

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

BOOKS IN CANADA

MARGARET LAURENCE: REBEL ANGEL



The political conversion of H.S. Ferns
Aritha van Herk on Anne Hébert
And an interview with Guy Vanderhaeghe

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$12.95 A YEAR

Volume 13 Number 2

FEBRUARY 1984

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Books in Canada is published 10 times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 366 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. Available to the public free in subscribing book stores, schools, and libraries. Individual subscription rate: \$12.95 a year (\$15.95 overseas). Back issues available on microfilm from: McLaren Micropublishing, P.O. Box 972, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2N9. Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index. Member of the CPPA. Member of the Bulk Distribution Audit Division of CCAB. Material is commissioned on the understanding that both parties are bound by the terms of the standard PWAC contract. The editors cannot be held responsible for unsolicited material. Second Class Mail — Registration No. 2593. Contents ©1984. Typesetting by Jay Tee Graphics Ltd.

ISSN 0045-2564

As for you and your house: the cold comforts of life on the reading circuit

No place like home

SILAS ERMINESKIN, who narrates many of my short stories, often jokes about white people's misunderstanding of Indians. Silas points out that because Indians are associated with the outdoors, people assume they do not get as cold, wet, or wind-blown as ordinary mortals. After a number of disastrous experiences as a guest in private homes, while on reading tours or visiting book stores, I have learned first-hand that Silas's point is as valid for writers as it is for Indians. I'm not sure whether I am identified with Silas (the Implied Author Syndrome) or whether ordinary citizens simply feel that writers (a) live in cold garrets, (b) don't eat properly, and (c) don't mind being stored away in basements like old furniture.

My wife and I have sponsored many readings in the past six years, and I am the first to admit that there often is not enough money for hotel accommodation for a visiting writer. But with the exception of Crad Kilodney, who slept under our dining-room table in Calgary for several days, I think we always managed housing that was at least better than a wilderness survival camp.

My own experiences have been somewhat different. I never envision the Hyatt-Regency; all I expect in the way of lodging is a room in a building with central heating, where the temperature may be raised or lowered to approximately 68 degrees Fahrenheit, where there is indoor plumbing and the occasional hot shower. Should be no problem in the 20th century in North America, right? Wrong. I have been frozen repeatedly, broiled on occasion, and harassed regularly by gargantuan pets and villainous children. I have taken slip-covers off furniture to use as blankets; I have been housed in a room with an unclosable door, and had to roll the bed against the door to keep a monstrous dog in the hall. Actually, the dog probably had good reason to harass me, for, judging from the amount of dog hair on the blanket, I was sleeping in his bedroom. Believe me, I earn my reading fees.

I won't name any of the perpetrators, for there has never been even a hint of malice involved: just complete thoughtlessness, lack of consideration, and a

dearth of common courtesy. I think it's related to what I call the Isn't Everybody a Chipmunk Syndrome. The syndrome takes the following form: local person who has been dragooned into housing the visiting author says, usually with great cheerfulness, "I sleep in the nude in my deepfreeze, and find it immensely stimulating." He feels, therefore, that his guest should enjoy spending the night the same way. Food is a whole other matter: "I live on a diet of sardines, eggplant, and buttermilk," en-



thus the host, "and that's what we're having for supper. Really, it tastes great, after you conquer your gag-reflex." Travelling writers must simply expect the inedible. I try to persuade my hosts that there must at least be enough money to send me to a restaurant, but usually I am pleasantly surprised by anything that

doesn't strike back when I dig my fork into it.

I exaggerate, but only slightly. Let me elaborate on some of my recent experiences where the common denominator is lack of heat:

1. While my hosts slept in a cozy bedroom upstairs, I was housed in an unheated basement room next to the tool shed. Mercifully there were about eight inches of blankets. The bed, however, had not been opened since, by my conservative estimate, 1976. By sleeping in all my clothes, including my baseball jacket, I survived.

2. A magnificent, unheated mansion, big enough, as Silas would say, to graze livestock. Also cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass buffalo. The bathroom was a full 100-yard trip to another unheated floor.

3. Upon entering a house cold enough to refrigerate beef, we were instructed to take our boots off. The furnace was turned on for about 30 minutes, then turned off for the night. Bedroom and bath were just like outdoors. My wife was with me to keep me warm or I probably would have died — as it is, weeks later, I am still suffering from the cold I contracted. And I just love going to the airport unshaven and unwashed because the bathroom is too cold to use.

Why not just leave when I find myself in an impossible situation? Two reasons. I am usually trapped without a vehicle and at the mercy of my hosts. Also it is a matter of disbelief: I keep thinking that no one in his proper senses could expect anyone to sleep in these conditions. It must all be a mistake. The heat will come on in a moment.

On one occasion I was actually warned in time. On the way to her home my host said, "I hope you don't mind, but we have no indoor plumbing."

"Yes," I said, "I mind very much." And other arrangements were made quickly.

Although it shouldn't be necessary, from now on I'm planning to send out, to each organization that invites me to read, a letter outlining minimum qualifications for non-hotel accommodation. I love giving readings and making public appearances, and I'm not about to quit. But oh, if I could only go straight home afterwards.

— W.P. KINSELLA

If you manage to recover from
New Year's Eve, 1999, battle-scarred but intact, you
still won't have made it to the 21st century

By **BOB BLACKBURN**

AT THE END OF 1983 the newspapers and newscasts gave wide circulation to the story of an American bon vivant who had just made a hotel reservation for the Dec. 31, 1999, New Year's Eve celebration, because he wanted to make sure he would be able to greet the 21st century in proper style. Not one of the stories I saw or heard mentioned the fact that the man was a year off in his timing, probably because about 99.9 per cent of the population would think he was right.

This amazes me, because anyone who thinks about it must recognize that the 21st century will begin on Jan. 1, 2001, not 2000. That is plain fact, and anyone who disputes it is being illogical. In our calendar, there is no year zero. The 1st century of the Christian era began on Jan. 1 of the year 1 A.D. This century began on Jan. 1, 1901. The next will begin on Jan. 1, 2001. It's that simple.

The prevalence of this misconception drove me to distraction in 1949 and 1950, when there was a tremendous foofaraw about our entering the second half of this century in 1950, when, in fact we remained in the first half throughout that year. And all that hullabaloo surely will be as nothing com-

pared with what's going to start happening in 1999, provided the world survives that long. I don't expect to be here for it, and that's just as well, because I think the frustration of trying to make my point would kill me anyway.

So I'm bringing it up now, in the hope that a few of you will put it in the backs of your minds and carry on the fight when the time comes.

Should any of you think that this subject is a little off-base for this column, I disagree. Numbers are part of our language. And this misuse of them is identical to the misuse of the words — it comes from wrong thinking and the failure of the mass media to impose discipline on the so-called communicators upon whom we rely so heavily.

Probably this particular misconception is so generally accepted because of our common way of labelling our decades as "the Twenties" or "the 1930s" or "the '40s," and so on. This is colloquial and convenient, and I have no quarrel with it on those grounds, although it is misleading. It would be pointless to say that 1980 was not the first year of "the '80s," but the fact remains that it was the last year of the

seventh decade of this century, not the first of the eighth. Anyone who thinks of decades in the colloquial terminology could be pardoned for having to stop and think before realizing that the last year of the 1990s is *not* the last year of the 20th century, but should not be pardoned for failing to stop and think before publishing the misinformation.

The problem may also have something to do with North American impatience. That problem also shows up in the peculiar way in which the logical system of decimal counting in the United States, and hence in Canada, becomes illogical when it passes from 999,999,999 to 1,000,000,000. The latter number is not one billion, it is one thousand million, as the British well know. One billion is 1,000,000,000,000. This is where impatience and megalomania come in.

We read that there are a number of billionaires (in terms of the Canadian or U.S. dollar) in the world. Actually there isn't one. Properly, a man would have to be worth a million million dollars to be called that, and I can't think offhand of anyone who qualifies. If there were, he would popularly be called a trillionaire, but to merit *that* label he actually would have to be worth \$1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. And that's a lot of bread.

Such vast numbers matter little to most of us. But consider that it's exactly the same as if North Americans had decided somewhere along the line that the number after nine would be called "one hundred," or that 10 times 10 would be called "one thousand." It is, simply, that illogical. (Of course, it cuts both ways. I'm sure that there are times the Americans would rather think of the potential perils posed by a mere thousand million Chinese than a billion.)

So, just as we are impatient to turn our millionaires into billionaires, we seem impatient to get from one century to the next; so impatient that we will be agreeable to stupidly believing that we are in the next one a year before the current one has ended.

When all the noisy nonsense is going on in 1999, I hope with all my heart that there will be one among the younger readers of this magazine who will stand up and holler, "But the Emperor is bare-ass nekkid!"

IF YOU INSIST on words instead of numbers, how about this line from a sports report that told us some football player had "rebounded from a broken hand"? Whose? I think it meant he had recovered quickly from an injury.

A report on CBC-TV's *The Journal* said that someone had emerged from an ordeal "battle-scarred but intact." Neatest trick of the month. □

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REBEL ANGEL

'I feel that I am a religious writer,' says Margaret Laurence, whose commitment to social justice springs from her interpretation of the gospel

By MATT COHEN

ON THE COVER of the mass-market edition of *A Jest of God*, Margaret Laurence is described as "Canada's most celebrated, most popular novelist." As advertising hyperbole goes, this statement is pretty close to the truth: almost every reader of Canadian books knows that Margaret Laurence was born in the Manitoba town of Neepawa in 1928, and that while still a young woman she travelled to Africa and England, where she began writing what are now known as the Manawaka novels — a series of books about interrelated people who came from the fictional Prairie town of Manawaka. It is almost 10 years since the last of these novels, *The Diviners*, was published, yet royalties from the paperback editions of her books still provide Laurence with her main source of income.

Since her return from England, Laurence has lived primarily in Lakefield, a small, picturesque town straddling the Otonabee River, a few miles from Peterborough, Ont. Almost every week she makes the two-hour trip by bus to Toronto, either to see friends or to fulfil various publishing or speaking engagements. I had read somewhere that her Lakefield house was a former funeral parlour, so when I arrived to interview her I expected to find her ensconced in lugubrious isolation. In fact, the only hint of the house's former occupation lies in its being conveniently located near three churches. Inside, the house is well-lit, pleasantly and carefully decorated in colour-coordinated rugs, wallpaper, and paint. It might be said to exude the modest good taste and comfort to be expected of a much more conventional representative of Margaret Laurence's generation. "It was the only house I looked at," Laurence says. "I was extremely fortunate that here it was, waiting for me. I saw it and the whole deal was signed, sealed, and delivered within two hours."

It was May 1, 1974, when she took possession of the house — the same spring that *The Diviners* was published. *The Stone*

Angel (1964) had already established Laurence's academic reputation, and the film *Rachel, Rachel*, adapted from her 1966 novel *A Jest of God*, had greatly widened the audience for her books. But it was *The Diviners* and its immense and immediate success that catapulted her into the role of Canada's "most celebrated, most popular novelist." *The Diviners* won the Governor General's Award; it also placed Margaret Laurence at the centre of a very public controversy about censorship and book-banning. And yet, as she points out, "at the same time that a lot of people were saying what a

terrible book it was, and how much they hated it, a great many people were teaching it not only in high schools but in universities, and a great many critical articles were being written about it and others of my books. I found it hard, perhaps I still find it hard, to forget about all those voices. You can't write with someone looking over your shoulder."

The accusations of obscenity and the banning of her books from local high-school courses — a ban that has since been lifted — was doubly painful, because Margaret Laurence is and always has been a very religious person, an active Christian in both church and secular affairs. "The political themes in my work are

also religious themes," she says. "In fact, my whole background was religious. I took my B.A. at a theological college, United College in Winnipeg. I believe in the social interpretation of the gospel. My sense of religion has been in doubt for years, but I have the sense that my belief in the Holy Spirit gives us the responsibility to care for our fellow man. I feel that I am a religious writer and I feel that it should be said."

UPON HER PERMANENT return to Canada in 1973 Laurence became writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario. That spring *The Diviners* was published, and the following year she was writer-in-residence at Trent University



Margaret Laurence

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in Peterborough. Her year as writer-in-residence led to a three-year stint as chancellor of Trent, a term that is just about to end. She intends neither to renew her role as chancellor — though there will be a less formal continuing association — nor to become writer-in-residence at another university. “Being writer-in-residence is a full-time job, though it allows you to save money for writing later.” Now she wants to devote more time to her books. Since *The Diviners* she has published no other adult fiction, though there are often rumours of a forthcoming novel. “I like to play it close to the vest,” she says. “I’ve never in my life read from a work-in-progress, and I never will. But what I’m working on will be, I think, pretty different from anything I have done so far.”

Recently Laurence’s most conspicuous public role has been less as a writer than as an advocate for nuclear disarmament. In her foreword to *Canada and the Nuclear Arms Race*, edited by Ernie Regehr and Simon Rosenblum (James Lorimer), she says, “I believe that the question of disarmament is the most pressing practical, moral and spiritual issue of our times.” Her involvement in the peace movement is a long-standing one. During the 1960s she went on several Aldermaston marches, and although her participation tapered off upon her return to Canada, she has become active again during the past few years, especially since Ronald Reagan was elected president. She is a member of PEN — an international writers’ organization that devotes much of its energy toward lobbying for the release of political prisoners — and two anti-nuclear groups: Operation Dismantle and Project Ploughshares, an inter-church group that does research on disarmament and lobbies governments.

The most recent campaign was, of course, an attempt to get Canada to refuse to allow testing of U.S. cruise missiles. Although that testing now has become government policy, Laurence continues to support Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s peace initiative, because, as she says, “If he can do anything at all, his efforts are worthwhile — no matter what his motives. But if he had refused to have the cruise missile tested in Canada, the credibility of Canada in the international scene would be far greater than it is.”

In pursuit of her goals Laurence has devoted a great deal of time to meetings, giving talks, and writing articles, which to some might seem to take away from her work as a novelist. But she insists that her writing has always had strong political themes, beginning with her African books, such as *This Side Jordan* (1960) and *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963). Central to *Long Drums and Cannons* (1971) — a study of the literature of Nigeria as it moved out of the cultural shadow of England — is the issue of cultural nationalism. Through nationalism, argues Laurence, a people come to possess their own history, and in Canada over the past several decades some real gains have been made. “MacLennan, Buckler, Callaghan, Sinclair Ross — they were the first generation of non-colonial writers who were indeed writing out of what they knew.” In Canada today, she says, there is a continuous stream of good books.

Always an avid reader of Canadian fiction, Laurence for three years served on the Governor General’s Awards committee, for which part of her job was to read every book of Canadian fiction published that year. In addition, she has served on several juries for awarding grants to writers. Both duties are, of course, carried out under the umbrella of the Canada Council, an organization she credits with much of the contemporary renaissance of Canadian writing. “The Canada Council plays an extraordinarily positive role, and we are very fortunate as writers to live here. All the arts in this country owe a great deal to the Canada Council.” It was continuing conflict between the Canada Council and the Writers’ Union of Canada that led Laurence, a founding member, to leave the union — a decision that took several years to reach. “I was heartbroken that I had to resign.”

While Laurence denies that writers and artists have a special sense of social responsibility (in fact, she says, some of her writer friends hold political beliefs with which she disagrees passionately), she points out that in her Manawaka books "there is a strong sense of social justice and injustice, although many people don't perceive it. In that fictional small town there is a social hierarchy I obviously don't agree with. In *The Diviners*, for example, Christie Logan is looked down on because he is the town garbage collector. Yet he's a kind of Christ figure — his name was not chosen lightly. He's a kind of scapegoat for the town's problems, a garbageman both symbolically and literally.

"In fiction what concerns me is the characters, the human individuals. All my work proclaims the value of the human individual. The theme is that no one is ordinary. But my novels are not didactic — I don't want them to be — and that is why on the nuclear issue I have to speak directly rather than through fiction."

One of the problems with Reagan's presidency, she says, is that it lacks imagination. "The unthinkable has to be thought about. Talk of a limited nuclear war is just insanity. The Reagan regime finds itself able to talk about a nuclear war in which only 500 million people would be killed. Only 500 million! If you think of each of those 500 million as yourself or your child, it all looks different. But they don't. I'm absolutely terrified of Ronald Reagan. He thinks world politics is happening on television or the old-time movies. He's an ignorant, stupid, and very dangerous man. The fact is, the two superpowers have to learn to live on the same planet or we are *all* going up in smoke. Only an idiot could be optimistic in this terrifying world, but at the same time, that doesn't mean I have no hope. We have to go on believing we can make a difference."

Just as younger generations may remember the assassination of John F. Kennedy as a kind of watershed of innocence, Laurence remembers the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the dividing line after which she knew "the world would never be the same. The violence inherent in the human race is something we have to oppose, just as we have to have laws to prohibit criminal acts against other people. I don't think the whole human race would go berserk if there were no laws, but I do think they have some kind of restraining effect. An awful lot of women *do* oppose violence, whether or not they've borne children."

ALL OF LAURENCE'S Manawaka novels centre on strong female characters, and in the 1970s Laurence became publicly committed to the feminist movement. "I used to think that for the generation younger than myself things would be extremely different, that women would be able to have relationships as true equals to men. That hasn't come to pass. In the United States the Reagan regime doesn't even believe in the equality of women." Although she doesn't believe she has had more trouble getting her work published than a male writer might have had, there did used to be some special responses. "When *This Side Jordan* came out a reviewer said, 'Ho hum, I wonder why Mrs. Laurence felt it necessary to include the obligatory birth scene.' And I thought, Good God, birth is a damn sight more interesting than male masturbation. But it wouldn't happen now."

Laurence is currently working for the re-election of the NDP member of parliament Lynn Macdonald, with whom she shares strong feelings on censorship and pornography. A victim of public censure herself, Laurence recently said in a speech to an association of judges that censorship should never be carried on behind closed doors. Nevertheless, she advocates legal restrictions on what can be shown on film or video: there should be laws to define what is permitted, and violators should be prosecuted.

"My sense of social awareness, my feelings of anti-

NORVAL MORRISSEAU AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE IMAGE MAKERS



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imperialism, anti-colonialism, anti-authoritarianism, had begun, probably, in embryo form in my own childhood," Laurence has said. "They had been nurtured during my college years and immediately afterwards, in the North Winnipeg of the old Left; they had developed considerably through my African experience. It was not so very difficult to relate this experience to my own land, which had been under the colonial sway of America.

"But these developing feelings also related very importantly to my growing awareness of the dilemma and powerlessness of women, the tendency of women to accept male definition of ourselves, to be self-deprecating and uncertain, and to rage inwardly. The quest for physical and spiritual freedom, the quest for relationships of equality and communication — these themes run through my fiction and are connected with the theme of survival, not mere physical survival, but a survival of the spirit, with human dignity and the ability to give and receive love."

She says to me: "I really have a sense of faith. I have felt this

all my life." The strong moral voice that distinguishes her novels is clearly audible when she talks about the various causes she has espoused since her return to Canada. But perhaps her work deserves to be re-seen, as she hopes it will be, as springing from religious roots. "All the symbols of the Old and New Testaments come into my work. The Bible is a constant reference. Read the last paragraph of *A Jest of God* and you will see what I mean." *God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God.*

Unfortunately — or perhaps not — a writer has the last word inside the covers, but once the book is closed it is up to the reader to decide the meaning. After our conversations about the post-nuclear world, the focus somehow shifted to life on other planets. Laurence has read, it turns out, all of Carl Sagan's books, and is completely in agreement with his assertion that there is life on other planets. "I used to look out at the stars and I would think that there are other intelligent creatures. But for us, we have only ourselves, and we have to try to do what we can." □

FEATURE REVIEW

The sound and the fury

Anne Hébert's powerful new novel, *In the Shadow of the Wind*, is a subtle conversation between water and wind: sometimes breathless, sometimes cresting

By ARITHA VAN HERK

In the Shadow of the Wind, by Anne Hébert, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman, Stoddart, 184 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2016 2).

ANNE HÉBERT'S *In the Shadow of the Wind* (*Les Fous de Bassan*) requires an extraordinary reader, because it is an extraordinary novel, as superbly elusive as the elements that control its world. This is a novel of wind and water; "throughout this story you must never lose sight of the wind, of the presence of the wind, its keen voice in our ears, its salty breath on our lips. No act is performed by man or woman in this land that is not accompanied by the wind." Its effect is maddening, intoxicating. Once again, Anne Hébert has prised open the unimaginable, imagined for us the underbelly of an eerie and intractable, irrevocably doomed, place and people.

Griffin Creek is a Gaspé village, settled in 1782 by United Empire Loyalists. Separate from the outside world except for the occasional American in search of scenery, it is isolated, so claustrophobic as to be incestuous. It can be nothing but incestuous; there are only four family

names in the village: Jones, Brown, Atkins, and Macdonald. Each character is every other character's brother or aunt or cousin; they are also each other's memory and each other's conscience. "Too close to one another. Those people are never alone. They hear each other breathing. Can't move their little finger without their neighbour knowing. Their most secret thoughts are snatched at the source, very quickly no longer belong to them, haven't time to become words." They are surrounded by a landscape indelibly beautiful; it "gleams with liquid light, earth, sky, and water radiant as far as the eye can see." Sea on one side, forest on the other, their world is nothing less than Edenic.

But every Eden has its serpent, and Griffin Creek is no exception. He is Stevens Brown, a pied piper figure determined to "unmask them all." Returning to Griffin Creek after an absence of five years, he splinters the community like a gannet plunging into still water. He offers his services as a hired man to his cousin's widow and, from there, snakes his way into position as Griffin Creek's conscience and seducer. Stevens Brown

shines as the epicentre of the novel, a turbulent, rebellious character whose sole motivation is to infuriate others. "He's like the tree planted in the middle of an earthly paradise. The knowledge of good and evil have no secrets from him." To the villagers, especially Nora and Olivia Atkins, he is both attractive and repellent. They are Stevens's cousins, but they are themselves cousins, double cousins; their mothers are sisters who married brothers. And they are doubly delectable because they are inseparable, "Siamese twins since birth, never apart, filled with secrets unexpressed." That Stevens cannot ignore their delectation gives rise to the violent event that destroys Griffin Creek forever.

Having slumbered themselves into darkness, the villagers awaken one night to discover that Olivia and Nora Atkins have not returned home from a visit. The ensuing search for the cousins, a futile hurling of voices into the wind, yields nothing. Only the sea spills up fragments, a blue bracelet, a pink belt, and finally, the fish-nibbled trunk of Nora's body. Murder. The community is

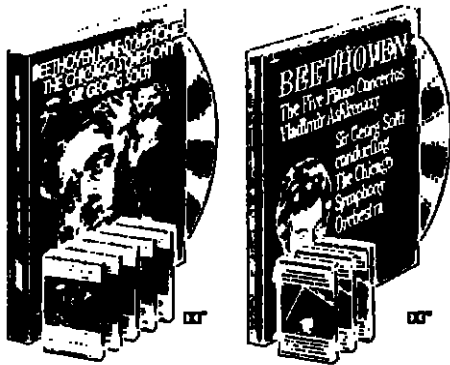
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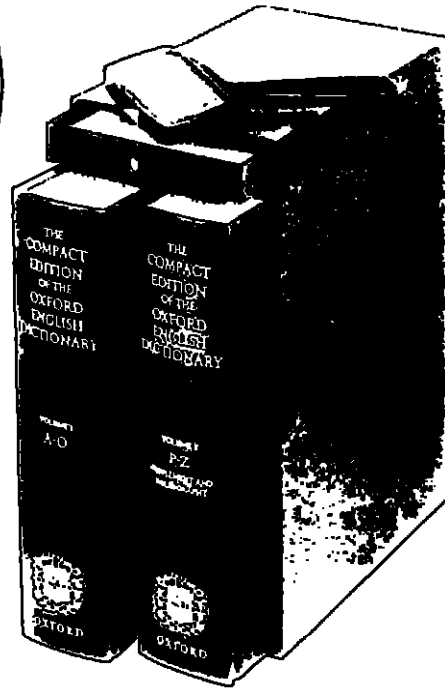
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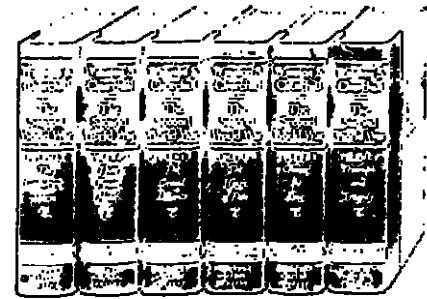
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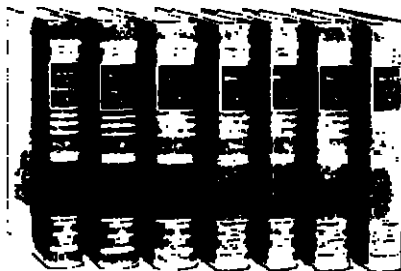
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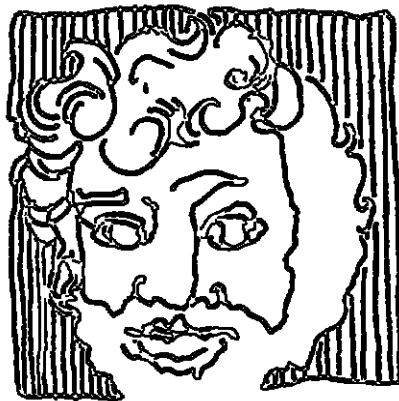
invaded by a paunchy, evil-smelling detective determined to collect his reward and indict Stevens Brown. But what is worst is the violation of the people themselves. "We the people of Griffin Creek, having been left behind by events, are unable to follow any longer, we are overwhelmed by the disappearance of Nora and Olivia and have no time for the necessary cross-checking among ourselves, we've been made to confront the police and charged with replying, without having time to consult among ourselves and think things over." The seduction of Griffin Creek is complete. They are, all of them, responsible for the girls' deaths, and this knowledge cracks their insular world wide open, at the same time as they are even more grotesquely united. "The village is surrounded. Stevens is with us for all eternity, not just passing through for a single summer, reduced to the terrible act of a single summer, one out of all the suns and moons that make up the summers at Griffin Creek. We are together, united, one to the other, for better, for worse, until the face of the world has gone by." They are damned.

The novel's form is something like a Book of Lives. Hébert uses different points of view to retell events, more texture than narrative, more voice than content. We enter the novel in 1982 through the Reverend Nicholas Jones, a minister "without a flock" who, "unable to avoid God," becomes "guardian of the Word at Griffin Creek." He is an irascible old man, largely interested in self-justification, who peppers his narrative with pious expostulations from the Bible. "Turning chronology upside down," Nicholas Jones decides to "begat his ancestors" and thus takes us back to 1936, Griffin Creek's last innocent summer. Stevens's two sections, one in 1936 and one in 1982 (oh yes, he outlives them all!), are chilling eviscerations of the community. His narrative takes the form of letters to a Florida friend, letters that are never answered and thus address a void. The village speaks mostly through the idiot Percival Brown (Stevens's brother), a lament poignant and effective. Only occasionally does he seem too much like Faulkner's Benjy, too given to howling at the moon. Nora Atkins's Book is adolescent innocence, offended play. It is Olivia Atkins's section that is rendered most hauntingly, from a place beyond death. Hébert has said that she wants to make the pure voice of femaleness heard. Olivia of the High Sea is quintessential femaleness, perfect, an echo of the lost Eden underlined by the powerful regenerative force of the women in the novel. It is no wonder that Stevens's perception of Nora and

Olivia is that "they grew too big. Real women." They are getting ready to take over from their mothers (Olivia already has), they are getting closer to the power of their grandmother Felicity, the undisputed matriarch who teaches them to bathe in the sea at sunrise. Stevens cannot bear their *potential*. That is what he is determined to negate. He wants to put them in their places, and so his killing of Olivia and Nora is more than a killing of two teenage girls. There will be no more children. Griffin Creek, impotent and issueless, dies.

The end of the summer of 1936 and the murder of innocence is heralded by a terrific apocalyptic storm, magnificently written and the central metaphor of the novel. The houses of Griffin Creek stand in a sea of water, like Arks, and Stevens confronts the storm on the shore, shouting into the wind. While the villagers cower inside, Stevens hurls himself into chaos, shouts himself hoarse "to accompany the elemental fury." That inarticulation, that calling into the wind, is the novel's refrain. These characters can only shout into the wind, scream into night. The search for Nora and Olivia is exactly that, disembodied voices calling names that are not heard. Their disappearance embodies all loss: lost voices and the loss of innocence.

In the Shadow of the Wind is, ultimately, a subtle conversation between water and wind. Its style is evocative of both elements, sometimes breathless and sometimes cresting, but so pure and controlled that one stops and rereads paragraphs for the pleasure



of the language. This difficult effect calls for an imaginative and yet perspicacious translation, which has been, I think, achieved. Only some too obvious repetitions mar the whole, and they are quickly forgotten.

That such a strange world has been captured, not only in content but in tone and sibilance, is a rare event. *In the Shadow of the Wind* won France's Prix Fémina for 1982. It was well-deserved. □

A passion in Venice

By RUPERT SCHIEDER

Johnnie Cross, by Terence de Vere White, Victor Gollancz (Academic Press), 160 pages, \$23.50 cloth (ISBN 575 03333 9).

ON MAY 6, 1880, George Eliot shocked her hordes of admirers and intimates. The death of George Henry Lewes, with whom she had lived for 24 years, had so devastated her that she had retired into numbed seclusion, not unlike Victoria after the death of Albert. Suddenly, shockingly, her private wedding to John Walter Cross, some 20 years her junior, was announced only after the couple had left for the continent. The next bulletin came from Venice: the bridegroom had jumped into the Grand Canal. He recovered, but six months after their return to London came the announcement of the death of George Eliot. Poor Johnnie Cross—"George Eliot's widow," they were soon calling him in the clubs—survived her by 44 years.

The dramatic possibilities of such material has now been exploited by Irish novelist Terence de Vere White, who since 1948 has produced 14 volumes of fiction. Works such as *Lucifer Falling* (1966), *The Radish Memoirs* (1974), and *Birds of Prey* (1980) demonstrate the shrewdness, the talent for sharp, concise characterization, and the wit that have established his reputation as a rewarding and entertaining writer of fiction. He has also, however, been working in other forms: history, topography, an autobiography, and chiefly biography. One is particularly relevant here: *A Leaf from the Yellow Book: The Letters and Diaries of George Egerton*. For in the work just published White combines the resources and materials of the novelist with those of the biographer.

Johnnie Cross begins not long before the death of George Eliot's widower in 1924. Colin Cathcart, an ambitious, smart, young journalist, stumbles quite by chance on the 83-year-old Cross. Colin is no admirer of George Eliot; he describes her with the usual clichés as "that great horse-faced woman," and gets "bogged down" in all her works except *Middlemarch*. John Walter Cross is now a club bore, an "Ancient

Beowulf and brewis

By TERRY GOLDIE

The Way of the Sea, by Norman Duncan, introduction and bibliography by John Coldwell Adams, Tecumseh Press, 354 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 919662 82 X).

THIS SEEMS A rather surprising reprint from a company like Tecumseh, which has in the past been devoted to mainstream Canadian, names like Sangster, Roberts, Lampman, and Scott. Duncan is a Canadian author, born in Ontario in 1871, but most of his productive life was spent in New York and he is well-known in only one part of Canada, Newfoundland. It would have seemed quite natural if *The Way of the Sea* had been reprinted in Newfoundland. Patrick O'Flaherty, in *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland*, deems Duncan to have been the first writer of fiction to "probe deeply into the experience of life in Newfoundland."

It is perhaps a symptom of Canadian regionalism, and of the extreme form associated with Newfoundland, that Duncan remains so little known, although his *Globe* obituary in 1916 referred to him as the "Famous Canadian Author." At his best, he was quite a fine writer, albeit always within the limits of his period. His most popular books after *The Way of the Sea* were probably *Dr. Grenfell's Parish* (1905) and *Doctor Luke of the Labrador* (1904), both shaped by a heroic vision of the famed medical adventurer Sir Wilfred Grenfell. Some sense of Duncan's general view of life can be found in his series of stories for boys, which follow the heroics of the metaphorically named Billy Topsail.

In reference to another writer, O'Flaherty comments on "that perennial, sturdy myth, the 'hardy Newfoundlander.'" This myth generally shapes Duncan's work. There is little sense of the joy of the fishing life, of dances and parties, the "times" that are such a part of our contemporary view of the old Newfoundland outpost. Duncan shows only the struggle, as in "The Fruits of Toil," in which the closest thing to triumph is a momentary survival: "Ay,

Mariner" clutching at unwilling listeners, stuffy, conventional, dithering; but Colin, desperate for material for a new book — his future marriage depends on its success — courts the old man somewhat like Henry James's predatory journalist in *The Aspern Papers*. He hopes, through Cross, to investigate the notorious mystery, to profit by hitherto unrevealed information, to get "the whole story" of the rumoured suicide attempt in Venice.

Cross, on his side, is anxious to reveal his secret to a sympathetic audience, for he fears that some "skunk" like Lytton Strachey, with the "sneering suggestiveness" of his *Eminent Victorians*, will distort the "facts." White ingeniously alternates Colin and Cross, his two narrators, through a complicated series of movements and counter-movements on the way to an "explanation." After Cross's sudden death, leaving Colin and the reader with alternative conjectures, an epilogue neatly rounds off the novel: Colin and his bride honeymoon in Venice, in the same hotel, perhaps in the same room, as their predecessors of 1830.

The mixture of fact and fiction, as in Anthony Burgess's *Earthly Powers* and Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words*, is both intriguing and irritating. White quotes directly from the letters of George Eliot, quite legitimately since Cross collected, edited, and published three volumes of them in 1885, five years after her death. (In the process, in order to play down the men with whom she had had close relations and to present a less earthy George Eliot to the public, Cross mutilated and bowdlerized many of them.) On the other hand, White refers to sources that would not have been available at the time of the events of the novel. Like Burgess and Findley he creates conversations, between Cross and George Eliot and others. He quotes from a letter from George Eliot to Cross dated Oct. 16, 1879, and so far I have found no evidence that such a letter ever existed. One begins to wonder about other details, other "facts." Did Cross die at Chester Square, for example, an actual address? Fact or fiction?

For me, the irritations are overcome by the professional adroitness of the manipulation of the mixed materials. I must admit to a biased interest here: if I were asked for a list of the most rewarding five or six novelists writing in English, I should with no hesitation name George Eliot as one. No bias is needed, however, for enjoying Terence de Vere White's novel. *Johnnie Cross is a minor work*: — his *Lucifer Falling* is better — but it is suggestive, necessarily inconclusive, inventive, witty, and entertaining. □

the sea has measured the strength of the dust in old graves, and, in this day, contends with the sons of dust, whose sons will follow to the fight for an hundred generations, and thereafter, until harvests may be gathered from rocks."

Part of Duncan's dark vision of the sea may have stemmed from his personal problems. He first encountered the area of Newfoundland depicted in his works because on his way to Labrador to meet Grenfell he became seasick and had to be dropped off at the next harbour. Still, his raging sea signifies much more than the weak stomach of a poor sailor.

One critic, Audrey Schultz, has commented that, although *The Way of the Sea* was first published in 1903, it often seems far removed from the 20th century. The stories in the collection have an atmosphere not unlike that found in the poetry of Earle Birney or E.J. Pratt. There is almost an Old English feeling, as these Newfoundland Beowulfs leave their fragile outpost halls to meet the Grendels of the gale-ridden ocean. At home there is some small protection and the fellowship of community under a benevolent ruler, with the local merchant, Luke Dart, playing the Newfoundland Hrothgar. So why leave? Duncan observes, "What matter — when there comes a night wherein a man may rest? What matter — in the end? Ease is a shame; and, for truth, old age holds nothing for any man save a seat in a corner and the sound of voices drifting in." Destruction is inevitable, but in this stoic world the only value of man is to strive against it as long as possible.

O'Flaherty notes the essential accuracy of Duncan's dialect and sense of place, but the most interesting thing about these stories is the authorial voice. The few quotations given above show the heroic tone Duncan affects, but there remains a hesitancy, reflected in the rhetorical questions of the last quotation, which often leaves his position unclear.

This is nowhere more perplexing than in the many comments about religion. Duncan presents the Newfoundlander as obsessed with an Old Testament fear of God's wrath. One story, "In the Fear of the Lord," makes it clearly a pre-Christian theology: "It was not the dear Lord: it was the Lord God A'mighty — a fantastic misconception, the work of the blind minds of men, which has small part with mercy and the high leading of love." Yet the narratives themselves show that the workings of nature supported this pre-Gospel view of the world. In one account of a small boy becoming theopathic in his attempt to live up to strict Christian principles, it seems as though his obsession is almost justified by the absence of any glimpse

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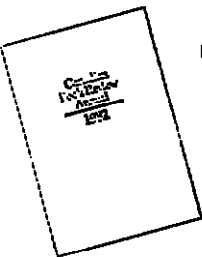
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of redemption. In a world where divine action is consistently destructive, the only possible means of gaining the grace that Christian teaching recommends is by performing the impossible.

The religious beliefs seem incredible in their ignorance of what we in the modern world regard as sensible. And Duncan seems to look down on them as well, as in his ironic comments on the healer whose use of gunpowder as an agent of God leads to the loss of his patient's foot. But there is no sense of an

alternative. We presumably laugh at Grendel as well, but in Old English society, with a very tenuous grasp on civilization, the monsters in the wilderness must have made a lot of sense.

It is difficult to place Duncan in a larger context. He seems a bit like Ralph Connor, but his are not tales of Muscular Christianity and there are no easy answers in moral virtue. His stories can offend the usual unity of time as they often sketch a man's life from youth to great age, but this seems less

because Duncan doesn't understand the needs of short fiction than because his philosophy demands such a sparse extension, to show a complete life of unceasing and unprofitable labour.

Duncan's vision may seem archaic and even absurd. And many writers since have created more polished and sophisticated portraits of Newfoundland. But *The Way of the Sea* remains unequalled in its evocation of the ironies of centuries of scraping survival in such an inhospitable place. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Passing Marx

The message of H.S. Ferns's autobiography is deceptively simple: in politics the knowledge of good and evil is an essential component

By PAUL WILSON

Reading from Left to Right: One Man's Political History, by H.S. Ferns, University of Toronto Press, 374 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2518 8).

HENRY FERNS IS not a household name in Canada. He may be remembered for a book that raised Liberal hackles in the 1950s called *The Age of Mackenzie King* (written with Bernard Ostry), and students of South America will know his *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1960. But apart from a stint in Mackenzie King's office and the department of external affairs during the Second World War, and a few years in Winnipeg as a university professor, would-be newspaper publisher (he founded the short-lived *Winnipeg Citizen* in the late 1940s), and labour arbitrator, much of his adult life has been spent quietly at the University of Birmingham in England, where he is a professor emeritus of political science and an honorary fellow in Canadian studies. Ferns does not even share the public notoriety of his friend Herbert Norman, who committed suicide in Cairo in 1957 after being denounced as a Communist agent during the dying days of McCarthyism.

What makes Ferns's political autobiography unusual, fascinating, and relevant is that he was once a member of the Communist party. He is certainly not the first intellectual (nor, one hopes,

will he be the last) to write about the failure of Marxism as a personal god, but he does so with a complete lack of the bitterness, stridency, and sermonizing that often distinguish such confessions. Tempering his reflections with a large fund of hard-won wisdom, Ferns confronts one of the mysteries of our time: the profound appeal of totalitarian modes of thought to intellectuals brought up within a Western liberal tradition.

Henry Ferns was born in Calgary in 1913 and came of age in Winnipeg during the Depression. As an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba, Ferns developed what would become a lifelong interest in economics. One of his university teachers, H.N. Fieldhouse, once gave him some advice that he never forgot: "Liberals" he said, meaning the British Liberal Party, "and Russians prefer to lie. . . . It is not just that they regard truth as rustic and uncouth and lying as a superior form of art. Lying gives them control of situations and arguments. When truth is assumed to reside in theories, it is possible and advantageous to lie about everything else."

Despite a number of such caveats sprinkled through his youth, Ferns was converted to Marxism in 1936 when he read a book called *The Handbook of Marxism* while crossing the Atlantic to study at Cambridge. He experienced "a

surge of enlightenment" in which his mind suddenly began to work like a calculating machine, automatically producing answers to almost any question he could pose.

Cambridge in the 1930s was a hot-bed of left-wing activity, among the student body at least, and Ferns was drawn to the Communist party soon after his arrival. He became a "backroom Bolshevik," that is, a non-card-carrying member of the party, and was assigned to do what he calls "missionary work" among students from the British colonies. This activity masqueraded as study, and while there were some genuine intellectual benefits, its real purpose, as far as the party was concerned, was to identify potential Moscow loyalists among future leaders in the anti-colonial struggle. It was the first and last time Ferns was ever an activist, and when he returned to Canada in 1940 he never bothered to establish contact with the Canadian or U.S. parties. He was still a Marxist, he says, but his interest in the party as such simply withered away.

Ferns frequently speculates on the ease with which he was able to embrace Marxism. Most significant in his mind were the "archetypes" or basic notions that Marxism appears to share with Christianity, such as the idea of progress in human affairs, or the belief that suffering is a necessary and ennobling pro-

cess. Such parallels made Marxism seem compatible with Western Christian liberalism. Yet while proselytizing among the foreign students at Cambridge, Ferns observed something that seems to me even more fundamental: students who retained a strong sense of traditional morality rooted in religion were practically impervious to his advances. "The Marxist missionary," Ferns concludes, "only succeeds when for some reason or other a moral vacuum is created in people's minds. Then Marxism flows in to fill the emptiness." Although Ferns does not dwell on the point, it is a judgement he would no doubt apply to himself as well.

How was Ferns able to maintain his faith in the face of what was going on in the Soviet Union? Interestingly, his first "niggling doubts" were spawned not by the testimony of writers like André Gide or Bertrand Russell but by an exhibition of Soviet art in Paris in the late 1930s that shocked him with its vulgarity and crassness. All doubts, however, were silenced by his belief that the Soviet Union and its ideology represented the only credible opposition to fascism, and that attacking the Soviet system, as Koestler and Orwell were doing, meant weakening the common struggle against the greatest evil in the world.

That belief, in fact, was merely a practical interpretation of the Marxist dogma, still widely held today, that fascism is the inevitable outcome of monopoly capitalism. The real beginning of Ferns's apostasy came in the form of a letter written to him during the war by a Cambridge acquaintance, A.M. Schlesinger Jr. "The difference between Nazism and liberal capitalism seems to me far greater than between Nazism and Communism," Schlesinger wrote. "The basic issue is the location of power; and it seems to me to be simply disingenuous to talk of Nazism as the last resort of entrenched capitalism."

Ferns was so upset by the letter that he could hardly bear to read it. It remained in the back of his mind until 20 years later when, he said, he "could no longer endure the mental confusion and inadequacy of Marxism and had to find for the sake of sanity a more satisfying general set of propositions concerning history." This came gradually, through a careful study and reappraisal of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and Rousseau's *Social Contract*. His beliefs were further altered by his experiences as dean of the faculty of commerce and social sciences at the University of Birmingham, and by his research in Argentina.

In the end, however, Ferns's Marxism fell victim not to a better set of ideas, but to experience itself, his own personal experience of the books and teachers

and friends and arguments and struggles that made up his life. His conclusions are deceptively simple: the knowledge of good and evil is an essential component in politics. "The United States," Ferns says, "as an example of a free, open society, differs from the USSR as an example of a Marxist society in an important respect. It is possible in the United States to have a knowledge of good and evil, to proclaim it and to seek to translate the knowledge into public policy."

In its own modest way, Henry Ferns's autobiography is a courageous book. The orthodox Left in this country still appears to believe that communism and fascism are implacable enemies at opposite ends of the political spectrum, and that being a Marxist means never having to say you're sorry. Ferns's book is a challenge to that view, and is likely to make him unpopular. Yet his story is profoundly encouraging. In the first place he has shown that one can, through a process of rational reflection, come to the same conclusions that thousands of former Marxist intellectuals in the Soviet empire have arrived at only through bitter and bloody experience. And in the second place he has shown that one can do so without lobotomizing one's social conscience or closing one's eyes to the real nature of power or the existence of misery in the world. His insights into totalitarianism may not be as profound as those of Hannah Arendt or George Orwell, but they are practical, penetrating, and valuable. They encourage us to believe that private conscience and personal responsibility can still be essential factors in politics. □

REVIEW

In cold blood

By JON PEIRCE

War Criminal on Trial: The Rauca Case, by Sol Littman, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 194 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 037 1).

ASSIGNED TO COVER the arrest of Helmut Rauca, the first Canadian citizen ever formally charged with war crimes, CBC journalist Sol Littman was asked by col-

leagues, "Why not let bygones be bygones? Isn't it a bit unseemly to pursue an old man who's never harmed anyone in this country?" Recognizing that many other Canadians were wondering the same thing, Littman wrote *War Criminal on Trial* in an attempt to answer those questions for all Canadians. No one who reads the book with any care should have to ask again.

This isn't to say that Littman is heavy-handed or propagandistic — quite the reverse. Though his attitude toward Rauca is clear enough, not the least of his virtues as a writer is the restraint with which he allows Rauca's grisly story to tell itself. And Littman is also to be admired for the thoroughness with which he has done his homework; his research included interviews with dozens of survivors of the Kaunas, Lithuania, ghetto where Rauca did his dirtiest work, and a lengthy search of court records both in this country and in Europe. As a result, he makes his point more effectively than a more strident, less professional writer would have done.

War Criminal tells us disappointingly little about Rauca's personal life. All we learn, basically, is that young Helmut always did well in school but found clerking in the local textile mill dull and thus decided to become a policeman — a career to which he was altogether too well suited. Even a few details about his boyhood and adolescence might help us understand what made him the brute he was destined to become.

But this lack of personal detail is more than compensated by the detailed account Littman provides of Rauca's activities at Kaunas, where he was directly responsible for over 11,000 Jewish deaths, and by his equally detailed discussion of U.S. and Canadian post-war immigration policy with respect to Nazi war criminals — a policy that allowed Rauca and many others like him to live in ease in North America for more than 30 years while often denying entry to their Jewish victims. It is this section that will probably arouse the most controversy. Not many people outside of the Jewish community are apt to be aware of just how lax the U.S. and Canada have been in their prosecution of ex-Nazis. Littman has done a most useful service by setting the shameful record straight.

He has done useful service, as well, by chronicling the spirited, imaginative, and determined resistance mounted by the ghetto community's leader, Dr. Elchanan Elkes; its engineering expert, Chaim Lipman; underground journalist George Kadish; and a host of others. Though space allows only the briefest glimpses of these fascinating figures, each would be worth a book to himself.

I hope Littman will be telling us more about these people in his subsequent work.

Of Rauca's deeds he has told us enough and more. A fanatic Hitlerite from the start, Rauca joined the Nazis two years before Hitler took power and was proud of having recruited 23 police colleagues into the party. As "Jewish affairs specialist" at Kaunas he was the Nazi official most directly responsible for enforcing the policies of terror designed to hold the ghetto in subjection. Whip in hand and Alsatian at heel, he was a familiar and fearsome sight; wherever he went, death and destruction were to follow.

Rauca personally superintended five major "operations" by which the ghetto population of Kaunas was systematically wiped out. In one, the "Grosse Aktion" of Oct. 28, 1941, he "declared redundant" some 9,200 Jews, sending those fit for hard labour (and thus continued existence) to one side and those destined for execution to the other. Whenever Elkes tried to save someone, Rauca would wave him off, saying, "You will be grateful to me, Elkes, for ridding you of this pile of manure." In another operation, the "Kinder Aktion" of 1944, he had virtually all the ghetto's children rounded up and executed. Not content with ordering people killed, he occasionally wielded the pistol himself, dispatching among others the family of the son of the chief rabbi, Nachman Shapiro. At no time does he appear to have repented any of his wartime activities.

What's almost as appalling as Rauca's wartime activities is the callousness with which U.S. immigration officials, caught up in the Cold War, suddenly decided that ex-Nazis could help them combat communism. Not only were many ex-Nazis admitted as immigrants, some were given important jobs with such organizations as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and the CIA language school in Virginia. Canadian officials were no more scrupulous. Indeed, some people whose pro-Nazi profiles were too high to be admitted safely to the U.S. found refuge here.

All this may help explain why chasing ex-Nazis has never been an RCMP priority, and why, in particular, the Rauca case should have been such a comedy of errors, at least until it was taken over by the highly determined Corporal Fred Yetter. (In all it took the Mounties 10 years to find Rauca, even though he lived openly under his own name, drew an old-age pension, had a car and an Ontario driver's licence, and often travelled abroad on a Canadian passport.) Eventually it took the personal intervention of Solicitor-General

Robert Kaplan to release Rauca's address and photograph to the Mounties and thus allow extradition proceedings to begin.

Helmut Rauca may be dead — he died in Germany recently while awaiting trial — but the issue of Nazi war criminals in Canada is still very much alive. It remains to be seen whether Rauca's extradition marked a change in policy or was merely a token gesture toward the Jewish community. In any event, Littman's book makes the strongest possible argument for such a change in policy. As philosopher Emil Fackenheim, himself a refugee from Hitler's Germany, has pointed out, "It is not out of revenge that we demand the prosecution of war criminals but out of a sense of universal justice." It's hard to see how any reader of *War Criminal* could fail to agree. □

REVIEW

The wrong stuff

By I.M. OWEN

Hugh Hambleton, Spy: Thirty Years with the KGB, by Leo Heaps, Methuen, 166 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 96970 2).

IN MARGERY ALLINGHAM'S late novel *The Mind Readers* a high officer of the Special Branch blurts out: "If I allowed myself to think of the utter uselessness of the secrets which half the villains I deal with pass on to the enemies of the realm, I'd go mad." Later in the same conversation a CID officer, objecting to the security man's theory about the case they are dealing with, says: "You're talking like a boys' comic!" He replies, mildly: "The world I live in is very *like* a boys' comic."

This combination of absurdly melodramatic form and negligible content is beautifully exhibited in the story of Hugh Hambleton, the Laval University economist now doing time in England for having, in the 1950s, given Soviet agents copies of NATO reports on the economies of member countries that had been classified as secret. Considered as the life history of a real per-

son, it could make a good book if it were written by an author who researched it conscientiously and had a full appreciation both of its comedy and its pathos.

Leo Heaps is not that author. When he was questioned by two RCMP officers in January, 1980, about his old school friend, he tells us, "I had a reluctance to pour out all I had known about Hugo." This reluctance was rapidly overcome: at the earliest opportunity he went to Quebec City to question Hambleton himself, and now he has poured out all he knows and all he guesses. With what motive? It would be unkind, and probably unfair, to suggest that he merely seized an opportunity to turn a friendship of more than 40 years into royalties. It's more likely that he really means the solemn warning in his introductory statement:

There has been . . . much ignorance shown of the deep penetration by the Soviets into the fabric of Canadian life. Neither the government nor the people have been aware of the depth of subversion by the KGB in Canada . . . In high places in government and private and public life, there are people whose background and beliefs make them prime targets for subversion . . .

It makes me sad to hear these McCarthyesque tones from the son of A. A. Heaps, who was charged with sedition in the Winnipeg General Strike and was one of the first three socialist MPs in Ottawa.

Of course there is interesting information in the book, but the research is so obviously slipshod that any attempt to summarize the story would have to be interlarded with cautionary qualifications. For example, Heaps has Hambleton being recruited in Ottawa in the spring of 1949, after a year spent studying in Mexico, by a KGB agent named Vladimir Borodin, described as youthful-looking, handsome, and cosmopolitan rather than Russian in his style; he is said to have left Ottawa in 1951. Anyone who has read John Sawatsky's carefully researched book *For Services Rendered* will feel sure that this is Vladimir Bourdine ("young, handsome, cosmopolitan"), who in Sawatsky's version arrived in Ottawa in 1953 and left in 1954. Add to this that Heaps on an earlier page says that it was in 1950 that Hambleton studied in Mexico, and that later he gets his own age in 1964 wrong by three years, and the reader will regard the other dates and names in the book with deep suspicion.

Hugh Hambleton's story has many curious and puzzling aspects, and some day a fascinating book may be written about it. The best that can be said for this one is that it will be a source to be used, guardedly, by the future author. □

Who was who

By WAYNE GRADY

Dictionary of Canadian Biography/ Dictionnaire Biographique du Canada, Volume V: 1801-1820, edited by Frances G. Halpenny and Jean Hamelin, University of Toronto Press, 1044 pages, \$45.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 3398 9).

IN MONTREAL we used to argue, during long, philosophical evenings at the *Henri Richard Tavern*, about the origins of Montreal street names. Some of us thought it was wrong, for example, for the Parti Québécois to take down the "rue Mountain" street signs, many of which had been obliterated by spray paint anyway, and replace them with signs reading "rue de la Montagne." Mountain Street, we held, had been named after either the Reverend Jacob Mountain, bishop of Quebec in the 1790s, or after his son George Mountain, bishop of Montreal in 1837. Dissenters brought out Stephen Leacock's rather dodgy historical tome *Montreal* (1948), in which the humourist claimed he had seen a map dating from the early 18th century on which a squiggly line leading from the general vicinity of downtown in the vague direction of Mount Royal was clearly marked "Chemin de la Montagne."

I don't recall now who won the discussion, but the present volume of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* would certainly have prolonged and deepened the debate. Jacob's brother, Jehosephat Mountain, was the minister at Christ Church, Montreal, from 1800 until his death in 1817. He was also a wealthy landowner, and it is clear that the Mountain family (George didn't die until 1863, so his entry appears in Volume IX, which was published in 1976) exercised a profound and lasting influence on the English Protestant presence in Quebec after the conquest of 1760.

We also used to argue about the proper pronunciation of "rue Guy": most of us pronounced it to rhyme with "blue sky," in the English manner, on the grounds that the street had been named after Sir Guy Carleton (whose biography in this volume runs to 28 columns). We did not advance this theory very

vigorously, however; it was more a point of pride, since we knew that Toronto had named its Carlton Street after Sir Guy and had managed to misspell his name. Rue Guy (rhymes with "Who he?") actually commemorates a thoroughly dislikable merchant named Pierre Guy (1738-1812). Guy had been born in Montreal and sent to school in France, where he looked after his parents' property so well that he returned to Canada a wealthy man. He weathered the English conquest admirably, joining the handful of Montreal merchants who appealed to "the kindness and sense of justice" of their new sovereign, George III, in order to ensure that French-speaking businessmen would be allowed to continue to trade with their new masters.

Guy later quarrelled with his confrères, however, accusing them of being too self-seeking in their petitions to the king; his own desire, he maintained, was to promote social and economic reforms that would benefit the entire colony. In 1775 he was one of 12 prominent Montreal citizens who signed the act of capitulation to the invading American troops under Richard Montgomery. Guy was, it seems, a consummate survivor. He and his wife had 14 children, all of whom were sent out to be raised in nursing homes:

This practice probably explains the apparently detached and laconic notes Guy wrote in his ledger on their deaths and the cost of burying them. . . . When his eldest son died at the age of six, he confided his pain and sorrow to François Baby, observing that Baby "did not yet know how sad it is to lose children of that age. And nothing teaches us better not to spoil them and love them too much, regrets are [then] less intense."

Dealing as it does with those who died between the years 1801 and 1820, Volume V covers Canadians and others who survived the American War of Independence (Benedict Arnold's comically disastrous siege of Quebec City is lengthily treated) as well as those who did not survive the War of 1812, and thus a very significant period of Canadian history is to be discovered in these biographies. Perhaps the most important theme, already suggested by the entries for both Mountain and Guy, is the emergence of Canada as a British colony after 1760. Military and political figures — Sir Guy Carleton, Sir Frederick Haldimand — still predominate, but are challenged by numerous hitherto anonymous people whose biographies begin: "merchant, militia officer, and office holder." The decline of the fur trade and the waning power of the Indian population is also evident in the biographies of Thayendanegea (Joseph

Brant) and Tecumseh. Lawyers, judges, and magistrates also outnumber, for the first time, artisans, settlers, and explorers.

Biographical information about Sir Isaac Brock and Benedict Arnold, however, are fairly easy to come by: the true value of the *DCB* for me lies in the fascinating insights it provides into the lives of people who have never been written about before, the minor characters in the vast historical novel that is Canada. For those who can't look up "metal fatigue" in the dictionary without become embroiled in "metaphysics" and "metastasis," the *DCB* is as teeming with unsuspected life as a Tolstoy novel or a New Brunswick swamp. *Where else, for instance, would one leave the company of Isaac Brock in order to shake the hand of Peter Byers, also known as Black Peter, who was hanged on Prince Edward Island in 1815 for stealing \$5 from a tobacco shop? Or with his page-mate Mather Byles, the Church of England clergyman who came to Nova Scotia as a Loyalist in 1776, found it to be "the most contemptible [area] my Eyes ever beheld," and moved to Saint John, N.B., to become rector of Trinity Church.*

It has been said before that the best way to read the *DCB* is as a novel; it is indeed a brave new world, and has such creatures in it. □

REVIEW

Daddy's girl

By MARIA HORVATH

Gone to Grass, by Jean McKay, Coach House Press, illustrated, 116 pages, \$7.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 262 7).

MOST BIOGRAPHIES are about the famous and the important. They describe lives far removed from our own. At least part of their appeal is that they introduce us to the sorts of people we'd otherwise never meet. But in her surprisingly enjoyable book about her father — Clayton Burkholder — Jean McKay proves that the story of an ordinary life, well told, can be just as appealing.

Six generations ago, Clayton's ancestors came to North America from Switzerland, where they left a farm they had worked since the 14th century.

Jacob, the patriarch, was a weaver who settled on the Hamilton Mountain, in Ontario, to serve men "tired of buckskin." His descendants continued to work the land as the family had in Europe. Then Clayton decided to gather a different harvest. He became a minister in the United Church.

As Jean McKay recalls, this vocation brought out his special qualities:

Listening to people was a big part of Clayton's job and he was good at it. . . . A woman could tell him anything. A difficult husband, children in trouble, whatever was making her life a struggle

I wasn't very old before I began to sense the special feeling some women had for him. He'd woven a part of himself into their lives, and the luminescence of their gratitude, their love, was often deflected towards me. So there was an endless string of picture books, cookies, hand-knit mittens. I was used to it, instinctively recognizing it for what it was, and taking it for granted.

Clayton was a very happy man, who sang "while he showered, while he drove, while he wrote sermons, built cupboards, picked cherries, tended campfires. His head was full of songs, poems, stories collected back on the Mountain when he was a boy. Songs I've never heard anywhere else, that nobody else ever seems to have heard." He would also "roam back into his memory and bring out all the people and places that he loved, set them moving and breathing." He was always telling stories — at home, to his son and daughter, and in church. He loved an audience. "The best way to be sure a thing is true," he liked to tell his student ministers, "is to make it up yourself."

In one of McKay's favourite stories, Clayton's grandfather saw an Indian in a canoe in the Niagara River, just above the falls. The Indian "got too close and the current caught him. He paddled like the dickens for awhile, but he wasn't getting anywhere. Finally he just threw his paddle into the water, folded his arms, and over he went."

McKay draws a picture of a loving and beloved father, engaging, witty, and at times even mischievous. Clayton is the guest you'd always be sure to invite. Not every story has a punch line; some you may have heard before; but his manner of telling them makes them all worth listening to. She recounts her father's life with a wit and timing that show she has inherited his gift for story-telling. Given the tone of the book, however, one thing seems out of place: her use, albeit occasional, of four-letter words describing bodily functions does clash, almost like discordant chords in a gentle melody.

Gone to Grass is not a full-fledged biography, but a skilfully coloured sketch drawn from impressions left by a happy childhood. At only 116 pages, the book is much too short. The reader is left eager for more stories about Jacob, Peter, Amos, Archie, and Clayton — the five generations before Jean. It is a delightful story. You meet, as people sometimes say, a real character: you listen to his songs and laugh at his stories, and when he dies, you miss him very much, as his daughter must even now. □

REVIEW

The doctor's dilemma

By ANN D. CROSBY

Doctors, by Martin O'Malley, Macmillan, 215 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9719 3).

IN HIS DESCRIPTION of pre-operation procedures, Martin O'Malley writes that ". . . a long network of tubing is used to carry the patient's expired breath out a hole in the ceiling. The anesthetist winds the tubing from the operating table over his shoulder, and then, standing on a chair, loops it behind a fire extinguisher on the wall before screwing it into the exhaust hole." The reason for this procedure, the author notes, is because "the expired breath of the patient causes a concentration of anesthesia high enough to debilitate the people in the room, including the surgeon."

In that last phrase lies the crux of the problem with this book about doctors: even O'Malley, who has studied the profession intimately for two years, separates doctors from other people. In spite of his insistence that doctors are human and fallible, he never quite manages to believe it himself, and so, in referring to the effects of expired anesthetics in an operating room, he mentions that all the people in the room can be affected, *even the surgeon*, as though ordinarily this would not be the case.

To a large extent the problem may be attributed to the doctors he has chosen to study. By his own admission, O'Malley deals not with the kindly general practitioner who can indulge in

"friendly chit chat over tea and home made biscuits." Instead he has chosen the high-powered specialists and the renegades, who by definition contain in their personalities exaggerations of the general medical character. They are the doctors who function continually in the realm of high drama, and O'Malley has taken their terms of reference as real instead of drawing back and seeing the distortion of some of their perceptions. In other words, what is natural and unquestioned by these physicians becomes natural and unquestioned by O'Malley.

Harley Sandwith Smyth is a prominent Canadian neurosurgeon who lives in Toronto and works out of Wellesley Hospital. He is arguably the best neurosurgeon in Canada, and O'Malley quite properly is impressed with his work when he witnesses Smyth performing delicate brain surgery on a young woman. It is demanding, life-and-death, highly skilled work.

Smyth is also an avid anti-abortionist, and while some of his reasoning may be suspect — such as his suggestion that the seeds of the Nazi horror were sown years earlier in Bavaria when doctors decided to sterilize the mentally ill — his basic premise is dead on. He does not believe that doctors have either the right or the training to make moral decisions on life and death. Personally, however, he believes in and speaks publicly about the sanctity of all human life, using his daughter, a Downes Syndrome child, as an example of the love and joy that would have been missed had she been aborted. One can see in O'Malley's writing that he is impressed by the courage of Smyth's convictions, and yet from an objective perspective, Smyth's sentiments are questionable.

Smyth says he works 12-16 hours a day, often through two shifts of nurses, and often seven days a week. Under these conditions his reverence for the sanctity of life, although unquestionably revealed in his work, is suspect, for the lives he should sanctify most — those of his three children and his wife — are necessarily neglected.

Just as it is relatively easy to hold high ideals professionally (as opposed to personally), so it is easy for doctors to assume that they are dealing with life by dealing with life-and-death situations through their patients — a misconception that O'Malley shares. In fact, doctors often are dealing not with life but with a distorted vision of life. Isolated by their commitment to their profession and dealing almost exclusively with sick people as opposed to normal ones, their experience of life is limited. In *Doctors* this becomes obvious, but is not pointed up by the author.

O'Malley had been warned that doc-

tors tend to be narrow and unworldly, but he says he found this not to be true. Yet details of the day-to-day lives of the 14 doctors discussed in the book tend to substantiate the thesis:

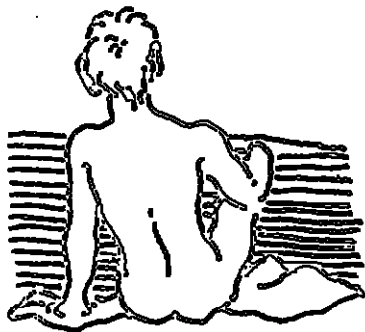
A radiologist in Vancouver, who is teaching a new technique in radiology to a student from Chile, addresses the student not by his name but as "Pancho."

A doctor of holistic medicine in Saskatchewan treats his patients with electrical stimulation, dietary prescriptions, enemas, fasting, and urine therapy — in which the patient drinks his own urine. This latter treatment, he says, works best on schizophrenics. His patients are generally elderly, uneducated, and poor. The physician, through his wife, owns his own lab and treatment clinic, but still feels that he closely identifies with his patients because he follows his own health recommendations. He also quotes only his *taxable* income, an easily manipulated figure.

Physicians who dislike either the financial or the bureaucratic arrangements of the Ontario medicare system move south of the border, easily avoiding the problems most other people have to face. Meanwhile, a young specialist in sports medicine pays \$250,000 cash for a new home.

A psychiatrist talks about how he was taught in medical school to be very controlled, so that if "a guy comes out and tells you he strangled his wife, you can say, 'uh-huh.'"

Had O'Malley truly believed that doctors are both human and fallible he would have seen that it is most difficult for a person to work under the conditions to which doctors submit themselves without becoming narrow and unworldly. How does a person who works 12-14 hours a day, often seven days a week, under tremendous pressure, with



little or no time to enjoy the fruits of his or her labour, identify with people who work normal hours and have normal problems? In dealing almost exclusively with disease, doctors are dealing with abnormal life, and in crisis situations must react unemotionally. These things are bound to colour their perspective.

O'Malley points out that of all the

professions medicine has the highest rate of alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, and suicide. Had he dealt with doctors on our terms instead of on theirs, had he seen the distortions that doctors so often themselves miss, O'Malley might have painted an understanding and sympathetic picture of physicians instead of leaving them in the rarefied and isolated atmosphere of their profession. □

REVIEW

Clash of the Titans

By FRANK RASKY

Voyage of the Iceberg, by Richard Brown, James Lorimer, 152 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862 656 8).

AT LEAST A DOZEN books have been written about the sinking of the *Titanic*. Dozens more have been written about the exploits of the explorers in the Arctic milieu. In this beautifully written but disjointed book, Richard Brown has combined both subjects. He has linked them by telling the story of the world's most infamous iceberg, the one-million-ton juggernaut that loomed out of the North Atlantic on the calm night of April 14, 1912, and ripped open a 300-foot-long gash on the starboard side of the 60,000-ton *Titanic* like a knife gutting a cod fish. It thus doomed 1,500 passengers who found a watery grave off the Grand Banks of Labrador.

Because he is a naturalist — a marine biologist with the Canada Wildlife Service in Halifax — Brown is at his best when he chronicles the natural history of what he calls this "capricious, icy demon lying in wait in the dark Atlantic and ready to strike at any passing ship." He describes with loving, discursive detail the voyage of the iceberg from the day it was calved from the Greenland icecap in the fall of 1910 until 18 months later, when it crippled the *White Star Liner* on her maiden voyage.

He evokes the teeming life of the polar world with a lyrical eloquence matched only by what most poetic of explorers, the Norwegian zoologist who won the 1922 Nobel Prize, Fridtjof Nansen. Here is Brown on the sounds of the Arctic:

The ice is full of noises. Cold though it

is, the Iceberg is still melting, and the seals underneath hear the faint, fizzling crackle as the imprisoned bubbles break free. The seals themselves call continually: the long, wavering whistles of bearded seals; the clicks, raps and deep, booming, bell-like calls of walrus; the barks and yelps of the ringed seals, and the gnawing creaks as they scratch their breathing holes open. Over and under them all, but never quite drowning them out, are the creaks, groans and grinding squeals of the pack-ice in movement.

However, when Brown interrupts his narrative of the iceberg's trek to sketch the people exploring the high Arctic during that period, his prose falls short. His judgements are superficial and sometimes wrong-headed. For example, he appears to have borrowed freely from one of my own books, *The North Pole or Bust*, to depict Knud Rasmussen, the great Greenland explorer, as nothing but a dandified ladies' man. Omitted from his one-dimensional portrait is the folklorist's passion for plumbing the psyche of the Inuit.

Likewise glib is his acceptance at face value of Robert Peary's official hagiographer that the Pole seeker "was the only one for whom the Inuit had any respect. He was a white man who actually listened to what they had to teach him . . ." This travesty of the facts is almost as absurd as Brown's flat assertion that the egomaniacal Peary "reached [the Pole] at last on 6 April 1909. . . ." The truth is, of course, as geographers now agree, that neither Peary nor his rival, Frederick Cook, came within 100 miles of striking the Big Nail, as the Eskimos laughingly termed the North Pole.

Brown's prose becomes feverish and his reporting erratic when he reaches the climax of his book. In his hyperbolic description of the collision between the *Titanic* and the berg he gives the impression that it was the speeding ice that rammed the ship, instead of the reverse. It is as though one were to say in an accident report that a racing motorcyclist ran over a semi-stationary truck. In other words, his sense of melodrama tends to get in the way of the facts. The reader must unscramble Brown's mixed metaphors and contradictory statements to determine finally that the *Titanic* was bowling ahead into the ice field at the furious rate of 22.5 knots while the berg was virtually standing still, or, as Brown says earlier in his text, "drifting almost as quickly as a man can walk."

Despite these lapses, Brown's book is eminently worthwhile reading. His research has unearthed (uniced?) some remarkable tales I'd never heard of, such as the dramatic piracy raid and tragic death of the Scot walrus hunters aboard the foundering schooner *Sedui-*

sante. One also forgives Brown for his sins because he has a wonderful way with a phrase when recapturing the feel of what it's like to be surrounded by millions of tumbling, grinding, squealing bergs of ice in the moving pack high up in the so-called silent Arctic. □

REVIEW

Beyond belief

By **MARIA HORVATH**

Harpur's *Heaven and Hell*, by Tom Harpur, Oxford, 248 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 19 540425 4) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 19 540428 9).

TOM HARPUR, a former Anglican minister, was for 12 years the religion editor of the *Toronto Star*, where many of the pieces in this book (to which he has added several new essays) first ap-

peared. As a reporter he can really shine. Especially memorable are his descriptions of a Christmas visit to the high Arctic, of the teeming streets of Calcutta, of the barren wilderness of Mount Sinai, and of a Nepalese clinic at the "very edge of the roof of the world," where

As we spoke, I had the illusion I could almost reach out and touch the mountains opposite (the so-called Third Pole of the earth) as they suddenly turned so white they made my eyes ache. Gigantic and saw-toothed, like the maw of a great shark about to consume the azure ocean of the sky, they are triple the height of the mountains around Banff. Yet all about us was lush tropical growth: huge poinsettias twelve to eighteen feet high, with crimson blooms as large as oversized dinner plates, orange trees, banana groves.

Unfortunately, entries of this sort are all too brief and few.

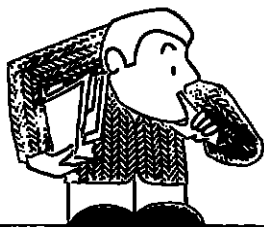
When Harpur moves from description to opinion he seems to relish too much the role of the rebel. In the very first sentence of his introduction he announces that "this is a controversial book both by nature and by design." But even controversies become commonplace when a new one is raised every three or four pages. Besides, once it is clear which theologians he admires — mavericks like Hans Kung and Edward

Schillebeeckx — his supposedly daring stands become quite predictable.

He laments that "each sect, cult and denomination seems convinced that it alone has 'The Truth' in its entirety." Each group proclaims all others to be heretical, he writes. Yet he too uses such epithets as "heretical," "immoral," and "totalitarian" to brand positions he does not agree with. And at times Harpur can be very harsh indeed.

The belief held by many Catholics that the Pope is infallible he calls "no less idolatrous than the fundamentalists' claims" that the Bible is to be taken literally. An important Christian tenet that Christ suffered for the sins of mankind, says Harpur, "not only boggles the mind but seems to me to be fundamentally immoral." Elsewhere he argues that it is "heretical" to speak of Christ as announcing that he was God; Christ, he writes, was not the son of God but merely a teacher, albeit a wise and prophetic one. And just because he disagrees with the Pope's efforts to re-establish the authority of Rome, is it fair for Harpur to endorse the suggestion that John Paul II is "totalitarian" in his methods?

Harpur obviously believes what he says, and is clearly sincere. Yet he doesn't see the most striking contradictions that mark his position. Against the



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background of his opposition to Christian orthodoxy, his support of the "pro-choice" position in favour of abortion, and his remonstrations against the Pope, his virtual canonization of Mother Teresa is particularly strange. Mother Teresa would be the first to point out that her commitment to her missions among the poor is part of the fabric that also includes her fidelity to the precepts of the Church, her fervent opposition to abortion, and her steadfast support of John Paul II's papacy. If not oblivious to the connection among all these things, Harpur's version of Christianity shows little appreciation for that connection.

What is most disquieting about the book, however, is that it appears to argue that Christianity permits only one ideology. Harpur is unreserved in his praise for groups that translate their religious concerns for the poor and oppressed into political support for so-called liberation groups. But it seems that only those people oppressed by forces on the right need to be liberated. For instance, in his vigorous defence of the World Council of Churches he fails to mention that, at its recent assembly, the council clearly refused to support the Afghan peasants who were then being oppressed by the Soviet Army.

In another instance, because Christ "treated women with equality and approached them primarily as human persons," Harpur argues that "Jesus was a radical feminist and it follows that anyone professing to belong to him should be one too." Quite apart from the theological sleight-of-hand and lack



of historical perspective here, it's worth noting that throughout history many individuals have insisted on the equality of all human beings. Does that make each of them a "radical feminist"?

The British essayist Cyril Connolly once wrote, "Contemporary books do not keep. The quality in them which

makes for their success is the first to go; they turn overnight." Tom Harpur seems so eager to make Christianity relevant that his book ends up reducing one of the world's great religious (and intellectual) traditions to little more than a loose assemblage of trendy opinions. When all is said and done, both Christianity and the world are much more complex than Harpur's *Heaven and Hell* would lead us to believe. □

REVIEW

The Heathcliff inheritance

By ERIN MICHIE

The Female Gothic, edited by Juliann E. Fleenor, Eden Press, 311 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 920792 06 5).

THE COVER of *The Female Gothic* is eye-catching. Simple, melodramatic use of colour and a familiar scene — the mansion on the hill and a fleeing heroine in the foreground — combine to produce an instant reaction: a slight repugnance, the same vague feeling of superiority one has when surveying the racks of cheap novels in the supermarket. Of course this response is hypocritical (who can't admit to enjoying one form of literary trash or another?), and it is worth a second thought. For Gothic literature, a genre that has been around since the 18th century, was extremely popular then, and is, as the proverbial cover reminds us, just as popular now.

Until recently criticism of the "female Gothic" — a phrase coined by Ellen Moers, one of the pioneers in this field — has been sparse. Moers's basic argument, according to Marcia Tillotson in one of these essays, is that "women writers used Gothic mechanisms to express feelings and beliefs and even facts about their existence that they could communicate in no other way." Sexuality, maternity, and female reaction to patriarchal, societal restraints all are portrayed in the female Gothic.

One of the basic problems, as the book's editor, Juliann E. Fleenor points out, lies in defining the female Gothic. Many labels, such as serious, popular, horror, terror, grotesque, and domestic, are affixed to the word Gothic in various

works discussed in the anthology. But categorization is not terribly important. What is significant is that the genre has existed and developed over roughly 200 years and continues to be embraced and modified by serious modern writers, as well as by their less serious counterparts. Fleenor attempts a summary of the female Gothic that is useful in understanding the issues discussed in the anthology:

It is essentially formless, except as a quest; it uses the traditional spatial symbolism of the ruined castle or an enclosed room to symbolize both the culture and the heroine; as a psychological form, it provokes various feelings of terror, anger, awe, and sometimes self-fear and self-disgust directed toward the female role, female sexuality, female physiology, and procreation; and it frequently uses a narrative form which questions the validity of the narration itself. It reflects a patriarchal paradigm that women are motherless yet fathered and that women are defective because they are not males.

Fleenor asserts that the key difference between Gothics written by men and those written by women is the employment of spatial imagery, especially with respect to the emotions of self-fear or self-disgust. The self-divided heroine appears to be the most common element in the female Gothic, and the ambivalence she feels (unconsciously or not) toward her own womanhood is because of the restrictions of a male-dominated society.

Fleenor develops the significance of this Gothic schizophrenia by postulating an interesting but debatable theory: at the core of the female Gothic is the conflict with "the all-powerful, devouring mother." She suggests that the popularity of the Gothic for women exists because it expresses this contradiction of the mother-daughter relationship, one of the "central enigmas of female existence."

Her theory, however, is just one of many in this collection of essays, which range from a boring structuralist analysis of Victoria Holt's Gothic romance to a remote, abstract discussion of literalization in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Many address the question of the Gothic's appeal for women, with varying degrees of directness, and the result is a provocative and manifold set of deductions. There are two basic critical readings: one submitting that the Gothic serves as social reinforcement, that its heroines are passive, and that its allure is escapist; the other perceiving the Gothic as a statement of rebellion, with such active and assertive heroines as *Jane Eyre* and Catherine Earnshaw.

Many other fundamental themes are investigated in these essays. Some deliberate over the Gothic phenomenon

of madness, and others explore the ambivalence of motherhood as found in the Gothics of some female authors. Early works (those by Radcliffe, Shelley and the Brontës) and the later novels of some modern authors who have chosen the genre (Atwood, Dinesen, Lessing, O'Connor, and others) are analyzed.

The Female Gothic is a stimulating addition to criticism of women's literature, but it is interesting to note that this anthology contains no essays by male critics, though some are referred to. If the amount of criticism a type of fiction receives is an indication of the degree to which it is taken seriously, surely all criticism should be welcome, and neither the male nor the female variety excluded. □

REVIEW

Eyes, ears, and navels

By RAYMOND FILIP

The Inner Ear, edited by Gary Geddes, Quadrant Editions, 208 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 86495 021 7).

A Slow Light, by Ross Leckie, Signal Editions/Véhicule Press, 68 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 45 8).

Night Letters, by Bill Furey, Signal Editions/Véhicule Press, 56 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 44 X).

THE BLACK COVER befits a book of the dead, not an explosive pleiad of young living poets who will have "a considerate impact upon the future of poetry in this country." That is the first immediate contradiction, implosion, black hole in *The Inner Ear*.

The book was originally intended as a booster shot for three of Gary Geddes's graduate students, Jim Smith, Ross Leckie, and Ronn Silverstein. The roster grew to include teachers, friends, and the best self-addressed, stamped egos desperate enough to pay to be published in a subscription press.

The Inner Ear has no direction. The disorder is counteracted with political pitches. Prof. Geddes instructs us to hear the voices as "verdicts" relevant to "our times." An outer thrust toward global discord. Small-l liberal, slightly to the left of Mickey Mouse, Geddes matches his name in the introduction

beside Voznesensky, Levertov, David Jones, and Friedrich Durrenmatt. As if those outspoken champions of social change would balance the anthology's insipid silences.

Geddes's Sir Galahading begins and ends with the cowardly cliché cop-out: "writing is a political act." For deaf mutes in an isolation tank, yes. His white, Anglo-Saxon apocrypha contains no working-class voices, no ethnic minorities, nor that major minority in "our nation," the French. The recent apolitical collection *Cross-Cut: Contemporary English Quebec Poetry* was progressive enough to incorporate a French poem by an anglophone poet, or franco-phone poets in translation. And Quadrant Editions has one foot based in Québec. So much for "innovation and incentive."

Good literature should hit you right between the eyes, and ears, like a golden hammer. But one *tries* to appreciate *The Inner Ear*. The word I, I, I, I, I, I, buzzes on almost every page. "I" has to be the ugliest sound, syllable, vowel, in the English language. Call it itacism or egotism, excessive use of the first person singular is the mark of amateurism. Of the 11 poets, Robyn Sarah, Ross Leckie, and Ken Stange successfully sortie out of themselves to sometimes speak in plurals.

Susan Glickman is self-centered to the point of autism:

*Each night I lie down in my death
as though for the last time.
I close my eyes — Goodbye colours,
you can be yourselves now
I give up your names. Goodbye,
goodbye.*

In "Naming the Dragons" she decides her demons are "men." Which men? Where? When? Why? Poetry must particularize; generalization is for pop sociology. Glickman cannot find the words. The "stop-gap summation to let us quit the confessional with grace."

St. John Simmons likewise does not offer any fresh flashes of illumination to make the traffic stop for two minutes. His "Arthur Rimbaud in Cambodia" is as retrograde as Rudyard Kipling in Abyssinia. Assuming the role of bawdy Rimbaud, Simmons indulges in fantasy-land:

*I shall bugger little children
if it will make me famous.
I will fill their intestines with semen;*

Rimbaud stopped writing at 19. Simmons should do the same. If he can't be apocalyptic now, he should at least be *au courant*. Cambodia has been called Kampuchea for eight years. What would a refugee from that crazy country think of a Canadian writing such drivel? Let's see real scars, hear real pain.

But what does the reader get? "Bour-

geois Pleasures" by Ken Stange. Complete with a poem dedicated to Pablo Neruda (not another one!). You can almost smell the easy living latex:

"(Innocence and experience are having incestuous relations)."

A line that sums up *The Inner Ear*.

The innocents are sweethearts. Jim Smith actually writes a love poem to his mother entitled "Navel." John Barton trumpets such truths as: "Men who don't cry lean against trees in itchy jeans clenching their teeth." Makes a man want to cry, or eat quiche.

Ronn Silverstein's "The Angelo/Blaank Letters" is one for the Curia. Blaank means God. The reader receives more redemption value from a supermarket coupon:

*Let me know where you stand on this;
abstraction versus fornication,
or vice versa.*

Ronnie Brown and Margo Swiss are too stylized. Their tone is as flat as the hum of an electric typewriter. Swiss says:

*I am Eurydice, tatty, inviolate,
within the groin of dark,
who sears her dogged wound
and stings to shape
a mouldy grief.*

How long can you listen to that?

However, *The Inner Ear* does deliver a musical delight to rock your cochlea. She does not play variations on themes by Virginia Woolf or Sylvia Plath. Robyn Sarah is Robyn Sarah. Her verses are everyday dreamy divertimenti. Contrapuntal *aperçus* as in "Fugue" or "The Cyclist Recovers His Cadence." She even practices Pac-manopoeia:

*... You are a functional illiterate
among the software, the blip-blip
and the wooky-pooky.*

Robert Billings has been involved with some activism. He performed volunteer work for The Writer and Human Rights: A Congress in Aid of Amnesty International, and he once wore "an army surplus jacket with a red target drawn in the small of the back into East Berlin. . . ." Out of it all, he was rewarded with "Chest Wounds":

*... I am no
longer most eager for fame My
idealism is dead on arrival at a
New York hospital I record the
exact date that each new missile goes
into production I have never decided
never
to leave my wife,*

Now that's new! Poets are not known to mate for life! His wife has it in writing!

The Inner Ear is not the sort of book you want to read until sunrise. It is basically a subscription-press book dividend. One level higher than a graduation yearbook. Replete with photographs. A

teaching aid to darken an English department desk. And then the general public, the outer ear, wonders why poetry pathways seem so pretentious? *The Inner Ear* is a sound reason.

Another poet from the miscellany



who does not grind on your antenna with gloom is Ross Leckie. When Leckie speaks of light in his first book, *A Slow Light*, you can believe it the way you can believe a blue sky. No quick answers. Only the friendly searching of a gentleman and wandering scholar:

*The crystal glass
is beautiful
because of its fragility,
because it might
break*

*Almost perfect,
so much so that it suggests
a brilliant light beyond this glass cave,*

Leckie's rhetoric is also rare among young poets, especially in his carefree use of cryptic conceits: "O fling your caustic repartee, floccose world." His humour grows on you as naturally as flowers on a bookshelf. As in the punch line to his poem "Noam Chomsky":

*I have loved passionately the surface of
grammar*

*Father, forgive them
They know not how they speak*

If there is any flaw in *A Slow Light*, it is artificiality. One is never sure how much of the source material is artifice, and how much art? How much éclat, and how much eclecticism? The articulations vary from juvenilia, such as "Elegy for John Lennon," to abstract meditations on post-modernity that tend to become sermons:

*Ultimately science is unseasonable, not
like these poems,
which formulate a textbook of a
different sort,
expressing the pale autumn of a
deciduous science.*

Working with twilight words, Ross Leckie still leaves you feeling good.

Night Letters by Bill Furey sparkles more like spit on a pencil tip. The reader is not spared the pat poetic trip through solitary streets, rooms, bars, cemeteries, and libraries in pursuit of love and beauty. Sometimes he loses, as in "Rimbaud" (not another one!), and some-

times he gains gracefully. As when the Newfoundland Irish in Furey rises to the occasion with "Burial Rites":

*Bury the dove in the air.
Insist on lowering him
in the bright sky,
Or instead lay him down to rest in fire,
Or give his small white body
to the voyaging mist.*

The religious references throughout the volume are not powerfully original. But they are pure in their intent and lyricism. Sometimes even kneeling kneelers as in "Ballad from Villon":

*I can tell a Franciscan by his cowl
I can tell a coyote by his howl
I can tell a priest by his collar
I can tell a Beethoven from Mahler
I can tell a giver from a taker
I can tell a fakir from a faker
But I can't tell you from me.*

The reader can tell a Furey from a Leckie. Both bear promising signatures. No points should be deducted off their poetic licence for despairing with darkness. Both deserve praise for their positive light, day or night. □

REVIEW

Troubled waters

By PETER O'BRIEN

Brides of the Stream, by Joe Rosenblatt, Oolichan Books, 88 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88982 048 1).

AT HIS BEST Joe Rosenblatt is a strange underwater poet fabricating elaborate, microscopic universes out of small bits of colour that float down from above. Or he is mapping out the ecstatic flight patterns of hieroglyphic creatures who borrow their names from things we know, but which are much more a product of his own invention. In the bee-buzzing *Bumblebee Dithyramb*, in *Virgins and Vampires*, full of its own "supernatural nutrients," and in such poems as "Epilogue" from *Top Soil*, Rosenblatt is close to the "painted phantoms" of de Quincey and the "monstrous scenery" of Coleridge. He is comfortable with the teeming underside and dreamy atmosphere of fantastical normality: big words for small things, small words for big things.

Brides of the Stream is Rosenblatt's first book in three years. Unfortunately, it does not live up to the multitude of secrets that are hidden in his earlier books. There is a magic present in the earlier books that is not present in this one. *Brides of the Stream* is not a bad book: it will interest those who would normally be excited by a new volume by Rosenblatt, but it will not gain for him a new group of enthusiastic readers.

Although the jacket note describes it as a long prose-poem, it is more a collection of philosophical musings, some in prose and some in verse. The reader follows a man/fish, sometimes called Uncle Nathan, in and out of the Little Qualicum river on Vancouver Island. There are many words and images that drift in and out of view: "pebble," "pebbles," "pebbled floor," "pebbled bed"; "A shadow must adhere," "my shadow divides into minnows," "A shadow shook her," "shadow the dream." Together the words create a fluid, liquid logic that spawns new and sometimes slippery connections between them and their metaphorical mutations. Through Rosenblatt's poetry there is a concern with metaphor, and how metaphor is enclosed both within things (animals, insects, fish, people) and within the words used to describe these things. In the poem "Plat du Jour" there is the image of fishing/writing and the arguments that result: "Trout disappear at the materialization of ink. . . . Trout are always writing aquatic novels. Of course, they're left unfinished." Yet Rosenblatt, as fisherman, sometimes becomes overly philosophic, and the poems overly complicated, or just cloudy:

*The angler, struggling to decipher the
plat du jour for pampered felines in
troutily clothing, discovers a lusty worm
is an answer to gastric mood deviation.
Offered in early morning, or late after-
noon, trout take to the worm as a
weakling would to a virility pill prom-
ising a he-man's body in a Palm Springs'
tan. A worm, taken liberally, brings out
the girth in a spotted pansy. Washed
into the stream by an angry rain god,
such offerings seldom throw an
ominous shade.*

There's something going on here, but the message is too convoluted and too nebulous.

Some of the other poems suffer from a naive self-reflection: "I toss a pebble. It goes sailing into eternity"; "I detach my fluttering mind. I let it slide against the current"; "A thick grub worm conveys a whole train of meaning." These thoughts seem sentimental and shop-worn.

There are certainly some good poems in *Brides of the Stream*, among them

"Speckled Sky," "Disguises," and "An Obsession":

I'm obsessed with water as a fish is inspired by sky. I nearly drowned as a youngster. Green bubbles pressed against me. My body swayed to bursting worlds. I pressed out of a chrysalis. Buoyant like a sea onion my suburban body slipped under for a third time.

In his earlier books Rosenblatt has pushed his poems toward pure metaphor, pure sound, pure dream. In the poem "Of Spit Between the Sidewalks," from *Virgins and Vampires*, the speaker talks of gorging on intellect "until the stomach bursts freeing all the metaphor." There is some of this in *Brides of the Stream*, as in "Caterpillar Disarmed":

they are fuzzy dreams in dream pajamas

*...
they eat far too much mulch
they love the warm weather
they take shelter in the storm
they hate the rain on their fur.*

But not all of the poems have been pushed far enough, and some are just too muddy. In the past Rosenblatt has been able to activate Shakespeare's line: "Where the bee sucks, there suck I." In this book, however, there's not enough of that animate electricity. □

REVIEW

Sticks and stones

By KEITH GAREBIAN

Predators of the Adoration: Selected Poems 1972-82, by Christopher Dewdney, McClelland & Stewart, 207 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 2743 5).

Settlements, by David Donnell, McClelland & Stewart, 127 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 2849 0).

THE MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS, underwater swimmers, soaring aerobic wondrous, mystifying magi, and sex gurus of Canadian poetry have been joined by a brilliant original: a poet of natural history and science who goes far beyond mere naturalism by turning nature into "a surreal theatre of marvellous intent." The son of Selwyn Dewdney, renowned archeologist, historian, and author,

Christopher Dewdney grew up in London, Ont., near a forested system of ravines and ponds known locally as the Cove. In this environment he found "exotic tropical landscapes and fabulous creatures, themselves steeped in the diffuse light of shallow equatorial oceans," and slow, oracular rocks, with compressed millennia in the shells and skeletons of underwater creatures of eons ago. In a true sense his book — a collection of prose, verse, and collage illustrations from five works — is a new form of poetry that makes organic use of scientific diction. As he asserts, in speaking from "the inviolate fortress of a primaeval history uncorrupted by humans," it is "a codex of the plants and animals whose technology is truly miraculous," and for whom he is "merely a scribe."

But this is too modest on his part. Dewdney is often merely a scribe, but often as well he is something much greater — a word-wizard who goes beyond facts or a division of the world into the totality of atoms or the physical guarantees of information. All poetry is, of course, ultimately a source of information — even in its delicate sensuousness, metaphor, and ambiguity — but Dewdney's poetry is not so clottingly unimaginative as to make fact, suggestion, and thought come to rest in knowledge. It transforms the scientific bias into evocative mythopoeia. It accedes to the will of science in classifying phenomena and giving detailed illustrations, but it also moves toward formalism and transformation. Behind it is a modern mind — an incredible complex of impressions and signs — that attends scrupulously to both the warp of data and the woof of symbolism.

The idealism of Dewdney's poetry is centred on form. Paradox is at its core, for the poetry — especially in "A Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario" — shows how form can be revealed through *erosion*. Form is infinite, eternal, accretive, narcissistic. It can be fixed "like a mathematical constant" in the deciduous trees in whom "at a carefully chosen angle, and on particular winter days, the vaulting and altar plans for Chartres, Rheims, Orléans, and Amiens can be seen in their branches." The apparent typos ("angel," "their") are really a subtle alteration of spelling to enlarge the suggestiveness of the lines. And the paradox of passive stancancy and dynamic enlargement is illustrated in the fact that the trees live entirely in the age that their roots tap.

The accretive nature of form is manifested in the concretion images that become a dominant emblem in the prose and verse. Concretions are solidified swellings in rock, but to Dewdney they

are "sacraments of the memory table," with jackets of time. In them time is embedded in space, and their wondrous nature is expressed in an image of silent formations gathered in a dim Stonehenge on a lake bottom.

The impersonality and frequent dehumanization of scientific knowledge is absorbed by Dewdney's form which, true to Coleridgean poetics, offers pleasure as well as truth. One delight in Dewdney is the cataloguing craft, which sometimes looks like a remote impersonal operation but which often yields beautifully suggestive images — as in the surreal, erotic "Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night," a type of Rimbaudian fantasia of the senses that



becomes dreamlike and quiescent at the end. The poetry can be Joycean ("there be shall mutt natching of teat") or perversely parodic. It can be brittle and cryptic or lush and sensual, crystallinely lucid or bafflingly idiosyncratic. A catchy pun is a good label for it all: concretion poetry that is like hipgnosis. The pun encompasses Dewdney's litany of naturalistic wonders, humorous word-and-punctuation play, and social passion. The poetry has many fascinating lures, and it helps us divine for spirits in our ancient harsh but lovely land: "The coprolitic chrysalis cases, grub-loam geodes & the sculpted obsidian deities within. Pelidnota & Osmoderma." This is not poetry for everyone, but an abstruse poetry of cumulative insights and rewards. The book, edited by Stan Dragland and Michael Ondaatje, is helped tremendously by Dragland's brilliant afterword, which raises our consciousness without reducing our pleasure.

Poetry, like fiction, is a world with many perspectives. In David Donnell's case it blends Canadian populism with post-modernist craft. Ideas and images hit highs and lows, and the catalogues, lyrics, and prose-poems create interesting configurations in heady, raffish, or pensive ways. Donnell, author

of two other poetry collections (*The Blue Sky* and *Dangerous Crossings*) and a "critical fiction" called *Hemingway in Toronto*, exhibits clarity of diction, boldness of symbol, and an expansive prosiness of style. He is full of self-deprecating humour and points up his own frustrated fantasies engagingly: "None of the women I know are throwing themselves at my feet/and the price of art materials makes supper impossible./Only the pigeons outside Osgoode Hall believe in my kindness."

His love-lyrics are earthily sensual, and they are never far from either hearty laughter or blood-quickenning ecstasy. But they are not the only province of his quickest passions. They are simply the arch his soul makes as it bends from history to politics or morals. True to the universe of poetry, Donnell includes whatever he has experienced directly or vicariously, but his mode of entertainment lies not so much in his themes as in his stylistic approach.

His prosiness has candour and directness — even declamatory power — but, more intriguingly, it also has contemplative pauses. At first it appears to be especially fond of ironic counterpoint ("Daniel Boone shot bears/while the Germans debated questions of philosophic method/America settled its west/the European peasants rebelled

savagely again and again") or segmented utterances (as in the magnificently structured "The Blue Sky"). But the split-line technique and cataloguing indulgence often give the verse a speculative force. This is not to suggest, however, that his poetry is true or solemn meditation; it has too much capricious or wry humour and wicked playfulness to be tightly tethered to an unwavering line: "The Puritans recognized earth in the pale potato./Its simple shape reminded them of the human soul./The many eyes of the potato amazed them./They split it in half and saw the indivisibility of man./They looked at the many shades of the potato/and saw God looking back at them with the colour of light."

Actually what we have are personal vectors whereby Donnell radiates images and ideas of varying magnitudes and velocities. He is subtle without deviousness, wry without malignancy. Sometimes the shifts from one analogy to another are not smoothly wrought, but Donnell's skill brings things into a focus (especially in the satiric poems) and takes the music of a line as his rhythmic basis. The result is a language we often hear spoken about us every day, carried by the force of the poet's emotions and will to a level that common poets could hardly reach. □

Fighting words

By J.D. CARPENTER

Life by Drowning, by Jeni Couzyn, House of Anansi, 174 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88784 098 1).

Signs of the Former Tenant, by Bronwen Wallace, Oberon Press, 109 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 483 3) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 484 1).

DURING THE question period that followed a poetry reading by Margaret Atwood in 1969, someone asked her, "Why is it that your poetry projects such a bleak view of humanity?" Atwood snapped back, "Because I don't see any reason to be optimistic, that's why."

Little has changed, it seems, in the world of women's poetry. If these two offerings are representative, then victimization, sexual oppression, and what's wrong with the world in general — wife-beating, child abuse, political torture, pornography, starvation, men — are still the most popular themes of our female poets. Such poetry is important, of course; but it has to be pretty damned good if it's going to rise to the surface of the deluge. Atwood is the best example. Her harrowing poems of political torture in *True Stories* reveal her talent as well as her outrage that sadism should be officially sanctioned.

Jeni Couzyn comes close. Several of the poems in *Life by Drowning* are so graphic as to be disturbing. In "The Man from the CID" and "Preparation of Human Pie," we see callousness carried to the extreme: in the former poem the man sent to pick up "a head/severed, on the railway line/from the body" is upset by what he at first thinks is a rat coveting the corpse from the shadows; that it turns out to be the victim's still-beating heart impresses him not at all. In the latter poem a recipe for human pie is in fact an invective against the casualness with which political prisoners are dispatched:

3 Using a small sharp knife
remove heads hands and feet.
These contain only bones and waste
matter.

Too many of the poems in this collection, however, are angry attacks on men and their predatory approach to sexual-

SUSAN ISAACS

From the slums of the lower East side to Manhattan high society, from vaudeville to the stages of London and Broadway, *Almost Paradise* follows the fortunes and adventures of a spirited family. It is the captivating story of the bittersweet marriage of Jane and Nicholas Cobleigh, and the generations of family and friends with whom their loves and lives are intertwined.

Almost

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ty. Poems such as "The Babies," "A Warning to Blood Suckers," "Chinese Doll" ("For god's sake/hurry up. Open your goddamn legs"), and "The Red Hen's Last Will and Testament to the Last Cock on Earth" jab away at men until the unrelievedness of the whole business becomes tiresome. The fact that some men continue to belittle women will not be altered by these poems: the women who read them may become angrier, but that sort of anger will never touch that sort of man.

In "The Tarantula Dance" the systematic dismemberment of a man/predator seems a pointless exercise, or worse, a corrupting indulgence:

*I cut off his right foot.
He horrified himself, a cripple
a deformed thing.*

The ironic pornography of "World War II" in which a soldier watches a child-sex act in the Egyptian desert, apparently with pleasure, is the kind of easy, irresponsible poem that fuels a gratuitous hatred for men. Couzyn is a fine imagist, a fine shot, but too often is guilty of sniping. She seems to be sticking pins into doll-men, hoping to sting some far-off males. Wolves prowl in her poems.

In the final section of her book, however, she lays aside her weapons and chooses instead to sing. Her subject is childbirth, an experience that makes her joyous.

*We forget the pain.
We surrender the memory gladly, at
once
hoarding no trace of bitterness or fear.*

*We'll have other children. Gaily
we encourage each other.*

In the first section of *Signs of the Former Tenant*, Bronwen Wallace takes us on a tour of her childhood. She describes her favourite game, recounts a tale of near-abandonment in Kresge's, and recalls her parents' anxiety the time she wandered away from home in pursuit of a sunset she had mistaken for strawberry ice-cream. Through these and other poems we get the impression of a self-interested little girl who grew into a self-interested adult.

Later poems in this section take us into her adolescence and early adulthood. We see her conferring with girl-friends about French kissing and charm bracelets; we see her preparing to be walked home from a school dance while her wallflower buddies lend her perfume; we see her, years later, indifferently resuming a relationship with a former lover who calls from the airport, "in town for a few hours/suggesting dinner." Again we are struck by the self-absorption of the poet/heroine who views herself as a disappointed *femme fatale*, "writing imaginary let-

ters/to someone I never slept with/but wish I had," a would-be tragic figure "writing poems and drinking soup from chipped cups."

Despite the universal "you" implied in many of these poems, they fail. They fail because the cuteness and winsomeness of the child, the popularity of the teenager, the *angst* of the adult are self-serving. They are saying, "Look at me, I was cute!" or "Look at me, I'm weary of it all." They are unfunny and uninteresting.

However, when Wallace turns outside herself for material (the '60s, for example, in "Becoming a Generation," or formative events of childhood in "Inside Out") she has an engaging and unassuming effect.

In the second section the poet becomes wife and mother — a prisoner of kitchens — and the poems take on a self-pitying tone. Poems with such titles as "Woman Sitting" and "A Simple Poem for Virginia Woolf" are precisely as self-conscious as their titles suggest. Adultery in these poems becomes a virtue; we get the impression that without whole rafts of lovers one can never hope to become a writer. She tells us that

*every time I read a good poem
by a woman writer I'm always peeking
behind it trying to see
if she's still married
or has a lover at least
wanting to know what she did
with her kids while she wrote it
or whether she had any
and if she didn't if she'd chosen
not to or if she did did she
choose and why*

Again, the successful poems in this section are those that deal with subjects other than the poet herself. Unfortunately those other subjects happen to be child abuse, wife-beating, and brain damage. But nobody's asking for fairy tales here, nobody's asking for unreality.

And then with some surprise we discover the delicate grace of the final section, which chronicles the slow death by cancer of someone close to the poet/speaker. As the patient loses touch with reality, Wallace writes,

*I want you here again
and lean toward you calling
but your name is just another word
you've put aside for the ones
you are learning in the country of your
dying*

Having finally found her subject, a subject free of cause and pretense and self, Wallace sparkles.

Like all poets, these two women love words and understand both their power and their limitations: "and sometimes words are not/enough they don't even matter," Wallace tells her dying friend. And both are constantly in search of

things to write about, to care about. "The pain will make poems that will last forever," says Couzyn's dismembered man. Both poets have a gift for words, but they're so serious, so beleaguered by their lives, that too seldom do we see their gift for beauty, for light. □

IN BRIEF

Mecca, by William Deverell, McClelland & Stewart, 391 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 2666 8). The glossy crimson-and-gold dust-jacket of William Deverell's third novel invites the reader into a world of Concorde Jet espionage and intrigue. A chapter or two into the novel, however, it takes on a yellow tinge, with characters, plots, dialogue that form a collage of DC comic books, Doonesbury cartoons, and Toronto *Sun* headlines.

Jacques Sawchuk, a radical Canadian poet living in Cuba, is thrown out of the country for writing anti-government tracts. On his return to Canada he is arrested by the RCMP for essays he wrote supporting the FLQ. To clear his name and live in Canada, he is persuaded by Group Seven, an organization of nations against terrorism, to infiltrate the Rotkommando, a group of international terrorists who are planning some kind of attack on Mecca. Simultaneously, in New York, ex-Washington *Post* reporter Charles Rubenstein is informed by a disgruntled general that the U.S. Senate vote on the selling of cruise missiles to Saudi Arabia has been fixed by the blackmailing of prominent senators.

In Paris, Sawchuk shoots his way into the hearts of the Rotkommando by gunning down some Fatah guerrillas. The Rotkommando are led by Karl Wurger, a psychopath, and his girl-friend Kathe Zahre, a nymphomaniac. They rehearse for Mecca by knocking off prominent European Zionists.

Those are just the major plot lines. Just when you think you have the conspirators, agencies, assassins, and targets figured out, suddenly, like an automatic softball pitching machine out of control, Deverell throws in another series of characters and conspiracies, until what had been an overstocked team to begin with is now riot size.

The overabundance of storylines and characters can be attributed to Deverell's cinematic technique of quick, short, disconnected episodes; a TV miniseries in the making. And Jacques Sawchuk, who tries to emulate Tom Selleck's *Magnum P.I.*, could be played by his true counterpart — Bob or Doug McKenzie. —SHERIE POSEORSKI

Bright fish and golden bees

By L. KING-EDWARDS

A Throw of Particles: The New and Selected Poems, by D.G. Jones, General Publishing, 112 pages, \$9.95 paper. (ISBN 0 7736 1129 0)

Selected Poems, by John Montague, Exile Editions, 194 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 42 8).

IN *A Throw of Particles* we have distilled for our pleasure the finest vintage Jones, a rare VSOP of poetry, crafted for both the ear and the eye, the heart and the head. There is not a poem in the volume that could be excluded on the basis of quality: for craft and content, the workings of these poems revive metaphysical poetry at its peak and bring us reverberations from Marvell to Stevens.

Metaphysical, not a word often used when discussing Canadian poetry; even

the erudite and amusing preface to this volume kowtows to our preoccupation with place not space. Jones's metaphysical poetic is based on the modern and post-modern concern for man creating himself through what he sees and names in the midst of chaos. It is an act of creation in the teeth of the void. There is an imperative, such as we find in "Snow Buntings":

*You must think of the birds
and make them as you will
wood or stone or broken clay
with a brown glaze*

*You must lie down in the dark
in the naked fields*

*You must think of the birds
and make them as you will*

Things of the natural world become not symbols, but signs for the poetic imagination. In the selection from *Phrases from Orpheus* we are again hearing and seeing the act of the mind in creation. Throughout the poems there is an exhortation to the poet that he must not repeat and that the mind must not be still, but active.

*For hell's the lords
bijouterie
a Byzantine world
where the clockwork birds
and the golden bees*

*eternally repeat
what the heart once felt
the mind conceived
for the mind in time
is a perishing bird
it sings and is still*

As one moves through the book the landscape becomes humanized, and people become more than just counters in this attempt at creation in the instant allowed the mind. Thus we get in "Kate, These Flowers. . . (The Lampman Poems)" a situation where human love and the flowers of the earth do battle against violence and technique. Though the emphasis on the mind in the act of creation does not end, there is more of the larger human situation, and more of its obvious concomitant — mortality — in the later poems. There is never a nihilism or giving over to this mortality, but a celebration of it, with humour, as in "Soon, Yes." Spring is always believed in despite snow, wars, and absences.

The last group of poems, the title section of the book, is certainly concerned with darker, denser things than is most of the earlier work, but there is always the assertion of the work itself, an act that may be momentary, but which does stave off the darkness:

*these falling flakes
soundless on the page
defend us*

It is interesting to note in this context the emergence of the feminine in the latter two sections of the book, in the image of the woman as creatrix, and of the placenta. But above all, these poems give the reader what is quintessentially human, from the lush to the stark in nature man is reflected and seen in his naming and creating. It is a self-conscious act, but not one that excludes all the juice and sap of the living thing.

Unlike Jones's distilled selection, Montague's *Selected Poems* is more of a gathering or harvest of poems held together by the themes of remembrance and loss. Though there is a diversity of form and a few experiments with double-columned poems of history, the poems emerge as a consistent entity with a definite style and tone.

In general these poems are about a man's memory of his childhood, and of his country, which are then given a living context as the poet returns to his native Ireland. The people and places of his past mingle with the present as the poems often function on two levels in time simultaneously. There is also the expected allusion to Irish myth and history as well as to the troubles in the north. There are few surprises here; they come mainly in the love poems and in the darker surreal poems.

At his best Montague does what he

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outlines in "A Bright Day":

*At times I see it, present
As a bright day, or a hill,
The only way of saying something
Luminously as possible.*

*Not the accumulated richness
Of an old historical language —
That musk-deep odour!
But a slow exactness*

*Which recreates experience
By ritualizing its details —
Pale web of curtain, width
Of deal table, till all*

*Takes on a witch-bright glow
And even the clock on the mantel
Moves its hands in a fierce delight
Of so, and so, and so.*

This poetic gives us the life of his mother in "The Leaping Fire" and that of "The Hag of Beare"; it gives us his namesake in "A Country Fiddler," and all of these portraits are done again from the present as well as the past.

There are many descriptive poems of landscape and town, and some of them sparkle:

*Here the delicate dance of silence,
The quick step of the robin,
The sudden skittering rush of the wren:
Minute essences move in and out of
creation
Until the skin of soundlessness forms
again.*

*Part order, part wilderness,
Water creates its cadenced illusion
Of glaucous, fluent growth;
Fins raised, as in a waking dream,
Bright fish probe their painted stream.*

But often one leaves a poem with the feeling that, though well-crafted, it is done so at the expense of anything that would add insight or excitement to the process. There are many poems, one goes away feeling, some of them good, some of them not bad, a few of them excellent; but a smaller selection might have been more invigorating. There is a deliberate repetition of theme and style that leaves the reader with too much of dew on grass and deal tables, and not enough of bright fish. The man/woman, personal poems, which stand out as some of the best, are sparsely represented, though the latter ones give a lift to the book as it comes to a close. One can recommend "Tracks," "Tearing," and "Closed Circuit." And another longer poem, "O Riada's Farewell," seems to combine both remembrance and horror of the annihilating future in a fitting lament.

Collections of poems have been dismissed for being too diverse, too scattered, too experimental — in Montague's case it is rather an air of sameness that mars a collection of many well-made poems. □

'I have felt a kind of personal solitude, a separation from my contemporaries,' says Guy Vanderhaeghe. 'I am not without hope, however'

By MORRIS WOLFE

WHEN GUY VANDERHAEGHE was a history student at the University of Saskatchewan he wrote his M.A. thesis on John Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir) who, among other things, established the Governor General's Awards. Last year Vanderhaeghe won a Governor General's Award for his book of short stories, *Man Descending* (Macmillan), which was compared favourably by critics to the work of Alice Munro and hailed by W.P. Kinsella for "a deftness of touch and maturity of vision seldom seen in first collections." His second collection, *The Trouble with Heroes*, has recently been published by Borealis Press. Born in Esterhazy, Sask., in 1951,



Guy Vanderhaeghe

Vanderhaeghe now lives in Saskatoon, where he is writer-in-residence at the Saskatoon Public Library. On a recent trip to Toronto he was interviewed by Morris Wolfe:

Books in Canada: How did you come to choose Buchan as an M.A. subject?

Guy Vanderhaeghe: Well, I suppose a part of it was a childhood fascination with British Imperial history that I got from a *Boy's Own Annual* that a little old English lady who was cleaning out her attic gave me. I read again and again about stirring adventures and India and all the rest of it, and that must have stuck in my mind. When I came to do my thesis I was already shifting away from what I would call pure historical

research and moving, I suppose, in the direction of literature. I've also always been very interested in how certain writers, often not those writers whom we think of as important writers, can reflect the preoccupations of their times. I think Buchan did that.

BiC: And to what extent did he?

Vanderhaeghe: To a great extent, I think, at least for a certain segment of the British middle class. But as the century wore on he grew more and more out of touch with his public. That is, his public stayed firmly attached to him, but he found it more difficult to take himself seriously. At the beginning of the 20th century, in some literary circles anyway, Buchan was considered a young man of great promise. Toward the end of his life he felt he hadn't lived up to that promise, that he had strewn his talents prodigally and hadn't done what he might perhaps have done. He became more and more preoccupied with history and the writing of history. The writing of fiction wasn't as interesting for him anymore; he came to think of himself as a historian and a biographer.

BiC: You said in an interview that winning the Governor General's Award made you feel a little bit like a rookie coming into the big league and finding himself on the same team as Gordie Howe. Is there still something of that feeling, or has it passed?

Vanderhaeghe: The feeling hasn't passed. What I was trying to say is that I stand in awe of many writers, writers who are responsible for creating Canadian literature. My attitude is still that of a fan. And it's very difficult for me to believe what has happened to me. But I suppose with time everything tends to wear off or wear down. I'm probably not quite as taken aback as I was initially, because I've had several months to get used to the idea.

BiC: Taken aback that you've had this kind of success at all, or that it has come this quickly?

Vanderhaeghe: Both. The response of reviewers, with exceptions, has been very favourable, and even the idea that I could be nominated came as a great surprise to me. So for all these reasons

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sometimes I have difficulty adjusting to the idea.

BIC: *Who do you see as the prime intellectual and literary influences on your work?*

Vanderhaeghe: That has been something I've been giving some thought to lately because I've had to. It was never a question I had to face before. To a certain extent I separate them in my mind. When I think of intellectual influences I think first of all of the Bible. I do not come from a religious home or a church-going family, but I have always been a Bible reader. In some way that I can't define, Søren Kierkegaard has influenced my thinking. And when I was at university I read a very peculiar book, Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*. I don't by any means agree with everything in that book, but it confirmed some of my suspicions about modernity and the mind. Until that point I had thought of myself as a rationalist and an empiricist. About that time I began to change.

When it comes to literary influences I find it even harder to isolate certain writers as being the most important. Perhaps I feel the strongest affinity with those writers I can only describe as "agrarian." People who write of the American South, such as Flannery O'Connor or Eudora Welty. Or Canadian writers such as Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence, who write of small towns and rural people. They showed me that it was possible to turn what I knew into literature. On the other hand, I admire very much writers who write in a very different manner — among them V.S. Pritchett, Evelyn Waugh, Vladimir Nabokov, and above all, Anthony Powell. How they influenced me I can't even begin to guess. There is one other writer I should probably mention. That's Dr. Johnson. People either love him or hate him. I happen to love him. Despite his great failings he was a man and writer of great courage, compassion, and charity. He fought many demons, and if he didn't vanquish them he wasn't vanquished by them either.

But when I write, I'm not conscious of either influence or theory. I didn't study literature. I am not, for instance, very familiar with critical schools or the intellectual justification for contemporary ways of writing. I do not write from a theoretical standpoint.

BIC: *But you do write as a moralist?*

Vanderhaeghe: I'd like to say no to that because if I agree I run the risk of an unpopular classification. I probably am, though, even though I don't set out with the intention of "writing morally." But I probably do write out of a sense of some kind of universal justice, even though that justice may not be apparent.

I mean I write in the hope of that, so in that sense maybe I'm a "moral writer." In some of the stories I've written reviewers claim I show "the dark side of human nature." That may indicate a belief in original sin. By that I don't mean that I necessarily believe in the idea of man's literal temptation and literal fall, but that I believe human beings are not perfectible creatures. If we accepted human limitations, the notion of human limitations, then perhaps our transgressions wouldn't be quite as large as they sometimes are. But when I sit down to write a story that is all in the back of my mind. The story is important and I feel it shapes itself. But I suppose no one can keep their convictions from showing.

BIC: *I don't think it's an accident that the last story in Man Descending ends with one of your characters quoting Kierkegaard on the subject of will: "What ability there is in an individual may be measured by the yardstick of how far there is between his understanding and his will." Where do you think will comes from?*

Vanderhaeghe: The whole question of will is a very difficult one because obviously some people have a greater capacity to will than others. I don't know where it comes from. I assume it is a gift like any other gift. And I assume that like other gifts it grows from being exercised. But not everyone is given an equal amount.

BIC: *You yourself, I take it, are an agnostic, but you have what I've heard you describe as "a faith in faith."*

Vanderhaeghe: Well, I think I'd probably go further. I call myself a Christian. Other Christians, however, may not agree with me. But I think I am a Christian of some kind — maybe an eccentric and anarchic one.

BIC: *As opposed to an institutional one?*

Vanderhaeghe: I don't like to think of myself in opposition to institutional Christianity, although I'm highly critical of it. I see great virtues in institutional religion. I think that institutional religion is not merely, as we often think, a dangerous force. It can also be a force for great good. But as soon as you start typifying yourself or anything else, you see the other side of the coin. I think it was Kierkegaard who said that once the crowd begins yelling a truth it becomes a lie.

BIC: *And Nietzsche says someplace that truth is the lie that permits a species to survive.*

Vanderhaeghe: Yes. I think that is why myths are so important for society. They are always truer than "facts."

BIC: *I want to read you a comment I read by Cyril Connolly recently that made me think of your work. The*

quotation is this: "It is closing time in the gardens of the West, and from now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair."

Vanderhaeghe: I would like to think that's not true, but it might be. That statement implies, at the very least, uneasiness with our civilization. I never guessed that showed in my work. I would say, with all honesty, I never thought my work bleak. But the response to it has made me see that by others' standards it probably is. I know I have felt a kind of personal solitude, a separation from the aspirations and ideals of my contemporaries. When I say

that, I suspect it sounds self-pitying. It isn't. I'm satisfied with that solitude, at times even pleased with it. I am not without hope, however. I believe in the importance of endurance and the stubborn refusal of men and women to submit to circumstances. That attitude sanctifies our existence. But I don't want to suggest that the true indication of a writer is his solitude. There are great writers who feel intimately connected with their societies. How a writer writes really depends on what vision of the world he has been given, and those visions he acquires. Circumstances, in part, have determined how I see the world. □

FIRST NOVELS

A remarkable journal affirms the capacity of victims of unprecedented barbarism to regenerate their own humanity

By PAUL WILSON

FELDAFING IS A small town on the edge of the Starnberger See, a lake set in the rolling sub-Alpine Bavarian countryside south of Munich. It is one of the most beautiful places in Europe; so beautiful, in fact, that today Germans voluntarily accept lower wages in exchange for the privilege of living there. It was in this picture-postcard landscape that the Nazis built hundreds of concentration camps, whose names have largely been forgotten, though they were frequently as bad as or worse than the larger, more notorious camps. When the Second World War ended in Europe in May, 1945, a band of half-dead men and women who had survived Hitler's "Final Solution" straggled into Feldafing and, under the benevolent supervision of the American army and the UN Refugee and Relief Administration, gradually nursed their battered bodies and souls back to health.

Feldafing, by Simon Schochet (November House, 175 pages, \$8.95 paper), is about the slow and painful re-entry into normal life of this small group of survivors. It is one of the most remarkable books on a Holocaust theme I have read, not because it deals with a little-known aspect of the war, but because without ignoring the brutality of Nazism it focuses on the astonishing capacity of human beings — even vic-

tims of an unprecedented barbarism — to regenerate their own humanity when the proper conditions for it are provided.

As the lowest circle in the totalitarian hell, concentration camps are the ultimate perversion of the collectivist ethic: individual will is violently repressed and uniformity is absolute. Yet immediately upon being released, the Feldafingers began to become individuals again. What is more, they revelled in their individuality, cherished it and encouraged it in each other. At the same time — and these two aspects are obviously related — a strong sense of community developed among them. They were constantly doing little things to make each other feel better. One of the men, for example, would flirt shamelessly with all the women. Schochet's anonymous narrator was put off by this until he realized the man was in fact helping to rehabilitate these poor, emaciated women, who had probably been raped many, many times, by showing them the warmth of a normal sexual advance and enabling them to think of themselves as desirable again. Another inmate, a commercial photographer, took pictures of the Feldafingers and retouched them masterfully to make them appear as they would like to be seen. Neither the flirt nor the photographer was being honest by ab-

solute standards, but the Feldafingers needed what they were offering as much as their battered bodies needed decent food and rest.

Schochet's book is full of such details, anecdotes, character sketches, reflections, and observations which, taken together, give us an unusually intimate perspective on the war. Apart from its many other virtues, it contains information seldom found anywhere else, such as the Nazi scheme to exterminate the Gypsies, or the existence of post-war pogroms in Poland.

The author, a Polish Jew now living in the United States, experienced much of what he describes. He has written this book as a journal or diary, and though it may seem misleading to call it a novel, it is fiction in the same sense that Swift's *A Journal of the Plague Year* is fiction: a heightened, imaginative reconstruction of something that actually happened.

Despite its direct, economical style, *Feldafing* so teems with life that its proportions seem epic. And like all epics, it serves to remind us of our humanity. Nazism was a revolutionary ideology with the absolute demands on human nature that all revolutionary ideologies make. But human nature, it would seem, is reactionary, and when people are suddenly released from the clutch of absolute demands they quickly revert to their old, everyday virtues and vices. In the wake of totalitarianism's monstrous parody of human nature as "perfectable or else," these little strengths and weaknesses appear not only as infinitely preferable qualities, but as the very stuff and substance of civilization. If you feel you never want to read another Holocaust best-seller, I urge you at least to read *Feldafing*.

Under the Moon, by Jane Buchan (McClelland & Stewart, 257 pages, \$18.95 cloth), is an example of what can happen when fiction is deliberately used as a vehicle to persuade the reader that the author is right or that something in particular is wrong. Even in the hands of great writers the results are almost always second-rate. Buchan may have been appalled by conditions in Ontario's nursing homes — and from all accounts the conditions need remedying — but that is not enough to save her novel from a limp story line (two feisty old ladies contrive to make the best of a bad thing), flat characterizations (the heroines are treated as interesting only as they react to their surroundings), and some annoying stylistic habits that any editor who was awake should have cut. My main dispute, however, is not with Buchan's ability to write but with her choice of genre. A good non-fiction account of the author's search for a suitable home for her maiden aunts,

which apparently provided the book's immediate inspiration, would have been far more interesting, and had greater impact as well.

Comeback, by Canadian singer and song-writer Dan Hill (Seal Books, 310 pages, \$7.95 paper), is a saccharin-coated but essentially sleazy novel about a fading pop star who inadvertently puts his career back in orbit by committing statutory rape. The book is supposed to draw on the real-life details of showbiz, but the style and the morality are strictly pulp fiction.

In *Search of April Raintree*, by Beatrice Culleton (Pemmican Publications, 228 pages, \$3.95 paper), is an almost artlessly told story of two Métis sisters who are separated from their alcoholic parents and each other by the Children's Aid Society when they are scarcely capable of understanding what is happening to them. The narrator, April Raintree, is dominated by a cruel foster mother and, attributing her misery partly to race, she is determined to blend into white society as soon as she can.

April's younger sister, Cheryl, is luckier in her placement, and she develops into a bright, outgoing girl who is proud of her Métis heritage and determined to do something about the legacy of misery that white civilization has left her people. April marries a white businessman from Toronto, the marriage collapses, and she returns to Winnipeg to re-establish a life with her sister, only to find that Cheryl, stunned by the discovery that their father is a helpless wastrel, has turned to drink and prostitution. After a horrifying dénouement, April determines at last to embrace her real heritage.

There is a striking similarity of tone and theme between this book and Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, written more than a decade ago: a woman's search for identity and her struggle to overcome degradation and exist in harmony with two vastly different worlds, both potentially her own by birthright. The Métis are recognized as one of Canada's native peoples, but genetically and historically, of course, they are more than that. In a sense they are the epitome of Canadian history, a mingling of the blood and traditions of Europe with the aboriginal people of this continent. Their search for the undiscovered conscience of their race, therefore, is an important one.

In choosing first to be white, April Raintree was, in a sense, being as faithful to a part of her heritage as her sister, who identified with the native component of Métis-hood. Culleton's sympathies are obviously with Cheryl, and yet there is a strong suggestion that April's chances for dignified survival as

a Métis are better in the long run. The book's ending is really a new beginning and thus, while not breaking any new

ground stylistically, *In Search of April Raintree* does open up a potentially rich territory for further exploration. □

CRITICISM

Two studies go beyond conventional criticism by devising new ways to mediate between the text and the reader

By KARL JIRGENS

THE EMERGENCE of radically different approaches to language in many of today's innovative writers has created a demand for a new style of criticism. Taking their cues from the French structuralist and phenomenological schools of criticism, Hédi Bouraoui and Robert Kroetsch have evolved their own unique systems. By refusing to allow the conventional separation between creativity and criticism, they question not only the generic definition of criticism but also its onto-linguistic roots. Perhaps the greatest influence on both has been Jacques Derrida's notion that we are locked into a philosophical-linguistic framework that was initiated by the early Greeks. There is little we can do about this entrapment beyond being aware of it. Derrida's notion is akin to the concepts of *langue* and *parole* put forward by Saussure and advanced by Barthes. Both Bouraoui and Kroetsch acknowledge their pluralistic background and their subjective methodology, thus uncover pleasures of the text in works that have until now resisted more traditional analysis.

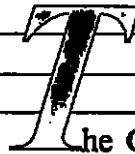
Hédi Bouraoui's *The Critical Strategy*, sub-titled *Mediatix* (ECW Press, 146 pages, \$9.95 paper), reveals as much about his critical stance as it does about the texts he responds to. The collection is divided into 13 chapters, of which the first two argue convincingly for a new critical freedom. Bouraoui says that "the dream of every critic, as of every creator, is to move beyond *mediation* to *liberation*: to be not merely the revealer and interpreter of existing truth, but the creator of new truths and a new order." For the next nine chapters he puts theory into uncompromising practice. Using his unorthodox creative-critical method, Bouraoui presents unprecedented revelations on the techniques of works by such disparate artists as John Cage, William Burroughs, and Samuel Beckett. He also approaches a variety of difficult ques-

tions involving developments in experimental theatre. Bouraoui's subjective analysis includes both implicit and explicit argument: explicit in regard to weaknesses and strengths in the texts in question; implicit insofar as Bouraoui's engagement with the texts results in a sympathetic and exemplary response to otherwise obscure passages. Further, Bouraoui's intertextuality does not stop with his personal response to the texts in question. In fact, it invites a further response from the reader.

Bouraoui's approach does present some problems. For the uninitiated reader it can obscure aspects of the text as much as reveal them. However, for a reader at least partly exposed to conventional criticism and perhaps with some ideas on structuralism, the rewards are considerable. Another hurdle is the fact that portions of this collection are in French, since Bouraoui refused to compromise by offering translations. While this may seem to be a form of literary suicide, we have to respect the integrity of a critic who refuses to disavow the duality of our culture.

Bouraoui also examines the works of Frédéric Baal, Lévi Strauss, Edouard Glissant, Michel Butor, and Helen Weinzweig. He looks at a wide range of experiments in language dealing with arrangement of letters, words, and sentences on the page, aspects of typography, experimental paragraph structures, sequentiality of pages, fragmentation of conceptual flow, the relationship of audience to both the text and stage, and the biographical possibilities in critical work.

Bouraoui has philosophical affinities with Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Husserl. He picks up where Ihab Hassan leaves off. While his approach may be creative, his mastery of the subject is impressive. This may be because a critic attacking the cultural status quo cannot afford to make mistakes. Bouraoui makes no



The Canadian Book Information Centre is a trade association coordinating promotion and marketing services for Canadian-owned book publishers. We have begun a new series of attractive subject catalogues of recent publications from our members. The first three, New Canadian Books for Children, New Canadian Business Books, and A Guide to Selecting Canadian Materials, are now available. Single copies of these catalogues are free in return for one stamped, self-addressed business envelope per catalogue requested, and answers to the questions in the clip box.

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errors and always delights in the play of his presentation.

Robert Kroetsch's collection, entitled *Essays*, appears in the current issue of *Open Letter* (edited by Frank Davey and bp Nichol, Coach House Press, fifth series, No. 4, 124 pages, \$4.50 paper). Through his unique approach to critical language, Kroetsch preserves the kinetics of the moment of composition. Unsatisfied with conventional approaches, he re-invents language in order to make it serve better, stating that "the narrative, adhering to old grammars, refuses the excitement of its own language." His essays are littered with tangential arguments, anecdotes, autobiographical entries, puns, and jokes. His onto-linguistic background can be traced to Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Freud, and Lacan, incorporating these with his own unique point of view and applying it to a wide variety of Canadian texts.

Throughout the 14 essays that make up this collection, he addresses such issues as the American influence on Canadian culture, the erotic dialectic of space, the need to take greater risks in our approach to language, and the development of the long poem form. In the course of these analyses he refers to a plethora of writers including such earlier artists as Grove and Lowry, established writers such as Davies and Laurence, and more experimental creators, including Bowering, Hodgins, Nichol, and Ondaatje. His allusions and references are numerous, arising from a variety of cultural biases. He devotes considerable attention to several important French Canadian writers, notably Gabrielle Roy.

While all this may sound as if Kroetsch were trying to set up some kind of pantheon or canon of Canadian writing, he is not. In fact, he argues strongly against such a notion. He is concerned with re-inventing our mythology in order to arrive at a greater sense of cultural identity. He focuses on questions of language and the fact that when brought to the foreground, it becomes the subject itself. He extols the virtue of the oral tradition, the notion of *versions* of myths, and the concept of new beginnings. At the same time he opposes the idea of *telos* or closure. His Derridean deconstructions not only shift the centre of attention in the books he holds up for scrutiny, but also re-align his own position as a critic and writer.

There is one problem that exists within a number of these essays: while he opposes closure, he also withholds conclusions in his literary-critical speculations. In many instances the reader must complete the thoughts that Kroetsch initiates. While this permits

readers to arrive at their own conclusions, some will find his silence, or absence, disturbing. Nevertheless, a reader who is seeking fresh insights into

a variety of Canadian texts — ones that have already suffered from less sensitive readings — will find this collection a stimulating experience. □

THE BROWSER

In which we opine our dearth of dreams,
art, film scripts, and privacy, and recall all
patients of psychoanalysis since 1897

By MORRIS WOLFE

WHAT, PRAY TELL, does it say about us that *The Oxford Book of Dreams* (Oxford, 268 pages, \$20.95 cloth) contains not *one* Canadian Dream? (Most of the book's contents, we're told, derives from "the literatures of Europe and North America.") Is it a joke? It reminds me of *Encyclopedia Britannica's* entry on Canada, which invites readers to "see also Visual Arts, Western," and when one does so, there's *nothing* there on Canada. No dreams. No art. What is the world to make of us? And at the rate at which Oxford books of this and that roll off the presses, presumably we'll soon have an *Oxford Book of Oxford Books*. If so, I vote for the non-inclusion of Stephen Brook's *Oxford Book of Dreams*. The categories into which Brook divides and subdivides his material are hopelessly inadequate, and the whole project is made to seem far less interesting than I could have dreamed possible. Charles Dickens raises the most intriguing question in the book. He wonders whether writers of fiction ever dream of their own creations: "I never dream of any of my own characters," he writes, "and I feel it is so impossible that I would wager Scott never did of his, real as they are."

A PRIVATE PRESS is one whose owner does most or all of the work involved in the production of fine, non-commercial printed material. The owner usually supports his or her eating habit in some other way. The number of private presses in Canada grows each year. Now we have *Canadian Private Presses in Print*, 1984 edition, compiled by and available from Lyndsay Dobson Books, Box 285, Grimsby, Ontario L3M 4G5 (unpaginated, \$19.00 cloth). This handsomely produced catalogue (in an edition of 275 copies) lists books, broadsides, posters, pamphlets, and ephemera available from 28 private and institutional presses across Canada. One of the

bits of decoration in the catalogue is a statement of the Pen & Press's "House Rules for Punctuation: We set type as long as we can hold our breath, and then we put in a comma. When we yawn, we put in a semi-colon. And when we wish to light up our pipe, we start a new paragraph."

I RECENTLY received one of those form letters from a celebrity — this time Sylvia Tyson — urging me to send money in support of a worthy cause — this time World Literacy of Canada. "Illiteracy," writes Tyson, "is an open invitation to exploitation and oppression." But so too, of course, is literacy. As Jacques Ellul puts it in *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, "the fact of knowing how to read is nothing; the whole point is knowing *what* to read." Most of us aren't so much literate as semi-literate — literate enough to be exploited by the political and economic powers-that-be. Having delivered that brief sermon, I'll now put my cheque to World Literacy in the mail. The address is 692 Coxwell Avenue, Toronto, Ont., M4C 3B6.

BRIEF COMMENTS ON three recent films based on Canadian books: *The Wars*, *Never Cry Wolf*, and *Maria Chapdelaine*. In each case the script is something of a problem. *The Wars*, directed by Robin Phillips, works well, I suspect, only for those who have read the novel. Others will find it too elliptical. It's the case of a theatre director, accustomed to working with audiences familiar with the text, bringing that sensibility to film. As a result, Phillips overshoots his mark. At least so far as appealing to a wider audience is concerned. Maybe Timothy Findley was the wrong person to adapt his powerful novel to the screen. The trouble with *Never Cry Wolf* is that cinematographer Carroll Ballard con-

Sins of omission

tinually gets in the way of director Carroll Ballard. (The same thing is true to a lesser extent of his earlier film, *The Black Stallion*.) *Never Cry Wolf* is much too concerned with being pretty, and not enough concerned with being clear. I had to go back to Farley Mowat's book to make sure I understood a number of points about the wolves' behaviour. *Maria Chapdelaine* is probably the best of the three films, but its script had me worried for the first half hour or so when too much was going on, and I got confused. I wondered if director Gilles Carle had forgotten that it was Hémon he was directing and not Hébert (*Kamouraska*, say). But things finally settled down and, as usual, Carle provides us with a wonderful sense of time and place. The best-scripted Canadian film of 1983 may turn out to be *The Terry Fox Story*, a film that could have been awful, but is actually quite good.

NOT A DAY goes by now without a book or article or news item on the subject of computers and privacy. There recently appeared on page seven of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* an article titled "The right to privacy in computerized world." What seems increasingly clear is that the words "computer" and "privacy" are mutually exclusive; whether we like it or not, we're going to have to conform to the needs of the computer. The articles and reports on the subject all seem to be part of a softening-up process. We're slowly being encouraged to accept the view that concern about privacy is really just a silly hang-up. It's not something sophisticated people should worry about. As one friend put it when I expressed concern, "What have you got to hide, anyway?"

NO ONE INTERESTED in intellectual history and politics (to say nothing of intellectual backbiting) will want to miss Janet Malcolm's fine two-part article "Trouble in the Archives," which appeared in the December 5 and 12 issues of the *New Yorker*. Malcolm continues her exploration of psychoanalysis begun in *The Impossible Profession*. Two renegade scholars profiled by Malcolm argue that Freud made a crucial error in 1897 when he postulated the oedipal and castration complexes and wrongly discarded his Theory of Seduction. The sterility of the psychoanalytic movement today, these scholars suggest, is largely due to that early error. (All patients treated by Freudian analysts since the turn of the century will now have to be recalled.) The turmoil into which the psychoanalytic community has been thrown by these revelations is wondrous to behold. I'm sure we'll be hearing much more about this. □

HELL HATH no fury like a writer scorned, and Wayne Grady no doubt expresses the collective fury of the CanLit industry in being omitted from Michael Stapleton's *Cambridge Guide to English Literature* (December). What grounds does he have for his wrath? How much Canadian writing can be truly said to belong to English Literature? After all, perhaps Stephen Leacock and Lucy Maud Montgomery are the only Canadian literary writers to be popular outside their own country for more than a generation. No doubt Stapleton is not well-informed on Canadian writing; but then who outside of Canada is?

Grady touches on absurdity when he suggests that details of Shakespeariana might be profitably omitted in order to provide room for some contemporary Canadians. I suspect that even Grady is aware that Shakespeare is regarded throughout the world as the supreme writer of English Literature, so that even fairly minor characters in his plays are widely studied. When, in 350 years, Grady's writers are universally regarded as of the greatest literary importance, it will be time enough to complain of their omission from dictionaries of literature.

One fears that Grady's views represent a common assumption in Canadian letters, namely that many of our contemporary writers have reached an elevated plateau, where they merely need to wait for the tardy recognition of mankind. Effective criticism of leading contemporaries is, therefore, very rare, and quality suffers accordingly. CanLit studies have too much adopted the Hollywood "dream factory" approach to native endeavours, so that we stand now as far from the threshold of English Literature as ever.

Kevin McCabe
Hamilton, Ont.

I HAVE BEEN reading Wayne Grady's review of *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature* and rather enjoying his pique caused by that book's ignorance of Canadian writing. He must have been really annoyed, because he took the opportunity to lambaste the ignorance of other folks, too. But I wonder whether there might be a little uncomfortable irony here. Grady says Malcolm Lowry's poems "exist only in a

Canadian edition edited by Earle Birney."

Does that mean that the *act* of edition was Canadian because Birney is? Does it mean, by the way, that poems exist only when published? Does it mean that the Lowry poems I bought in 1962 in San Francisco are in a forged publication? I bought the book at City Lights Books. The book appears to be part of City Lights's Pocket Poet series. Was I duped? A further question: if the annoyed Wayne Grady is wrong about other people being wrong, is he wrong about his being right elsewhere in the review? Is there perhaps no such thing as *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature*?

Ed Prato
Vancouver

I REFER TO Wayne Grady's review of the new *Cambridge Guide to English Literature* in which he drew attention to errors in the entries about Canadian writers. If it would be any consolation, Grady should hunt up what British reviewers were unanimous in saying about the quality of this work. Suffice it to say that his annoyance becomes the mildest of leniency by comparison with theirs. The University Press of the Other Place brings out its revised *Companion to English Literature* next year (edited by Margaret Drabble); and I think one may safely expect the highest standard of reliability from that.

C.M. Chadwick
Representative, the British Council
Ottawa

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

Through the Eyes of a Cat: Irish Stories, by Séan Virgo, Sono Nis. Written over a brilliant undercoating of ancient history and myth, Virgo's allusive stories gain, not lose, by their ambiguity. We understand the character, the mood — if not the background — and the unsolved riddle enhances the metaphor.

NON-FICTION

Everest Canada: The Ultimate Challenge, by Al Burgess and Jim Palmer, Stoddart. An extraordinary record of the flawed, fatal, 1982 assault on Mount Everest, in which

the fortitude, tolerance, grace, and good humour of the high-altitude Sherpas by far outshines the unpleasantness of the strife-torn Canadian team.

CANWIT NO. 90

Anna K., a married woman, has a date with Count Vronsky. He moves away, and they never see each other again.

FIRST THERE WAS lite beer. Now Roz Chast, a cartoonist for the *New Yorker*, has come up with lite books — condensations that take all the calories out of heavyweight reading. (Chast's *Anna Karenina Lite* is reprinted, in its entirety, above.) Contestants are invited to compose similarly lightweight versions of well-known weighty tomes. The prize is \$25. Deadline: March 1. Address: CanWit No. 90, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 88

OUR REQUEST for postal-code place-names brought a flood of entries from NS to BC and points in between. The winner is Joan Rouse of Toronto for a list that includes:

- Eden, BC
- Picture, SK
- Astcrisk, NB
- Callio, PE
- Tee, NT

Honourable mentions:

- Edward, LB
 - Split, NS
 - Arsee, MB
 - Trudeau, PE
- David J. Paul, Lucan, Ont.

CLASSIFIED

Classified rates: \$8 per line (40 characters to the line). Deadline: first of the month for issue dated following month. Address: Books in Cahada Classified, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9. Phone: (416) 363-5426.

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- Sktoon, SK
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— Orest Cochkanoff, Halifax
- Wright, ON
- Metric, LB
— Mrs. G.E. Clerihew, Vancouver
- Hay, BC
- Tampo, NS
— Bernard Trotter, Kingston, Ont.
- Polarity, NS
— Joan McGrath, Toronto
- Bar, PQ
— Richard Parker, Liverpool, N.S.
- Kilo, LB
— Claire Anderson, Lucan, Ont.

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:

- Applied Handwriting, by Arnold Holtzman, The Greenwood Chase Press.
- As You Like It, by William Shakespeare, edited by Elliot Hayes and Michal Schonberg, CBC Enterprises.
- The Axe's Edge, by Kristjana Gunnars, Press Porcépic.
- The Bag Man, by Douglas C. Perry, Seal Books.
- The Basement Book, by Harris Mitchell, New Trend.
- The Biggest Modern Woman of the World, by Susan Swan, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Black Waters: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature, edited by Alberto Manguel, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Bobby Hull's Hockey Made Easy, Methuen.
- The Book of Canadians, by Carlotta Hacker, Hurig.
- A Bride in Three Acts, by Mary Melif, Guernica Editions.
- The British Between the Superpowers, 1945-50, by Elisabeth Barker, U of T Press.
- The Burning Cadillac, by Larry Towell, Black Moss Press.
- Byng of Vinay, by Jeffery Williams, Collins.
- Canada and the Nuclear Arms Race, edited by Ernie Regehr and Simon Rosenblum, James Lorimer.
- The Canadian Children's Annual, edited by Robert F. Nielsen, Potlatch.
- The Canadian Market Place, by Michael J. Trebilcock and Patricia McNeill, CBC Enterprises.
- The Cat in the Cathedral, by Bernadette Renaud, Press Porcépic.
- Chameleons, by Bill Shermbrucker, Talonbooks.
- Children of the First People, by Dorothy Haeger, Pulp Press.
- Collective Bargaining in the Public Service, Volumes 1 and 2, by Jacob Finkelman and Shirley B. Goldenberg, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Common Ground for the Canadian Common Market, by F.R. Flatters and R.G. Lipsey, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- The Communication Lab, by Rilla Clark, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
- Complicity, by Susan Gluckman, Véhicule Press.
- The Concrete Reserve, by Gail Grant, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Dancing in the Dark, by Joan Barfoot, Avon.
- A Doctor in the West, by Morris Gibson, Collins.
- Elahotan, the Corn Grower, D.C. Heath.
- Emilee Dyke: Health Care Pioneer, by Marion Royce, Dundurn Press.
- Excerpts from an Anonymous Life, by Donna O'Sullivan, Primary Press.
- Figures on A Wharf, by Wayne Tefs, Turnstone Press.
- First Secrets and Other Poems (bilingual edition), by Elodie Grandmont, translated by Daniel Sloate, Guernica Editions.
- The Flying 400, by Thomas G. Lynch, Nimbus.
- For Arts' Sake: A History of the Ontario Arts Council, by Roy MacSkimming, Ontario Arts Council.
- Forgone Conclusions?, by Donna O'Sullivan, Primary Press.
- Formaldehyde on Trial, by Lloyd Tatarny, James Lorimer.
- Goldenrod, by Peter Gault, Elephant Press.
- The Grand Duke of Moscow's Favourite Solo, by Robert Finch, Porcupine's Quill.
- The Great Code: The Bible and Literature, by Northrop Frye, Academic.
- Gyno Text, by Lola Lemire Tostevin, Underwhich Editions.
- Headless George and Other Tales Told in Canada, by Steven Freygood, Key Porter.
- Hillmother, by Clair Weissman Wilks, Exile.
- Hoblyn's Nativity, by Hugh Oliver, Evergreen Publications.
- Home Publishing, by George Bailey, The Information Company.
- Hope's Half-Life, by Raymond Filip, Véhicule Press.
- House of Dreams, by Robin Skelton, Porcupine's Quill.
- Ideas for Poetry, by Louis Dudek, Véhicule Press.
- Jack and Jill in Toronto, by Jones, Unfinished Monument Press.
- Knowledge Never Knew, by Steve McCaffery, Véhicule Press.
- The Kootenay Kidnapper, by Eric Wilson, Collins.
- Language & Nationhood: The Canadian Experience, by Ronald Wardhaugh, New Star Books.
- Larry Gardig's Power Plus Skating, London Power Skating School.
- Let's Die Living, by Vivienne Clarke, Simon & Pierre.
- Lives of the Princesses of Wales, by Mary Beacock Fryer, Dundurn.
- Macbeth, by William Shakespeare, edited by Elliot Hayes and Michal Schonberg, CBC Enterprises.
- Mathways for early childhood, by Jeanette L. Jones and Elizabeth Vernon, Copp Clark.
- The Medusa Head, by Mary Meigs, Talonbooks.
- Mirages, by Susanna Wald and Ludwig Zeller, Hounslow Press.
- Mistain, the Buffalo Hunter, D.C. Heath.
- The Modern State, by Frank Hartison, Black Rose Books.
- Murder on Locuston, by Howard Engel, Seal.
- Newfoundland Datebook, edited by Calvin Coish, Lifesyle Books.
- The New Profit Taker, by Don Abrams, Deneau.
- Ninastis: Haida World Heritage Site, by George F. MacDonald, UBC Press.
- Night Watch, by Terence Dickinson, Camden House.
- The Northern Naturalist, by E.O. Hohn, Lone Pine Publishing.
- A Nose Is for Smelling, by R.H. Wright, Douglas & McIntyre.
- Oceans from Space, by Frank E. Bunn et al., The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Ochechuk, the Caribou Hunter, D.C. Heath.
- The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, edited by William Toye, Oxford.
- Oyal, the Salmon Fisherman and Woodworker, D.C. Heath.
- Painted Ladies, by H.R. Percy, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Puritan Novels, by Richard Truhlar, The Front Press.
- Peggy, by North Caltahan, Cornwall Books.
- Perpetual Motion, by Graeme Gibson, Seal.
- Personal Development, by Jack Martin and Wyn Martin, Detselig.
- Private Security and Private Justice, by C.D. Shearing and P.C. Stenning, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Probable Fictions: Alcee Munro's Narrative Acts, edited by Louis K. Mackendrick, ECW Press.
- Production/ReProduction, Gurney, et al., A Space Public Fantasy: The Maggie T Poems, by C.H. Gervais, Sequel Press.
- Saga of the Wet Hens, by Jovette Marschessault, Talonbooks.
- The Scales of Justice, edited by George Jonas, CBC Enterprises.
- Seagull on Yonge Street, by Bill Bissett, Talonbooks.
- Seven Years at Sea, by Manuel Alvarez, New Star Books.
- Shulamis, by Shulamis Yelin, Véhicule Press.
- Smoky-Top: The Art and Times of Willie Seaweed, by Bill Holm, Douglas & McIntyre.
- So You Want to be a Helicopter Pilot, by Greg Bailey, The Information Company.
- Songs of the Indians, I & II, edited by John Robert Colombo, Oberon.
- Soup Time!, by Bob McNeil, Soup Time! Publishing.
- The Strangest Dream, by Merrily Weisbord, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Syntax, by Robin Blaser, Talonbooks.
- The Tall Soldier, by Manuel Alvarez, New Star Books.
- A Taste of Lebanon, by Mary Salloum, A Taste of Lebanon Enterprises.
- The Tempest, by William Shakespeare, edited by Elliot Hayes and Michal Schonberg, CBC Enterprises.
- Time Is, by Marg Melanson, Copp Clark Pitman.
- Tolerable Levels of Violence, by Robert G. Collins, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Toronto In Art, by Edith Firth, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
- Total Value Cook Book, by Muriel Brecksteadt, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Towers at the Edge of a World, by Virgil Burnett, Porcupine's Quill.
- Trade Employment and Adjustment, by Charles Pearson and Gerry Salembier, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Tremors, by Claire Weissman Wilks, Exile.
- The Trouble with Heroes, by Guy Vanderhaeghe, Borealis Press.
- Trust: The Greyson Affair, by Terrance Belford, James Lorimer.
- Understanding the Canadian Economy, by W. Trimble, Copp Clark Pitman.
- Voices From the Shadows, by Gwyneth Ferguson Matthews, The Women's Press.
- When Freedom Is Lost, by Paul Driven and Robert S. Trudeau, U of T Press.
- White Hood: Canada's Ku Klux Klan, by Julian Sher, New Star Books.
- White Tulips for Leau, by Elizabeth Veroczky, Simon & Pierre.
- Who's Who of Canadian Women, 1984, edited by Evelyn Davidson, Trans-Canada Press.
- Who's Who in Canadian Literature (1983-84), compiled and edited by Gordon Ripley and Anne Mercer, Reference Press.

COMING UP IN THE MARCH ISSUE OF

BOOKS IN CANADA

IN THE MODE

Computers and creativity: the state of the art

By Paul Wilson

CRITICS' CHOICE

A review of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*

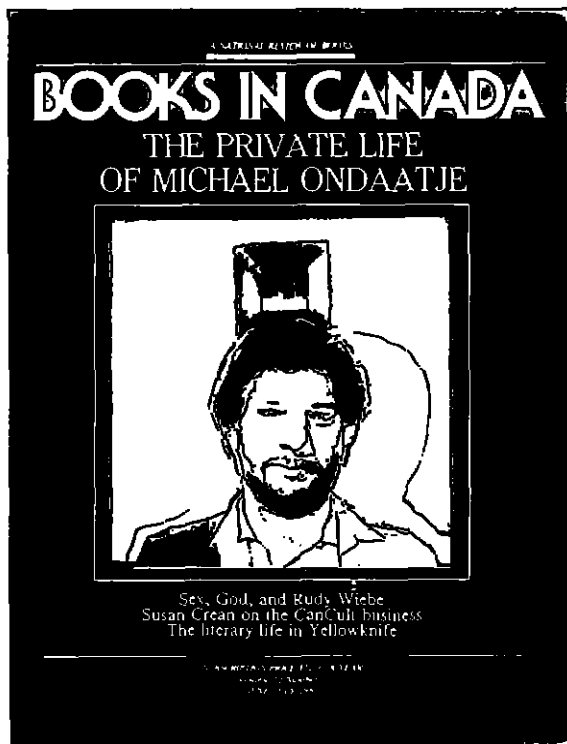
By Rupert Schieder

SOLE ATTRACTION

A review of David Helwig's novel, *The Only Son*

By George Galt

Plus reviews of new books by Kristjana Gunnars, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Bill Schermbucker, and an interview with Irving Layton



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