though, and gets going on "the undeniable desire that adults have for some form of sexual fulfilment with children," his writing turns humourless, over-insistent, windy. He makes, for example, a good point about the otherworldliness of children, then continues: "For one thing is certain: if we ever do discover life on other planets, our first and deepest instinct will be to mate with the new race." I'm not so sure. Our first and deepest instinct might rather be (I just throw this out) to take Kodachrome slides.

Joyce Marshall, Edward O. Phillips, and Rona Murray all have good stories here. I'd have excluded David Watmough's "Fury" on account of its pompous manner.

Coming *Attractions* is the new name for Oberon's "Impressions" series, an annual showcase for promising new writers. This year they are Sharon Butala and Bonnie Burnard, both of Saskatchewan, and Sharon Sparling of Montreal.

All three are worth reading. Burnard, on the evidence here, has the greatest range. She is psychologically astute, whether writing of a young girl who shows her breasts to the breadman or of an old man and woman, 47 years married, who bring their differing views of themselves and their lives on a visit to their just-bought burial plots. This graveyard story is Burnard's best. It's ambitious, sympathetic, and the writing has opened up. Two other Burnard stories are harmed by a relentless march of short, flat descriptive sentences — the reader begins to feel that he is being force-fed emotional case-studies.

Butala, of this trio, has the most personal-seeming fictions, and the most winning heroines. In "Breaking Horses," a story of a rancher, his wife, and a hired hand, her prose is tough, concrete, laconic — ideally suited to its

subject. In "The Mission" a woman who has been married first to a no-good in Halifax and then to a farmer in Saskatchewan reflects on her two husbands, end on her two lives that don't much anywhere meet. These are both fine stories.

Sparling is the youngest and flashiest of the three. Her characters are brittle Montrealers preoccupied with self and style. "Goya sky," one remarks, by way of greeting, and is at once corrected: "El Greco. View of Toledo."

Sparling has two stories here about a pianist named Chloe, and the odd thing is that the first is quite good while the second is remarkably bad. The first has a natural flow; the second moves in jerky contrivances. The first shows; the second tells. The first implies; the second crassly states. Chloe is reduced in the second story to that one-time staple of women's-magazine fiction, the glamour girl with man troubles.

Finally, and at the risk of revealing myself as an unusually petty and malicious person, I want to mention that Sparling has written "lay" where she means "laid" in the very first sentence of her good story, "The Chinese Coat." *Saturday Night* magazine (where it first appeared) published it uncorrected, and now Oberon has published it uncorrected. □

REVIEW

Dead souls

By ANTHONY BUKOSKI

Café Le Dog, by Matt Cohen, McClelland & Stewart. 182 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 2179 8).

YOU WANT TO help the troubled and dying people make up their minds in Cohen's eight *Café Le Dog* stories. No doubt they would eschew such attention: in Cohen's universe, characters find little psychological or spiritual comfort. Anally, even if it means suicide, they decide on courses of action only somewhat less unpleasant than the ones they are on. With so little happiness to go around, Cohen seems to ask, how do you settle gracefully into the unhappiness of the world? Is it worth the trouble when your aging flesh reminds you of nothing so much as the horror of the past? G&rally, in addition to any but

the most impersonal physical and emotional contact and the rapid approach of old age, Cohen's dead souls fear history — both the relatively recent past of their own wrecked lives and their antecedents' longer, deeper history, which sometimes goes back as far as the Spanish Inquisition.

I shouldn't like these stories so much. I admit to a bias against angst-ridden English-professor stories, especially with graduate students in them. The first story, "Golden Whore of the Heartland," contains by my count no less than three graduate students, a Biology professor whose wife is a "Vegetarian Psychic," and three — yes, three — professors of English. Somewhere in the middle of "Golden Whore," however, Cohen's depth of vision captivates me. Nor do I use the term lightly. I think Cohen's vision is deep — consistently so in *Café Le Dog*.

In "Golden Whore of the Heartland" he offers agonized, privileged glimpses of the human condition. Aside from the depth of poetic vision itself — the conception of Benton, the divorced, mildly diabetic professor settling into middle age — he employs resonant imagery to illuminate Benton's condition. A topographical analysis of the professor's farm, with its half-remodelled chicken coop and falling down barn in "surrounding woods

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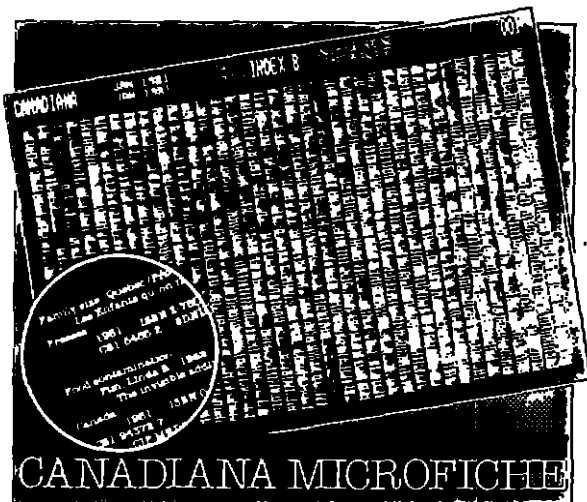
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and hills" 40 miles from Toronto's "perpetually humming" downtown, projects Benton's emotional condition and his potential dissolution. So do images of a sky whose blades of winter light "slip between his ribs." "I've had a heart attack," he thought to himself, an attack of the heart."

F. Scott Fitzgerald's photograph on his office wall farther reminds Benton of a "man whose sincere desire to stick to his last had been corrupted — but only temporarily — by desire. The desire for fame, for the touch of beautiful women, the release of alcohol, and, most of all, the drunkenness of love" — Benton's predicament exactly. The professor's excesses are of far less significance to the world than Fitzgerald's. Benton is one of the "little men" of the universe. He prevails nevertheless by resisting the "Golden Whore." Robyn Marler, whose "used, hide-like skin," Cohen says, "had been leathered by empire and corruption." Where Fitzgerald, and Jay Gatsby, had been seized upon by the heartland that produced them, were seduced by alcohol and beautiful women, Benton resists "this aging American goddess . . . with her honey-blond golden whore hair and her wise-dirty smile . . . [of] the sweet drugged heartland of New York vice and corruption." In the end he returns to his Thalia and the pastoral Canadian countryside.

Threatening images of commerce and industry recur in *Café Le Dog*. Another time, for example, Cohen speaks of "steel reinforced businessmen." In "Sentimental Meetings," an extraordinary story, Joseph B. and the "family friend" Hanna, having recently arrived from Paris, find themselves denied access to the *Synagoga del Transito* in Toledo, one of the most beautiful in the world. While a German film crew shoots inside. Within a few minutes "floodlamps had been set up, the entire synagogue staked out by the crew. . . . The sounds of camera motors filled the room; electric whirrings that buzzed about . . . the floodlights trailing their course. . . . 'We wanted to film people praying,' the director said." In "At the Empress Hotel," moreover, "fat cars" hurl by the shadowy "maestro." And in the tide story Cohen mentions "the lot of the poet in this century of shit and machines."

Despite the threat of machines and the frequent absence of love in the modern world, Cohen sometimes reaffirms life, as in "Golden Whore of the Heartland," "Death of a Guppy," and "The Sins of Tomes Bemires." In procreation and physical intimacy there repose if not joy and strength, then at least temporary "surcease of sorrow," as Poe would say. Other times

characters choose to resist life, to avoid regeneration. In "A Love for the Infinite" the protagonist freezes to death in the woods; in "Sentimental Meetings" Joseph Benares quite possibly suffers from "the same disease . . . aloneness" as Hanna Santangel — "thirty-seven and unmarried, all the Benares genes and chromosomes begging to be reproduced;" and in "Life on This Planet," Heinrich Brandt, the piano player, is "not so used to the company of women," though he would have as believe otherwise.

Usually sombre of tone, the eight stories here are sometimes frightening; they offer so bleak a world-view. There is fine writing here nonetheless. Cohen's often leisurely exposition, especially in the long first story, accretes details that later return to haunt reader and character alike. Little hope exists for the future. At best one tries to compromise, or subdue, Cohen's longings and in the process forget the past. In *Café Le Dog* it is usually best to do that, though sometimes it becomes impossible. In the title story, Camille is exemplary of the sort of unsettled peace Cohen's protagonists seek. With his girl-friend, a pock-marked Parisian whore with whom he has spent the night, and his unstable mother, who hopes to see Sartre, "the three of us," Cohen writes "went to *Café Le Dog* and took our coffee outside [in the morning]. No one in Paris could have been happier." □

REVIEW

Style over substance

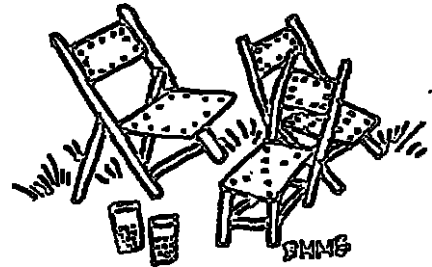
By GEORGE GALT

Storm Signals, by Charles Ritchie, Macmillan, 192 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9782 7).

IN HIS FIRST published diary, *The Siren Years*, Charles Ritchie wrote: "The things that one cannot talk about accumulate each year — each month there are more things one suppresses. One grows more polite, more guarded. . . ." The fourth volume of his journals, covering the decade 1962-71, supports

that observation made in 1941. The old ambassador's prose is as elegant as the young foreign service officer's, but the perceptions are less venturesome, the interests less broad, the enlightened curiosity markedly diminished.

Those who have grown fond of Ritchie through his earlier diaries, however, will enjoy this book. It tracks the



author, by 1962 a senior Canadian diplomat, through his years as ambassador to Washington and high commissioner in London. These assignments, his last with the department of external affairs, echoed his first diplomatic assignments as an apprentice officer in Washington and then as Vincent Massey's private secretary in war-time London.

Throughout his career Ritchie moved easily in a wide circle of diplomats and socialites. Apparently he was an able policy maker and foreign representative. He also had the good fortune to enter Canadian diplomacy during its formative years, establish himself as a man of some influence in external affairs, and secure a series of enviable postings. He was a gifted writer with a full life in and out of the office. His diary was by turns an entertainment, a means of holding precious momenta, and an attempt to clarify the chaos of his sometimes frantic official life.

As ambassador to Washington Ritchie was caught in the middle of the Diefenbaker-Kennedy antipathy. Canadian-American relations deteriorated badly during these years, recovering briefly when Pearson took office, but sinking again after Kennedy's assassination. The diplomatic tension may not have improved Ritchie's life — he toyed with the idea of resigning at one point — but it certainly improved his diary. He was still capable of distilling his observations of the great political currents of the day into a few pithy lines:

The cast of thought in Washington is absolutist. It is true that there are a number of incompatible Absolutists, often in embittered struggle with each other, but all are Absolute for America, this super-nation of theirs which charges through inner and outer space engined by inexhaustible energy, confident in its right direction. the one and only in-

heritor of all empires and the one which most fear; and condemns the name of Empire, the United States of America, exhorting, protecting, preaching to and profiting by — half the world.

At the most highly charged meeting of his Washington years, Ritchie watched through a window while Lyndon Johnson ranted at Lester Pearson for advocating a pause in the Vietnam bombing. Contrary to later reports the ambassador did not see the president hoist Pearson off the ground. He "strode up to him and seized him by the lapel of his coat, at the same time raising his other arm to the heavens." Ritchie expressed pride in Pearson's courage to speak out, but Johnson's outrageous behaviour and the Prime Minister's mild-mannered acceptance of it can hardly be considered a high point in Canadian foreign relations.

The Canadian High Commission in London seems to have made few demands on Ritchie's intellect, and he was perhaps too comfortable there to press himself. As a diarist he was becoming too gentle, and lapsing too often into the banal. We read of a 60-year-old ambassador who feels his age, focuses increasingly on good food, soothes his angst with walks in the park, still delights in the company of attractive and witty people, but as much as anything,

likes high position and its perks.

"I reflected on the excessive attraction which style exercises over my imagination," he noted in 1939, diagnosing his own tragic flaw. Judging by the diary 30 years later, attention to style and surface have blunted the incisive moral and intellectual energy that were so engaging in the young man.

Novelist *manqué* that Ritchie always was, however, even in these later years he could still fix an undiplomatic observer's eye on the little dramas around him and come up with sentences like, "In the afternoon a Brigadier and his wife came for drinks, she a tiresome woman with that air of tucking away what you say to her with disapproval, as if she would take it out of her bag when she got home and, if necessary, report it to the Proper Authorities." And he could still preserve people perfectly in a phrase or two, as with Jean-Luc Pépin, "a cross between an Assyrian emperor and Groucho Marx."

In Storm *Signals* Ritchie has allowed us to watch him wind down and grow old, a fascinating and disturbing process often unflattering to the author. If we do not always love this safe, sybaritic, old Tory, we must be grateful for his un pompous sense of self, and the unconventional diplomat's ego that wanted to make it all public. □

REVIEW

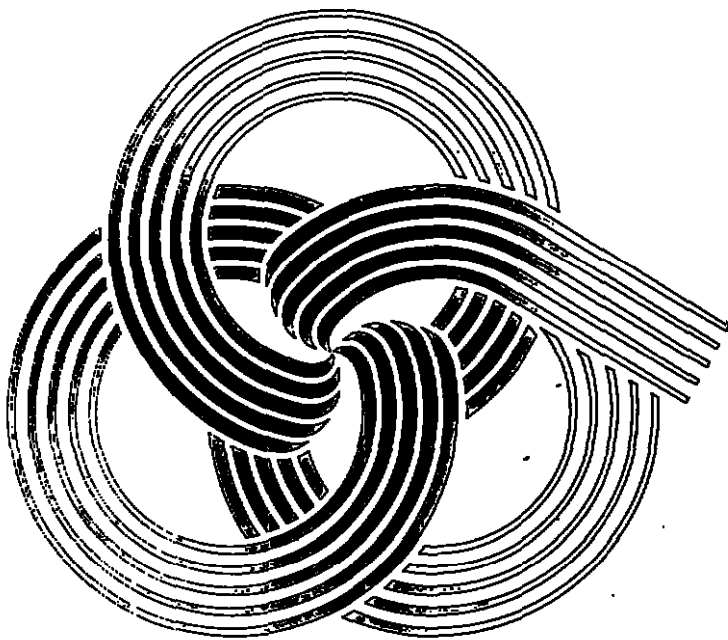
Voyeurs chez nous

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

L'Écrivain devant son oeuvre, by Donald Smith, Editions Québec/Amérique, 338 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 2 89037 139 5).

THERE ARE FEW things I like more than listening to other people talk shop. Only those passionately involved with their own work can give us an idea of the fire, the motives, the procedures that lead to the final achievement, and few people are more passionately involved with their work than writers. Talking shop, a writer will tear apart the clockwork of his craft, and sometimes, if we are lucky, we will catch a glimpse of the springs that make him tick. Although a writer's work on its own should (and usually does) suffice, a knowledge of his landscape — tastes, opinions, anecdotes, reading lists — can add new meanings to

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the text we read. There is little harm in being voyeurs of literature.

Donald Smith's collection of interview is a guided tour to a writers' workshop. Almost all the better-known French-Canadian writers are here: Smith began his interviews in 1976, for the then recently founded magazine *Lettres québécoises*, and has since revised and added to them. Included are interviews with Félix-Antoine Savard, Anne Hébert, Yves Thériault, Jacques Ferron, Gérard Bessette, Marie-Claire Blais, Jacques Godbout, Gatién Lapointe, Michel Tremblay, Antonine Maillet, Adrien Thériot, Gilbert La Rocque, Jean Barbeau, and Pierre Morency.

So different are these writers, their aims and styles and views, that one wonders at the end of the 350 pages what exactly is this strange beast we call French-Canadian literature, composed of parts so heterogeneous that their only common features are trivial or accidental: a language and a place of residence or birth. Language and place, however, seem to form the same recognizable pattern in each of these writers' several carpets — a pattern that leads French-Canadian literature its identity. Each of the writers interviewed here is concerned with the use of language, and sees in the land he or she has chosen a mirror of the universe. "This, for me, is the world as

it is," says Marie-Claire Blais in her inter&w. "This is not only literature, this is how the world is mad;."

The French-Canadian tongue seems to be their most precious possession. Félix-Antoine Savard, a writer whose novels (*Menaud, Martin et le pauvre*) appear more concerned with the facts of the plot than with the words that tell it, is shown here outraged at the "linguistic degradation" he witnesses (even though he admires that overrated melodrama, Maria *Chapelaine*), and condemns those who "want to innovate and only succeed in cresting chaos." Clearer, more precise in his thoughts, is Yves Thériault: "A language imposes a certain mentality, a certain manner of thought. The logic within a language lends a logic to our thinking." He then adds: "French is a totally illogical language."

Two writers who might be expected to concentrate on purely linguistic problems, — Anne Hébert and Marie-Claire Blais — surprise us by turning instead to the factual source of their fiction. "I believe," says Hébert, "that of the roots of *l'imaginaire* [I am curious to see how the translator will render this word into English] are material roots, real roots." Reading *Héloïse*, and *Les fous de Bassan* I felt that Hébert's world arose from ineffable dreams and visions.

Wrong, Hébert seems to say; it is the other way round: the world is at the origin of her dreams. In *Kamouraska*, for instance, "the snow brings back the story," the material world sparks off the nightmare, the remembered crime. Marie-Claire Blais shares this order of cause and effect. Her hallucinatory universe is created by what she calls "a frantic realism" of which snow and cold are essential elements. "We live," she says, "in a country where the rules set by the cold, and the renewal brought on by the end of each winter, play an important part."

Most of the interviews have the quality of conversation, but a few are also, in themselves, examples of the writer's craft. Gatién Lapointe is one of those gifted with exquisitely constructed speech. Some of his answers read like prose poems or poetic essays; deliberate pieces rather than improvised, random thoughts. Antonine Maillet's commentaries are also intelligent and elegant, and her distinction between the masculine symbols chosen by Quebec writers, as opposed to the female symbols of Acadian writers, is certainly worthy of investigation.

Perhaps the most successful portrait in the book (because it somehow seems complete in every sense) is that of Michd Tremblay. Donald Smith guides us fimm Tremblay's youthful feeling of shame regarding the literature of his country on to his discovery of the stage and the triumph of *Les belles soeurs*. Reacting against the theatre of Marcel Dubé, and under the triple influence of Genet, Beckett, and the classical Greek playwrights, Tremblay explains that he decided to use language "almost as a political weapon, transposing it but not changing it, making it into a language of the stage, keeping all the words, making them 'fly' in a powerfully dramatic way." And further on, defending his use of Quebec French as opposed to the French of France, Tremblay says: "My characters speak a certain language, I write a certain language. Both languages are not that different. I don't want to look like an intellectual discussing the underdogs and using a language that is not their own." According to Tremblay, when he entered school in 1949; to speak French was see" as something "only for the girls."

Through the intelligence of Smith's questions even writers whose work I find less interesting achieve a voice of their own. Gérard Bessette, for instance, makes his ideas for *Les Anthropoïdes* sound so appealing that it is hard to believe they became the unreadable finished book. I was also astounded to hear Bessette declare that "Bergson and Freud" were his strongest influences:

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Nietzsche and Jung would have seemed more likely — but these are the surprises one comes to expect in this volume.

We turn to the opinions and anecdotes of these writers as we would turn to the words of a shaman or a sibyl, perhaps because of the magic element involved in every act of creation; we turn to them also because we delight in eavesdropping and gossip. Whatever the reasons, this volume of interviews collected by Donald Smith is a delight, and essential reading for anyone interested in the voice of French Canada. □

REVIEW

Life with father

By JUDITH FITZGERALD

The Tiger in the Tiger Pit, by Janette Turner Hospital, McClelland & Stewart, 242 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4221 3).

JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL'S second novel is an unusual blend of goodness and greatness. On the one hand, it is merely a good novel; on the other hand, it is written by a novelist with a potential for greatness. Bring both hands together and applause does not result.

Set predominantly in Ashville, Massachusetts, the novel examines the traumas and treacheries the Carpenter family endures throughout most of its existence. Edward Carpenter, a patriarchal archetype if ever there was one, displays a perverse predilection for self-abasement in spite of his better intentions. Incapable of breaking out of an inescapable homage to conventional correctness, Carpenter's emotional paralysis is deftly reflected in the active revolt his 73-year-old body engages in. It refuses to cooperate with Carpenter's image of himself, and throughout the novel Carpenter berates it because its legs no longer support him: "He had begun to hold insulting conversations with his body since it had chosen to go its own defiant way." In effect, as Hospital points out, Carpenter cannot bear the thought of any thought, thing, or person (including those in his family) going its own way.

Carpenter, a retired School principal,

sees (and dreams) things his way. Elizabeth, his wife of 50 years, sees (and daydreams) things her way. Their three adult children, of course, see thii their way. The story is focused in the tension that derives from its several ways of seeing. Victoria, the eldest, has long since lapsed into the refuge of mental illness; Jason, the son in the middle, has lapsed into the refuge of practising psychology; and, to complete the trinity, Emily, the youngest, has lapsed into the refuge of becoming a concert violist.

Complications abound. Emily, for instance, already has an eight-year-old son by the time the novel opens. Not just any son. Emily's son is a bastard, at least in Edward's original sense of the word: "A word flew fmm his mouth like a stone. Slut, perhaps. Or tramp ... I will not have a bastard in my house. I never wish to see him. Never."

Together yet impossibly apart, the members of the Carpenter family move inexorably toward discovery and self-definition. Affairs of the heart, the acts of the past, the tensions of the present all combine to provide the novel with a verisimilitude rarely equalled in family fictions.

However, the novel doesn't succeed, not insofar as it could have. The primary flaw of *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* can be located in the fact that, as a narrative, it can't compete with the singular talents of its creator. Hospital is an author in search of a subject worthy of her vast abilities. Somehow, the terrors and titillations of the Carpenter family are not that subject. Indeed, 50th wedding anniversaries and family reunions of any kind ought to be left to the manufacturers of greeting cards.

The narrative structure of *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* bears a resemblance to William Faulkner's masterpiece, *As I Lay Dying*. As well, like the hapless Bundren family, the Carpenters display a perverse tendency for chaos (one of the author's favourite words) in spite of themselves. But ultimately Edward Carpenter's attempts to go ungentle into that good night are not the stuff of which great novels are made; neither is the way the remaining Carpenters, either consciously or unconsciously, sustain his rage against the dying of the light. The individual and collective trials and triumphs could have shone and shimmered had they been showcased in a short story; as they appear here, they do not rise to the obvious talent Hospital has expended in their creation and resolution.

Finally, *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* might be viewed as a literary tragedy, not unlike the tragic heroes Hospital herself alludes to throughout the novel. Hospital's writing, with the exception of

her overdependence on simile, is exceptionally polished, brilliantly executed, and everywhere fraught with such intensity of spirit and sensibility and such richness of style that the results are consistently breath-taking. She has the eyes, the ears, and especially the piercing insights so necessary to the art and craft of great fiction. However, when all is said and undone, *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* will stand as a testament to great failure which, incidentally, is far more admirable than lukewarm success. □

REVIEW

Gestures of love

By KEITH GAREBIAN

Selected Poems, by Fred Cogswell, Guernica Editions, 59 pages. \$15.00 cloth (ISBN 0 919349 22 6) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 919349 21 8).

The Moment Is All: Selected Poems 1944-1982, by Ralph Gustafson, McClelland & Stewart, 191 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 3714 6).

The Vision Tree, by Phyllis Webb, Talonbooks, 160 pages, 96.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 202 9).

FRED COGSWELL'S poetry (at least that selected by Antonio D'Alfonso) has not worn well. There is a distinctly old-fashioned mustiness to its techniques and sentiments, and although the rhythms are generally fluent and lyrical, the familiar wisdoms and earnest paradoxes compound the quaintness of diction and form. Virtually all the poems are in rhymed verse, and while this shows his easy skill with old conventions, it hardly breathes fresh life into subjects that quickly assume a hoary cast — as in "Death Watch":

No thought or act of mine can twist
The fate that ticks upon my tit;
Is sixty seconds deeper prod
My body's stake towards the sod:
And every pause becomes to me
AR ominous eternity,
And should I tear the watch apart
Each tick would echo in my heart.

I hear echoes of doggerel.

The collection opens dreadfully: "I from my myness/must a you create/for your yourness/is inviolate." Rarely has

metaphysical wit bee" so appallingly or rudely misspent. And from here the verse, which at its best has a "Elizabethan grace, rarely redeems itself. "Had Our Love's Disease" shows rhetorical cleverness, and "The Maelstrom" entertains with "trite paradox, but Cogswell falls into hackneyed images and platitudes. Where our Victorians and neo-Victorians stabbed themselves with maple leaves and the sublimity of jagged mountain tops, Cogswell suffers under "the whip of love." Where the modems bravely let loose the id and libido, Cogswell follows with his strenuous sexual imaged: "Where river slides through spreading thighs of soil/Whose maidenhead is captured by the worm,/Where summer air wins free from tension's coil/As lightning darts to deepest womb of storm. . . ." The triteness is all: "Poor fools who walk staid roads and crave/The high, bird-travelled sky above./Who want the things they dare not have/And have the thii they will not love."

If it is true, as Cogswell sneers, that "the modern critic gives his best reviews/To work that's esoteric and abstruse," this collection will not earn praise. But the blunter truth is that this poetry is unnecessary homage "before tradition's throne": it has served a "apprenticeship to rules, is not twisted by

dreams or myths of Freud and Jung, but traces naked truths with reverence for dusty poetic gossamer.

Ralph Gustafson is eight years older than Cogswell, yet far more in step with poetic progress. In *The Moment Is All*, a collection culled from the past four decades, Gustafson exhibits the meditative cast of a mind that lyrically and wittily integrates the earthly and definite with the spiritual and ambiguous. For all their forged ingenuity and diagonal movement, his poems have strong aural values that create music for the humanist. Gustafson appears to subscribe to Wallace Stevens's belief that "the gaiety of language is our seigneur," although Gustafson's ellipses and sprung rhythms often get the better of acutest speech or clearest song.

At his lyrical best, even in the early poems of *Rivets Among Rocks*, Gustafson builds compact verse with internal rhymes, alliteration, consonance, caesurae, and funnelled phrases. His landscapes (as in *Corners-in the Glass*, *Landscape With Rain*, or *Conflicts of Spring*) are beautiful, soft pictures of settings that vindicate human intelligence and love. Paradox moves like a subtle stream through poems that wimple with phrases, fold subordinate clauses upon one another, so that the mind can follow both God's and the poet's creation in layers of revelation. Gustafson's technique is a practised one that goes back to Anglo-Saxon kennings, metaphysical wit, classical forms, romantic and modernist devices. The technique leads frequently to effects that Babette Deutsch once called exuberant but overly hortatory, but the rich sensuousness and contemplative music always provide a sense of process or movement. Because "abstractions are a" airy nothing," Gustafson turns to the specific moment whose gradations of meaning and grandeur are worked into a coherent vision. "Wisdom is/Accumulation," and "being/Is from choice, conclusions learned."

"The moment is all" — its temporality a reminder of a poignant paradox: "So God loved/The world He gave us brevity in it" ("Sermon for the Day"). Gustafson delivers many moments — from one with a" old Moscow woman sweeping the pavement and showing her unique humanity, to another of country walking, where perception "folds in inverted syntax and a sequence of mingled active and passive voice. A woman poised 0" her verandah beneath a gold moo" in October ("Hunter's Moon") is a moment of burnished beauty, just as the cutting and eating of a peach ("Aspect of a Cat Peach") creates a moment Intensely alive with guilty vibrations:

*Cut on the china plate of mint foliage
Around the rim, a cool gathering circle
Of indentation holds the fragments of
quench
And question.
What has this to do with hunger
And Ethiopia; rotten weather in
Ontario
Raised the rarity of that peach; the
skin peeled
Back like a sexual nonpresbyterian
pleasure,
What of the cry of children that runs
off
The guilty blade of silver? Heaven is
doomed
here. Only in paradise are peaches
Prized purely and is pith succulent.*

Gustafson's social conscience is easily activated (in, for instance, "I Think of AU Soft Limbs," "The Newspaper," "State of Affairs"), but his soul is not chained to history. Although the palms of his hands are marked by lines of history, and his mind is alive with anecdotes and examples of the past, his preoccupation is with the moment, our designed interim, where intuition or pure knowledge cannot be a sufficient fulcrum for being. Knowledge, of course, is valuable, for "What ma" creates in meaning is/The world we live in though the rocky/Earth is what we ride on," and eve" skepticism — the healthy, cynical knowledge that challenges self-complacent faith — is inadequate to contend with "coming and becoming."

Gustafson would readily leave contemplation of history to go out and smell jonquils ("Thoughts 0" a Narrow Night"), but he has a quick soul and subtle mind, and he responds to being more than to myth (or so he seems to claim). Accordingly, his entire poetic career has appeared to be a fugue 0" the necessity of love. In "Praise of Margins" he takes St. Francis's point of view ("All Is news of God") and finds love to be the pivot of the world. This human love becomes the true *raison d'être* in various poems, whether expressed as religious devotion or secular commitment, the love of trivia or the sexual celebration of erotic love, the "permanence of temporary gods." Intuition and knowledge must yield to this force: "Not cogito; amo ergo sum." There is special love in his craft where, in the corners of his poetic glass, "Style is action shaped, structure/Done, the form without waste,/And time ordered, to rightness come."

Rightness has certainly come to Phyllis Webb, who recently won the Governor General's Award for *The Vision Tree*. At first her poems appear to be gestural in a quotidian sense: "On the apparent corner of two streets/a strange ma" shook/a blue cape above

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my head, / I saw it as the shaking sky/ and was forthwith ravished." The familiar is transformed into the strange or mysterious. Immediately after, a man bending in a park to light a cigarette joins himself to flame with succinct ease. The poet's "prism eyes" find that somehow "shapes fall in a torrent of design" as "we shake a world to order." Webb's gestural mode has a poignancy that sinks into the metre, rhythm, and sound. "Lear on the Beach at Break of Day" is a stark expression of the pathos of madness, as Lear "tosses the buttons of his sanity/like aged pebbles into the hay." The pebbles are pieces of his own shattered self that drop like "a hardened crop/into the soft, irrational sea."

The gestures are shrewdly chosen, without any false effort toward the grand style, and they reflect an attempt to write and live without feeling ultimately absurd or petty or negligible. They constitute one important device in Webb's poetic strategy that often complicates itself by a cognitive mode.

"Chung Yung" sets a geometry of ideas as the year is brought around full circle. "Cycles within cycles" give birth to words, patterns, moods, and finally there is a delicate balance — a pivot "Around which are described/Immaculate arcs." This might sound drily

abstract until we discover Webb's movement toward composure — a point that is underscored in Sharon Thesen's interesting introduction to the book. In poems such as "And in Our Time," "Patience," "Two Versions," "Breaking," or "Marvell's Garden," Webb moves from familiar humane wisdom to cognitive disclosures that balance ambiguous profundity against a "serene capacity" for wisdom. Through her clever effects (word inversions for rhythm, shamanistic chant, metaphysical imagery) Webb is poised on the poems' senses by a strong voice that works along the lyric notation.

The dialectic of dream and cognition, the strange and familiar, grows darker in the poems from *The Sea Is Also a Garden*. And it is in these selections that she, like Pound, tries to elude "The Great Iambic Pentameter/who is the Hound of Heaven in our stress." Although the voice is generally poised, even in its growing pessimism, there is a certain disconcerting over-projection at times when, as in "Poems of Dublin," sentimentality gets the better of her gesturalism. Apparently aware of this, she determines to write either Haiku or "long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo" — the poetic poles stretching between the pared-down

Naked Poems and the enigmatically coded *Wilson's Bowl*. Then she experiments, with characteristic defiance of traditional rules and constraints, with Persian anti-ghazals that tend toward the topical, dialectical, and private.

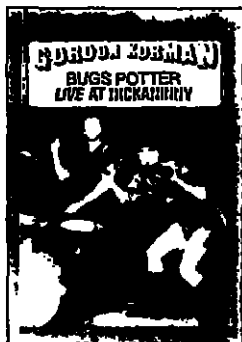
Finally, however, the defining authority of Webb's best poetry comes from her deciphering mind and heart. *The Vision Tree* delivers an iconography that joins the celestial and chthonic by a marriage of symbols. Webb envisions a tree akin to the Tree of Life or the shaman's magic sky-ladder, where "With laughter on his haunted face/a madman captive in a leaf's embrace/the poet wildly shakes his tree" as he tries to see life steadily and well. The tree's rootedness, regenerative power, and receptiveness to birds and men allow it to link the world and gods. This tree is wedded to Wilson's Bowl, the ancient petroglyph bowl carved into the shoreline rock in B.C., which also joins heavenly and earthly realms by floating the sun and moon on its water in a stone basin. As Sharon Thesen indicates, "the lance and the cup of Christian mythology find their pre-Christian counterparts" in Webb's iconography. Both are fixed, holy, and eternal centres from which the poet passes "the great dreams" on to our "common good." □

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Charles R. Saunders on the role of blacks in
fantastic literature: 'Outer space
seemed as segregated as a South African toilet

By JOHN BELL

Reading from
Left to Right

ONE MAN'S POLITICAL HISTORY

H.S. Ferns

Foreword by Malcolm Muggeridge

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- Thomas Edison worked on a machine to kill to the dead?

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NOT ONLY one of the few Canadian heroic fantasy writers but also one of a handful of black writers active in the field, Charles R. Saunders was born in Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, in 1946. After completing his B.A. in psychology at Lincoln University, he emigrated to Canada in 1969 and now lives in Ottawa, where he teaches at Algonquin College. In 1975 his story, "City of Madness," which first appeared in the Canadian small-press magazine *Dark Fantasy*, was selected by Lin Carter for the DAW Books anthology, *The Year's Best Fantasy Stories*. Since then his fiction has been published in a number of collections, including *The Year's Best Horror Stories: VII*, *Hecate's Cauldron*, and the ground-breaking feminist anthology, *Amazons!* Saunders was nominated for the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Award for his first novel, *Imaro* (DAW, 1981), the story of a black warrior whose fantastic adventures rival those of Robert B. Howard's *Conan*, and his second book in the series, *The Quest for Cush*, is to be published next year. Praised by Spider Robinson as "a man who has obviously made a thorough study of African mythologies," Saunders talked to John Bell about his unique role in fantasy writing:

Books in Canada: *What attracted you initially to heroic fantasy, a sub-genre of fantastic literature that was once notorious for its less-than-enlightened racial attitudes?*

Charles R. Saunders: As a reader, I was attracted by the action, the mayhem, the exotic settings, and the sheer imaginary power of the genre. Also, I was fascinated by the kinship between heroic fantasy and the ancient epic myth-cycles that were the world's first literature. The legend of *Beowulf*, for example, could have easily been marketed today as heroic fantasy. As for unenlightened racial attitudes, I must admit that when I first encountered the genre, in the early 1960s, I did not pay very much attention to the racial content of the stories I read. It was only when I became deeply absorbed in the study of African history and culture that I took a second look at the fantasy I had been reading, and at

that point I began seriously to question the racial content of some of it.

BIC: *Do you think your use of African mythology will inspire other fantasy writers to look at non-traditional sources?*

Saunders: It would be extremely pretentious of me to think that my work could have such an effect. Long before my first novel was published, writers like Richard Lupoff and E. Hoffman Price used Oriental culture in an original, non-stereotypic way. Anthologists such as Marion Zimmer Bradley have shown a



Charles R. Saunders

sincere interest in non-traditional, Arthurian, Scandinavian, or Celtic sources in selecting stories. Perhaps my own work is contributing to the achievement of an atmosphere in which publishers are becoming more open to non-traditional fantasy. But I can't say I started the trend.

BIC: *How do you account for the lack of involvement by blacks in science fiction and fantasy?*

Saunders: First, most black writers become involved at an early age with black literature, which is a field all its own, like Canadian literature. Black literature involves interpretation and evocation of the black experience. There is a long and honourable tradition in that area, stretching from Richard Wright through James Baldwin to Toni Morrison. Many young black writers are attracted to that tradition. Second, until recently there wasn't very much in science fiction and fantasy for black readers to identify with. Outer space seemed as segregated as a South African toilet, and it was hard to imagine blacks

PHOTOGRAPH BY SU ROGERS

sitting at King Arthur's Round Table. Of course, there were plenty of blacks in Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan stories, but they weren't quite of the same stature as a Kwame Nkrumah or an Albert Luthuli [winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960]. Today, fortunately, there is excellent work being produced by such black writers as Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, and Steven Barnes. Also, white writers like John Brunner, Robert Silverberg, and Spider Robinson are using non-stereotypic black characters in their work.

BiC: Why is heroic fantasy enjoying such phenomenal popularity today?

Saunders: Heroic fantasy has always been popular. As I mentioned before, the genre has deep roots in epic mythology. In pre-industrial times all cultures — literate and non-literate alike — developed epic myth-cycles full of quests, heroes, heroines, gods, goddesses, monsters, and other imaginary beings. These myths were an integral part of the belief-systems of the cultures that spawned them. The advent of industrial society changed the ground rules under which epic myth had operated for so long. No longer was the transmission of culture couched in myths and folk-tales. Cultural lessons became the province of the school-teacher, not the story-teller, and epic mythology was relegated to the wayside. But only temporarily. After a long period in limbo, epic mythology finally gravitated toward a new social niche — commercial publishing — and the educational function of these epics became superseded by the entertainment function. What's phenomenal is not the current popularity of that genre. What's phenomenal is that it took publishers so long to realize that a substantial proportion of us continue to dream of dragons — even though those dreams were detoured for a while.

BiC: How do you respond to the charge that fantasy fiction is escapist?

Saunders: Of course it's escapist. And what's wrong with that? A U fiction, regardless of genre or medium, is by definition escapist, because none of it really ever happened. The reader and the writer engage in a temporary partnership in the willing suspension of disbelief. The writer creates a new reality that exists only in the pages of his work. If the work is successful, the reader will share that reality with its creator. Fantasy cannot be singled out as the only "escapist" form of fiction. We've been creating fiction ever since our prehistoric ancestors swapped stories by the firelight in their caves.

BiC: Why is it, do you suppose, that you've managed to break into a number

of recent feminist anthologies?

Saunders: Well, I'm in sympathy with many feminist ideas, but I've never intentionally written a feminist story. I have written some stories about an African woman warrior, and the setting for those stories is based on pre-colonial Dahomey [now Benin]. In Dahomey, a woman soldier was hardly an anomaly, as the Dahomean army contained three regiments that fought alongside their male counterparts. Perhaps the editors of these anthologies appreciated the way I was able to integrate the concept of a woman warrior into the cultural background of the stories.

BiC: What trends do you foresee in the fantasy field?

Saunders: It's hard to speculate on new trends in a field that relies on folklore and traditions of the past. However, I do think the genre will broaden its

scope. Currently, 90 per cent of the fantasy on the bookshelves is based on IO per cent of the world's epic mythological traditions. I hope more attention will be paid to that untapped 90 per cent. Not only that, I also feel there will be greater participation in the field by authors of ethnic minority background, who will turn to their own cultural roots for inspiration, as I have done.

BiC: Do you anticipate an increase in Canadian participation?

Saunders: I don't have to anticipate that trend. It's happening right now. Here in Ottawa alone there are three other fantasy writers who have had stories published professionally, and they're all writing novels now. Remember these names: Charles de Lint, Gordon Derevanchuk, and Galad Elflandsson. You'll be hearing a great deal from them in the future. □

FILM

From the sex life of cricketers to Earle Birney's train imitations: a browser's notes on the Festival of Festivals

By MORRIS WOLFE

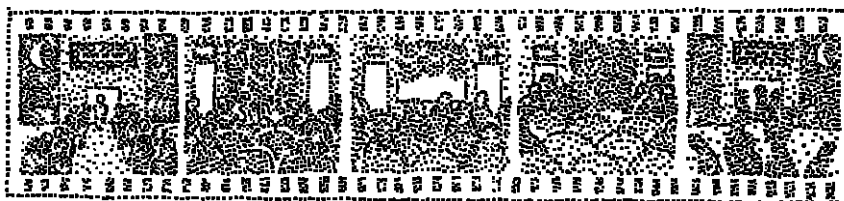
EXCEPT FOR the rep cinemas, this was not a vintage summer for film viewing in Toronto. Few new releases were worth going out of one's way to see: Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* was lovely to look at, but essentially empty. Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* was handsome, but much too clever for my liking. I found more laughs in Bob and Doug McKenzie's flawed *Strange Brew* than in Woody Allen's one-joke concoction, *Zelig*. My favourite film was probably Daniel Vigne's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, although less for its story than for the fascinating view it offers of everyday life in 16th-century rural France.

For the benefit of my eager eyes, therefore, the eighth annual Festival of Festivals arrived not a moment too soon. Although I don't think there were any masterpieces among the 30-odd

films I saw, there was certainly enough good viewing to make up for the summer. (I should warn you that I stayed clear of almost all the "big" films — those that would probably have a run after the festival: *Educating Rita*, *The Big Chill*, *Merry Christmas*, *Mr. Lawrence*, *The Moon in the Gutter*, etc.)

The film I enjoyed most was a documentary titled *Trobriand Cricket*, a delightful anthropological study of the ways in which natives of the Trobriand Islands have slowly adapted their old colonial masters' game of cricket to their tribal needs and customs. There are dozens, sometimes hundreds of players on each team — all wearing war paint. Tribal dances and chants are performed; the chants frequently reflect on the sexual prowess (or lack thereof) of one's opponents.

Trobriand Cricket was just one of



many good documentaries. **Simcha Jacobovici's *Falasha*** is a passionate film about the plight of the black Jews of **Ethiopia**: blacks persecute them because they're Jews; Jews are embarrassed because they're black. Don **Pennebaker's *Rockaby*** shows us British actor **Billie Whitelaw preparing** for and then giving a haunting performance of the Samuel Beckett play, ***Rockaby***. **She's** directed by an unctuous Alan Schneider. Another good (although short) documentary, ***Aloud***, by Don **McWilliams**, consists of the performance of a sound poem by **Earle Bii**, who recalls the sounds of trains from his childhood. His performance is **intercut** with shots of trains, including footage from ***Night Mail***, another film about trains for which **W.H. Auden** wrote poetry of a very different kind 50 years ago.

I first praised **Allan King's** documentary, ***Come On Children***, in ***Saturday Night*** 12 years ago. But the film, about a group of confused teenagers brought together on a farm for 10 weeks, was never released. ***Come On Children*** (its title comes from the **Arlo Guthrie** song) finally had its premiere at the festival. It stands up well. It's a much quieter film than ***Warrendale*** or ***A Married Couple***, but just as compelling.

Certainly ***Come On Children*** provided

a nice contrast with the far more flamboyant and much less interesting ***Seventeen***, which was also screened. ***Seventeen***, by **Joel De Mott** and **Jeff Kreines**, is in the sneering tradition of **American** film-makers **Frederick Wiseman** (***Hospital***) and **Allen Funt** (***Candid Camera***). There is rarely anyone to like on the screen. Except for the director, such work seems to say, the world is full of twits. **Seventeen** will probably do very well at the box office; ***Come On Children***, on the other hand, will likely disappear from view.

There were also some interesting notion fii. ***Insiang***, by the celebrated Philippine director **Lino Brocka**, was the best of those I saw. In ***Insiang***, acted out to a backdrop of the shuns of Manila, a mother and daughter, trapped by their roles and their poverty, briefly and tragically share the same lover. It's melodrama, but it works. The two women, played by **Hilda Koronel** and **Mona Lisa** (that's her real name), are superb.

Lo ***Quarantine***, by Quebec's **Anne Claire Poirier**, brings together some childhood friends who haven't seen each other in almost 30 years. These men and women are all now in their mid-40s and have all been saddened into adulthood, each in his or her own way. Unfortunately, **Poirier** occasionally allows twits

of melodrama to get in the way of this otherwise effectively understated film. ***La Quarantine*** is reminiscent of, but muck better than. **Robert Altman's** ***Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean***.

I hadn't read or seen **David Fennario's** play ***Balconville***, but was impressed by **Mark Blandford's** video production of the work. The play concerns poor working-class anglophones and francophones living side-by-side in east-end Montreal. Both are victims of the system. Videotape often makes serious drama look too two-dimensional (it works better for sitcoms), but the play is so strong, and the performances are so good, that I quickly forgot it was videotape I was watching. Would that **Ronald Sutherland's** ***Lark des neiges*** (***Suzanne***) had been as well served by film-maker **Robin Spry**. **Seeing *Balconville*** reminds me that **Mark Blandford's** beat work for television, the six-part series ***Duplessis***, has yet to be shown in English Canada.

A FEW WORDS about festival publications. For me, the most interesting part of the quite good festival catalogue is a 10-page section by **Peter Harcourt** titled "The Documentary Context." No one has more incisively explained Canadians' predilection for documentary:

The less a country relies on, big studio production, the more it may encourage documentary. The more a country is concerned with self-definition, the more it may resort to documentary. Finally, the less money a country has for film production, the more it may be reduced to documentary. All these considerations have had their effect on film production in this country.

The October, 1983, issue of ***Video-mania*** (920 Alness Street, Suite 110, Downsview, Ont. M3J 2H7) is devoted to video at the festival. The issue is atrociously designed and has more typos per square inch than anything I've seen in a while. But it's worth a look just for the interviews with **Allan King** and **Marion Lewis**, probably Canada's foremost promoter of video. Lewis admits the self-indulgence (solipsism) of most video art. But she argues that it's a necessary stage video artists have to go through on their way to discovering exactly how video is different from film and what its possibilities are. We'll see.

A new film book, published by the Academy of Canadian Cinema, was released during the festival: ***The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg***, edited by **Piers Handling** (General Publishing, 216 pages, \$11.95 paper). **Cronenberg** is probably English Canada's most controversial filmmaker. I've only recently come to recognize (largely as a result of seeing his

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most recent work, *Videodrome*, and the Cronenberg retrospective at the festival) that his vision is in fact interesting and worth examining. The trouble with *The Shape of Roe*, which is nicely put together, is that only one dissenting voice is heard — that of Robin Wood. Perhaps the best part of the book is a lengthy interview with Cronenberg in which he talks about his obsession with

what Morse Peckham has called "man's rage for chaos."

FOOTNOTE: Overheard at the festival, one woman to another: "Canadians never seem to do anything original. The Germans make a film called *The Tin Drum*, so Canadians have to make a film called *The Tin Flute*. What'll they copy next?" □

PAPERBACKS

Famous first words: a second look at some novice novelists and the depressing truth about writing for dollars

By ANNE COLLINS

THE WARS was treated like Timothy Findley's first novel, one of those myths of overnight success, a fictional miracle birth out of virgin imagination. *Famous Last Words* was reviewed like his second novel — with generous praise for his ambitions but some slight hesitations. (Was it as good as the first?) Developmental notions now are knocked askew with the re-release of Findley's actual first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People* (Penguin, \$3.95), which was published in Canada, the U.S. and Britain in 1967 and 1968. won a rasher of good reviews, then dropped from sight. It should be read without much of an eye to the future, for what it is: a good first novel in which the writer displays his skills, his art, and his passion on a limited stage.

It is the story of an 11-year-old boy's miserable summer. Hooker Winslow's mother has locked herself permanently in her room, on strike as both wife and mother. Cool Aunt Rosetta runs the household with her set of matron's keys and strict social standards, always there to collect the patriarch Nicholas's overcoat and cane on his daily return from vague business on Bay Street. No one acknowledges the crazy mother, or Hooker's only brother Gilbert, a 20-year-old failure who drinks heavily and does not consort with women. Except Iris, the black maid, who is Hooker's earthly refuge. The point to which the summer leads is Hooker's unimaginable crime — Findley imagines it very well. This child turned murderer is not psychologically warped or sent by the devil, just possessed by the unhappiness of his family. He picks up all the

wrong cues to put an end to it. The novel is claustrophobic as summer heat and poetically resourceful in its misery.

Lester & Orpen Dennys has also done some mining for gold in the early works of reputable authors, and come up with a new International Fiction List offering called *Marcovaldo*, by Italo Calvino (\$9.95). It's a collection of 20 short stories Calvino wrote in the 1950s and mid-1960s, about a downtrodden unskilled labourer living an ugly and impoverished life in an ugly and large Italian city. Calvino writes folk tales for modern times, and perhaps that is why reviewers have compared his *Marcovaldo* to Chaplin's Little Tramp, this century's bittersweet folk tale of the "little man." There is nothing sweet nor sentimental about *Marcovaldo*. He does struggle hard to graft a vision of untouched nature onto the urban landscape, but largely to fantasize about eating it. He thinks beautiful, edible thoughts about mysterious mushrooms that spring up in his local park. A whispering flight of woodcocks is due over the city; *Marcovaldo* gets set to trap them. He liberates a laboratory rabbit from a hospital: "And he looked at it with the loving eyes of the breeder who manages to allow kindness toward the animal to coexist with anticipation of the roast, all in one emotion."

He resents his wife. His children have demanding open mouths like little birds. The point of tales of *Marcovaldo* is not to celebrate the beautiful humanity thriving in the bosom of the insignificant little guy, or even his capacity for Chaplinesque rebellions against the

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system. None of Marcovaldo's rebellions work: the mushrooms are poisonous; only a pigeon falls into his trap; the rabbit has been injected by experimenters with a deadly and contagious disease. These stories are about how the little guy never wins, bitter folk tales of capitalism and the machine age.

I took refuge from the uneasy thoughts inspired by Marcovaldo in what I hoped would be a nicely executed genre piece, as might be expected from a Seal First Novel Award winner. Tim Wynne-Jones's second novel, *The Knot* (Seal, \$3.95), is *Oliver updated* and set in Toronto's unequally renovated Cabagetown, but with no innocent child hero to love. Too many heroes is, in fact, the problem. There is Crunkscully, an ex-mayor of Toronto afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, who escapes from a chronic-care institution to search for a son he's forgotten he never had. And Stink, one of the band of young thieves around whom *The Knot* turns, who is trying to develop a heart. And R. Rum Crawford, police detective, who eventually retrieves the parts of the puzzle. AU three have their charms (though if I had to vote I'd go for Crunkscully, fitfully aware of the marbles he's losing). But three are too many to fit through the eye of a thriller. Good writing on

Wynne-Jones's part is undermined by an unwieldy and unfocused plot.

I then tried Seal of the next year's vintage: Janette Turner 'Hospital's 1982 prize-winner *The Ivory Swing* (\$3.95). I could not get excited, nor even interested in the ride heroine Juliet is on, so obviously is her swing drawn. At one end of the arc is freedom end self-fulfilment; at the other is motherhood, wifehood, commitment. Juliet, her husband David, and their children are on David's sabbatical in India. The exotic setting becomes a further trap for Juliet, isolated in heat haze and the cultural oppression of women. Hospital's prose is uneven, the occasional brilliant metaphor choked out in a jungle of more ordinary meanings.

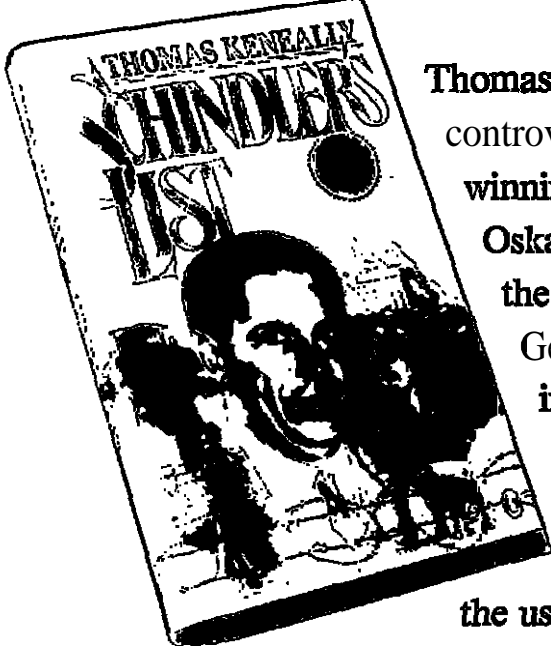
None Is Too Many: *Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-40*, by Irving Abella and Harold Troper, won the U.S. 1983 National Jewish Book Award and the 1983 Sir John A. Macdonald Prize in Canadian history. It sold more than 12,000 copies in hardcover in Canada alone, and Random House is publishing it in the States. The trade paperback version (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 59.95) should sell even better, if there is a market for stories of terrible injustice, for a book that should make every Canadian think twice about our eter-

nally sweet sense of Canada as conscience of the world.


Two simple figures from the preface sum up the story: between 1933 and 1945 Canada admitted 5,000 Jewish refugees from Europe. From the end of the war to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, Canada admitted only 8,000 more. There is a villain of the piece, a bureaucrat named Frederick Charles Blair who was director of the Immigration Branch until he retired in 1943. Blair was openly, drastically anti-Semitic — he saw the Holocaust almost literally as a plot to break down his immigration regulations and force the most undesirable of aliens on Canada. In the Blair years, the department wouldn't even issue transit passes to Jews with visas who wanted to travel through Canada to reach some other place of refuge. (A foot might touch Canadian soil and long to linger.) But Canada's record was not one racist's doing; that racist rigidly defended the articulated policies of the Canadian government. When Blair retired in 1943 he was invested with "the highest award given a public official for meritorious service."

I can't resist quoting a sentence from the press release announcing *Deadly Inheritance* (Avon, \$3.50), an original mystery romance by Canadian Fionauala Reeves. The inheritance is an old family mansion in County Cork, Ireland. What's deadly about it are the mysterious circumstances under which heroine Joanna Wentworth's grandmother died. Here we go: "A chance encounter with Colum McCarthy, a handsome, renowned photographer of impoverished children begins a mutual attraction, but strange events like being nearly run off the mad by a mysterious van lead to the knowledge that her grandmother's death was more than an accident and that Colum, the man she is falling in love with, could be involved!" Sic.

The problem with *Our Retiring Prime Minister*, a wishful and thin picture book from Seal (\$4.95), is evident in its subtitle: *A Slightly Irreverent Look At Canada's Most Controversial Public Figure*. Scatological, satirical, even sartorial would have been preferable to slight irreverence. How one can be only slightly irreverent about Canada's most controversial public figure is a puzzle, but Ottawa columnist and Southam news chief Charles Lynch gives it his best shot. In his introduction he describes Pierre Trudeau as "the most evocative prime minister Canada has ever had." He confesses that his years of Trudeau-watching have been literal: he has counted the PM's facial expressions which, he says, number 36. He feels "an undercurrent of respect, and a smidgin of affection"



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for Trudeau. "But, how? No."

Lynch therefore exercised his type-writer in a gently naughty way to put captions to photos of the ever-mobile Trudeau. As described by Lynch in pictures and words, he comes across as a lecherous, imperious boy-child suffering the headaches of too many unfulfilled political promises. No — he doesn't even come across as that interesting.

The sell line of the revised and updated *Words for Sale* (Macmillan, for The Periodical Writers Association of Canada, E10.93) also did not hit the mark: with me. It reads, "More than two dozen professionals show how you can make money in the Canadian magazine market." When I look at it again, I realize it doesn't say how much money.

For the rest, editors Eve Drobot and Hal Tennant have produced an excellent guide to the conditions of a freelance magazine writer's life — relentlessly (depressingly) realistic about the profession. No idealists here dedicated to telling society the important stories about itself, but a people and piece workers who know they should cut their losses when a story grows to uneconomical size or complexity. I was riveted by the question asked in Part I, Chapter 1: "Do You Really Want To Be A Freelance Writer?" □

LETTERS

Poetic injustice

I SEE in your August/September issue that you have finally reviewed *The Beauty of the Weapons* by Robert Bringhurst. This, of course, happened after the book was nominated for a Governor General's Award. As of this writing, you have yet to review the eventual winner by Phyllis Webb or the other two nominees. Why not?

There seems to be a definite hierarchy at *Books in Canada*: novels always come first (which explains the fast review of Clark Blaise's *Lusts*), and everything else can fall as it may. Does your magazine seek to treat poetry with the same indifference that is usually thought to be the exclusive property of the general public? If poetry is such a vital part of literature, why doesn't your periodical accord it the same treatment as novels — i.e. a review fast on the heels of publication? There seems to be

no insurance against this wallflower treatment, whether one be a major Canadian poet like Milton Acorn (who has had to wait three seasons so far for *Dig Up My Heart* to be reviewed) or a newer poet like Roo Borsen (who had to wait a full year before her book, *A Sad Device*, was reviewed).

Maybe I am being too harsh. Poetry, after all, produces scores of volumes each year, and the poor editors at *Books in Canada* obviously have no way of knowing who to review or not. How else can one explain their absolute loss of words when it comes to reviewing works by new poets? (Certainly, it can't be because of time. It's always shorter, in terms of time, to read a book of poetry than a novel.)

Any regular reader of Canada's "little mags" soon realizes there are certain poets whose work stands head and shoulders above the rest. Readers soon learn specifically to look for these poets. From this base, an audience is built, one that will buy their books — or know of them. Astute editors should be part of that base, so they will know who to follow — or publish. Right off, I can think of several poets who promise major fireworks if they can maintain their present course: Susan Glickman, Jim Joyce, Kevin Irie, and Jan Conn. None of these poets have published first books as yet, to my knowledge. Do the editors at *Books in Canada* know of these poets, or any others, or do they just sit around till the Governor General lists some nominees who could possibly be reviewed — if space is found? These are tough questions, but they are valid ones. *Books in Canada* is too prominent and powerful an organ in that vast creature called CanLit to ignore or totally swallow poets unseen, and more important, unheard.

Deirdre Brooks
Toronto

IT IS RATHER disheartening that Steven Smith, who is able to recognize Robert Bringhurst's use of "traditional poetic devices, like parables, or dramatic monologue," and that "there are many layers to be perceived and associations to be made" in the poetry, would so off-handedly mention Francesco Petrarca only as "an Italian living around 1370." Along with Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca was a great innovative and influential poet, and any statement about him such as Smith's totally misrepresents him. Doesn't Smith think that the use of Petrarca may underline something more in the poem than just the irony of "classic structures and devices delivering content relevant to the modern sensibility"?

This misrepresentation betrays a cer-

tain ignorance of basic literary texts and personalities. It would seem a duty of any reviewer to investigate allusions within a text, especially if he intends to use them in his review.

Pasquale Verdicchio
Victoria, B.C.

Fast work

WE VERY MUCH appreciate Mary Ainslie Smith's perceptive comments on Frederick Philip Grove's *The Adventure of Leonard Broadus* (offered as a double issue of *Canadian Children's Literature*) in the August/September *Books in Canada*. You were so quick off the mark, however, that your review was in print before we could send you a copy of the book version, *The Genesis of Grove's The Adventure of Leonard Broadus: A Text and Commentary*.

We are bringing out *Broadus* in book form so that an adult audience can enjoy this unusual and important specimen of Grove's work. Mary Rubio's comments on the way the book fits in with Grove's general practice as a major and controversial producer of Canadian fiction is supplemented by the story of its curious publishing history in the '30s, a bibliography, and a note in the manuscript. This is an important book for Canadian studies rather than a book for children.

Elizabeth Waterston
Co-editor

Canadian Children's Literature
Guelph, Ont.

CANWIT NO. 87

THE REPORTED popularity of Ontario's new vanity licence plates prompts us to wonder what plates contestants might compose for Canadian writers and other public figures. The plates must employ any combination of six digits and/or letters, and in Ontario (to no one's surprise) there must be no hint of double entendre — a prohibition we are delighted to waive. The prize is \$25. Deadline: December 1. Address: CanWit No. 87, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street West, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 85

ONCE AGAIN our worst fears have been confirmed — that Canada really is a nation of practical people in sensible shoes. At least that is the impression left by the response to our request for opening paragraphs of fantasy novels set in the Great White North. Even the winning entry, by Sandra Burrows of Ottawa, owes more to the real than the

fantastic. though in politics perhaps nothing is too incredible for words:

The Lord and the Stoned
(From the King Brian Legends)

The Chair of the Leader of the Opposers stood large and empty in the Big House. Who would dare to sit in the Pit of Tedium? Sir Peter the Proud had tried, but his ego was too large for the Chair. Wizard John of the Cross Bees had tripped over his tongue on the Way and Old King Joe was busy pulling daggers from his back. Up walked young Brian the Bold through the Left, Right, and Centre. Could he fill the Grand Seat and wrest the Maple Leaf from Pierre the Powerful, Priest of the Pragmatists? Could he wake the Sleeping Beauties of Canadaland with a kick? The King-makers, Stevens the Steadfast and Wilson the Willing, watched with baited ballots. . . .

THE EDITORS RECOMMEND

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

FICTION

A Time for Judas, by Morley Callaghan, Macmillan. Close in theme to his best-known pre-war novels, Callaghan's version

of Christ's betrayal, Crucifixion, and Resurrection suggests that, at 80, he might embark on a fine new career as a historical novelist.

NON-FICTION

A Date with History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian, by C.P. Stacey, Deneau Publishers. Recounted with style and wit, Stacey's experiences as a historian in a soldier's uniform demonstrate that military history — and its participants — need not be as dull as they often seem.

POETRY

Birding, or Desire, by Don McKay, McClelland & Stewart. McKay brings to his observations of the natural world an adult intelligence in the best sense: compassionate, curious, and knowing. In their precise attentiveness his poems have less in common with Wordsworth than with the novels of Flaubert.

BOOKS RECEIVED

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

The Absolute Beginner's Cookbook, by Jackie Eddy and Eleanor Clark, Hurtig.
Acadiana 1930-1982, by Claude Fortin, Les Editions CRP.
Airs et melodies, translated by Marie-Thérèse Paquin, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
Alzheimer's Disease, by Lenore S. Powell and Katie Couric, Addison-Wesley.
Arch/Elegies, by E.D. Blodgett, Longspoon Press.
Atlantic Spectrum '84, edited by Leslie McKillop, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
The Boatman, by Sidney Alinson, Mosaic Press.
Bob and Doug McKenzie's Strange Brew, by Tom Nesbitt and Nick Poliwko, Methuen.
The Book of Names, by Ralph Blum, Methuen.
Both Sides of the Street, by Floyd S. Chalmers, Macmillan.
British Columbia: A Celebration, edited by George Woodcock, photography by J.A. Kaulis, Hurtig.
Canada's New Access Laws: Public and Personal Access to Governmental Documents, edited by Donald C. Rowat, Department of Political Science, Carleton University.
Candle, by Eric Nicol, Macmillan.
The Cave of Trophonius and Other Poems, by Francis Sparshott, Brick Books.
Comet's Tale, by Sue Ann Alderson, Tree Frog Press.
Coping with Arthritis, by Patrick Baker, Clarke Irwin.
The Creative Kids' Colouring Book, by Kate Christie and Peggy Patterson, James Lorimer.
David's Father, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick Press.
Dead in the Water, by Ted Wood, John Wiley and Sons.
Dome: The Rise and Fall of the House That Jack Built, by Jim Lyon, Macmillan.
The Dream of Snowy Owls, by Monty Reid, Longspoon Press.
The Droid's Tune, by O.R. Melling, Puffin Books.
E.J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry, edited by Susan Gingell, U of T Press.
The Edmonton Eskimos, by Dan Kepley, Methuen.
Empire of Wood: The Macmillan Blooded Story, by Donald MacKay, Douglas & McIntyre.
Energy Tomorrow, by Peter Harsanyi, Academic Publishing Co.
Experiencing More with Less, by Meredith Sommers Dregni, The Herald Press.
Exploring Algonquin Park, by Joanne Kates, Douglas & McIntyre.
Folding, by Simon Schochet, November House.
Ghost Towns of Ontario Volumes 1 & 2, by Ron Brown, Cannonbooks.
Glenn Gould: Variations, edited by John McGreevy, Doubleday.
The Glory Trap, by E.J. Goodden, Three Trees Press.
Goblins, by Brian Froud, Macmillan.
Gone to Grass, by Jean McKay, Coach House Press.
Grapes, by Don Cherry, Avon.
H.D. Atter: A Bibliography, by Harry Oxera, Lancelot Press.
A Heart of Names, by Robert Billings, Mosaic Press.
Hitler's Bomb, by Chris Scott, M & S.

Hungarian Short Stories, edited by Paul Varai, Exile Editions.
I Had A Birthday Everyday, by C.H. Gervais, Black Moss Press.
In the Days of the Red River Rebellion, by John McDougall, University of Alberta Press.
The Ivory Swing, Janette Turner Hospital, Seal Books.
Jewish-Ukrainian Relations, by Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj, Mosaic Press.
Kurelek's Vision of Canada, by William Kurelek and Joan Murray, Hurtig.
Larousse Good and Easy Cookbook, by Carol Bowen and Jill Spencer, Hurtig.
A Life of Many Paths, by Albert M. Jabara, Jerusalem International Publishing House.
Lost Bonanzas of Western Canada, by T.W. Paterson & Garnet Basque, Sunfire Publications.
Loyalist Foods in Today's Recipes, by Eleanor Robertson Smith, Lancelot Press.
Loyalists in Nova Scotia, edited by Donald Wetmore and Lester B. Sellick, Lancelot Press.
Lucy Kent and Other Poems, by Stephen Bett, Longspoon Press.
Making the Grade, by Patrick Grassick, Macmillan.
Manure on My Skates, by Dennis McCloskey, Three Trees Press.
Me Too, by Donald Jack, Doubleday.
Methods of Pincer Mining, by Garnet Basque, Mr. Paperback.
The Melton Saga 1763-1933, by Shirley E. Woods Jr., Doubleday.
Music We Can See and Hear, by Peter Magadini, Frederick Harris Music Co.
New Light Letters and Songs, edited by George A. Rawlyk, Lancelot Press.
Nine Micmac Legends, by Alden Nowlan, illustrated by Shirley Bear, Lancelot Press.
No Memory of a Move, by Anne Campbell, Longspoon Press.
No Weapon Save Love, by Lisa Potter-Seasons, Lancelot Press.
The Nozze di Figaro, translated by Marie-Thérèse Paquin, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
Nunavut, by Peter Jull, The Nunavut Constitutional Forum, Ontario, The Pioneer Years, edited by T.W. Paterson, Cannonbooks.
Ontario Spectrum '84, edited by Daryl Cook et al., Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
The Other Mrs. Distenbaker, by Simma Hoh, PaperJacks.
OWL's Amazing But True #1 and #2, OWL/Golden Press.
OWL's Jokes and Riddles, OWL/Golden Press.
OWL's Puzzles and Puzzlers, OWL/Golden Press.
A Pair of Baby Lambs, by David McPadden, The Front Press.
Passchendaele, by Ted Piantos, Black Moss Press.
The Pie's the Limit!, by Judy Weiss & Rick Johnson, Penguin.
Politics in Britain, by Colin Leys, U of T Press.
The Power in the Land, by Fred Harrison, Prentice-Hall Canada.
Precautions Against Death, by Maria Jacobs, Mosaic Press.
The Prodigal Son, by Boschka Layton, Mosaic Press.
Quebec Spectrum '84, edited by Sister Eileen Poole, et al., Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Scotia Story Tellers, by Rosemary Baughman, Lancelot Press.
Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada, by Renate Usmland, UBC Press.
Senate Reform: Moving Towards the Slippery Slope, by Roger Gibbons, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.
Set your course, by Gerald Cosgrave, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
A Short History of Canada, by Desmond Morton, Hurtig.
Slings at the Whirlpool, by Miroslav Pavlovic, translated by Barry Callaghan, Exile Editions.
Songs from the Drowned Lands, by Eileen Kernaghan, Acc. Space Trap, by Monica Hughes, Groundwood.
Spokesheards, by Sandra Braman and Paul Dutton, Longspoon Press.
Stones in Water, by David Solway, Mosaic Press.
The Struggle of Love, by Cheryl Sioez, Kindred Press.
Teach Me to Fly Skyfighter!, by Paul Yee, illustrated by Sky Lee, James Lorimer.
Tiek Bird, by George Swede, Three Trees Press.
Trull of Iron, by Bill McKee & George Klassen, Douglas & McIntyre.
Tree of Life, by George Korey-Kryczowski, Mosaic Press.
Unlucky Lady: The Life & Death of HMCS Athabaskan 1940-44, by Len Burrow & Emile Beaudoin, Canada's Wings.
Urban Politics in Ottawa-Carleton: Research Essays, edited by Donald C. Rowat, Department of Political Science, Carleton University.
Vintage Canada, by Tony Aspler, Prentice-Hall.
Walter Dabry Bannard, The Edmonton Art Gallery.
The War of 1812: Land Operations, by George F.G. Stanley, Macmillan.
Western Spectrum '84, edited by Martha Colquhoun et al., Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Whistle Daughter Whistle, by Carole Iler, Caidin Press.
Windfalls for Cider: The Poems of Raymond Knister, Black Moss Press.
Wiener Takes All: A Privateer's Guide to Commodity Trading, by William R. Gallacher, Midway Publications.
Wise Eye, by Margaret Bunde Edwards, illustrated by Rose Zgodzinski, Three Trees Press.
Wooah! I Hear a Sound, by Emily Hearn, illustrated by Heather Collins, Annick Press.
Words for Elephant Man, by Kenneth Sherman, Mosaic Press.
Yeah, I'm a Little Kid, by Darryl Borden, illustrated by Lynn Smith, Annick Press.
You Can't Print That!, by Charles Lynch, Hurtig.

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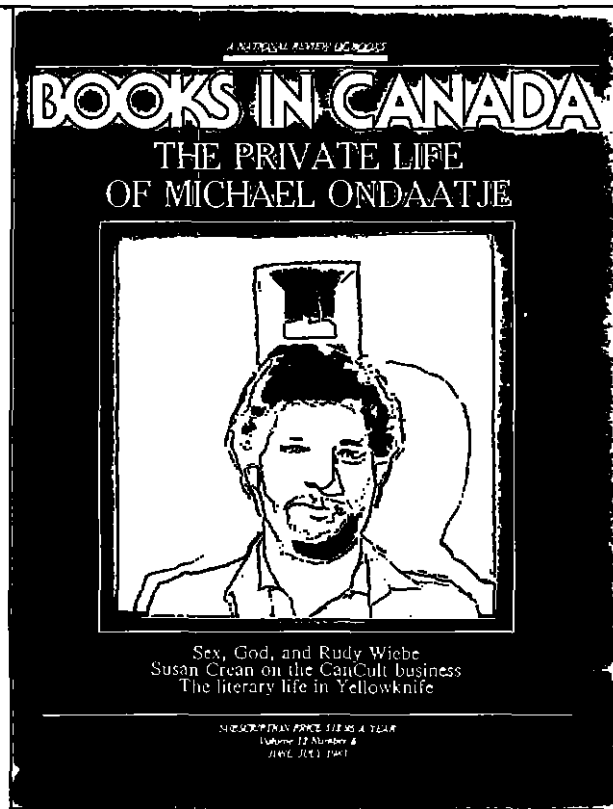
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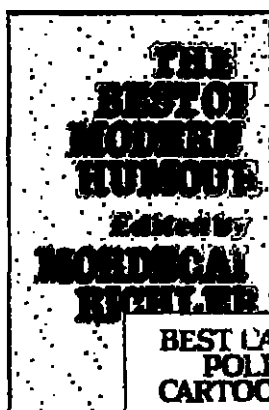
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