

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

# BOOKS IN CANADA

## EDITH IGLAUER: A NORTHERN AFFAIR



The home thoughts of Mordecai Richler  
Miriam Waddington on Frances Brooke  
And an interview with Leonard Cohen

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FEATURES

Northern Journey. Edith Iglauer chronicles for Americans the curiosities of Canadian life. *By John Goddard* ..... 6  
 Prague on the Humber. A review of Josef Skvorecky's *The Engineer of Human Souls*. *By I.M. Owen* ..... 10  
 Having It Both Ways. Mordecai Richler's journalism combines wit with scathing bitterness. *By George Galt* ..... 13  
 A Sequence of Dreams. For Jorge Luis Borges, reading is half the soul of literature. *By Alberto Manguel* ..... 16  
 The Moon. A poem. *By Jorge Luis Borges and Richard Outram* ..... 17

REVIEWS

Vengeance: The True Story of an Israeli Counter-Terrorist Team, by George Jonas ..... 11  
 An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke, by Lorraine McMullen ..... 17  
 Love Is a Long Shot, by Ted Allan ..... 18  
 The Elizabeth Stories, by Isabel Jirggen ..... 20  
 When There's a Will . . . , by Edward Phillips ..... 21  
 Blue Mondays, by David Fennario; The Growing Dawn, by Mark Frutkin ..... 23  
 Hugh Hood, by Keith Garebian; Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts, edited by Louis K. MacKendrick ..... 26  
 Quadriga for Judy: Poems and Prisoner of the Rain: Poems in Prose, by Michael Bullock ..... 27  
 The Thomson Empire, by Susan Goldenberg ..... 28

DEPARTMENTS

Field Notes		Children's Books, by Mary Ainslie Smith	31
Wide Open Spaces, by K.G. Probert	3	Letters	32
Small Beginnings, by Cary Fagan	4	CanWit No. 95	33
English, Our English, by Bob Blackburn	5	The Editors Recommend	33
Interview with Leonard Cohen, by Doug Fetherling	29	Books Received	33
The Browser, by Morris Wolfe	30		

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN GODDARD

# Big horizons: Saskatchewan's writers celebrate 15 years of filling in the blanks

## Wide open spaces

"AND WHERE ARE YOU from, Mr. Simpson?" asked the hospitable sixtyish woman as she seated herself before Leo Simpson in the lecture hall. "Limerick," he replied. "Ah, Saskatchewan," she said confidently, having missed the Irish inflections in his speech.

Her assumption that any writer present that day in Regina was a Saskatchewan native or a long-time resident was entirely understandable, for the 15th anniversary conference of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild was justified in its self-congratulation.

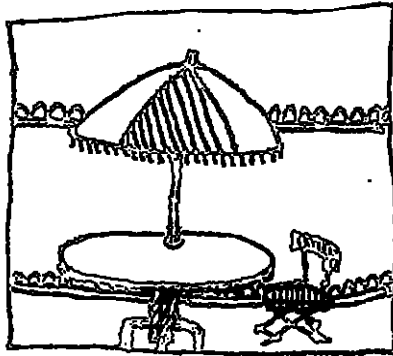
The SWG is the model for other open-membership provincial writers' organizations. It now boasts 600 members — an astonishing number in a province whose population is only a million — and estimates that this year's revenues will be \$300,000, a figure that makes other writing groups yearn for larger horizons. It uses that money to salary a full-time executive director, Victor Jerrett Enns, and some support staff; to fund two conferences a year; to publish a monthly newsletter, a fine "little" magazine, *Grain*, and *Windscrip*, a magazine of high-school students' writing; to run workshops and readings throughout the province (117 last year); to fund the Saskatchewan Playwrights' Centre, whose major public activity is the annual reading in workshop of new plays under the direction of a visiting playwright (Carol Bolt this year); to award up to 20 cash prizes each year for the best writing by members in several categories; and to support three short-term artists' and writers' colonies that allow participants to retreat from the world for two weeks and get on with their work.

A forum discussion with representatives of municipal, provincial, and national funding agencies and the lengthy annual general meeting dealt with the increasingly complex administrative strategies required to keep all these programs operating. For the most part, however, this was not a working conference but a weekend of performance and celebration.

Leo Simpson, the outsider (and judge of this year's short-story prizes), delivered a witty paper on endings in fic-

tion, and natives John Archer, John Newlove, and Erika Ritter talked about their respective crafts of non-fiction writing, poetry, and play-writing. (Sheila Fischman — a Moose Javian! — was unable to attend and lead an advertised session on translation.) Major readings were given by Leon Rooke and Phyllis Webb. Rooke roared in the huge auditorium at the University of Regina, and the crowd roared back as he read his story "Sachs in Fifth Avenue," intercutting it with sections from "The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta" and *Shakespeare's Dog*. The personae he created were typically outraged and loud, but the room was big enough to contain both his performance and his audience. In the same room Webb managed to draw the audience closer together and caress it with her marvelously hoarse voice, which forges such intimacy between poet and listener.

The festivities opened on Friday afternoon with the public performance of "Triumph, Saskatchewan," a program of new work commissioned from eight Saskatchewan writers for CBC-Radio's



*Anthology*. Arranged and edited by Geoffrey Ursell, "Triumph" presents a fictional Prairie town's memories in diverse voices. The second half of the program was a rather livelier Ursell extravaganza, "Plain Songs," a collage of 25 songs, poems, and prose excerpts by various Saskatchewan writers.

Saturday evening's banquet and dance, a cooperative effort with the League of Canadian Poets, brought SWG members face-to-face and belly-to-belly with writers not fortunate enough to live in or be from Saskat-

chewan. It also gave many of them their first taste of fiddleheads, which may have been procured by the league to remind guild members that everything worthwhile does not necessarily come from the Prairies.

The celebration came to a head at the awards brunch on Sunday morning, where Erika Ritter advanced her explanation for the high proportion of Prairie natives among Canada's writers. She noted that whereas residents of more exotic or culturally rich cities find their imaginations fully engaged by their environments, young people in Regina must imagine their own universes to fill in the blank spaces all around them.

The guild then recognized this year's space fillers by awarding 17 cash prizes for the best work in several categories, including two \$1,000 awards for the best manuscripts in this year's major category, non-fiction. But the most important part of the brunch was the presentation of Founders Awards to seven writers who have made memorable contributions to Saskatchewan literature and to the province's literary community. The awards took the form of individually designed ceramic books by local artist Vic Cicansky. Two recipients, Sinclair Ross and W.O. Mitchell, were unable to attend the conference, but the others were there: Robert Currie, Ken Mitchell, John Newlove, Anne Szumigalski, and the ubiquitous Eli Mandel.

These are names to conjure with, indeed; and even cynics must conclude that writing in Saskatchewan will continue to flourish. The guild itself prospers and grows; Fifth House has joined Coteau and Thistledown as publishers of attractive and often exciting books; the province has begun a program of funding resident artists in communities with the appointment of Gertrude Story in Prince Albert; the Summer School of the Arts at Fort San encourages new writers every year; and the Saskatoon and Regina public libraries continue their writer in residence programs (Geoffrey Ursell and Lorna Crozier replaced Guy Vanderhaeghe and Sean Virgo in July).

While it is unlikely that all 600 SWG members will become trend-setting authors, the flourishing writing community in the province has created an

enthusiasm for home-grown talent that would have been unimaginable 15 years ago. Writing in Saskatchewan now has joined bad weather as something inevitable for its citizens to brag about. That, surely, is progress. — K.G. PROBERT

## Small beginnings

IN THE 1950s a group of writers gathered in a New York apartment to give encouragement to a not-so-well-known Saul Bellow as he sat translating a story from Yiddish into English. The story's author, Isaac Bashevis Singer, was known only to a small Yiddish-speaking audience, but when the story, "Gimpel The Fool," was published in the *Partisan Review* the result was almost instant recognition for Singer. Years later Singer marvelled that every American literary figure of importance must have read that issue of *Partisan Review*.

Could such a discovery happen here? Not likely, simply because there is no literary magazine in this country with an influential enough readership. Instead, we have quantity: dozens of magazines, each clinging to its handful of sub-

scribers. No magazine is considered essential reading or acts as a flagship for the best and riskiest in new writing. Regionalism may have its virtues, but it also carries the price of fragmenting the already small literary audience into yet tinier pieces.

What would happen if an I.B. Singer appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, *Malahat Review*, or *Grain*? Not much. The publication would likely pass by unnoticed. *Tamarack Review* was something of a flagship (I know writers who are still sore about never having made it there), but since its demise no magazine has jumped ahead of the pack to replace it. For a while it seemed that *Ethos* might do so, but its first issue was disappointing and its second went virtually unnoticed.

Is it reasonable to assume that those readers who are publishers would pore over literary magazines? Since magazines already whittle down a flood of unsolicited manuscripts to a publishable few, a shrewd publisher could find in the pages of *Quarry*, *Dandelion*, or *Prism* writers worth approaching for book-length manuscripts. The reality is that publishers still largely wait for writers to come to them, and the literary magazines have only a mild influence on the publishing industry.

"I can't even keep track of what's arrived and what's failed," Lester & Orpen Dennys's Gena Gorrell sighs when she thinks of the many literary magazines. Gorrell tries to keep an eye on them, but she hardly has time to read the unsolicited manuscripts that come in. The idea of an influential literary magazine appeals to her, but like many editors she fears it would become an organ for the Canadian literary establishment. Breaking into the "magic circle," as she calls it, is hard enough, and a diversity of magazines seems to make it easier.

Literary magazines do have some effect. Manuscripts that come in over the transom carry added weight if the writer has magazine credits, especially if a Lester & Orpen Dennys editor recognizes the name. And publishers' hit-and-miss approaches to keeping track of magazines does occasionally find the target. According to the editor of *Descant*, Karen Mulhallen, Louise Dennys read an excerpt of a novel by Susan Swan in *Descant* and asked the writer for the manuscript. Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* was published last October to good reviews and was nominated for the Governor General's Award.

If any one editor voraciously read the literary magazines, a good guess would be the poetry editor at McClelland & Stewart. Poets rely on the journals more

than fiction writers, and numerous publication credits are almost mandatory before a publisher will take a collection. Editor Russell Brown (who took over from Dennis Lee and who previously had a stint at *Descant*) notes that submissions to McClelland & Stewart are more amateurish than those he received at *Descant*. "To submit first to a literary magazine makes for sophistication, because you have to know what's going on in them."

So does Brown rely heavily on the magazines? Not at all. "It's important I look at the literary magazines," he says, "but I don't think it's necessary that a writer appear there." Instead manuscripts arrive unsolicited or via well-known authors. Next year McClelland & Stewart is publishing a collection of poems by John Steffler, a Newfoundlander who has never published in the magazines.

If publishers aren't terribly aware of the goings on in the magazines, magazine editors seem even more oblivious to the impact they might have on publishers. Creating a larger audience for their writers ought to be a goal of magazine editors, but many don't even bother to send publishers their issues. They seem happy to run in their own little circle, unconcerned as to whether or not it connects with the larger circle of book publishing.

One journal that gets some attention from publishers is the *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (circulation 2,000), as much because of its exclusive devotion to fiction as to editor Geoffrey Hancock's efforts to be at the forefront of new writing. Hancock disagrees that the Isaac Bashevis Singer scenario couldn't happen here. He cites *CFM*'s special Mavis Gallant issue in 1978, which was a catalyst to the surge of interest in her work.

Hancock rejects the idea of a need for a definitive literary magazine. "In dissonance there is discovery," he approvingly quotes William Carlos Williams, and adds knowingly that there are only 10 or 15 magazines of real importance. For Hancock, publishing in the magazines is not merely a literary apprenticeship, but is an end in itself. "A magazine's strength is that it is a magazine and not a book," he says. "I

# TORONTO

## TO 1913

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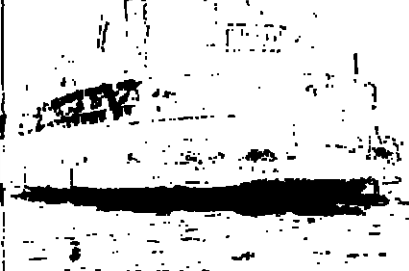
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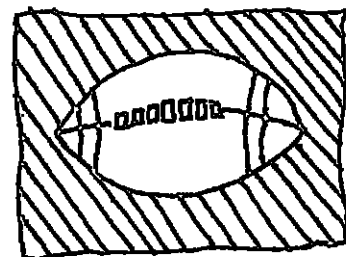
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Cheques and balances: if you've any reason to believe that it makes your meaning clearer, you've got to use 'gotten'

By BOB BLACKBURN

wouldn't want the impression that if Ed Carson [of General Publishing] can't use Martin Vaughn-James [subject of a recent *CFM* issue] then I've failed as a magazine editor or he as a publisher. There is a very strong distinction between literary magazines and books, and the success of one is not necessarily the success of the other."

Fair enough, but most writers would like to think: there is more than a tenuous connection between appearing in magazines and publishing a book one day. Some of those writers would be surprised to learn what the *real* circulation is of the magazines they eagerly submit to. If so, they might be somewhat relieved by the attitude of Douglas Gibson, publisher of Macmillan of Canada.

"I expect all of our editors to be aware of what's going on in the little magazines," he says. That awareness has paid off at least a couple of times. Jack Hodgins had a solid list of magazine credits when Macmillan approached him for a manuscript of stories. *Spit Delaney's Island*, published in 1976, was a warmly received precursor to Hodgins's novels. When Guy Vanderhaeghe's unsolicited collection arrived at Macmillan, editors recognized his name from the magazines, and so had already gained a favourable impression. *Man Descending*, published in 1982, won the Governor General's Award that year.

There are some practical reasons why Gibson looks to the magazines. A publisher can have a hard time selling a first-book author. Booksellers, confronted by an unknown name, can be impressed by publication credits, and so can reviewers. Magazine publication can also help in getting quotes from established authors to splash on the dust-jacket. Margaret Laurence was glad to write words of praise for Hodgins's work, which she had been following in the magazines.

No magazine in this country has the influence that the *Partisan Review* once did, and immediate recognition for any writer is unlikely. But the many magazines do have a collective impact on book publishers, albeit a slow and cautious one. No doubt there are those who would argue that the current process is better, avoiding the too-sudden rise or the flash in the pan. Still, a literary review with greater prominence than the current offerings would be a valuable addition to the scene. Time may have made us overly nostalgic for *Tamarack*, but the magazine did leave its mark. Whether any new or existing magazine will rise to a similar visibility, perhaps with greater energy and willingness to take risks, is yet to be seen. For now, what strength there is resides in numbers.

— CARY FAGAN

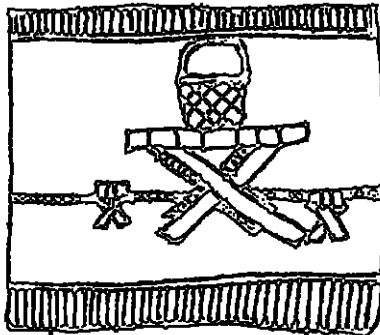
I AM FREQUENTLY chided for saying *gotten*. I do say it frequently, and probably write it from time to time because, for some reason, it is firmly fixed in my vocabulary.

I will continue to use it, because I do not accept the arguments of those who tell me I am wrong.

However, the issue is worth looking into.

*Gotten* fell into disuse in England in the 17th century, but by that time it had been brought to the American colonies, where it thrived. It is not an Americanism; it is part of our English heritage. Since we have patriated our constitution, I feel no obligation to abandon *gotten* just because it is now considered archaic in the Old Country.

Furthermore *gotten* provides a valuable distinction that is not available to the British. If your English business associate tells you, "I've got the money we need," you are left wondering whether he is referring to his own money



or means that he has raised the money. If he could bring himself to say, "I've gotten . . .," you wouldn't need to ask.

As an alternative past participle, *gotten* is acceptable and useful in North America. You should not hesitate to use it in place of *got*, if it makes your meaning clearer. You might better ask yourself if you've got any real reason to use either form.

The use of *have got* for *possess* is an apparent redundancy that probably resulted from our long-entrenched habit of eliding personal pronouns with forms of *have*. As long as we do that, *got* is virtually essential. Fowler notes that it has long been good colloquial English. He even makes a case for its use in written

English *without* the contraction. He cites a defence of the form of Philip Ballard, who in turn cites some of the grandest names in English literature and concludes "the only inference we can draw is that it not a real error but a counterfeit invented by schoolmasters." Says Fowler: "Acceptance of this verdict is here recommended."

If the contractions are used, we must say *he's got it* rather than *he's it*, lest people think we're playing tag.

There are those who say that contractions have no place in written English. Those who say that may be technically correct, but have little understanding of the realities of trying to communicate with the public of 1984 by means of the printed page.

*Got* is also useful for emphasis. You might consider the nuances of *She's got money, she has money, she has got money, and she's money.*

ERIC ELSTONE of Acton, Ont., has reported a modest triumph in a battle that raged all last winter between him and the editors of the Canadian edition of *Reader's Digest*. It started when the magazine, quoting a quip from Toronto *Globe and Mail* columnist Richard Needham, changed his spelling of *cheque* to *check*. Elstone wrote a letter about it, and was told in reply that *check* was very common in Canada and that there was no clear evidence that *cheque* was the preferred spelling.

The correspondence grew voluminous. Elstone pointed out that if *check* is commonly seen in Canada it is because U.S. publications are commonly seen in Canada. Eventually he won a grudging admission from a senior editor that, on further study, it did seem that *cheque* was the preferred spelling, but he could offer no assurance that the Canadian edition would change its style.

Surely, you would think, anyone living or working or dealing with Canadians would know, even if he knew nothing else, that, no two ways about it, to a Canadian a cheque is one thing and a check is another.

I would, though, like to ask Mr. Elstone what he was doing reading *Reader's Digest* in the first place. □

# NORTHERN JOURNEY

A New Yorker who lost her heart to the North, Edith Iglauer chronicles for Americans the curiosities of Canadian life

By JOHN GODDARD

EDITH IGLAUER is sitting at a corner table by the window of the Marine View Coffee Shop, on the second floor of a fishing warehouse overlooking the Campbell Street Dock, a few blocks east of downtown Vancouver. Outside the seagulls are circling, their necks bent toward the dock workers who jockey crates of fish around on motorized carts. Iglauer is regarding a saucer heaped with tiny plastic containers of 10-per-cent cream sealed with paper lids.

"Why don't these ever go sour?" she asks a harried-looking waitress hurrying over with a plate of crab-meat sandwiches.

The waitress stops, looks at Iglauer, glances at the saucer of coffee creamers, looks back at Iglauer and, with a perplexed gaze that shows she has never asked herself that question, replies, "They get used up first." The waitress retreats to the busy lunch counter; Iglauer, apparently satisfied, gives her attention to the crab-meat sandwich, remarking how generously stuffed it is, how tasty.

Edith Iglauer possesses a consuming curiosity. Her face, when not lit with a broad smile, tends to settle into an inquisitive expression. Frank questions on subjects many people might wonder about but never pursue have launched her into mammoth research projects that have ended up as long articles in the *New Yorker* magazine, some subsequently published as books.

One gray morning in the early 1960s she leaned out a window of her New York apartment, sniffed the city's air, and embarked on a two-part study of air pollution that provoked legislators to pass tighter anti-pollution laws.

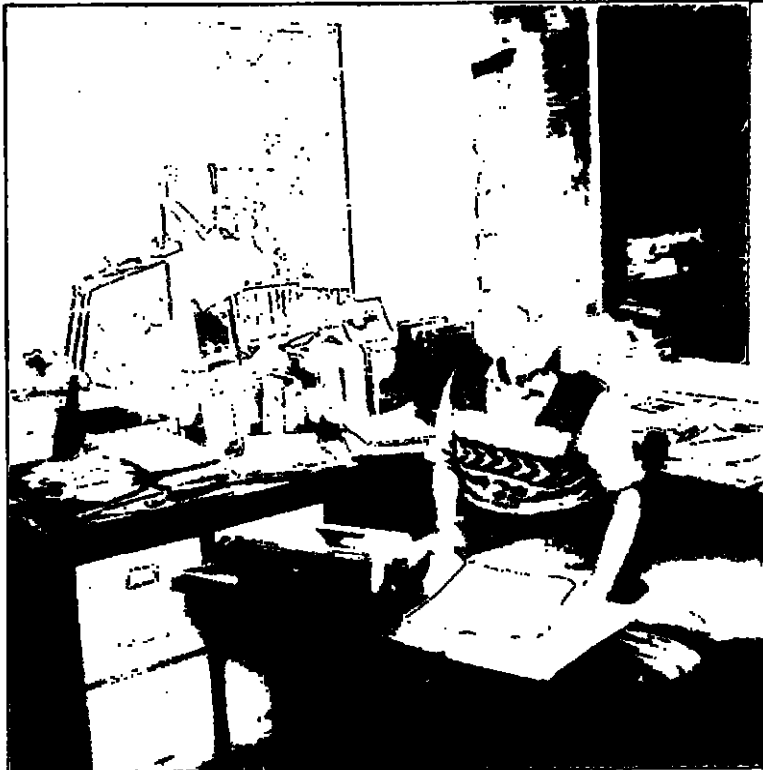
She once took friends to the Statue of Liberty and, looking back on the shimmering skyline, said to herself, "This is funny. Why is this here and not someplace else?" Manhattan, she found out, is grounded on extremely hard rock, the ideal foundation for enormously high buildings, which led her to write about the biggest foundation of all — that of the World Trade Centre, then under construction.

When researching an item about the New York Stock Exchange, she allowed herself to be sidetracked by the first Inuit art exhibition to come to New York City, and ended up on a dog sled in Northern Quebec to write a four-part series on the establishment of the first Eskimo co-operatives. The series formed the basis of her first book, published in 1966 as *The New People: The Eskimo's Journey Into Our Time* and reprinted in 1979 as *Inuit Journey*. The Inuit journey, for Iglauer, became a Canadian journey — a long circuitous pursuit of information that made her a chronicler of Canadian life and attitudes for U.S. readers.

She went along with men who plough winter roads into remote regions of the western Northwest Territories, a *New Yorker* assignment that became her second book, *Denison's Ice Road*. She wrote a landmark profile for the *New Yorker* on Pierre Trudeau shortly after he became prime minister in 1968, giving details of his rambunctious youth, such as this often-quoted anecdote from the war years: "He and his friends used to amuse themselves by donning German helmets, goggles, sabres, and boots and racing through the countryside on motor bikes, scaring people." She wrote an exhaustive study of Canada for *The Atlantic* in 1973,

which begins in her typically lucid, straightforward style: "Directly above the United States on the map is a huge land-mass called Canada frequently colored pink to distinguish it from us. Most Americans have no idea what goes on up there. . . ."

The Canadian journey led to Vancouver where Iglauer, awed by the beauty of Simon Fraser University, began a major study of architect Arthur Erickson. And the journey led to her acquaintance with a salmon fisherman named John Daly, which blossomed into a love affair of the type usually confined to fairy tales. She married him, became a landed immigrant, joined the Writers' Union of Canada, and became part of a tiny but distinguished literary community at Pender Harbour,



Edith Iglauer

a two-hour coastal drive north of Vancouver. Daly is the subject of her current work-in-progress, but she is having a hard time with it. Daly died of a heart attack in 1978 after they had been together six years, and Iglauer is still mourning his loss.

"This makes me very nostalgic," she says on a walk along the Campbell Street Dock, clutching a red umbrella to keep off a light rain. "I love the sounds. I love the smells. I love everything." During the fishing season she and Daly would sail into Burrard Inlet at night in his salmon trawler, the *Morekelp*, to drop off their catch. Then they would breakfast at sunrise on bacon and eggs at the Marine View Coffee Shop. "If you love somebody completely, it's wonderful. It's absolutely wonderful, and it's well worth it. But if you lose them, it's just the reverse of what you've let yourself in for. I mean it's devastating."

On the way home from lunch, she points out the fishermen's union hall her husband used to frequent and the marina where he'd buy his fishing gear. She drives across Lions Gate Bridge, through West Vancouver to the ferry and north along the coast, past Gibsons Landing where *The Beachcombers* is filmed, past the cottage at Pender Harbour where Elizabeth Smart wrote *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, to Garden Bay and the home Daly built on a steep, wild slope that drops to the sea.

Daly's presence is everywhere. A lightbulb shines for him at the end of the wharf. His carpentry tools still hang neatly in his workshop. His books line a shelf in the living room — the John Daly Memorial Bookshelf, Iglauer calls it. Cartoons clipped from newspapers and maxims in his handwriting still paper the bathroom wall. But his is a comforting presence, not a creepy one. There is no sense of stagnation. Iglauer has recently added a bathroom and study to the house, and gone ahead with renovations they had planned for the kitchen. "I like the feeling that John is around me," she says.

IGLAUER IS a lively talker. In casual conversation she is apt to jump quickly from subject to subject, sometimes offering strong opinions on such topics as Premier Bill Bennett ("that miserable creature") and the retired newcomers to Garden Bay who are pushing out the fishermen. ("Mostly Social Creditors, small-thinking, self-made businessmen, horrible people. Quite often their wives are much nicer than they are.") But asked to recount her life story, she becomes a model of concentration, even while rinsing strawberries and stir-frying Chinese greens for lunch. She switches to the logical, flowing narrative that is at the basis of her writing.

The name Iglauer is derived from the town of her ancestors — Iglau, now part of Czechoslovakia. Her father was a businessman in Cleveland, Ohio (where she was born), the executive vice-president of a department-store company. Her mother came from West Virginia. "I was brought up in a very well-to-do house, with anything I wanted," she says, sitting at one end of her kitchen table as storm clouds roll in over the bay. "It never occurred to my mother that I might have to work for a living. I was supposed to marry someone who would take care of me the way my father took care of my mother. She wanted me to be a writer, but it was really more important to her that I set a good table and know how to run a house, that sort of thing. My father kept drilling it into my head that I must get some sort of profession so if I had to I could earn a living, and I've blessed him over and over for that."

At the age of 12 she began writing a novel in her head that she never put on paper. She attended a private women's college, did well, briefly thought of becoming a doctor — "I liked the idea of walking around in a white coat" — then chose journalism. But the Depression was on and the editors at Cleveland's three daily newspapers weren't hiring. She spent a summer sitting outside their offices — six hours each day, two

hours at each. ("I read that if you persevere you always get what you want.") When they still didn't hire her, she enrolled at the Columbia School of Journalism in New York where she met her first husband, Philip Hamburger, later to become reporter-at-large, music critic, and television columnist for the *New Yorker*. "We're very good friends even now," she says of him. "We met in 1939 and we've been on a continuous conversation ever since."

When war came, Iglauer worked for *McCall's* magazine, then in the radio newsroom of the Office of War Information. When the *New Yorker* sent Hamburger to Italy, she decided to go too. "We were the first correspondents into Yugoslavia and the first to report that it was a straight Communist government, not a popular-front government as they claimed. It created a big stir." She filed stories to the *Cleveland News* that were picked up by the Associated Press. "It was 1945. Europe was in ruins. In Yugoslavia the buildings were bombed right and left. There was tremendous damage and very little food. . . . In Naples we were in a hotel next to a railroad station and we were both sick. I think it was from what we were breathing, which was rotting bodies.

"It was terrible, but I think that's when I probably learned I could take care of myself very well. That gave me a lot of confidence and I was never a person with a great deal of confidence. It's very hard to be the wife of a very, very good writer and still think of yourself as a writer too."

On her return, Iglauer covered the United Nations for *Harper's*. As she began to raise a family her writing tapered off, but she did the occasional article on places she could take her two sons. One was the Bronx Zoo, another the mounted-police academy near their home. Her sons grew up to be helpful critics. She remembers her elder son, at age 16, picking up a draft of one of her Eskimo co-ops stories while getting ready for bed, becoming engrossed, walking down the hall with the pages held out in front of him, and continuing to read as he sat down in the bathroom. "I knew my piece was okay."

The Eskimo co-ops series was her first major contribution to the *New Yorker*, and *Inuit Journey* remains an important book historically and anthropologically. When Iglauer landed with a federal official in 1961 at George River, on Ungava Bay on Quebec's Arctic coast, she witnessed the formation of the first Eskimo co-operative by a cluster of desperate families who had begun to find nomadic life untenable. Theirs was the first of a succession of co-ops to be established throughout Arctic Quebec and the Northwest Territories, forming the basis of Inuit economic development and cultural survival. The book is a remarkable success story. "It is the only thing written about what it was really like at the time of the change from a nomadic life to a settlement life and how it happened," Iglauer says. "One of the things I'm told I'm good at is making people feel as if they were there, and it is a very accurate book about what happened at that time in that place."

No matter how good, stories about Canada are hard to sell in the United States. "Canada to most Americans hardly exists at all. They know who some of the actors are — Christopher Plummer, the Stratford Festival. But I can't tell you how many people don't even know there are provinces up here. They haven't the foggiest notion where British Columbia is or where Vancouver is. I think of it as an enormous curtain that goes right along the border from Maine to Washington that they can't see through. I don't understand why it's so hard to sell a piece on Canada. I love Canada and I have a tremendous respect for Canadians. What's wrong with a country that's peaceful? That's the most important thing."

The *New Yorker* editor, William Shawn, once told her he hates snow so much that when he sees it on TV he changes the channel. Iglauer is the opposite. She recoils at the look of red earth in places like Virginia and Arizona. "I was totally thrilled when I saw the ice and snow without any trees." She

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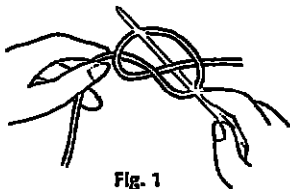


Fig. 1

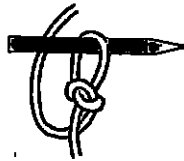


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



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managed to talk Shawn into another Northern assignment, a profile of Yellowknife, named capital of the Northwest Territories in 1967. It had trees, but she had never been there and wanted to see it. Also, her marriage had broken up in 1966, and she was anxious to get away.

"Before I left, Bill Shawn said, 'I just want a profile of Yellowknife — I don't want you going off on anything else.' " But her curiosity kept pulling. In Yellowknife she met John Denison, leader of a team of truckers who annually ploughed a winter road 500 kilometres over frozen lakes and through the wilderness to a silver mine beyond the Arctic Circle. She wanted to go along.

"Edith was no mean persuader when she set her mind to it," says Helen Parker, a friend of Iglauer's in Yellowknife and wife of John Parker, commissioner of the Northwest Territories. "She has such an intense interest in everything and everybody. She was a great participator and a great giver of herself."

Iglauer did go along and the result was perhaps her best book to date, *Denison's Ice Road* (1975), also published in part in the *New Yorker*. It is an adventure story of heroism against the elements, enlivened by a poignant tension between Denison and herself, which mellows into a grudging, mutual affection. The trucks regularly fall apart in the extreme cold, and tempers snap as well. Denison is a fanatic, driving himself so hard he has to stop to vomit in the snow. "I began to wonder seriously if John was going to die," she writes.

The next time Iglauer went north was to tag along with Pierre Trudeau shortly after the 1968 election. She also interviewed "about a million people" who had known him, partly because Trudeau himself was less than cooperative — in one interview, he deliberately spoke faster than she could take it down. The profile (which appeared in the *New Yorker* in July, 1969) is a brilliant, colourful, comprehensive study that deserves a permanent place in Canadian letters. But she says Shawn was angry with her in October, 1970, for not having foreseen Trudeau's use of the War Measures Act. It made no difference nobody in Canada had anticipated the event either. "You're not supposed to miss something like that," she says. "On the other hand, it was all there in my piece about his coldness and the difficult way he behaves." Even the opening line alluded to his arrogance: "Pierre Trudeau, the improbable fifteenth Prime Minister of Canada, whose dream is to mold a more nearly perfect government and save his country from dissolving into separate nations, is a man who likes to have the last word."

THERE IS A fascinating postscript to Iglauer's dealings with Trudeau. Not long after the profile appeared, a Trudeau aide phoned to say the prime minister was coming to New York, could she recommend a play he might see? On the advice of her elder son, who has since become a New York theatre director, she suggested what turned out to be a brooding, avant-garde production, not much to Trudeau's liking, in a cellar seating 100 people. But there is more to the story. Iglauer had also said Trudeau would be welcome to come for a drink — or perhaps dinner — before the play. Trudeau accepted dinner. Not even her mother could have prepared Iglauer for the evening that followed.

"I was immediately stricken with terror. So I called up Bill Shawn and said, 'You got me into this. The prime minister is coming to dinner. You have to come. I don't care what night it is, you have to come — I'll never get through it.' So he and his wife came, and I asked Bill Maxwell and his wife. He was the fiction editor at the *New Yorker*. They're my closest friends. And my son Richard came. He was at drama school at Yale at the time. And I had the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, too — it was before the War Measures Act. I think there were 10 of us. Then word came the prime



minister was going to bring somebody with him, was that all right? And I said sure.

"I was so nervous I hired a cook, but I didn't realize she would be nervous too. She was made particularly nervous by the fact that the RCMP man stood over her while she was cooking. In the middle of everything — she told me later — he said to her, 'Say, Mr. Trudeau had the same meal at noon.' They had been to John D. Rockefeller III's for lunch, and he had served the same meal, lamb. And I remember I had raspberries for dessert, and the cook was so nervous she forgot to drain the raspberries, and they came in wet and soggy. The whole meal was terrible.

"Anyway, he came in, and everybody was there, and they were fascinated with him. He was at his most charming. He was wearing one of those wonderful blue, blue shirts, just the colour of his eyes, and I remember he really looked quite stunning. Then the doorbell rang, and it was Barbra Streisand. Up until that point I hadn't the faintest notion who was coming, so I hadn't been able to warn the other guests.

"Well, she completely took over the entire proceedings. From then on nobody else said a word. She looked quite wonderful — she isn't pretty at all, but she has gorgeous skin. She was wearing, I remember, a plush suit, one of those things that look like a carpet bag that they wear, a beautiful suit, with a big fur collar cut right down to her waist. We had a very interesting dinner, and when they left we all collapsed."

BY THIS TIME, Iglauer had considered leaving New York for Yellowknife. She settled instead in Vancouver, and one day phoned John Daly, a friend of a friend, who came over in his fishing pants. The match was not as unlikely as it might sound. Daly was divorced and had raised two sons. He carried volumes of Shakespeare and poetry on his boat. "He came from one of those upper-class English landed-gentry kind of families that train you either to go into the Church or into the army," Iglauer says. He had grown up on Vancouver Island, was sent to private school in Victoria, then in England. He got sick in England, almost died, and returned home. After his mother committed suicide, he bought a fishing boat and in 1947 became virtually the first resident at Garden Bay.

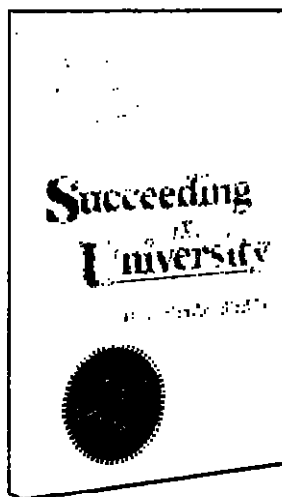
"He used to say, 'We'll have a very beautiful life — you go home to your family in the summer while I fish, and we'll be together in the winter.' But I went fishing with him and loved it, and it turned out he had always dreamed of having somebody like me on the boat. You know, a woman to keep him company who wouldn't get seasick. We both loved being in the boat together. It's an absolutely fascinating life. The people you meet and the places you go, it's incredible. I knew that at the time. I was very well aware when I was doing it that I was the luckiest girl in the world."

She wrote her profile of Arthur Erickson on the boat, at a table not much larger than her typewriter. She has since expanded the article to a coffee-table book full of photographs and drawings, published in 1981 by Harbour Publishing and University of Washington Press as *Seven Stones: A Portrait of Arthur Erickson, Architect*.

Harbour Publishing is run by Harold White, an early playmate of Daly's sons, a poet, editor of the annual *Raincoast Chronicles* (which features stories and poems by West Coast writers), and chief prodder of local writers such as Iglauer and Hubert Evans.

"*Seven Stones* was reviewed favourably without exception," White says on one of his frequent visits to Iglauer's cottage, as he sits with a glass of white wine beneath the John Daly Memorial Bookshelf. He later qualifies this remark, noting that many reviewers started with complaints about Erickson — things like "a friend of a friend has an apartment designed by Erickson, and the roof leaks."

The temptation for reviewers to knock Erickson is perhaps



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brought on by a lack of criticism in the book. Iglauer includes some of Erickson's failings, and says his boldness rubs some people the wrong way, but she is mostly given to superlatives about the man and his work. "When I'm writing, I try not to form likes and dislikes, but it's very hard for me to write about somebody I don't like," she says. "This is what everybody who knows anything about my writing has noticed. They're always kidding me, my friends — the fact that I always like the people enormously that I'm writing about."

White says the Erickson book was not intended so much as a portrait of the man but, as one reviewer phrased it, "a study of the creative mind at work." Iglauer agrees. Creativity is a subject that fascinates her. "Erickson says all his good ideas come out of the super-conscious, and what he means, I think, is that you sort of stop consciously thinking, and you just let your mind hang out. A great many people think your mind keeps working all the time on a problem, like a machine that doesn't stop, and I think Erickson believes most of his ideas come from this area of his mind.

"One of the best examples is the last six pages of my Trudeau profile, which just came pouring out. It was all the knowledge that I had been building up and that I had been working with, and it came out almost word for word the way it was printed.

Now to get to that stage is quite an operation. I'm not sure you can do it without a lot of focusing in ahead of time."

Iglauer says she usually has difficulty writing. Her concentration now is focused on the John Daly book, which Shawn is also interested in. From the first time she went on the boat, she says, she knew life on a salmon trawler would make a great story. She began a journal, and when she and Daly got to know each other better, she took notes as he talked. The fishing life ended for her when Daly died, "but I'm hoping I will be able to work my way out of my sadness about John if I get it all on paper."

Iglauer spends five months of the year in New York now but returns every spring — the best of both worlds, her friends say, although if Daly were alive she says she would be with him all the time. "I don't know how long I'll stay here. I like the climate, and I love this coastline. I feel part of me belongs here. I like it also because of John. I mean, he's more here than anyplace else. I love looking at the things he looked at. And my friends are here. They've been watching me to see what I'm going to call home. They'll phone me in New York and say, 'Are you ready to come home?' Or they'll say, 'It's high time you came home.' I feel this is home, I guess. I need roots and my roots are here." □

#### FEATURE REVIEW

## Prague on the Humber

Exuberantly comic and deeply serious, Josef Skvorecky's new novel finds ease in the comforts of Toronto but freedom in youth and dictatorships

By I.M. OWEN

**The Engineer of Human Souls: An Entertainment on the Old Themes of Life, Women, Fate, Dreams, the Working Class, Secret Agents, Love and Death**, by Josef Skvorecky, translated from the Czech by Paul Wilson, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 589 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919630 17 0).

WE WHO ARE native to this peaceable kingdom must often wonder how it seems to those who live among us but whose minds were formed in countries that have been fought over and tyrannized over for most of their lives. That's precisely what *The Engineer of Human Souls* is about. Written in Czech for Czechs and published in 1977, it has now appeared in the admirably natural English of Paul Wilson, and enables us to eavesdrop on the thoughts and feelings of an émigré community.

Stories of Danny Smiricky's youth under the Nazi occupation, as an enthusiastic jazz musician, unsuccessful girl-

chaser, and occasional Resistance fighter, were told in *The Cowards*, *The Swell Season*, and the extraordinarily beautiful novella *The Bass Saxophone*. Now we meet Danny again as a middle-aged Czech novelist who is also a professor of English literature at a suburban college of the University of Toronto. The foreground story of his life in Toronto has two strands, intertwining only occasionally — life among the émigrés, and life among his students and colleagues at Edenvale College. And into these two lives there constantly intrude recollections of his earlier years, coming to him in a random chronological order, as such recollections do. This makes for a novel of such complexity and variety that it should really be read at one sitting so that you can keep all the narrative threads in your mind, but also of such formidable length that such a reading is impossible. My solution to the problem has been to read it three times — so far.

Danny's Toronto is beautiful:

The Toronto skyline is more beautiful to me than the familiar silhouette of Prague Castle. There is beauty everywhere on earth, but there is greater beauty in those places where one feels that sense of ease which comes from no longer having to put off one's dreams until some improbable future — a future inexorably shrinking away; where the fear which has pervaded one's life suddenly vanishes because there is nothing to be afraid of. . . .

I feel wonderful. I feel utterly and dangerously wonderful in this wilderness land.

But there's something missing, of course; as he reflects when he recalls a joyous New Year's Eve party in the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (a scene that's one of the high points of the book, by the way):

We were sixteen, we were young and free in that awful dictatorship. . . . And it seemed to me that freedom is purely a matter of youth and dictatorships. That

it exists nowhere else, perhaps because we are not aware of it. Just as we are unaware of air until, in the gas chamber of life, it is replaced by those crystals, tasteless, colourless, odourless. . . .

Danny enjoys his intellectual adventures with his students — each chapter title is the name of the author he is discussing with them at the time — but it is with his students that he most often feels a baffled, lonely alien. As in his interminable running argument with Hakim, an American Arab who doggedly follows the Communist party line; or when his class is talking about *The Red Badge of Courage*, and considering whether it is truly an anti-war novel. Danny, without naming his source, quotes one of Stalin's thudding truisms: "There are wars that are just, and wars that are unjust."

"Sir!" Wendy McFarlane's excited voice interrupts me. "Name me a single just war!"

She takes my breath away. . . . No one yawns. Vicky puts aside her bag of potato chips and Wendy repeats, "A single one!"

Oh God. I lower my eyes.

And this former subject of the Third Reich can think of only one thing to say: "Class dismissed."

There's also the time when his rich student, Irene Svensson, invites him to her family's house to see a screening of *Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl's documentary on a Nazi rally: "My sister says it's the first art film made by a woman." What can one say to that? He goes, and watches in silence as "lines of arses stuffed into army breeches parade across the screen."

This same Irene Svensson provides a fitting climax (well-chosen word) to the story of Danny Smiricky, which began in his teens with his repeated failures in seduction: in his middle age, this 19-year-old virgin succeeds in seducing him. And at last he gets the answer to the question that's troubled him for well over 30 years — what is the colour of a natural blonde's pubic hair?

Life as an émigré novelist is marked by frequent visits from professed admirers who are obviously inept agents of the Czechoslovakian secret police. Why?

I concluded long ago that the agents of the State Security police are indulging in their own peculiar version of art for art's sake. . . . In short, the secret police arrange for informers to spy on me because that is what secret police are supposed to do. . . . Formula art.

It's not only the Communists who provide undercover adventures; smuggled manuscripts from the opposition come Danny's way because of his friendship with Mrs. Santner, the Toronto Czech-language publisher — in real life, of course, she is Zdena Salivarova, the

wife of Josef Skvorecky, and her frequent appearances undoubtedly contain a number of private jokes. On Mrs. Santner's behalf, Danny undertakes to receive a manuscript in Union Station, and this leads to a wonderfully elaborated comic episode, ending perfectly with the discovery that the manuscript is a novel based on a profound belief in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Eventually Mrs. Santner sends it on to a Moscow publishing house.

This incessantly comic novel is capacious enough to contain two tragic heroines, utterly different from each other and both movingly portrayed. The one in the present-day story is Veronika, a pop singer from Prague, wittily and embarrassingly outspoken in her anti-Communism. She loves Canada and is nearly in love with a Canadian, but exasperation with both leads her to yield to her homesickness and go impulsively back. The last we hear of her is a cable from Prague, reading "IM A FOOL STOP."

The other heroine belongs to Danny's wartime recollections: Nadia, an uneducated, underfed working-class girl of 19, doomed to die of tuberculosis at 21. It's with Nadia that Danny at last manages to lose his virginity. She is loyal to him yet loyal also to her burly fiancé, who beats Danny up, not for the obvious reason but because he suspects him of involving her in dangerous sabotage in the Messerschmitt factory where they both work. In fact, the opposite is true: Nadia's father has disappeared into a concentration camp and she's implacable in her anti-Nazism. Here is a portrait that could have had a Little Nell sentimentality, but succeeds in being profoundly moving.



Josef Skvorecky

The book is dotted with letters from various of Danny's friends, from various times and places, that give other aspects of the experience of Skvorecky's generation of Czechs. One of these friends is semi-literate, and some of the others indulge in highly literate punning — both challenges to a translator that

Paul Wilson has met magnificently.

This exuberantly comic and deeply serious book is as powerful a counterblast against tyrants as we have seen since — well, since *The Bass Saxophone*. □

## REVIEW

# Stranger than fiction

By PHIL SURGUY

**Vengeance: The True Story of an Israeli Counter-Terrorist Team**, by George Jonas, Lester & Orpen Dennys/Collins, 376 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 217269 0).

UNLESS YOU somehow missed all the hoopla last May, you already know that *Vengeance* purports to be a first-hand account of how an Israeli hit team avenged the 11 athletes slaughtered by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Olympics.

George Jonas's primary source is a man he calls Avner, who claims to have led the team. Avner's story is that, following service as a commando in the Six-Day War, he was recruited by the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency. He worked as a sky marshal on El Al flights and eventually became a low-level operative with frequent assignments in Europe. Then, in the fall of 1972, after a secret briefing at Golda Meir's apartment, he was given command of four other men and sent to Europe with a hit list of 11 key Palestinians. The team severed all formal connections with Israel and the Mossad, and was sent into the field for an indefinite time with unlimited funds paid via a Swiss safety deposit box.

Over the next two years, Avner claims, his team shot or blew up three men in Paris and three more in Rome, Nicosia, and Athens. They also, he says, set up a raid by Israeli commandos that nailed a further three targets in Beirut.

Those killings are a matter of public record. But Avner also claims that the team, expecting to find two more of their targets, raided a Swiss church and killed three Palestinian "foot soldiers," the only enemy they found. There is no known record of these killings, nor of

the foot soldier Avner says they got outside a villa in Spain, or of Jeannette, the beautiful Dutch assassin who murdered one of the team in London. They killed her with single-shot guns made from tubular bicycle frame.

So much of this book is unbelievable. The Mossad (as Jonas points out many times) is, at heart, a bureaucracy. It's difficult to accept that *any* bureaucracy would allow five men to run around Europe for two years with a fortune in unaccountable funds. No intelligence agency would ever allow one agent, let alone five, to operate without controls, and the notion that five unsupervised assassins would be turned loose is preposterous. There are many instances in the factual spy literature of closely controlled, apparently reliable agents and assassins with only one target — including supposed supermen from the KGB — screwing up, losing their nerve, or otherwise turning strange. Yet we are asked to believe that the Mossad expected these guys to keep themselves straight through an unbroken succession of 11 high-stress missions.

We are further asked to believe that Avner's team was given no information on the whereabouts of its targets. But

surely the Mossad was devoting much of its considerable resources and expertise to locating and spying on the Palestinian leadership. Surely it would have, at the very least, passed basic who/where information on to the team it had sent out to kill these people. In *Vengeance*, however, the hit team has to put its security on the line by buying intelligence (and guns, getaway cars, and a host of other support services) from mercenaries, notably an all-seeing, all-powerful terrorist-support organization called Le Group.

Jonas was quoted in *Maclean's* as saying that, before he started this book, he had never read a thriller. If he had, maybe he would have taken a third or fourth look at some of the things Avner told him, for there are parts of *Vengeance* that thriller readers will welcome as old friends. For instance: The hero's secret briefing by the powers-that-be has been with us since Erskine Childers and John Buchan. Beautiful hit ladies are a dime-a-dozen in thrillerland (and the tone in which the Jeannette killing is described is eerily reminiscent of the famous last paragraphs of Mickey Spillane's *I the Jury*). Improbably omnipotent outfits like Le Group are more

common than beautiful hit ladies. And Avner, bless him, comes equipped with an almost camp staple of detective fiction — a special sixth sense that tells the hero when he can or cannot trust people and alerts him when he is being followed, even on crowded streets.

After *Vengeance* was published *Maclean's* reported that Avner had been trying to peddle his tale for several years before he hooked up with Jonas. Apparently, he had worked and fallen out with two previous authors, and his story had changed radically.

*Maclean's*, in tandem with the London *Observer*, also established, fairly accurately it seems, that Avner was an El Al steward and security guard from 1967 to 1974. Maybe that's all he was. Or maybe he also did odd jobs for the Mossad during layovers and picked up a lot of tradecraft and gossip.

It's even possible that he was indeed a member of the Mossad and perhaps, in some capacity, took part in one or more hits. If so, no matter how greedy or disgruntled he was, it's highly unlikely that he would risk retribution by betraying secret details of the agency's operations. He would have to cloud his story with nonsense like Le Group, the sloppy raid on the church, unaccountable funds, and funny guns made out of bicycle parts. Or maybe he's *still* an agent and all this is a Mossad deception.

Going by his previous work, George Jonas is neither a fool nor a charlatan. Avner did convince him that this story is true. The central problem with the book is that Jonas (who admits to having altered details to protect his source and Israel's security) has not seen fit to devise a secure and compelling way to communicate his conviction to us.

The truly interesting thing about *Vengeance* is that, in essence, it's not too different from Jonas's previous books: the excellent *By Persons Unknown* (written with Barbara Amiel) and the superb novel *Final Decree*. Put very simply, both books are about aliens confounded by the machinery of the society they happen to be living in. Avner is a similar character. He is an Israeli of western European origin, and he believes that Israel is run by and for cliques of people with eastern European backgrounds, who have persistently abused, thwarted, and betrayed him. How much this aspect of Avner's personality influenced Jonas's judgement is, of course, impossible to say.

But what must be said before closing is that, all matters of veracity aside, *Vengeance* is an exciting, fascinating book. I read it in two sittings. Jonas hasn't given us a completely true story, but he has certainly produced the best thriller ever written by a Canadian. □

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# Having it both ways

Mordecai Richler's journalism combines the wit and intelligence that his followers admire with the cheap shots noted by his critics

By **GEORGE GALT**

**Home Sweet Home: My Canadian Album**, by Mordecai Richler, McClelland & Stewart, 291 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 7488 3).

UNLIKE MOST Canadian novelists — indeed most novelists anywhere — Mordecai Richler can perform as a master journalist. The large talent for social satire in fiction gives his magazine pieces an entertaining edge and unifying tone that most good journalism lacks. More than that, Richler knows the long hours of a good picker, not merely indiscriminately slogging through the trees to fill his basket, but working overtime to pluck only the best plums: the choice facts, the juicy anecdotes. His new book, a collection of articles on subjects Canadian published over the past 24 years, exhibits the intelligence, wit, and polish his followers admire, also the bitterness and breeziness sneered at by his critics. Richler's scathing impatience with fools and deadly skewering of hypocrisy are delivered with such fluency, such a delicious mix of barroom banter and elegant high prose that anyone who enjoys language must in some way warm to these essays.

The barbed comments on Canadian topics addressed to American readers will not endear him to cultural nationalists here, but then offending them has never weighed heavily on his conscience. *Home Sweet Home* contains a few pieces that appeared originally in *Maclean's* and the *Canadian* magazine, but most of the material was written for U.S. periodicals, and carries an unfortunate (and no doubt unintentional) condescending tone for Canadian readers, with too many over-obvious explanations. We are, in fact, reading the copy of another country's foreign correspondent here, "Our Man in Canada" at *Esquire*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, and the New York *Times*, who just happens to be a local boy. Why U.S. editors turn to Richler is not hard to fathom. A few other Canadian journalists spin out paragraphs as engaging, but he alone is

possessed of a satirist's comic detachment, not to mention an international reputation.

Richler writes at his best when he can personally inject himself into his story, at his worst when he feels called upon to make pronouncements on the state of the nation. "My Father's Life," the most impressive essay in this collection, may surprise readers who expect a running patter of sly one-liners. Despite



Mordecai Richler

its unusual earnestness, his biographical sketch of Moses Richler draws on the author's long-cultivated strengths: the keen and particular memory, attention to significant detail, an exceptional talent for the rendering of dramatic cameos, and an unbending sense of who he is and where he comes from. The comic public commentator unmasks himself, revealing a painful and embittered childhood; the angry love a tough Jewish kid felt for his gentle, inept father; and the beginnings of this author's iconoclasm — first on St. Urbain Street and then in the world, beyond. It's a confessional piece of the best kind, escaping the sentimentality and self-aggrandizement that can easily sink such a memoir. What he has written is a miniature map of his own psychology, and a street-wise eulogy to the father who helped shape it.

"My Father's Life" (first published in *Esquire*) leads a group of seven essays linked by their autobiographical form. "Pages from a Western Journal" (from *Maclean's*) is the slightest, offering no more than the title advertises, disjointed impressions from a 10-day flying visit to Brandon, Winnipeg, and Edmonton. "St. Urbain Street Then and Now" (from *Geo*) has the grit and tension of rich childhood memories juxtaposed against the middle-aged nostalgia of eyes wandering their old neighbourhood. "Making a Movie" (New York *Times* and *New York* magazine) gives us the jaundiced and jaded cosmopolitan screenwriter up against Hollywood hubris — and winning. No one at the Academy Awards festivities in Los Angeles thought much of the movie *Duddy Kravitz*; it didn't make enough money. But the screenwriter (who was nominated) scores nice points against the venal and apparently vacuous producers he meets. "On the Road" (New York *Times*) is the standard essay on the perils of an author's promotional tour, though Richler writes it better than most. "North of Sixty" (*Signature* and *Esquire*), an essay on Yellowknife,

reaches the excellence of the St. Urbain Street memoir. Sourness and vitriol, ladled out so generously in the pieces on southern Canada, are foregone here. Instead a sense of wonderment and celebration propel the writing. And wackiness:

"You taking off with Daryl today?" I was asked.

"Right."

"Well, you needn't worry. He's one of the best around."

I nodded, appreciative.

"How come, you'll want to know. Well, I'll tell you. He's the one bush pilot in Yellowknife who can drink scotch standing on his head."

"And when did he last manage that?"

"Four o'clock this morning."

"Home is Where You Hang Yourself" (*New York Times Book Review*), which opens the book, announces its tone and substance. ("But what really impelled me, after years of vacillating, to finally pack my bags was a recurring fear of running dry, a punishment, perhaps, for luxuriating all those years in London, not paying my Canadian dues.") Abroad, Richler was a Canadian, never a former Canadian. But he has always felt deeply ambivalent about his homeland, one part of him loving it and relying on it for source material, another despising its middle-brow mediocrity. The ambivalence is, or has been, essential to the success of his work, as this essay demonstrates. He rarely misses the chance to take a shot at the parochial, as if the bright, ambitious Jewish kid inside him still suffered a claustrophobic need to escape the cultural narrowness of Montreal's ghetto and middle-Canada's small-mindedness. On the other hand Montreal, with all its faults, is the place he knows most intimately and loves best. For a novelist that makes it indispensable. "I could not live anywhere else in Canada but Montreal," he writes in another essay. "So far as one can generalize, the most gracious, cultivated, and innovative people in this country are French Canadians." In itself the comment means little — no evidence is proposed in support of this emoting — but it's a loaded remark for anyone interested in Richler's vision. His displeasure with anglophone Canadians, whether Jew or gentile, implicitly characterizing them as crude, uncultivated, and unimaginative, allows him the critical detachment he needs and in turn supplies this book with many of its strengths.

Specifically, Richler takes a poke at the cultural immaturity of the country Richler remembers from the 1950s and '60s, but with an unusual *mea culpa* evening the score. "Like many of my

contemporaries, I was mistakenly charged with scorn for all things Canadian. For the truth is, if we were indeed hemmed in by the boring, the inane, and the absurd, we foolishly blamed it all on Canada, failing to grasp that we would suffer from a surfeit of the boring, the inane, and the absurd wherever we eventually settled. And would carry Canada with us for good measure."

Apart from the pieces with a personal touch, there are three sports essays that shine, and a comic ditty expertly puncturing puffed-up Yousuf Karsh. Then there are the political pieces.

In his article on the October Crisis the author concludes: "But at the day's end, at the risk of appearing callous, I must say damn little actually did happen in 1970. In an American year in which there were 13,649 homicides, eighty cops were killed, and Weathermen blew up banks and university buildings, in Canada a politician was murdered and a diplomat kidnapped, later to be freed. Everybody in the house, not only Trudeau, overreacted. To some extent, I think, out of issue-envy." First published in *Life* magazine (and originally entitled "Canada: An Immensely Boring Country — Until Now"), Richler's essay is a cute interpretation of our major political shitstorm since the war, but in more ways than one it just doesn't wash.

If we were unconsciously relieved by the events of that bloody-minded autumn, it was hardly because, as this essay suggests, we were catapulted onto the world stage, our geopolitical inferiority complex finally appeased. Had Richler been living here at the time, he might have better sensed, at least among anglophones in central Canada, the deep confusion and anger sewn first by the FLQ bombings and then by the rise of the PQ. And he might have realized that after a decade of choking blind in the mysterious smoke emanating from Quebec separatism, many anglophones were content at last to reach the flash-point and witness the fire, no matter who came out of it scorched.

Indeed, having returned to Montreal for a year in 1968, Richler must have had a good whiff of that smoke. Still, it better suits his ends, psychological and journalistic, to explain 1970 as our shot at the bigtime, our bid to play in the global league of media hot spots and factional killing. Even defining it thus he has us fail, as we so often do in his vision. Eighty cops wasted in the U.S.? 13,649 homicides? Don't mind us, we had only a single pol garrotted. But we dream of doing better.

"Pourquoi Pas?" — a Letter from Ottawa," which appeared in *Harper's* in 1975, quickly takes our political pulse,

and examines at some length the cultural currents of the day. Always wary of nationalist sentiments, scornful of the protective and affirmative action such sentiments often inspire, Richler here points to the Independent Publishers' Association's 1973 suggestion for Canadian content quotas in book stores to support his distaste for the whole movement. He ridicules this idiotic proposal deservedly and well, getting off a good gag about "the RCMP paperback detail — plainclothes, of course — each constable only five-foot-four, bespectacled, checking out your corner drugstore and newsie against his Canadian-content pocket calculator."

But it's an example of a position either ill-considered or sloppily researched. "The pity is," he concludes, "that our economic nationalists, if only they would stay clear of cultural matters, obviously beyond them, do have a case. We are too much subject to the whims of multinational corporations, largely American owned." The statistics on foreign ownership speak for themselves. But what of cultural matters? One of Richler's peculiar habits as an essayist is to focus on a single foolish act — proposed content quotas in book stores, for example — and use it as the clincher in an argument. The truth that was sacrificed for wit is that the IPA proposal was an aberration in a persistent and mostly enlightened lobbying by the IPA and others. This led to a publications program administered by the federal department of communications, providing funds that many publishers of Canadian books would be hard put to forgo.

Richler implies that Canadian writers of quality will sell their books abroad, as he did, and that those who can't are mediocre and unworthy of support. As an economist he's a good gag writer. Apart from the respectable case much of Canadian publishing can make that it is an infant industry in need of temporary nurturing, the Canadian market will probably always be small enough to warrant some intervention on behalf of special-interest books whose appeal is naturally limited.

"Language (and Other) Problems," taken from pieces in the *Canadian* and *Atlantic*, discusses the origins of French Canada's malaise and the foibles of the PQ administration since 1976. Mostly it's solid reportage but says nothing new to anyone who has followed public affairs over the past decade through major Canadian newspapers. Some of Richler's interpretations are unfortunate. He compares Quebec's public and para-public payroll of 342,000, for example, to California's 320,000, about as facile a conservative put-down of the

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PQ's social-democratic tendencies as can be imagined. In the next breath "an all-but-comprehensive health plan here" is acknowledged, but exactly how many thousands of doctors, hospital workers, and administrative employees this would subtract from the total is not offered. Nor does Richler bother to add that Hydro Quebec, now one of the most profitable corporations in Canada, employs some 19,000 people. This is careless journalism, hustling a few selected facts into the right order to defend a prejudice.

There are careless slips in the final

political piece as well. "O Canada" (from *The Atlantic*) tells us twice that the Foreign Investment Review Agency was put in place at the same time as the National Energy Program in 1980, which must have surprised any of Richler's American readers whose applications FIRA rejected in the previous six years. The Tories' Ottawa leadership convention was held in 1982 according to this essay, making the one held last year a charity benefit. Minor points, of course, but curiously slapdash for an author of Richler's high reputation. Half a dozen of our best political jour-

nalists could have written these political pieces more convincingly, not to say more accurately.

To be fair, every essay here offers entertaining reading. As he has grown older, Richler has turned the volume down on his Canada-bashing rhetoric, though the caustic bitterness is by no means entirely muffled. I find a monotony and predictability to his treatment of Canada as a country of hopeless yokels, but even in his political journalism there remain many moments of intelligent laughter. We will never have enough of that. □

## FEATURE REVIEW

# A sequence of dreams

Reading, for Jorge Luis Borges, is not only the counterpart of writing: it makes up half the soul of literature, and needs as much talent

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

*Twenty-four Conversations with Borges, Including a Selection of Poems: Interviews by Roberto Alifano 1981-1983*, translated from the Spanish by Nicomedes Suarez Arauz, Willis Barnstone, and Noemi Escandell, Lascaux Publishers/Grove Press, 158 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 394 53879 X).

THE BEST INTERVIEWS are those in which the subject is allowed to speak for himself, to explain, instruct, hesitate, make fun, invent, remember; those in which we can hear a personal voice moving across the page as it moved across a room. I have sat in Jorge Luis Borges's apartment and listened to him speak many times, always amazed, always enchanted, as his slightly breathless voice slowly revealed the secret makings of the world. In Roberto Alifano's interviews Borges is alive and intelligent. Countless writers and journalists have interviewed Borges (I know of at least 20 such books, by Richard Burgin, Victoria Ocampo, Alicia Jurado, Antonio Carrizo, Emir Rodriguez Monegal, and many others), but none of them approaches the reality of Alifano's book.

The 24 interviews range from personal memories (childhood in Buenos Aires, the years in Europe, the influence of his

parents and of his English grandmother) to the discussion of favourite writers (Dante, Virgil, Kipling) and themes (labyrinths, tigers, Japan, blindness, time). Every page reveals an astounding anecdote, or makes a statement that clarifies our reading of Borges's work, or introduces a new passion which, in an 85-year-old man, is always something profoundly moving.

Not only the content: the style of Borges's conversation has a rare quality, a polished and restrained sense of measure and of rhythm that surely comes from his habit of composing his texts in his head before dictating them whole to whoever happens to visit him. Since blindness overtook him, Borges has refused to use any kind of machine or even Braille to help himself write his work. He prefers to write by memory, as Homer probably did, and this justifies, he says, the brevity of his texts. And he composes his conversation with the same elegance with which he composes his poems.

Poems, essays, and short stories (and a combination of all three, which Borges calls "fictions") make up a considerable body of work for a man whose longest prose barely exceeds 20 pages, and who usually limits himself to a couple of paragraphs: his complete works fill a

volume of more than 1,000 pages, plus another volume of the same length that contains his "works in collaboration."

And yet it becomes clear that Borges is not essentially a writer, but a reader. Borges reads (or remembers what he has read, or asks to be read to); writing comes later, as an afterthought, and it surprises him to find that his written work (that of "an Argentine lost in metaphysics") should be highly praised and carefully studied. Reading for Borges is not only the logical counterpart of writing: it makes up half the soul of literature, and needs as much talent and perseverance and an ear for music as does the writing. Borges's first book of poems, *Fervor of Buenos Aires*, published in 1923, carries this dedication "to the eventual reader":

If the pages of this book allow one happy verse, may the reader forgive me the discourtesy of having usurped it before him. Our nothings are barely different; it is a trivial and fortuitous circumstance that you are the reader of these exercises, and I their writer.

It must be said that Borges's reading is never imitative: it is wrong to see in the quotations (real and apocryphal) that he so frequently uses, in the references to other writers, in the summing-up of books that have delighted him or made





first novel, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*. In all, she wrote four novels, of which *The History of Emily Montague* was the second. She also wrote two tragedies, two comic operas, numerous essays, and translated three books from the French. She had a mild but lifelong quarrel with Garrick, who managed the important theatres of the day but refused to read or produce her work. Nonetheless, she lived to see her tragedy *The Siege of Sinope* acted on the London stage, and her two comic operas, *Rosina* and *Marian*, enjoyed great popular success.

What about Frances Brooke's private life and personality? Her outer life was unremarkable. She was the descendant of a long line of clergymen, she became the wife of a clergyman, and her only child, a son, also became a clergyman. She seems to have understood theological politics, and to have helped her husband and her son to obtain suitable livings. She was unhappy in her marriage but stoically sustained it. She wasn't a feminist in the modern sense, but she was aware of the difference in the education of men and women, and believed in choice and individual freedom. At one point the heroine of *The History of Emily Montague* comments: ". . . I will marry a savage and turn squaw . . . never was anything as delightful as their lives; they talk of French husbands, but commend me to an Indian one, who lets his wife ramble five hundred miles, without asking where she is going."

Her contemporaries agreed that Frances Brooke was lively, cheerful, witty, intelligent, and full of common sense. However, she was always mysteriously in need of money and turned her hand to many writing projects at the same time. On one occasion, as McMullen tells us, she asked Dr. Johnson to read and criticize one of her manuscripts. He suggested that she could do it herself just as well. She objected that she had no time as she had too many irons in the fire, whereupon Dr. Johnson is said to have told her that perhaps she should consign her work there too.

When you compare Frances Brooke with the many other women novelists of the time, she stands out as a writer whose work, though minor, has endured. *The History of Emily Montague*, despite its 18th-century style and moral overtones, is still very readable. It gives an intimate picture of colonial life in Quebec and Montreal, and depicts not only the conscious values of the times, but captures the unconscious feeling and inner spirit of our wintry country.

This is no mean achievement, for the 18th century with its neo-classical attitudes, its romantic revolt against tradi-

tion, its pragmatic realism, and its French love of lightness and elegance is too complicated to define, or even easily to characterize. Perhaps by reading this literary biography of one of its most representative writers, we can learn a few surprising things about that remote age.

First: the works of minor writers are the richest sources and the clearest mirrors of the taste, culture, and fashions of their times. Second: there is nothing new about unhappy marriages but there are honourable ways of dealing with them. Third: experimental little magazines and journalism weren't invented in the 20th century. Fourth: feminism was a way of seeing the world long before 1970, and finally, originality and venturesomeness on the part of women writers often takes 200 years to be recognized. We should therefore be grateful to Lorraine McMullen for giving us Frances Brooke, and to the University of British Columbia Press for so carefully producing a book whose illustrations and physical attributes do justice to its contents. □

#### REVIEW

## Smaller than life

By ELEANOR WACHTEL

*Love Is a Long Shot*, by Ted Allan, McClelland & Stewart, 171 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 0127 4).

THE 1930s were "wonderful days!" in Ted Allan's *Love Is a Long Shot*. The mid-1930s yet — 1935-36 — with Hitler and the Nazis firmly entrenched abroad and war imminent, while at home the Depression had been dragging on for more than half a decade. The explanation for the author's apparent naivety, however, is given in the novel's first line: "When I was not yet eighteen years old. . . ." These are the reflections of an older man, an indulgently fond look at youth when almost any social period would constitute the good old days as long as one were young and innocent enough.

Ted Allan is known in Canada chiefly for *The Scalpel, the Sword: The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune*, a book he co-authored 30 years ago, and for the award-winning screenplay, *Lies My*

*Father Told Me*. He's also written other films, plays, and novels, one of my favourites being *Willie the Squowse*, a charming tale about a squirrel-cum-mouse who unwittingly redistributes the wealth between two households that share a common wall.

In *Love Is a Long Shot* Allan returns to fictional territory so successfully mined by Mordecai Richler and in memoir recently by Shulamis Yellin — namely, Montreal nostalgia. His hero, David Webber, is a self-styled poet (he never actually puts pen to paper in the course of the novel), a member of the Young Communist League and activist in a secret four-person Trotskyist faction who mimeograph revolutionary leaflets that they distribute at night.

But most significant for the story is David's job behind the counter at Eddie Keller's Cigar Store, which operates as a front for a bookie joint in downtown Montreal. With good-natured slobbs like Brains Simco, Society Boy Morgan, and David's own Uncle Willie the perennial loser as regulars, this is Damon Runyan country. The Syndicate (the big boss excepted) is an almost benign presence in the shadows, while the police are foolish fall guys for corrupt politicians. This is such a warm-hearted book that virtually everyone is basically kind: Keller treats David like a son, and the young prostitute upstairs not only has the mandatory heart of gold, she initiates our young hero into the joys of sex, joins his political cell, and saves up gold as a nest egg for a future together.

As if David's work doesn't throw up enough eccentric characters, home centres on (what else?) a Jewish mother who demonstrates her displeasure with the world by sticking her head in the oven — without turning on the gas, of course. David's father, on the other hand, is truly crazy. A waif-like figure dreaming up inventions that are always just a little before or slightly behind their time, he wanders around the house in the guise of a mendicant barefoot Buddhist, and is alternately paranoid or catatonic. In brief, parental archetypes.

The plot in this very short book moves at a breakneck clip (outpacing most of the horses). It's polished, cinematic, almost cartoonish. All the characters are smaller than life. Despite their apparent excesses, they are more familiar than remarkable, none really extreme. Perhaps because the novel moves so fast, no one has the space to do very much.

But the tone is amiably ironic, and one scene in particular suggests that Allan may be writing with more guile and craft than might otherwise appear. Keller the bookie is not only intelligent and decent, a philosopher and a prince,

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## Crimes of the flesh

By PATRICIA BRADBURY

The Elizabeth Stories, by Isabel Huggan, Oberon Press, 184 pages, \$23.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 519 0) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 520 1).

ELIZABETH'S WORLD of childhood and adolescence is delineated by the Anglo-Germanic town called Garten, and by a psychological landscape of secrets and wounds. The formula for healing is one of defiance. Clandestine rebellion forms the buoyancy for escape not just from a community and misguided parents, or from the narrowing confinements of Elizabeth's own soul, but from the ceaseless humiliation that stems from, and threatens, all three. The story, though harsh, is told in quickening tales where cruelty almost always out-distances consideration, and Elizabeth's humble victory is not an act of redemption, but an ability to limp, somewhat valiantly, out of town.

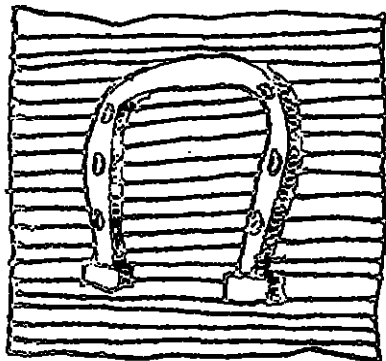
In this edenic, though stale and very crusty, children's Garten, sexuality is the obvious crime. We see, in dream-like sequences, Elizabeth and other five-year-olds climb into an abandoned bakery truck (painted dark brown and golden like a loaf itself) and lie, stacked on shelves (where the warm bread used to lie) lost in a fervour of masturbation. Much later, in a camp cabin on a darkening night, Elizabeth and several other passionate girls embrace in a swoon of kissing. These brief tribal ecstasies, ritualistically repeated, are grotesquely expelled when revealed. When 10-year-old Elizabeth is discovered on the floor, trying to re-live her bakery truck liaison with Rudy, the vengeance of her father is complete. Using his power as the manager of the local bank, he runs Rudy's family out of town. Years later, in a moment of loneliness and misery, Elizabeth forfeits her friendship with a Mennonite woman when, in a desperate attempt at recall and re-creation, she locks her in a tongue-filled kiss.

The book is often punctuated by sexual shocks — 13-year-old forcing fellatio on his sister; a voluptuous waitress, Faye, being picked up by drunken toughs who deny her the sex she is happy to give, and submit her to a barbaric

but he articulates (and presumably independently invents) Freudian theory about human behaviour — in much the same matter-of-fact but strikingly insightful, comic way that Joshua's father "explains" the Bible in Richler's *Joshua Then and Now*. Freud via Keller maintains that there is an irreducible, irremediable basis to human nature, not amenable to any social fix, including social revolution. So the intellectual struggle of the 20th century, the debate between idealistic Marxism and pragmatic, apolitical Freudianism, is played out between our hero and his boss. The omniscient author, meanwhile, puts his money on Keller even as he keeps a soft spot for David. (I still stick with Willie the Squowse.)

And what a hero David is! This is no angst-ridden adolescent, no modern anti-hero, no schlimiel. David gets the girl, stands up for her, and even manages to disentangle himself from her at the end without recrimination. She flatters his manhood, as they say, and he also wins over another girl, a socialist colleague. "My life was busy with meetings, preparing leaflets and making sure Marie and Susan didn't know my activities with the other. I would have preferred if everything had been out in the open, but neither girl was ready for that." On that point at least, one might well accuse our gentle author of a rather self-serving vision.

In addition to amorous heroics, David finds success in politics, proves an inspiring orator, and back at the bookie joint is a popular employee whose periodic flashes of clairvoyance unerringly enable him to pick winners at the track. Why do they decide to send him to college? As David himself says, "I didn't know it then, but I learned more



about life from Keller's Cigar Store than from my books."

*Love Is a Long Shot* is not always above cliché. But, if the memories are happy ones, who wants to be the one to tell the author about the dirty '30s? For a fanciful few hours, Ted Allan tries to make you forget about the '80s. I appreciate the sentiment. □

shaving — but the characters throughout remain simple and obscure, with Elizabeth knowing only in wide, blunt terms how any of them cope or feel. Her thoughts and observations are roundly stated like a child's. "He . . . twisted her elbow behind her back . . . Why did boys always do that?" she says. Or, "It was all beyond me . . . If you were like Faye . . . they hated and abused you. Could the mothers like Mavis be right?"

Unlike the observer of *Lives of Girls and Women*, who reaches intuitively beyond her years, and whose adult voice often returns like a seer's, Elizabeth is confined to uncomplicated reporting. But it's this limitation that gives her such power. When Elizabeth articulates the benefits of hindsight, most often to exonerate her father and mother, her softening seems disturbingly insincere.

Huggan's Garten is a fey though ice-ridden place, disconnected, it seems, from historical time, and droll in its tacit aberrations. There's the grandmother who scolds the pre-schooler Elizabeth for obscenely manipulating her body on her bear, then passes around chocolates with a coy defiance as she keeps the soft centres for herself. There are the annual trips to the hockey arena to follow *The Nutcracker*, like some rare form of bird, through a shared pair of field glasses. And there's Elizabeth's mother betraying the United Church when she meets an old lover and, in another town, becomes a secretive, flaming Anglican.

The separation of that which is controllable by Garten and that which permanently is not is symbolically rendered through two ill-favoured girls: Celia, a homely and simpering diabetic, and Gracie, a nine-year-old simpleton. Celia's sin is not just her meek pliability but her fear of not forgiving the unforgivable. Gracie's strength is her chilling but colossal innocence, which renders her judgement divine. "You broke my path," she cries out horribly, when Elizabeth is forced to erase their beloved attempts to create a woodland road. "I'm a good girl," she continues "and you broke my path." This resonant damnation is implicitly Elizabeth's when she suffers repeatedly from a parental control that forces her to flee from the purity of grace into the conditioned position of destroyer.

Only two people — a friend of the family called Edie, playing poker and liberally sipping from a flask, and Faye with her nipples showing generously through blouses — know the secret of escape. They simply don't care about Garten, and are safe. Both are punished eventually, in the usual way, with banishment to — God forbid — Toronto. Elizabeth will follow more nobly, by choice, when she leaves town for univer-

sity. But she goes only after she has mastered their secret — when Garten, for her, is as dead and persistent as the useless bits of scripture forever printed on her brain. "We must bear these verses in our memory," she says, "and still somehow get on with it." Characteristically, she sums up her experiences briefly, in a broad, unruffled way. She is, she notes, considerably wounded, but by some odd miracle, still intact. □

REVIEW

Art for Frank's sake

By MARK GERSON

*Where There's a Will . . .*, by Edward Phillips, McClelland & Stewart, 224 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 6999 4).

EVERYONE WANTS A shot at immortality. Some people produce children, others create works of art, and still others perform good deeds. Yet few carry the wish to be remembered beyond the grave to the point of obsession. Frank Clarke, the protagonist of Edward Phillips's *Where There's a Will . . .*, is one of those few. He has realized, a little later than most, that death will condemn him to oblivion, and is determined, with that determination only the obsessed possess, that his name will not vanish when he dies.

Immortality through progeny is out of the question for the 70-year-old, childless, gay divorcé. No memorials in stone and glass will survive him, for although Frank was trained as an architect, his only designs have been on others. And as for good deeds, Frank hasn't a selfless bone in his body. Even the decades spent pandering to the whims of his imperious Westmount widow of a mother have been motivated less by filial devotion than by a desire to remain on the right side of her will.

The key to immortality, Frank decides, is a choice collection of drawings to be amassed during his final years, bequeathed to a first-class museum, and housed in a gallery bearing his name. Money is the sole obstacle. While Frank is rich enough to avoid working, he hasn't the wealth necessary to round up

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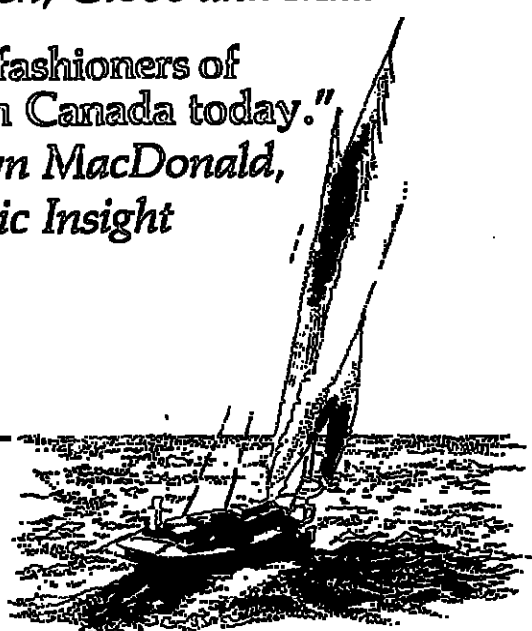
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a collection of sufficient stature. Not until he weasels a power of attorney from his invalid mother and, without her knowledge, begins liquidating her assets before death, inheritance taxes, and a sizable bequest to a senior citizens' residence can extract a substantial sum from both her estate and Frank's purchasing power.

It's not a difficult scheme for someone as devious, unscrupulous, and outwardly harmless as Frank Clarke. But he doesn't consider the unpredictability of the cast of characters he has been subtly manipulating. The first to sweep onto the scene is cousin Estelle, a.k.a. Stella della Chiesa, a flamboyant if faded diva who returns to the bosom of her indifferent family after a lengthy European absence. Flavia, Frank's mother, is a bully who has always had her way and expects nothing less. Mother and daughter Vivien, a 72-year-old hippie, have been estranged since the day Flavia's hectoring so provoked Vivien that she smashed all her mother's china figurines and nearly shattered her mother's jaw. To Frank's delight, his sister was disinherited for her unseemly conduct.

Although Phillips's characters are equally colourful, eccentric, and expertly drawn, they're static. That may be acceptable for lesser players and, symbolically, for Frank, Flavia, and the other Westmount dinosaurs, but characters like Vivien and Stella, who belong to a more adaptable species, deserve more development. Another flaw is Phillips's reluctance to develop the twists in his plot, those incidents that threaten Frank's scam. Whenever an alarm is sounded, it's prematurely declared false. There isn't enough time for suspense to build, or for the reader to consider Frank's exposure a credible possibility.

Despite these faults, *Where There's a Will* . . . is entertaining. It's bright and witty, without the cloying qualities of its predecessor, *Sunday's Child*, and it's well-written. A servant subjected to a tongue-lashing "wilted through the swinging door to correct her mistake." Stella "handled the teapot as though God were sitting front row centre." And Flavia, not content with merely answering the door, "kicked her train out of the way and flung herself" at it. The book is peppered with vivid aphorisms ("self-interest, like body lice, must be dealt with in private, denied in public") and clever observations: Mirabel, designed as it was by a government, is of questionable benefit as an airport, but "would have made a great Olympic stadium."

Phillips's one linguistic lapse is his use of "presently" in its accepted if

unacceptable meaning of "now." It's surprisingly sloppy form for an author so clearly tuned to the English language. And one factual error is his reference to Montreal's Notre Dame Basilica as a cathedral, which is an altogether different sort of church. □

## REVIEW

# Tracts from facts

By FRASER SUTHERLAND

*Blue Mondays*, by David Fennario and Daniel Adams, Black Rock Creations, 190 pages (ISBN 0 920295 00 2).

*The Growing Dawn*, by Mark Frutkin, Quadrant Editions, 167 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 86495 023 3).

THESE BOOKS INVITE questions: at what point does transcription become art? Documents become artifacts? Mark Frutkin's *The Growing Dawn* is subtitled "Documentary Fiction"; the journal extracts and poems in *Blue Mondays* convey the gritty surface of working-class Montreal. There, however, the resemblance ends.

In his pugilistic prologue to *Blue Mondays*, playwright David Fennario (born David Wiper) speaks of "the Black Rock memorial stone in the traditionally Anglo working class district of Point-Saint-Charles in Montreal, honouring the 6,000 immigrants that died of typhoid fever in 1847" and "placed on the common grave by the working men that built the Victoria Bridge." Marxist romantics that they are, Fennario and Daniel Adams view themselves as these men's inheritors:

Some of us shitdisturbers born down there in the Point Saint-Charles-Verdun ghetto have decided to form something called the Black Rock Group, basing ourselves on the last hope that what's left of the Anglo community can be salvaged and made useful to itself despite itself and hoping we can help place more weight behind the progressive forces trying to form a Québec that is a colony to no one and belonging to nobody but the people themselves, of themselves and by themselves.

Following Fennario's Lincoln-like address, Adams's epilogue boasts that "our class has taught us to tell the truth

or we would get a punch in the mouth" and warns the denizens of Westmount that "the Black Rock is not the myth of Sisyphus. We have pushed it up the hill and into your factories. It is washed with blood and now it shall be washed with the creative energies of a new generation."

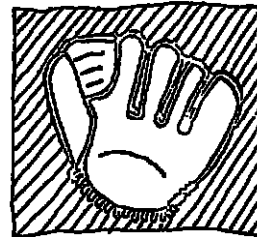
Just the same, the Adams poems that interweave with Fennario's journal are a long way from the savagery and diamond-hardness of Bertolt Brecht. They are often surprisingly soft-core in their sentimental rhetoric. Like Fennario, Adams frequently disinters the unhappy dead, his "Uncle Jack" facing Christmas broke while the "catalogue stores" are "deep in credit cards/the wise men are in Westmount." Then "the doorbell rings/the guy downstairs wants his rent/a week early." Adams's father was a worker, "and workers are like dandelions/one day they get white/and just blow away."

Adams dislikes the Queen, and quotes an Irish grandfather's observation that "she had a face like a handful of cats' arseholes" and "that he would like to take a piss down her neck," concluding: "I think he was quite correct/in fact/my apologies to the cats." The poems are not always this silly, and Adams is not just a "prole soul with a yen for the pen," as Ray Filip has described the typical Black Rocker. Poetry now and then shines through, as in "The Asylum":

*it is always noon  
the sun is always perpendicular  
sharp & explosive  
love is left up to the pigeons  
love is left up to our keepers  
& the pigeons*

In his last poem, "For David," Adams dismisses intellectuals as irrelevant parasites: "the guy next door only did Hamlet/after ten beers/the luxury of deep thought/doesn't bring jobs."

Fennario's journal, which runs from Oct. 5, 1969, to March 1, 1970, records the acquisition and loss of jobs. Fennario toiled — when he wasn't sharing a toke with the boys at coffee-break — as



a packer, releaser (of dresses from racks), and price-tag stamper at various Montreal garment depots. Leaving his first job he stuffed three new dresses down his shirt-front and returned to paint the Little Burgundy apartment he shared with his cat, Pearl, and girl-

friend, Liz, the latter a waitress in a Murray's restaurant. (Once Liz turns in her sleep and says, "Three soup, one milk, two coffees, and two donuts for table number eight — thank you, Pee-wee.") He wrote 1,000 words a day and tried to learn French. When they could afford it, he and Liz ate all-dressed pizzas.

In 1969-70, Fennario seems to have been something of a convenience store gourmet:

Had Puritan meat balls for supper instead of my usual Cordon Bleu and ugh, you can't trust those cheaper specials with the meatballs tasting like chunks of day-old pork sausages floating in greasy spot gravy. It even smelt bad, but I wolfed it down anyhow figuring, well, my mother's cooking didn't kill me so what's a couple of rotten meatballs.

His menus include "Blue Liner fish sticks, rice, and corn niblets" as well as "mashed potatoes, McCarry's Sausages and Aylmer dented tin-can yellow waxed beans," and he faithfully records every burp: "a half pound of Minute rice with Ideal corn niblets, burping to bed with Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution*."

That book is of interest, because Fennario also belonged to a Marxist faction called the Socialist Labour Party, which held monthly business meetings "sitting around the coffee table where Harry works as a self-employed mold-maker for the jewelry trade. Comrade Ross is also in the jewelry trade and so is Comrade Segalman." As his part in the revolution, he hawked ancient-looking copies of the *Weekly People* outside universities, sneering at Trotskyists and Maoists who are doing much the same thing: "Can't stand those Maoists with their beady blank eyes like the Jesuit Brothers at Saint Willibrod's when I was a kid and most of them are middle-class.

Ya gotta be middle-class to behave the way they do."

Fennario eventually became disenfranchised with the ineffectual SLP, and the journal ends with his enrolment in Dawson College. Still to come was the local publication of Fennario's first prose work, *Without a Parachute*, which McClelland & Stewart took up and released (with a new cover but without benefit of editing) in 1974. That journal, like these extracts, was naive, ingenious, and self-pitying, but also energetic, honest (within limits), and possessed of a keen sense of dramatic form. It may have been the latter quality that attracted Maurice Podbroy to appoint Fennario as playwright-in-residence at Montreal's Centaur Theatre, leading to subsequent theatrical successes like *Balconville* and *On the Job*.

There is one embarrassing typographical error in this book. The section dated "January 1, 1980" should probably read "January 1, 1970" — unless in 1980 Fennario was still hungover, living in Little Burgundy, and employed at a Simpson's warehouse. I suspect, though, he was working on a new play.

In prose best described as Kerouac-with-a-hangover, Fennario presents a vision of an oppressed labouring class exploited by merchants and industrialists, driven into ghettos where the workers destroy themselves and others with booze, drugs, and crime. What usually gets conveyed, though, is not trenchant social analysis but blatant attitudinizing.

By contrast, Mark Frutkin does not strike poses, and his book has other things to recommend it as well: an attractive cover by Veronica Soul and an introduction that does not bluster. Moreover, in narrating the development of wireless telegraphy by Guglielmo

Marconi, the book deals with science — a neglected topic in poetry, even more so in mainstream fiction — making it all the more welcome. Frutkin tells us:

The sciences . . . begin to sound strangely like a new mythology. The lexicon of quantum mechanics includes terms such as quark, gluon, quink, beauty, bottom, charm, up, down and strange. The job of naming things has always been reserved for those who create new worlds. What is fact and what is fiction or, for that matter, what is a fraction and what is friction?

One can almost hear Fennario snorting derisively at these questions. After all, Fennario reported a conversation with a friend

on whether life determines consciousness or does consciousness determine life and who or what with Pat into Ouspensky now. The Law of Three and the Law of Seven in a New Model of the Universe or some such heavy metal dope bullshit like that and meanwhile here we are, the same old dumb niggers doing the same old soft shoe down on Rockefeller's Plantation.

For Fennario, our lives are shaped by class: society defines reality. Frutkin, however, perceives a larger reality: man, his language, his technological creations, join with the universe in writing a natural poetry.

Using short, titled sections within larger units called "Storms and Cross-currents," "The Wheel of Life," "Faint but Conclusive," and "The Kite," Frutkin tells Marconi's story, which climaxes in the transmission of the letter S from Poldhu, England, to Signal Hill, near St. John's, Newfoundland, on Dec. 12, 1901. In following the Italian's career he goes inside minds and dreams while sticking to external facts. ("Most of what follows is fact and all of it is true.") Always, he is attentive to the net of coincidences that envelops the

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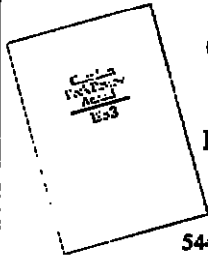
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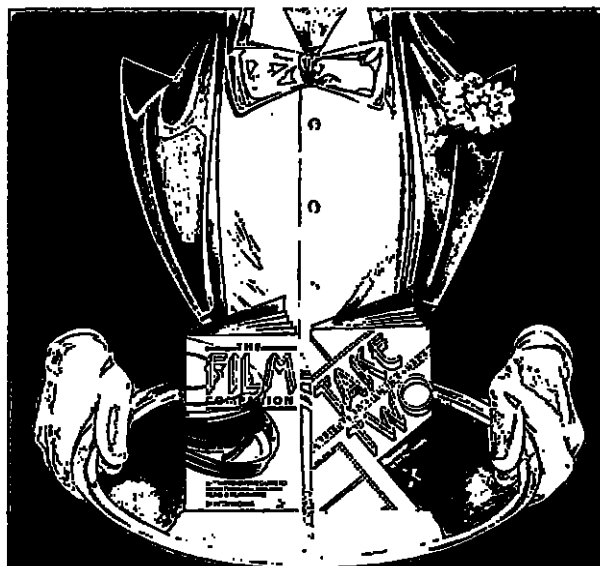
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world, and to myths implicit in the individual word: "Exposing the roots of words reveals a mythopoetic structure beneath language, a past that is not lost but is the actual hidden foundation of the presence." Hence he likes to list cognates, finding hidden correspondences:

"Every thought emits a throw of the dice." (Mallarmé, from *Un Coup de Dés*, 1897)

The word "emits" in French is "émit," which also means "to broadcast."

As well, he liberally quotes from sources as varied as Walt Whitman, Wilhelm Reich, Gaston Bachelard, and assorted Buddhist sages. Sometimes the epigrams are marvellous, like this one from Gottfried Leibniz: "Music is the pleasure the human soul experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting."

Given Frutkin's erudition and intelligence, I wish I could say that I prefer his book to that of Fennario-Adams. I don't. The fascinating Marconi — obsessed, philandering, a genius — never comes alive, partly because the dialogue is leaden. The following stacy example is typical:

"... O dio mio, I fear your brains have fallen into your shoes, little brother, or perhaps that young tart sucked them out your ear while you slept!"

"Never mind that. It is time to leap, Alfonso. We must attempt to signal across the Atlantic."

"No possibility! Out of the question!"

"Have I been wrong before, Alfonso?"

And so on. The titles of the short sections diminish the narrative impact; neither do the segments work as prose poems. A few descriptions of mechanical processes are wearisome, and occasionally the author unhelpfully intrudes: "On my way to the 3rd floor . . . I came across an exhibit called '100 Years of Colour Photography.' I entered on a hunch that I might find a photo of Marconi. I did."

Curiously, the authors of these two books contradict their assertions. Frutkin justly tells us that "even the most abstract treatise tells something of human relationships . . . . The biographer draws lines between stars, constructs a figure, animates the silence." Daniel Adams informs us that "Verdun is simple. We volunteer for everything. Its main arteries that pumped blood into two World Wars are still there." Frutkin knows that the world is complicated and rejoices in it, yet fails to bring it to life. Adams thinks the world is simple, but his and Fennario's book introduces yet another complication. □

## Style and substance

By **KARL JIRGENS**

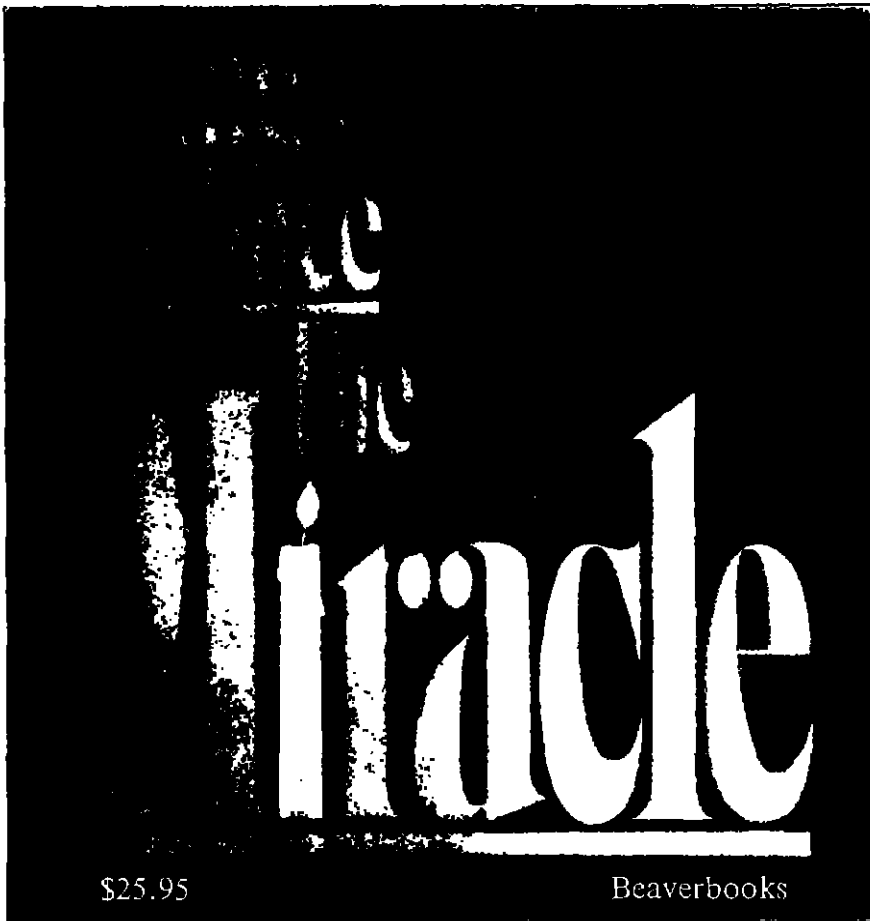
Hugh Hood, by Keith Garebian, Twayne Publishers, 150 pages, \$20.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8057 6556 5).

Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts, edited by Louis K. MacKendrick, ECW Press, 193 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920802 72 9).

IN *Surviving the Paraphrase*, Frank Davey states that "in its brief lifetime, Canadian criticism has acquired a history of being reluctant to focus on the literary work — to deal with matters of form, language, style, structure, and consciousness as these arise from the work as a unique construct." Two critical collections on the works of Hugh Hood and Alice Munro respond differently to the need for a rigorous analytical approach.

Keith Garebian's collection consists of eight studies of Hood's fiction and his background. Garebian uses a thematic approach in order to comment on the Christian allegory patterning Hood's vision of reality. Without becoming idolatrous, he traces Hood's Catholic ontology as well as the influences of Dante, Coleridge, Joyce, Proust, Anthony Powell, and Harold Innis. The entire collection has been well-researched and provides a reliable study of Hood's emblematic imagination within an allegorical mode.

Garebian's extensive scholarly background in apparent as he points to ontolinguistic oppositions in Hood's work. He conducts an in-depth reading of *White Figure*, *White Ground* as an analogy between art and religion and discusses the recurring pattern of descent and ascent with specific reference to *The Camera Always Lies*. Garebian includes and comments on important opinions by other Hood critics, and discusses the psychology of mythic and realistic levels of sex, politics, and football in Hood's *A Game of Touch*. The remaining essays address questions of Menippean satire in *You Can't Get There From Here*, encyclopedic eclecticism in *The New Age /Le Nouveau Siecle*, and Hood's resistance to the anxiety-neurosis that seems so common in Canadian fiction.



Garebian cross-references Hood's work to a variety of writers, including John Updike, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Balzac, and Robbe-Grillet. He points to the influences of classical and biblical mythology and explains their structural roles in Hood's anagogical and ironic super-realism. This meticulous study should prove highly rewarding both to fans and scholars of Hood's fiction.

In his introduction to *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts*, Louis K. MacKendrick claims that "these essays are variously stylistic, generic, or structural in emphasis." Unfortunately, this is not entirely true. Of the nine essays and one interview that make up the collection, only three or four address questions of structure and language in a comprehensive and systematic manner. A number of the essays conduct instead superficial glosses of theme and narration.

Robert Thacker, Margaret Osachoff, and John Orange address questions of narration in Munro. Osachoff does raise the important autobiographical aspect of Munro's fiction, but it is Orange who offers an accomplished analysis of levels of narrative time and its disruption. The ironic distancing apparent in Munro's earlier works eventually leads to a breakdown in the sequential, or logical-linear narrative structure. Associative shifts take the narrator to the point where even memory cannot be controlled.

Lorna Irvine's essay is not truly feminist, as has been suggested in promotional articles. Her case rests strongly on the critical approaches of Todorov and Kermode, ignoring such feminist critics as Kristeva or Cixous. She does offer us her views on the importance of the mother figure, as well as the tension between female bodies, and relates these views to questions of flux and secrecy.

Munro's fiction has a strong self-reflexive quality, and Catherine Ross alludes to but avoids discussion on the Barthesian notion of fiction pointing to its own artifice. She does analyze questions of death and ceremony as well as art and ritual. Perhaps of more interest is Ross's discussion of mythologizing or "naming" the local environment. She might have gone further into questions of "re-naming" and "un-naming" (à la Kristeva or Mandel), however, in order to reveal better Munro's later works.

Lorraine McMullen's analysis of linguistic paradox, irony, and humour is bright and witty. She addresses questions of structure, confines her argument to the issues at hand, and displays a well-researched understanding of the oppositional roles of oxymoron, paradox, and ironic juxtaposition. McMullen elucidates Munro's satiric presentation of the disorder, absurdity,

and farce that result from the clash between reality and romantic expectation.

Gerald Noonan's attempt at analyzing style becomes yet another discussion of plot, theme, and narration. Noonan does address the confrontation of art and life, but Lawrence Mathews takes his discussion of the same matter much further by pointing to Munro's tendency to withhold information in order to arrive at a disarrangement that reminds the reader that any significant truth that literature delivers is "partial and provisional." Mathews's solid study reveals Munro's distrust of aesthetic pattern. He addresses questions of the fictional mask that earlier essays in this collection avoided.

Tim Struthers's interview is uneven in quality, but at points it does sparkle. Struthers asks important questions regarding convention and versions of text, and if at times he misses opportunities to ask Munro pertinent questions regarding the structure of her work, Munro herself rises to the occasion and makes a number of salient comments on herself and on her attitude toward fiction. □

#### REVIEW

## Lost in translation

By JOHN OUGHTON

**Quadriga for Judy: Poems**, by Michael Bullock, Third Eye Publications, 52 pages, \$6.00 paper (ISBN 0 919581 09 9).

**Prisoner of the Rain: Poems in Prose**, by Michael Bullock, Third Eye Publications, 118 pages, \$10.00 paper (ISBN 0 919581 06 4).

MICHAEL BULLOCK certainly gives George Woodcock some competition for the title of Most Prolific Author Brought Up in England Now Living on the West Coast. These two collections bring his poetry output up to eight titles and his prose to five, unless "poems in prose" should add half a title to each column. His major effort has been in translation, with English renderings of more than 150 books and plays.

Given that preponderance, it's not surprising that some of his original

works suggest translations from another language. What is lost in translation for poetry is some of the resonance and music; without the intoxication of original inspiration, the translator necessarily puts more weight on imagery and message. Prose is less dependent on the exact texture of a language, but it is difficult for the translator to Anglicize completely the sentence structure. Reading a German novelist in English, for example, often makes the reader play "find the verb."

Also, Bullock is a surrealist, and surrealism in literature has been largely the province of non-English writers. Few contemporary anglophone writers have introduced elements such as the wise, talking fairy-tale fish, and characters reborn throughout human history, of Günter Grass's *The Flounder*, or the ghosts and miracles of Marquez's *Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Bullock has argued that surrealism may offer the best future path of development for English fiction. Surrealism, he explains, aims to reproduce all elements of consciousness, creating an integrated man "in whom the conscious and the unconscious are in harmony, like two horses pulling a single chariot."

For Bullock, the unconscious provides the literary "energy," the conscious "a spontaneous organizational role in channeling this flow into a coherent work." He also quotes perhaps the most memorable of Breton's definitions of surrealism: "a perpetual walk in the forbidden zone."

With these theoretical underpinnings, it is strange that both his new books suffer from seeming too safe, too much on the side of control. Certainly there is imagery of pain, disintegration, menace; but the language is overly smooth in the poetry, and baroquely self-conscious in the prose poems. Bullock writes with the facility and careful choice of words of the seasoned translator, but also with more craft than inspiration.

In *Quadriga for Judy*, Bullock has added two more horses to his unconscious/conscious chariot: a "quadriga" is a chariot pulled by four steeds, so Bullock gives us a title poem with that image and four sections to the book. Perhaps he intends the title to suggest that he is going beyond the conscious/unconscious dualism to a more complex sensibility, but much of the poetry is cerebral, impressionistic rather than visceral.

"Daibutu" tells us of his fear but doesn't transmit it: "Standing in the Great Buddha/I wait to be born afresh/reluctant to step out/for fear/of this new incarnation." He is better when his sensitivity to nature combines with the flow of images to produce lines like

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those closing "Knife in the Water":  
"The wound will heal/when the water  
turns to ice."

"Prisoner of the Rain" is more problematic. Surrealist prose is an acquired taste (as the alternatively enthusiastic and condemning response to Bullock's novel *Randolph Cranstone and the Glass Thimble* showed). Surrealism in prose works best when the unexpected trope comes as a surprise, a shock suggesting Breton's forbidden zone. Too many red herrings frustrate any emotional effect a passage might have, as in "The Ostrich," which brings in whales wearing ostrich-feathered hats and then trails off with: "picnicking in the desert or beside woods inhabited exclusively by dormice is expressly forbidden by laws said to derive from Moses or from even earlier lawgivers. . . ." Granted, images from the unconscious shouldn't always follow, but in the best surrealism there is a "rightness" to the surprises, a hitherto unsuspected resonance between the fish and the bicycle. Would the preceding passage really suffer if the dormice were replaced by "aldermen" or Moses by "Hammurabi"?

Some of these pieces do have the requisite mystery and tension. When the language is simpler and the energy there, as they are in "Dusk," the results show it: "Night is a very tall, dark woman armed with a curved knife that flashes dimly in reflected light. With it she sets free everything that day has kept tethered in its place."

That sounds like it belongs in English. □

## REVIEW

# In the name of the profit

By CHARLES MANDEL

The Thomson Empire, by Susan Goldenberg, Methuen, 266 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 98210 5).

THE THOMSON COMPANY is Canada's fifth largest corporation and its owner Canada's only billionaire. Besides owning more than 200 newspapers in Canada, the U.S., and England, it counts among its assets extensive interests in energy, book publishing, and

data services. The corporation's founder, Roy Thomson, acquired two of Britain's most important newspapers, the *Times* and *Sunday Times*. His son Ken includes the *Globe and Mail* and the Hudson's Bay Company among his holdings.

Susan Goldenberg, in *The Thomson Empire*, approaches the massive Thomson corporation and its founder and his son as a series of paradoxes. For example, Goldenberg sees the company's newspaper monopoly in direct opposition to its investments in such competitive fields as energy and book publishing. Elsewhere, Goldenberg outlines the reluctance with which the company grants such minor supplies as pens and steno pads to reporters on its smaller newspapers. This, of course, is happening while the company simultaneously bargains in the millions of dollars for yet another paper to add to its collection. She discovers that such differences are equally inherent in Roy Thomson and his son Ken. She finds Roy to have been a flamboyant, extroverted wheeler-dealer; Ken is viewed as an introverted, paler version of his father.

Goldenberg hasn't ignored the many problems that have plagued the company. From the Kent Commission inquiry into the concentration of newspaper ownership to the internal bickering in the Thomson's book-publishing domain, she documents the corporate troubles to their sometimes bitter end. Not everything is dirt and scandal. For every bad story circulated about a Thomson or a Thomson holding, Goldenberg finds an equally favourable tale to quote. Of course, any defence of the Thomson empire originates from a Thomson employee.

If Goldenberg finds contradictions within the Thomsons' style of business, so too the reader will discover the paradox in Goldenberg's writing. An enormous amount of meticulous research went into the book, yet the manner in which it is presented is less than exciting. At her best, as when she is dealing with Roy Thomson, Goldenberg is skilled in uncovering the quirks and personal mannerisms that bring that picture to life — among Thomson's favourite entertainments were Doris Day movies.

Yet when the writing turns into lists of the Thomson holdings, a seemingly endless procession of executives, and, out of necessity, discussion of profit margins and production methods, the book becomes about as entertaining as a report from Statistics Canada. Readers enamoured of power will find much to intrigue them in Goldenberg's book, but the lists are listless. □

# Leonard Cohen

'The critics can be kind or cruel, but I always think there will be a spot for a writer who has really put himself on the line'

By DOUG FETHERLING

THE USUALLY elusive Leonard Cohen, not subject to the full force of the North American limelight for some while, continues to be a concert draw in Europe. He can sometimes be found at his home on a Greek island when he is not at his house in Montreal or the upper duplex he maintains near Los Angeles. For a few days recently he surfaced with something like his old vigour but speaking far more directly, less allegorically than in the past. The occasion was the release of his first music video, *I Am a Hotel*, and the simultaneous publication of his 10th book, *Book of Mercy*. It is his first book since *Death of a Lady's Man* in 1978 and is described by the publishers, McClelland & Stewart, as "contemporary psalms . . . which resonate with an older devotional tradition." Now 50 but looking 15 years younger in a chalk-stripe Savile Row suit and cowboy boots, Cohen spoke in Toronto with Doug Fetherling:

**Books in Canada: How has your audience changed over the years?**

**Leonard Cohen:** I haven't sung in North America for about seven or eight years, and for that and other reasons, mostly market considerations, my audience has diminished considerably over here. In Europe it's continued and even grown.

**BIC: Do you still draw mainly younger people?**

**Cohen:** The range is very wide. There are kids of 13 and 14 and people right up to middle age.

**BIC: One hears about the crisis in the recording industry, how in a short time this will mean that all the big labels will have no room whatever for anything but the most commercial types of music. Do**

**you think you'll still have a home with a major company?**

**Cohen:** I don't know. It's certainly up in the air. The whole thrust of the business seems to be going the way you describe, which is unfortunate. Even singers who would sell over the years are simply being ignored. One of the problems is the value of rack space in record stores. Also, the style of music changes very

**when you stopped writing fiction.**

**Cohen:** That's a good point, and this book is prose. But I don't know that I feel like writing prose now.

**BIC: Do you think you could write another novel one day?**

**Cohen:** I would like to. Of course the novel is such a special kind of long-term enterprise. It demands a daily regimen that is somewhat different from that of

song-writing or performing, and I think my life hasn't delivered that kind of opportunity for the past few years. But by the end of the next tour I'll pretty well have had it with travelling. So that would be a time when I might start something more prolonged. As they say in rock 'n' roll, "They don't pay you to sing, they pay you to travel."

**BIC: There's been quite a poetry renaissance in English Montreal the past few years. Do you feel in any way part of that or are you just a sympathetic onlooker?**

**Cohen:** Well, I'm certainly not what one could call a guiding light but I am a sympathetic onlooker. I know a lot of the guys. You know, I bump into them in the restaurants on the Main and in the bars. I've generally had a very — what would you call it? — personalistic approach to the literary scene. I'm always interested in what Joni Mitchell or Layton or Dennis Lee is doing. There are two writers I've met in the past few years whose work I think is really fine. One of them is Henry Moscovitch, whom I

think is one of the best poets in the country. The other is a young man named Philippe Tetrault who calls himself Harry Two Hats and lives sometimes on Mount Royal.

**BIC: To what extent did you consciously**



Leonard Cohen

swiftly in America, whereas in Europe the audiences themselves change more slowly and their loyalty is deeper.

**BIC: In literary work, it would seem that your verse is becoming more prose-like, as though to fill the vacuum created**

have the *Old Testament* in mind when deciding on the language for Book of Mercy?

Cohen: That was just the natural language of prayer for me. I just tried to bring to the experience whatever skills I had as a writer, but the thrust of the thing was not to create writing. I do think that the book is very, very modern. I don't think that the general sensibility of readers, of ordinary people who don't read, would be ill at ease with this book. They would find it a lot easier than people who are deeply interested in writing, because there would be certain agreements that would be unchallenged, unquestioned by ordinary church-going people who have not been exposed to modern writing and would have no relationship to anything Joycean or post-Joycean — and I also think that people who have too deep an investment in modernism would find the book offensive from that point of view.

ElC: *Do you hold as strongly as you once did views about the importance of ceremony in everyday life?*

Cohen: I think that whether we call them ceremonies or not people do fall into patterns of greeting one another, of experiencing phenomena. My feeling is that there are certain patterns that have been developed and discerned to be extremely nourishing. It seems to be a waste to discard them. There are some of them from our traditions that I think are very worthwhile.

ElC: *Of the religious sort?*

Cohen: In a real religious life, such as I don't lead but have led from time to time, there is a vision for everything that comes up. For instance, in the orthodox Jewish tradition there's a blessing for everything: when you see a rainbow, when you meet a wise man, when you meet a stupid man, when you hear bad news. They all start off, "Blessed are Thou, King of the Universe, the True Judge. . . ." In other words, we can't determine where bad news fits in. When you see someone who's very beautiful, or who's deformed, it's the same blessing. It's "Blessed are Thou, King of the Universe, who varied the appearance of this creature. . . ." I'm not saying that everyone should learn the blessings, but that kind of approach to things, where there is a reference always beyond the activity, is a perspective that I think is very valuable. Most of our ceremonies, the ones we develop ourselves, usually out of cowardice, ambition, or just mean-spiritedness, all have that.

ElC: *When there is a wholesale turning away from even anti-romanticism, such as we're seeing in the past few years, what do you believe that says for your place in the scheme of things?*

Cohen: I think there's always a place for my kind of writer. I'm not sure what kind that is. But, you know, your sales can go up and down, your audience can change, the critics can be kind or cruel, but I always think there will be a spot for a writer who has really put himself on

the line, whatever his vocabulary, whatever his understanding of what post-modernism or any of those things demands. I think there is a heart and that the heart is manifest in writing and that it always will penetrate mere fashion. □

## THE BROWSER

### Bathroom browsing: notes on the dubious authorship of *Alice in Wonderland* and other morally trivial forms of art

By MORRIS WOLFE

ACCORDING TO THE Continental Historical Society of San Francisco, the real author of *Alice in Wonderland* was Queen Victoria. They have a computer that proves it. A recent letter to *The Guardian* by one Robert Leeson takes the notion even further. *Alice* wasn't written by Queen Victoria; it was written by a committee assembled by the Queen. Members of the committee included Disraeli, Gladstone, Charles Darwin, Florence Nightingale, John Ruskin, George Eliot, and William Booth. Karl Marx was briefly a member, but he quit in a dispute over royalties. The young Sigmund Freud (he was nine) contributed the metaphor of the rabbit hole. The committee, says Leeson, "met several times and the secretary, a don with literary pretensions named Dodgson, took copious notes. Unfortunately, consensus proved almost impossible and a majority finally declined to allow the project to go ahead. Dodgson, in chagrin, published the verbatim notes."

ALONG WITH about 150 others, I recently viewed the entire 15-part three-hour version of Al Razutis's experimental film *Amerika* at a private screening in Toronto. Razutis, who teaches film at Simon Fraser University, worked on the project from 1972 to 1983. *Amerika* looks at some of the central images of our culture — the TV commercial, for example. A seven-minute segment titled "A Message From Our Sponsor" intercuts hard-core footage with the soft-core porn of familiar commercials. Razutis makes explicit what is implicit in the ads. But surely the point is obvious, and his use of the hard-core material is merely gratuitous. (This comment should not be construed as an argument in favour of the Ontario censor board's banning of

the film.) *Amerika* isn't without some lovely moments. There's a sequence in which billboards in a city become TV screens; as we're driven past them they come to look like rear-view mirrors.

ON THE SUBJECT of censorship an interesting bit of research. In 1980, during the week after the Fonz took out a library card on an episode of *Happy Days*, the number of young people applying for membership in U.S. libraries increased by 500 per cent. Surely that's no coincidence. It seems safe to assume the Fonz's behaviour caused the increase. Television, I have no doubt, causes other things too — including bad things. "If you believe," Irving Kristol has written, "that no one was ever corrupted by a book, you have also to believe that no one was ever improved by a book (or a play or a movie). You have to believe, in other words, that all art is morally trivial."

THE 25th anniversary issue (No. 100) of *Canadian Literature* (University of British Columbia, 384 pages, \$15.00) may be the best yet. It demonstrates the health of its subject by publishing essays (almost all non-academic) and poems by 97 of Canada's leading writers. The issue also contains dozens of lovely prints (by unnamed artists) and, like those that have preceded it, has been beautifully produced by Morris Printing of Victoria. One of the best essays is a memoir by Henry Kreisel about his search for Canadian literature during his early days in Canada (he arrived in the spring of 1940). Kreisel reports that in 1961 Douglas Grant, then editor of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* asked him how long he thought the then two-year-old *Canadian Literature* could survive. Grant thought material for articles

would soon be exhausted. So there, Douglas Grant.

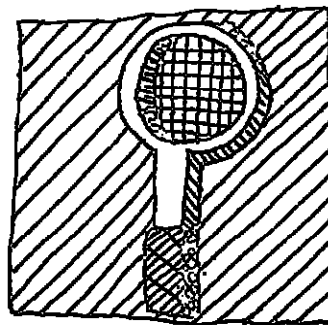
THERE ARE no longer announcers on CBC radio, it seems; there are personalities. In the good old days, announcers used to tell us the name of the piece of music about to be played and who was performing it. Personalities, on the other hand, feel compelled to chatter away at us about what the piece means to them, when and under what circumstances they first heard it, and so on. The trouble is, these are personalities without any personality. The same problem afflicts *The Journal's People* magazine approach to coverage of the arts. W.P. Kinsella isn't a writer; he's a personality — a personality who used to sell pizza and now sells dreams.

I'VE FOUND the ideal bathroom book — at least for encyclopediaphiles like me. And I found it on a remainder table. It's

*Makers of Modern Culture*, edited by Justin Wintle (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 605 pages). Unlike *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, say, this book offers more than just basic facts on the more than 500 individuals included. (Indeed, given the occasional inaccuracies of *Makers of Modern Culture*, *Columbia* is factually the more reliable book.) But *Makers* also provides a real attempt at interpretation, and it does so in a style that's always readable. Its prose was neither written by a committee nor a computer. "It never occurred to George Gershwin," writes Wilfred Mellers, "that distinctions might be drawn between making songs and selling them; and intuitively he was right in believing that, although commercial art operates in order to make money, it will do so best if the dreams it proffers bear some relation to people's emotional needs." I've spent many happy hours in my bathroom in recent months. □

when Ariel and Yadril rescue her and overthrow the evil councillors.

Pasnak (who lives in Alberta) writes well, never over-embellishing, but allow-



ing the flavour of Estria to come through on its own. Elena makes a good heroine, growing as the story progresses, discovering more about her inner resources and learning to appreciate the value of friendship and loyalty. But one problem is that, as the adventure draws to a quick and generally satisfactory conclusion, some threads of the conspiracy are left dangling and unresolved, and the significance of some characters is hinted at but not developed. The end of the story suggests that Ariel and Elena will have more adventures. That is to be hoped, because Estria and its inhabitants could earn a firm place in the landscape of Canadian children's literature.

*Tie-Breaker*, by Jack Batten (Irwin Publishing, 184 pages, \$8.95 paper), could perhaps be classified as another fantasy. The hero, 16-year-old Brad Fraser from Toronto, is a good tennis player — so good that he finds himself playing John McEnroe in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon. Brad has just about everything going for him. Besides his tennis ability, he has an affluent background, a supportive family, and a beautiful, sympathetic girl-friend, herself extraordinarily talented, a rising star at the National Ballet School. Brad has a charming modesty, and the incredulity with which he greets his personal success makes him an appealing hero.

But since a simple success story would presumably not make good fiction, Batten superimposes a plot complication, a mandatory cloud in the sunny sky. The tennis equipment sales representative who has befriended Brad for five years, supplying him with complimentary gear and encouraging his talent, suddenly demands payment. He insists that Brad supply him with a gram of cocaine to repay past favours. Batten tries to convince us that Brad cannot simply say no to this demand, even though he very much wants to, and so he has Brad drawn briefly, and very unconvincingly, into the underworld of Toronto drug-dealing.

#### CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Fact and fantasy: from the perils of a mythical kingdom to time-travel romance in the 'real' Barkerville

By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

TO CREATE another country, complete with a believable geography, history, and social network, isn't easy. C.S. Lewis did with Narnia, but other writers' efforts are often too embarrassingly terrible to read through. But the kingdom of Estria in William Pasnak's *In the City of the King* (Groundwood, 144 pages, \$7.95 paper) is real enough to involve pre-teen readers in the problems of its citizens. Pasnak's opening paragraph immediately places his readers in another time and place:

There is a place on the borders of the highlands of Estria, a low hill. Looking back from it, you can see clear across the high plain to the mountains. Looking forward, you can see the land fall suddenly away to the rolling lowlands below. Beyond, in the far distance, there is the shifting and twinkling of the sea, and on its shore the spires and domes of Rakhbad, the City of the King.

This is the perspective of the story's main characters, introduced in the next two paragraphs: Elena, a young girl, "small, slight and dark, dressed in a ragged jerkin and tights," and Ariel, her

companion, "a long, thin man with a lean brown face folded and creased by the weather." They are travelling entertainers — musicians, dancers, jugglers — and their journey through Estria is filled with adventure, mystery, and danger.

The king of Estria has fallen under evil influences. His true advisers have been usurped by sinister priests who have alienated him from his son, Prince Yadril, and seek to control his mind and thus the whole country. But the Brotherhood of the Silent Heart, a secret society of honest men that includes Ariel, is working to restore health and order to Estria and its citizens.

Elena is drawn into the intrigue. Her youth and innocence gain her access to the king, and make her his only link with light and sanity as the priests tighten their control over him. This also places her in serious danger, as she makes a bargain with the king that she will forfeit her life if his son does not reappear within three days. In the true style of high adventure, the priests are attempting to light the pyre to burn her alive

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This plot twist doesn't interfere very much with the real heart of the story, Brad's success at tennis, which Batten writes about very well. Anyone with even a superficial knowledge of the game will be caught up in the excitement of the matches that lead Brad to his appearance on Wimbledon's famous Centre Court.

The hero of *Cowboys Don't Cry*, by Marilyn Halvorson (Irwin Publishing, 138 pages, \$8.95 paper), is also a winner, although less spectacularly so than Brad Fraser. Shane Morgan has spent his life travelling the rodeo circuit with his parents. But when his mother is killed in a car accident, everything changes. His father, who has been a top bull rider, begins to drink heavily; prize money becomes scarce; and relations between father and son grow very strained.

When Shane's grandfather dies, he and his father inherit a small ranch in Alberta, and for the first time Shane attends school regularly and makes friends his own age. He discovers that he is good at school and exceptional at sports, but the gap between himself and his father widens with near tragic results before they resolve their problems. Halvorson, a teacher and a rancher herself, writes with understanding about young people, and the background of horses and rodeos will make this story popular with many readers.

Minerva, the heroine of Claire Mackay's *The Minerva Program* (James Lorimer, 178 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper), is not a success at school. Self-conscious and awkward, she is the sort of girl to whom accidents are attracted. Gym classes are particular nightmares for her, but mathematics fascinates and delights her, and when she is picked to be part of a special course in computers she realizes she has found her niche. Then disaster strikes. At report card time, Minerva's gym mark has been altered, and she is accused of tampering with the school's computer programming. Unjustly banned from using the school's computers, she sets out to clear her name.

Minerva's feelings for the computer are sympathetically presented, and many young programmers will identify with her. It is also reassuring to be told that computers will not replace — and can even enhance — the values of friendship and loyalty.

*Always Ask for a Transfer*, by Vancy Kasper (124 pages, \$3.25 paper), is one of a series of novels for young readers from Nelson Canada. Willy, the hero, is a foster child. He and his younger sister Laura are victims of their father's drinking; they have been shuffled from one foster home to another, waiting until their mother can care for them again. As

the story begins, they have been sent to a different sort of home. Their new foster parents, Dino and Yota Bazos, are Greek immigrants with no children of their own. The story tells how the Bazos' warmth and the strength behind their traditional values break down Willy's bitterness and alienation.

No overview of books for pre-teens would be complete without mention of at least one about time travel, surely the most popular gimmick in current Canadian juvenile fiction. *Your Time My Time*, by Ann Walsh (Press Porcépic, 157 pages, \$6.95 paper), is set in Wells, B.C., where 15-year-old Elizabeth finds herself transplanted when her mother, in search of independence and fulfilment, begins work as a cook in a local hotel. Lonely, missing the rest of her family back in Vancouver, Elizabeth finds diversion in exploring nearby Barkerville, the reconstructed site of the 1870 gold-rush town. She finds a ring in the old cemetery that, when she twists it on her finger, takes her back in time to the real Barkerville. There she meets and falls in love with 17-year-old Steven Baker. Another twist of the ring returns her to her own time period. As well as exploring the complications of being in love with someone from another time and place, the story imparts some interesting information about the excitement and hardships of life in a frontier society. □

## LETTERS

### More on metafiction

LIKE WOW! Reading Geoff Hancock's letter in your June-July issue really blew my mind. To think that we have all been labouring under the illusion that the universe had some order to it. Now I have the great insight thanks to Hancock. Like the whole thing is just a formless chaos, eh? I can't wait to tell the guys over in the Science Building that they can stop boiling up all those chemicals and zapping those energy fields. It's just pointless to try and impose scientific orderly theories on a formless chaos. This news will also be a big relief for all my pals in the nuclear disarmament movement. The bombs are only the physical manifestations of orderly theories that every metafictional writer knows are an illusion. Whoopee!



All you have to do to gain the great truth is to rip into a few chaotic meta-fictional short stories. How do we know that metafiction is an accurate portrayal of the formless chaos? Geoff Hancock says it "represents" reality. He can show how critics have traced metafictional elements in the works of various writers in a "clear line" of chronology.

Teaching English literature should be a breeze in the post-metafictional era. What a relief not to be forced to figure out what fictional works mean or how plots follow along logically. No deep meanings, little traditional character development, no clichés of language, and the breakdown of familiar patterns of order, along with a fragmented method of juxtaposition should make life in general a lot easier.

Like there's no need to get all hot and bothered about which came first, meta-fiction or television. It would only be important if some traditional cause and effect were asserted. But metafictional reality denies this in favour of "lateral causation." See my forthcoming article, "How World War One Caused World War Two."

Once I realized that "history is going into nothing," I decided to go into a new line of work anyway. I mean like once you know that 19th-century liberalism and social justice have been defeated by modern history, what is there to do? Personally I am setting up a franchise operation for moxibustion drive-ins that will offer a free acupuncture on the side.

F.K. Donnelly  
Associate Professor of History  
University of New Brunswick  
Saint John, N.B.

ONE POINT in Geoff Hancock's letter in your June-July issue needs clearing up. It was foolish of me to assume that all readers would be familiar with the rather old-fashioned technical term "barbarism," meaning a compound word whose elements come from two different languages, usually Greek and Latin. Like "television." Or "metafiction." By doing this I unwittingly gave Hancock the impression that I was hostile to barbarians. Heavens, no. Some of my best friends . . .

I.M. Owen  
Toronto

## 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

*Dinner Along the Amazon*, by Timothy Findley, Penguin. Against a background that at first seems familiar, Findley's characters find themselves in a world of mistaken assumptions. Their passionate struggle to make sense of what is happening provides some extraordinary stories.

### POETRY

*Kerrisdale Elegies*, by George Bowering, Coach House Press. No longer young but still taking large risks, Bowering mixes old wisdom with fresh insight in his most far-reaching book. Essentially one long poem broken into 10 parts, *Kerrisdale Elegies* is breathtaking, and its accomplishment matches its ambition.

## 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 Alarm Clock*, by Helme Heine, Annick Press.  
*American Indian Pottery*, by Sharon Witt, Hancock House.  
*Among Friends*, by L.R. Wright, Doubleday.  
*The Amorous Unicorn*, by Florence Vale, The Porcupine's Quill.  
*Amphibians and Reptiles of Nova Scotia*, by John Gilman, Nova Scotia Museum.  
*The Animals Within*, by David Day, Penumbra.  
*The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors, Volume V*, edited by Robert Lecker and Jack David, ECW Press.  
*The Antlered Boy*, by Lloyd Abbey, Oberon.  
*Around the Course in 19 Holes*, by Lo Linkert, illustrated by the author, Harbour Publishing Co. Ltd.  
*The Art of Complaining*, by Phil Edmonston, Musson.  
*The Art of the Totem*, by Marius Barbeau, Hancock House.  
*Aspects of Maritime Regionalism, 1867-1927*, by Ernest R. Forbes, The Canadian Historical Association.  
*Baker's Dozen: Stories by Women*, edited by the Fictive Collective, The Women's Press.  
*Barkerville*, by Florence McNeill, Thisledown Press.  
*Barkerville: The Town that Gold Built*, by Lorraine Harris, Hancock House.  
*Basic Rules for Typewriting in French*, by Alain Baudot and Theresia Lior, Groupe de recherche en études francophones.  
*A Batch of Biscuits*, by Kathleen Nichol, Bontempi Press.  
*Beautiful Chance*, by Leroy Gorman, South Western Ontario poetry.  
*A Beaman's Journey*, by Charles Sauriol, Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc.  
*Beneath the Skin of Paradise: The Plat Poems*, by Judith Fitzgerald, Black Moss Press.  
*The Best Gift: A Record of the Carnegie Libraries in Ontario*, by Margaret Backman et al., Dundurn Press.  
*The Betty Jane Wylie Cheese Cookbook*, by Betty Jane Wylie, Oxford.  
*Beyond the Door*, by Jacqueline Nugent, Groundwood Books.  
*A Big City ABC*, by Allan Meak, Tundra.  
*Binding Twine*, by Penny Kemp, Ragweed Press.  
*Bluebird's Egg*, by Margaret Atwood, Seal Books.  
*Bloody Victory: Canadians and the D-Day Campaign 1944*, by J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, Lester & Orpen Dennys.  
*The Book of Years*, by Susan Kerlake, Ragweed Press.  
*A Book of Roses*, by William Bryant Logan, illustrated by Drew McGhie, Prattice-Hall.  
*A Book of Wildflowers*, by William A. Niering, illustrated by Anita Marcel, Prattice-Hall.  
*Brian Mulroney: The Boy from Bale-Comeau*, by Rae Murphy et al., James Lorimer.

## CanWit No. 95

NOW THAT ONTARIO'S censor board has moved in on art shows (just because it calls itself art doesn't mean it isn't filth), can there be any doubt whether libraries will be next? We understand that, in the interests of blandness, the board has already proposed the laundering of titles of Canadian books. *The Edible Woman*, for instance, will be known in Ontario as *Margaret Atwood's Diet Book*, and Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* is to be retitled *Making Progress Through Destruction*. Readers are invited to rewrite other well-known titles to purge them of all sexual innuendo. The prize is \$25. Deadline: October 1. Address: CanWit No. 95, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

### Results of CanWit No. 93

CAN IT BE that none of our readers found anything funny about the resignation of Pierre Trudeau? Or has the PMO been tampering with our mail? Whatever the case, our request for excerpts from the forthcoming Trudeau memoirs — drawing heavily on other literary forms — was greeted by almost universal silence. The winner is Victoria Ellison of

Clandeboye, Ont., for a memoir that begins:

Call me Pierre. Some years ago — never mind how long precisely — having little else to do or to interest me, I thought I would enter politics and see the governing places of the world. As an antidote to boredom and depression, I became leader of this country. There is nothing surprising in this. Many other men would like to do the same. But I succeeded. You can also call me God.

Honourable mention:

### Counterattack

*From mania to mania*  
*My name was bright and then was black,*  
*The media were never slack*  
*In processing anti-Trudeau slack.*  
*Of Margaret keeping peeping track*  
*Of myself, chronicling every lack,*  
*I became a nut to crack.*  
*It got to where just any hack*  
*Would in vox populi invite me to pack*  
*If only my party gave me the sack,*  
*For Turner I should turn my back!*  
*Well, now, alors, alas, alack*  
*Canada's usual undistinguished knack*  
*Of choosing a prime ministerial quack*  
*Will return this country to ruin and wrack.*

— Elaine Matlow, Toronto

Canadian Woman and the Second World War, by Ruth French-Frison, The Canadian Historical Association.  
 Canadian Writers in 1934, edited by W. H. New, UBC Press.  
 The Case for Reincarnation, by Joe Fisher, Collins.  
 Canada in Amber, by Lilla Pepper, Black Moss Press.  
 C.E. Hat Navigation, by Pauline Jiles, M & S.  
 Champagne Farm, by Norman Levine, Penguin.  
 Character: Including Me, by J. Gordon Drysdale, Lancelot Press.  
 Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties, by Cyril Leung, U of T Press.  
 Children's Choice of Canadian Books, Volume 3, edited by Margaret Caughy, Citizens' Committee on Children.  
 Ching Chang and the Dragon's Dance, by Ian Wallace, Douglas & McIntyre.  
 Clapp's Rock, by William Rowe, M & S.  
 CIA: Act of Etiquette for Today, by Eve Drobot, Avon.  
 Coaching to Win Soccer for the Young Player, by Tony Walker, Totem.  
 The Color of Grass, by Gary F. Valcour, Avon.  
 The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx, by David MacGibbon, U of T Press.  
 Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies, Volume 1, by Kenneth D. McRae, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.  
 Crazy Ideas, by Ken Roberts, Douglas & McIntyre.  
 Debt Sheds: The Full Story of the World Credit Crisis, by Dorell D. Lamade, Lester & Orpen Denny.  
 Diener Along the Amazon, by Timothy Findley, Penguin.  
 Document on Relations between Canada and Newfoundland, Vol. 2: 1940-1949, Parts I and II, edited by Paul Bridle, Department of External Affairs.  
 Dupire 1, and the Union Nationale Administration, by Richard Jones, The Canadian Historical Association.  
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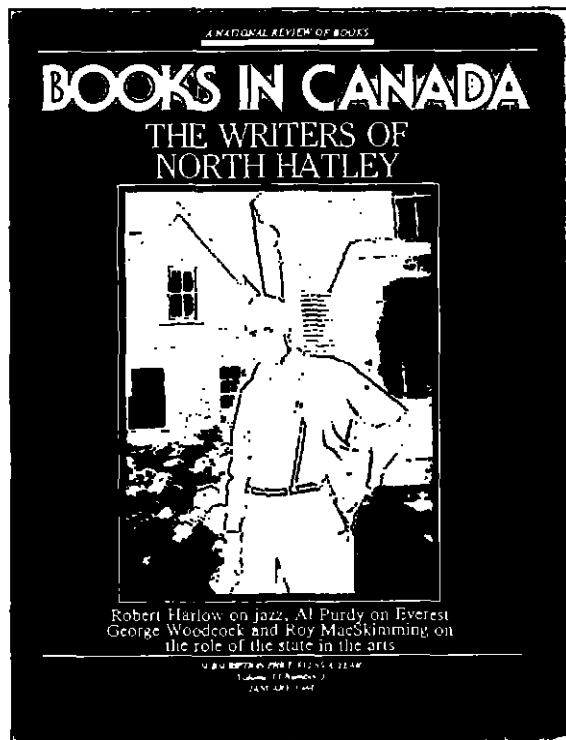
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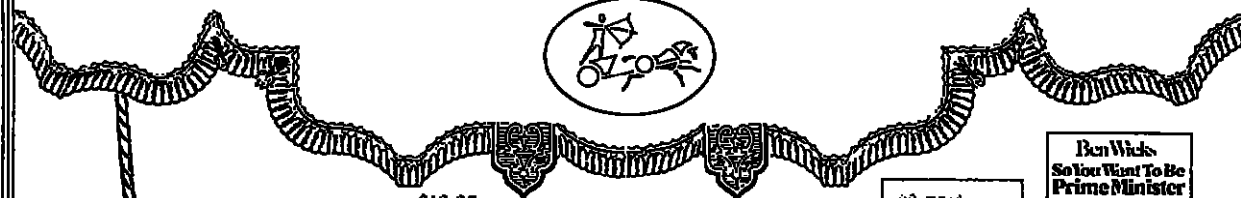
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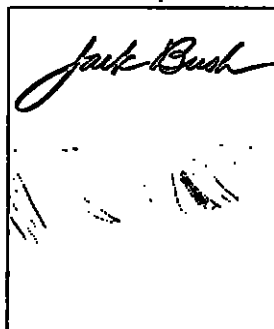
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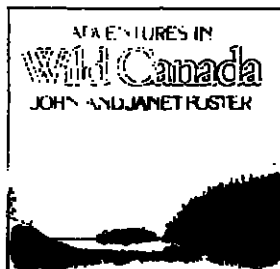
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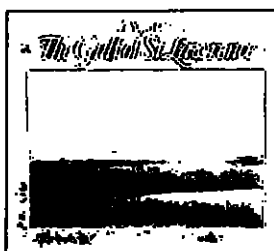
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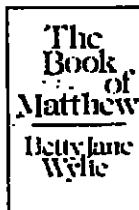
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