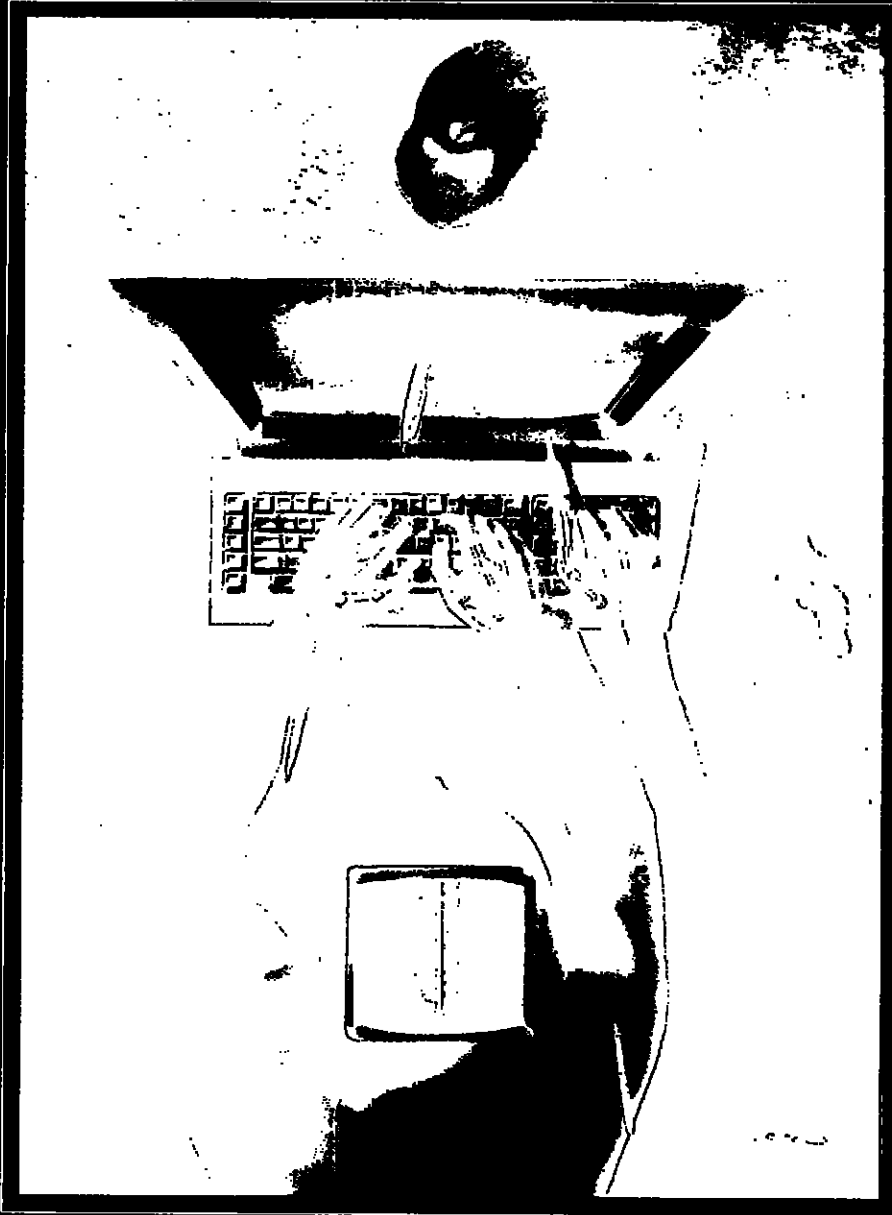


A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

BOOKS IN CANADA

COMPUTERS AND CREATIVITY



Kristjana Gunnars on Lorna Crozier
And an interview with Irving Layton

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Trivial pursuit: the short, happy life of a pioneer book review

Too little too soon

- (1) What was the average price of hard-cover books in Canada in 1949?
- (2) What Toronto book store reported selling 28 tons of books in two weeks early in 1950?
- (3) When and where did Harlequin print its first title in Canada?
- (4) Who published the first simultaneous hardcover and paperback editions of a new title, and what was the title?
- (5) How much did Macmillan charge for a handsome two-volume gift edition of *Don Quixote*, bound in buckram, stamped in gold, and boxed, in time for Christmas 1949?
- (6) In which two Canadian cities did groups of local businessmen get together to sponsor a retail book shop for the benefit of their communities?
- (7) What author received a brief, five-line obituary in *BOOKS in review* following his death in an English hospital on January 21, 1950?

ANSWERS TO THE above questions can be found in *BOOKS in review*, published by Maclean-Hunter between December, 1949, and April, 1950 — just four issues — and edited by one Robert R. Robinson and his bride of less than a year, the former Marian C. Sabine, erstwhile advertising and promotion manager of McClelland & Stewart, Toronto. The answers will also be found at the end of this article — which is just as well, since in all probability the only extant copies of this short-lived tabloid are on yellowed, crumbling newsprint in our private files.

BOOKS in review of 35 years ago was a noble (some said) experiment that died of advertising anemia. It started life lustily enough with an initial circulation of 50,000 across Canada, but this was more than somewhat artificial, comprising as it did a free distribution list made up of subscribers to the *Financial Post* and *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, two other Maclean-Hunter periodicals. Issue by issue, however, it attracted its own subscribers at the bargain rate, even in 1950 terms, of \$2 per year, \$3 for two years. What it failed to attract was the month-by-month advertising support of Canada's book publishers at \$500 per

page. Typically, they used it in their two big seasons, December and April, but we couldn't survive the other 10 months of the year.

There were many supporters of the venture among the cognoscenti, but we couldn't pay our way with fine words and noble sentiments. Encouraging letters came from such literary lights of the day as Thomas B. Costain, Hugh MacLennan, Merrill Denison, and others. MacLennan wrote: "The initial copy of *BOOKS in review* excelled my expectations of it. I can't say too emphatically how necessary it is, or what a brilliant idea it is. At a moment when the Massey Commission is drawing crowds to their hearings, you have come up with a practical measure which, if it succeeds, will be worth at least a quarter of anything the whole Royal Commission can hope to accomplish. . . ."

What was said back at Maclean-Hunter when they tallied up the red ink



Hugh MacLennan, 1949

was not at all like that. Indeed, there was one unforgettable final session in the office of then president Donald Hunter, who ended it all with the words, "But nobody reads books — I don't!"

However, there were some fine moments while it lasted.

For example, we published a lead article by Hugh MacLennan (then known for only three novels — *Barometer Ris-*

ing, Two Solitudes, and The Precipice), in which he discussed "Why a Canadian residence is imperative for someone like me." His words still carry an important message for writers:

While it is true that the main task of the novelist is to present human behaviour, while a novelist is good or bad in proportion to the profundity of his insights into experience and his truth in portraying it, it is also true that no human experience can be lived in a vacuum. The essence of any character is to be found in his behaviour within the society where he lives, moves, and acts. Individual characters dominate all novels, but no matter how closely your eyes are riveted on their actions, these leading individuals are never more than half the book. The other half is background; it is the society in which the characters of the story live It is this fact more than any other which makes it necessary for novelists to write of the backgrounds in which they have grown up Our intuitions are developed early in life. So is our sense of imagery and the direction of our style. If a novelist writes of a country other than his own, he throws away an advantage which has come to him without search and training It is not too much to say that he discards one of the most important parts of his own personality

MacLennan concluded that the pioneering days of serious Canadian fiction were nearly over in 1949-50:

Some day, perhaps some day fairly soon, a Canadian novel will be published which will be true and accurate without any of our old and necessary self-consciousness. If such a book achieves success abroad, our growing pains will be over and the flood gates will be opened wide. Canadian books will be accepted then as part of the literature of the world, not as regional curiosities or the tentative gropings of a people still colonial. It is because I have real hope that this time will soon arrive that I find it exciting to be a writer in Canada during these days of pioneering.

This question of Canadianism was very much to the fore in writing talk of that era, and our *BOOKS in review* No. 2 featured a piece by George Albert Glay (then known as the author of *Gina*, living in Duncan, B.C. and publishing in New York, and later editorial manager

SOUNDS OF SPRING! From Caedmon

WHOEVER HEARD OF A FIRD?

By Othello Bach

Read by Joel Grey

ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY

By Judith Viorst

Read by Blythe Danner

DOMINIC

By William Steig

Read by Pat Carroll

STREGA NONA MAGIC LESSONS AND OTHER TOMI de PAOLA STORIES

By Tomi De Paola

Read by Tammy Grimes

DINOSAUR ROCK

Read by Michele Valeri,

Michael Stein

BILLY AND BLAZE

By Clarence W. Anderson

Read by David Cassidy

HONEY I LOVE

Read by the author

Eloise Greenfield

WINNIE THE POOH AND CHRISTOPHER ROBIN

By A. A. Milne

Read by Carol Channing

THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

Read by the author

Paula Danziger

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Read by Ben Kingsley

Music by Ravi Shankar

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for Harlequin, Toronto). Here is how he began:

The skirmishes are at an end and the battle is about to be joined in deadly earnest. It promises to be bloody. On one side are those who insist that a writer in Canada must write only of things Canadian; that his thoughts must never linger in other lands; and that he must beat his chest and proclaim his Canadianism to the world. Across the field are the exponents of the keep-it-secret school of thought who firmly believe that to admit Canadian nationality is to place oneself among the little people and the ineffectual; who think there is little assistance and no sympathy for the writer in Canada and insist that a reputation must be made elsewhere. And the entire struggle is confused by Canadian critics and publishers who are unsure of their proper position and constantly switch sides

Let's treat all books, Canadian and otherwise, exactly alike; on their merits as books and not as national sacred cows. But on the other hand let's not kick them merely because they are Canadian Books are saleable merchandise and selling them is a business proposition, not a matter of national pride. We are not concerned with the ancestry of a cigarette manufacturer when we purchase his product but with the attributes of the product itself. Let's buy our books that way

A further indication of where Canadian writing stood can be found in another *BOOKS in review* article in the December, 1949, issue. This, by Albertaborn, New York-residing Robert Christie, whose first novel, *Inherit the Night* had just been published by Farrar, Straus:

Though authorship has always been a lonely and essentially personal art, the practice and pleasure and despair of the very few, it appears to the sympathetic observer that the Canadian writer is the most isolated literary worker imaginable. In a country in which the frontier virtues are still largely the virtues, the man with the back and the axe can look down on his brother with the pen. The question still remains: But what can you do? The writer is too often made to feel that he is a luxury which no self-respecting community can afford

And one final quote from 35 years ago, by William Arthur Deacon, then literary editor of the *Globe and Mail*. We asked him for a few hundred well chosen words about what he considered to be the elements of a satisfying novel; this is how he ended his contribution:

Every great novel carries deep significance of some kind, and this involves choice of subject-matter that can logically be elevated to supreme importance in individual lives; and novels must be rounded out to clear conclusions. The slab-of-life narrative, beginning and ending nowhere in particular,

and without definite meaning, is bad construction that leaves the impression of an author, both lazy and ignorant, who has nothing to say worth shaping into an effective form, capable of moving the reader.

We had other notable contributors with noteworthy comments in our first four issues, of course, but the above may be sufficient to give the flavour of the product, and also to reveal the temper of the times in Canadian writing and publishing. We even had a humorous piece by Ernest Buckler long before he began winning honours for his distinguished prose. He was identified in our footnote simply as "a magazine writer of some note, appearing in such periodicals as *Maclean's*, *Saturday Night*, and *Esquire*." And, yes, our March, 1950, issue presented the work of a woman writer, Nancy Jones, whose *For Goodness' Sake* had run through three printings by the Ryerson Press. We also carried 94 book reviews in our four issues: our reviewers included Ralph Allen, Pierre Berton, John Clare, Leslie Hannon, Adam Marshall, Floyd Chalmers, and even the distinguished Elizabethan authority Dr. Malcolm Wallace (commenting on *Shakespeare* by Ivor Brown).

It was fun while it lasted, but it didn't last long enough. Perhaps it was a few years ahead of its time.

ANSWERS:

- (1) Overall average price was \$3.25 — English publishers' average \$2.75; Canadian \$2.95; American \$3.95.
- (2) Coles at Yonge and Charles Streets early in 1950 promoted books by the pound — 29¢ a pound, five pounds for \$1. Mostly very old and utterly unreadable remainders, but cheap.
- (3) In Winnipeg in June, 1949. Harlequin soon reported that they were adding four titles per month and were gearing up "for big scale national distribution."
- (4) Simon and Schuster, New York, brought out *The Cardinal* by Henry Morton Robinson in hardcover at \$3.50, and in paperback at \$1.35. That was in 1950, and the book had 579 well-produced pages.
- (5) \$12.50 — "Saluted by critics as one of the greatest literary translations of our day, by Samuel Putnam."
- (6) In Moncton, N.B. (The Book Shop Ltd., run by Elva Myles, opened in 1949 on Main Street), and in Halifax (The Book Room Ltd. in the old Chronicle Building, re-established by the group with Howard Bendelier as manager, a year after he had found it necessary to close his original Halifax Book Room).
- (7) Eric Blair, otherwise known as George Orwell.

— ROBERT R. ROBINSON

A readable feast

AS BEFITS A representative of the Department of National Revenue, the Examiner of Publications was stern when he wrote John Glassco on April 30, 1946: "I have given very careful and earnest consideration to your request for a special permit to import Burton's translation of 'The Arabian Nights.' While I can quite appreciate your desire to build up your library, I do not think it is possible for the Department to agree to individual shipments of a book on the prohibited list."

As usual, Glassco had the last laugh, for he did import *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*. It — along with 525 other books, 88 periodicals, and hundreds of printed and hand-written items — is currently being offered for sale by The Word Bookshop in Montreal. The vendor, Adrian King-Edwards, calls it "a personal and working library." It includes books Glassco published under his own name as well as those he wrote under a variety of pseudonyms. Conspicuous are the "clean" and "dirty" versions of the novel commonly known as *Harriet Marwood, Governess*, but perhaps the most fetching item is a little paperback called *The Temple of Pederasty* (Hanover House, 1970).

The series of tales, which deals with the seldom-platonic relationship of 17th-century saumurai warlords and their page-boys, purports to be Dr. Hideki Okada's translation from the Japanese of Ihara Saikaku, with an introduction by Glassco. Actually, it's entirely Glassco's work; the author even specified the lurid illustrations executed by Philip Core, which have titles such as "The Three Youths Spent the Night in Love Play." Tucked into his copy are blurbs by George Bowering, Doug Fetherling, and Margaret Atwood, collected by Glassco for a prospective second edition. Atwood's reads: "John Glassco's new edition of the Japanese classic, *The Temple of Pederasty*, blends erudition with elegance and sustains the reader's interest to the end; it is handled with this celebrated editor's habitual grace."

Again Glassco had a tussle with the authorities, and again he triumphed. A photocopied letter from the customs and excise office in Granby, Que., informed him on April 21, 1970, that the copies of *Temple* mailed to him from his publishers in North Hollywood were "submitted to our department in Ottawa and classified as immoral." The Public Archives of Canada now is home to a copy of the book, but it came from the

sale of Glassco papers, not from a fellow government agency.

The 29 feet of shelf space taken up by Glassco's library includes several yards of pornography, for Glassco was a scholar of the subject as well as a practitioner. Yet in some respects the pornography is the least interesting part of the collection; it leans heavily to the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, as well as to much effluvia from Olympia Press in Paris, the first publisher of *Harriet Marwood*. But lovers of the obscure would adore *A Private Anthropological Cabinet of the Hermaphrodite*, published in New York by the Erotica Biblion Society, and *Amatory Episodes in the Life of Sir Clifford North and Others* (Cosmopolitan Bibliophilists Society of Alexandria, 1900-1901).

Glassco's interest in riding crops came honestly: the library also covers his activities as founder, director, and finally honorary chairman of the Foster Horse Show. In a charming note written for the ninth annual show, held in Foster, Que., in 1959, Glassco tells how one July Sunday afternoon he, his long-time friend Graeme Taylor, and a neighbour "were exercising their horses in Mr. Glassco's meadow beside the Waterloo-Knowlton highway. At that time a small group of riders from Waterloo happened to pass by. They were welcomed into the meadow and the riders and drivers put on a small performance for their own amusement. The colour and quality of the display was so remarkable that passing automobiles stopped along the roadside to watch, and as the number of spectators grew to



fifty or more, Mrs. Hazel Rhicard gathered the small donations that were laughingly offered by them, and these (amounting to \$9.14) were turned over to the local church. From this chance beginning the Foster Horse Show originated . . . a gathering of friends from everywhere, united in their love of horses and their dedication to the principle of disinterested charity."

Among the many horsy items the library contains are the minutes of a show committee meeting: "There was a discussion regarding the wet spot at the lower end of the track and Roland Desourdy suggested that a load of gravel might fix it, and this was left in the hands of Buffy Glassco."

Glassco had his hands full, for at about the same time he was almost single-handedly bringing French-Canadian poetry to the attention of the English-speaking public. Many signed presentation copies from Québécois authors testify to his efforts: Yves Préfontaine, inscribing his *Débâcle Suivi de L'Orée des Travaux*, may be typical: "Pour Buffy, qui fit plus pour la compréhension de l'âme québécoise, par la saisie de sa poésie, que tous les politiciens réunis. . . ." Several inscribed books came Glassco's way from poet Gérald Godin, who later became the Parti Québécois minister responsible for administering the language laws. In *Les Cantoliques*, Godin calls Glassco "ministre plénipotentiaire de la poésie québécoise auprès le monde anglophone, et mon amitié en poésie." A nice irony here, because Glassco once told me that in tune with the language legislation, Foster was to be renamed St. Jean-de-Foster. Godin was going to canonize him!

Godin was not the only politician to favour him with a book. Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau commemorated a Glassco visit to his restaurant, Le Vaisseau D'Or (a luxurious dining spot that later failed) by giving him *Émile Nelligan* by Paul Wyczinski: "cet exemplaire est affect à un grand poète de 20e siècle, John Glassco, avec mes sentiments les plus cordiaux. . . ." Another irony, because Glassco held Drapeau responsible for the mega-projects that were destroying Montreal's character.

There are tributes also from such fellow translators as F.R. Scott ("with gratitude for . . . leadership in this art") and Sheila Fischman. In the copy of Roch Carrier's *They Won't Demolish Me*, which she translated, Fischman writes, "to the most gorgeous Glassco of all — see p. 68." The relevant passage, which describes a wrestling tag-team, announces: "On my right, from Canada, weighing 609, the undisputed Canadian champions from one Atlantic to the other: The Gorgeous Glasscos."

Glassco was a distinguished poet, and his library witnesses the respect and affection such friends as A.J.M. Smith and Ralph Gustafson felt for him. Writing only a month before Glassco died, Gustafson refers to Smith's recent death, and tells his friend how his mind goes back to the afternoon Smith "drove me (recklessly) to Cowansville

and we stopped off at your farmhouse and I first met you who wrote poetry." A lot of Canadian literary history is packed into that sentence. Some dedications even hint at the supernatural. Inside a copy of Malcolm Lowry's *Selected Poems* Earle Birney, who edited the volume, writes, "Malc would have wished to sign this to you and so I do it for him 'God bless' Malcolm Lowry via Earle."

For someone so hermetic, Glassco was remarkably accessible to the young writers who hopefully sent him their new slim volumes. To Raymond Fraser (*Poems for the Miramichi*) he wrote: "It is the whole personality revealed that is most attractive. You seem so delightfully tired!" To me (*In the Wake Of*) he noted "with some small dismay you turned the weighty iambs of Garneau's Spleen into hoppity-hop dactyls: come, come" Sometimes he was less polite, at least on paper (he was never less than polite in person). To a translator who had sent his latest book for comment, Glassco fired both barrels: "I'm afraid that they're wholly and irremediably bad. I have never in my life read such slipshod and illiterate travesties of any French text. In my opinion, the publication of this book is a disgrace to the practice of literary translation in Canada. Sorry." Glassco

was too kind to post the letter.

Among his papers are many reminders of the people and places he wrote about in *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, which Malcolm Cowley has called "the liveliest and most candid memoir of Paris in the '20s and '30s." In a copy of *This Quarter* (Spring 1929) Glassco is identified as "a Canadian, 19 years old, educated at McGill University, Montreal. This is his first appearance in print. He is now in Paris." The first appearance — not strictly accurate: he had earlier written for McGill student publications — was "Extracts from an Autobiography," the genesis of *Memoirs*.

In researching Glassco's works I've learned that most of *Memoirs* was written not in the early 1930s, as the book states, but relatively near its publication date of 1970. In any case the library, like the book, takes us back to those Paris days: signatures of Graeme Taylor, Glassco's boon companion, and Kay Boyle ("Diana Tree" in *Memoirs*), briefly his girl-friend; a published tribute Glassco wrote in 1972 for Djuna Barnes on her 80th birthday: "I met you only once, in Paris in 1928, at the Falstaff Bar on the rue du Montparnasse, and (I was then seventeen) was so awed as to be speechless." (In *Memoirs*, Glassco recovered his speech to give his impres-

sions of "Willa Torrance.") In the tribute he calls Barnes "the greatest and most impassioned anatomist of sexual infatuation and jealousy since Proust."

A library is a kind of memorial, and mortality intrudes into the liveliness: books with inscriptions to Glassco's first wife, Elma von Colmar, the ballerina who, suffering from chronic schizophrenia, starved herself to death; a copy of M.B. Ellis's *De Saint-Denys Garneau: Art et Realisme Suivi d'un Petit Dictionnaire Poétique*, purloined from the library of the Royal Edward Laurentian Hospital, Ste. Agathe des Mouts. Some connections: Garneau, like Glassco, died of a heart attack; the hospital was where the latter convalesced from tuberculosis and wrote one of his most famous poems, "For Cora Lightbody, R.N."

Glassco was first of all a lyric poet. (Some of his books include extensive revisions to published poems.) Writing to Stephen Morrissey, who had sent a new collection, *The Trees of Unknowing*, he praises how the author records "glimpses of absolute reality with insight, clarity and quietness." The same may be said of Glassco's own poetry. The "personal and working library" also demonstrates that he was a man of absolute disinterested civility.

— FRASER SUTHERLAND

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IN THE MODE

Can personal computers really help people to write better? Or are they merely shortcuts in the technology of publishing?

By PAUL WILSON

LAST AUGUST I bought a word processor, which was in fact a microcomputer outfitted with a special set of programs that allowed me to use it as a souped-up typewriter. It was not cheap: most good word processing systems cost several times more than a good electric typewriter, but in my line of work — translating and writing — there were strong practical considerations in favour of getting one. I was just putting the final polish on my translation of a 900-page novel that had gone through a total of four retypings, two of which I did myself. The combined expense of that work — most of it mindless drudgery — could have paid for a machine that could eliminate that kind of repetition forever. So despite some misgivings, I took the plunge.

Once I'd bought the thing, I realized that I had also purchased entry into the mysterious world of computer technology. Everyone knows this world exists, just as everyone knows it is making big changes, analagous to those brought about by the internal combustion engine and the telephone. But most of the technology is invisible and hard to understand without some practical, "hands on" experience of it.

My first big discovery was that I had completely misunderstood the term "computer literacy." I had thought it was something you could achieve by reading books, and so I read a lot about computers before finally buying one. But now I realized that almost nothing of this had really sunk in, and it was only after some time with the machine that I gradually began to grasp, or at least was better able to conceptualize, what was going on.

Part of it was becoming familiar with the strange terminology. Expressions like "booting up," "saving to disc," "scrolling," "swapping," and "buffer" slowly began to make sense. Far from getting in the way of understanding, as they had seemed to do when I first read the manuals, they were, I now realized, vivid metaphors that help one to visualize invis-

ible operations. I was especially intrigued by the notion of "scrolling" the text through the monitor or "window." It was like a direct link back to a pre-book culture, and it made me feel a strong, if somewhat improbable, sense of continuity with the scribes of ancient Alexandria.

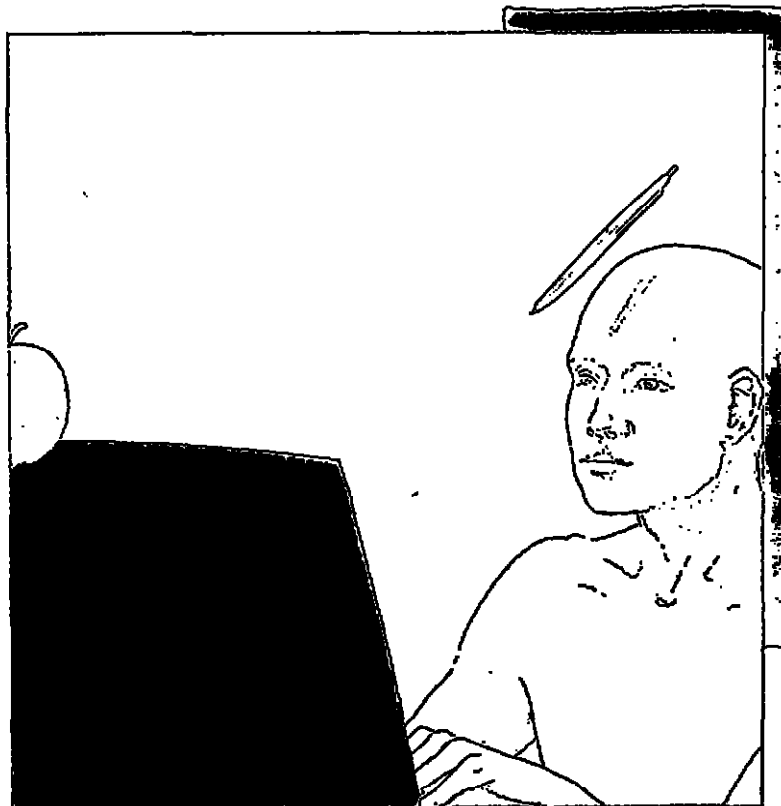
(Some time later, I learned in *The Telidon Book* (1981), edited by Dave Godfrey and Ernest Chang, that "computer literacy" really means the ability to write computer programs using one of the many "assembly languages" that translate the programmer's intentions into instructions the computer —

with its simple, binary mind — can understand and execute. So once more, I feel like an illiterate, but at least now I have a more intelligent idea of what it is I don't know how to do.)

A lot of computer jargon has come into our everyday speech, and this is a sure sign of its vigour, its usefulness, and its appeal to people's ears. Two of the most familiar expressions are "hard" and "soft," and in a way they point straight to the heart of the new technology. Computers are essentially a "soft" or malleable technology. They can be made to receive, store, manipulate, organize (the French word for computer is "ordinateur"), and transfer information, but the machine itself is inert, dumb, and

useless until it is configured to operate in a certain way by the appropriate "software" and given specific instructions by the user. The only limits to its potential are in the "hardware" — that is, in the design and capacity of the chips, the other electronic parts, and the peripheral devices that constitute the physical apparatus — and in the imagination and intelligence of those who design and use the software.

This is where the analogy with a typewriter breaks down. Suppose a writer buys a computer to write a book. Very quickly, he will discover that in addition to making the everyday chores of writing and revising much easier, the computer can



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also be used to connect him, via the telephone, to what are called data bases, essentially electronic libraries where he can search for the information he needs. When he finds it, he can then "download" the data into his computer and transfer it to his own data base, which he stores on floppy discs. Moreover, he can "log on" to a network of other computer users, find those who share his professional and personal interests, and use the computer to trade information, compare notes, and exchange letters. Finally, when the book is finished, he can send the "manuscript" electronically to a publisher. And all this has been accomplished with the help of billions of tiny, angelic bits of electricity dancing endlessly variable quadrilles on the head of a microchip. It is the variability of that dance that is the key.

Of course, even if you only use the microcomputer to write with, it is still a very useful tool. And that was my second discovery: although personal computers may have a power that is awesome to contemplate (according to *Scientific American*, if the aircraft industry had evolved as spectacularly as computers have over the past 25 years, a Boeing 767 today would cost \$500 and could fly around the world in 20 minutes on five gallons of fuel), and they may be surrounded by an aura of mystic potential for transforming the world, but basically they're just a tool.

As the strengths and limitations of this tool became clearer to me, I began to see that for all the extravagant claims being made, the computer had not really supplanted the "older" technology at all. My typewriter was still indispensable for addressing envelopes, filling out forms, and writing short letters, and pen and paper were still as useful as ever for taking notes and editing. Looking up words in the dictionary was often faster, and always more interesting, than "accessing" the computer's spelling program, as useful as that may be. And you can't read a floppy disc on the subway, at least not yet. So in fact, we are living in a continuity of technologies that stretch from the space age all the way back to neolithic times, if not beyond. To put it another way, John Henry may have died trying to beat the steam drill, but his nine-pound hammer is still on sale at the corner hardware store. In that sense, at least, I have stopped thinking of the computer as a threat.

THE THIRD THING owning a computer made me realize was how much of what the average layperson sees and reads about computers is hype, or at least hyperbole. Like so many important inventions, the computer is still very much a technology in search of new applications, and this is especially true of personal computers, which in the past three years have become a multi-billion dollar growth industry. This marketplace is teeming with contenders, from corporate colossi like IBM — which has only recently entered the personal computer sweepstakes — to tiny, hole-in-the-wall operations manufacturing what are sometimes called clones, computers cobbled together from spare parts to run on software meant for the established makes. In addition, there is a thriving cottage industry producing hundreds of thousands of programs and hardware "enhancements" to expand the capacity of existing computers. Each day, as computers become more powerful and versatile, and as the radius of the market extends beyond buffs, fanatics, and serious, informed users, the claims become more extravagant and less precise. In this situation the buyer, more than ever before, had best beware.

A good index of the expanding computer market, although it is always at least six months out of date, can be found in every book store. Computer books are rapidly becoming as popular as self-help books, to which they bear a strong resemblance. Apart from a few small sub-groups, like primers for children or popular studies of computer crime, the books fall into two broad categories that in turn reflect two important

realities in the marketplace. The smaller category, for non-users who are curious and anxious about computers, is full of titles like *How to Cope with Computers*, *How to Buy (and Survive) Your First Computer*, or *The Joy of Computers*, which may be one of the first coffee-table books of the new genre. The second and by far the larger group consists of books for people who already own computers but can't understand the manuals that go with them (computer instruction books are notoriously "user-hostile" — in other words, incomprehensible) or for people who want to do more with their computer than they know how to do now. My favourite

title in the latter sub-group is *Computer Programming for the Complete Idiot*. And finally, in a class by themselves, are the voices in the wilderness, the critics and dissenters, weighing in with titles like *Machine Takeover* and *Electronic Nightmare*.

One area in which computers have a natural application that needs little hyping is in the publishing industry itself. Most publishers now take advantage of some form of microtechnology, to handle bookkeeping and inventory, for example, but still have their books typeset and printed by outside firms who, of course, are usually equipped with computerized facilities. Publishers continue to deal with manuscripts in the

Zipperheads, open kimonos, and hot buttons

LIKE ANY OTHER major innovation, computers have given us a whole fleet of expressions that have come free of their moorings in high-tech and drifted into everyday use. When a woman in a *New Yorker* cartoon says: "I'm sorry, Harry can't come to the phone right now, he's just entered the vacation mode" (while Harry lies blissed out under a sun-umbrella), she is talking computerese. The world that produced computers is not a single entity, but a complex structure of interlocking and overlapping worlds, all sharing the same meta-jargon, but each with its own peculiar dialect, its own sense of humour, its own attitudes and its own point of view. The expressions below, and their definitions, are selected from a dictionary circulating unofficially inside the corporate sector of the computer world. It was put together by an anonymous compiler, who surely deserves an honorary degree in linguistics:

Bells and whistles: Frills added to a product to make it more exciting without making it much better.

Cold prickles: A nagging suspicion that somewhere you have overlooked something critical, and will be punished for it. See Warm Fuzzies.

Creationism: The principle that large systems are created from thin air in a single step. A religious belief devoutly held by many managers. See Evolution.

Dog and pony show: A presentation designed to (over) impress. Implies a certain amount of cynicism and deception, and contempt for the audience.

Evolution: The process of imple-

menting a large system by incremental improvements to a simple system. No other process has ever been known to work.

Glitch: A pulse that is less than or equal to 50 ns in duration. It cannot be observed and is therefore used as a perfect scapegoat to describe all hardware failures in electronic equipment. It is claimed that all glitches are caused by lightning strikes (or cosmic rays) and therefore are unavoidable and inevitable.

Hot button: Term currently of great interest to someone who matters (i.e. some big shot). Implies impermanence, and some contempt. The hot button of today is likely to be of only passing interest tomorrow. Current examples: "Usability," "Quality."

Net it out: Term used (mostly by managers) to denote a strong desire to bypass understanding in favour of a simplistic explanation. As in, "I don't want to understand all the reasoning behind it, just net it out for me."

Open kimono: 1. To reveal everything to someone. Once you have gone open kimono, you have nothing more to hide. 2. To give someone a tantalizing glimpse of a project, just enough to get him interested but not enough to give any secrets away.

Paged out: Not paying attention, distracted. "What did you say? I'm sorry, I was paged out."

Pony: Something good that may come out of a bad situation. Refers to an apocryphal story about the hopelessly optimistic boy who was given a barnful of horse manure for his birthday. He immediately

grabbed a shovel and started to dig, while chanting, "There must be a pony in here somewhere."

Reinvent the wheel: A derogatory phrase used to discourage someone from writing a system correctly now that he has become familiar, through experience, with what should have been done in the past.

Skrog: Also Skrag. To destroy irrevocably without hope of restoration, as in "I skrogged my A-disc today."

Think small: Hardware/software test strategy. The technique is to exercise the most primitive function to prove to yourself it works before trying more complex (and presumably failing) functions. When people forget this basic strategy, they are reminded to "think small."

Verbage: A term used to refer to any kind of documentation. The similarity of this word to "garbage" does not seem accidental. As in, "That user's manual sure has a lot of verbage in it."

Wall follower: A simpleton. An early robot-building contest that involved running a maze was won by a mechanism that sensed and followed the right-hand wall. It was called Harvey Wallbanger. Robots that tried to learn as they travelled the maze did not do as well.

Warm fuzzies: The kind of feeling you are alleged to get when you think you are proceeding in the right direction, or when you are treated well by your boss. It is usually of short duration and is succeeded by Cold Pricklies.

Zipperhead: One who has a closed mind. □

traditional "hard" way, and very few as yet are equipped to receive and deal with "soft," or electronic, manuscripts.

One remarkable exception is Coach House Press in Toronto, which is the most advanced publisher in the country in terms of its in-house use of computers, and in the way it helps authors (and other publishers) to take advantage of the new microtechnology. "The whole structure of publishing is bogged down in repetition," says Stan Bevington, who runs Coach House. Traditionally, authors submit typescripts of their work on paper — work they may already have retyped several times. The publishers will then edit it and have it typeset (which in effect means typing it again) and printed. It is a time-consuming and therefore costly operation. With the new technology most of those steps can be eliminated.

Bevington begins by distinguishing between word processing, which is what the author does at his computer, and text processing, which is what the publisher does with the text when he gets it. The more an author can actually do at his own console, the less a publisher has to do, and therefore Bevington encourages authors to get themselves the most powerful system they can afford, or to "log into" a larger system that makes available complex word processing programs like the UNIX Writer's Workbench software. The point of all this is to produce what are called "machine-independent text files," which means a piece of writing coded into a string of electronic signals that can be transmitted by telephone and "read" by another computer, regardless of the kind of software or hardware used to "generate" the text in the first place.

AT THIS POINT a brief excursion into the history of word processing might be appropriate. In order to design a program allowing people to write on a computer, programmers first had to analyze the act of writing, not from a psychological but

rather from a functional point of view. They distinguished two separable processes: the "creation" or writing of the text itself, which coincides with entering the text into the computer's memory via the keyboard, and the "formatting" of the text, which means organizing it into paragraphs and pages so that when it is sent out of the computer to a printing device it will appear on the page the way the author intended. When you write with a pen or a typewriter, you "create" and "format" at the same time without ever thinking about it. This is impossible with a word processor, because what you are actually "creating" when you type is just a string of electrical signals that have a fixed sequence, but no fixed format.

Starting from this point, the creators of commercial word processing programs proceeded in two different directions. The first approach assumed that the act of "creation" would be enhanced if the writer didn't have to worry about formatting while he was entering his text. This is the thinking behind programs like Perfect Writer or Scribe, which are often favoured by scholars and professional writers because they make dealing with longer texts much easier. What you type with such programs appears on the screen as a single-spaced continuous text broken into paragraphs but not pages. The formatting is accomplished by a separate program when the text is ready to print.

The other approach — and one that is becoming more and more common as "user-friendliness" becomes the dominant buzz-word — is to create a program that comes as close as possible to reuniting the two processes, thus making the sensation of working with a word processor as close as possible to that of traditional typing. Such programs — the popular Wordstar is one of them — are sometimes called "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" programs. All this means is that the program shows you on the monitor, as you write, a facsimile of

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what the text will look like when it is printed out. This has obvious advantages for short documents like letters or memos, but there are hidden disadvantages, particularly when the text is intended for publication and will very likely be formatted in quite a different way by someone else.

The best solution of all, according to Bevington, is something called generic coding. This means that instead of using the commands supplied by his particular program to format the text, the writer simply identifies separate literary elements, like chapters, sections, subsections, paragraphs, and so on, by inserting bracketed instructions in English at the appropriate places in the text. Thus his text can be sent electronically to any computer that recognizes standard alphanumeric character codes and be read by it. Such files are called "machine-independent" because they can be moved with ease between any computers that recognize the code. A publisher using this system can receive electronic manuscripts "generated" on a wide variety of machines.

When they receive the text, the people at Coach House can edit it, run it through programs that check spelling, format it, typeset it, proofread it, and even lay it out electronically, thus eliminating another stage that Bevington feels is wasteful — the "camera-ready" stage, when the typeset text is pasted onto boards and photographed before the printing plates are made. Thus a book may go from first draft to final printing without ever having to be retyped, since changes can be made electronically at any stage.

The point of all this sophistication, according to Bevington, is not just to save money, but to encourage variety and creativity. If publishing costs can be reduced, more books in smaller initial print runs can be published for less money, and more authors can get their books into circulation. The Coach House Press operation is an excellent demonstration of how a technology popularly perceived as a threatening instrument of uniformity and centralization can be turned around and used creatively to stimulate and encourage exactly the opposite qualities.

Another publishing house that makes use of advanced computer technology, though not to the same extent as Coach House, is Press Porcépic in Victoria, which has a software publishing arm called Softwords, run by writer and poet Dave Godfrey, who is the director of research. Godfrey shares many of Coach House's approaches and has swapped expertise with them, but he is more interested in the potential of software itself than he is in applying it specifically to book publishing. "For some things, the book is not really super-duper," Godfrey says. "You really need books, data bases, computerized learning, and networks. I don't think books will be replaced by computers, but you're going to get a much richer environment in which print material has a somewhat different role than it does now. The real revolution is going to come from improved communications networks and large data bases."

One of the most innovative publishing projects in the country is soon to come off the drawing board: an all-electronic literary journal called *Swift Current*. Scheduled to begin in July, the "magazine" will in essence be a literary network. Electronic manuscripts will be sent by writers to two inter-linked data bases, one in Toronto and the other in Vancouver. Subscribers with home computers will be able to gain access to the data base with a password allowing them to read and "download" any stories or articles or poems they wish. *Swift Current* is being coordinated by Frank Davey, who already has about 30 writers across the country seriously interested in the project. Davey feels that Canada, with its far-flung literary community and its "clean" telephone lines, is the ideal place for such an experiment.

HOW ARE WRITERS themselves taking to the new technology? Over the past five months I've conducted a random and very

unscientific survey. Among those who actually work with a word processor, statements like "I'd never go back" or "I don't know how I ever managed without it" are common. Writers who work to deadlines in particular find them indispensable. Many praise what they call the "pliability" of the text — meaning that you can play with it on the screen and get it right before committing it to paper; others say that the very ease of the physical act of writing seems to free the imagination.

Speculations on whether the computer actually helps people to write better vary widely, largely because the creative process itself is a far greater mystery than any technology. But there is one thing on which just about everyone agrees: the machine really comes into its own during the rewriting process. Writers like bp Nichol, who may go through many different drafts of a poem or script, find that it sharpens the editing process. "Hand-edited text makes it difficult sometimes to see through the layers of your intention," Nichol says. "A word processor is the perfect tool for working through that to a point of clarity."

In this connection Ian Lancashire, a professor of English at the University of Toronto and author of *Computer Applications in Literary Studies*, raises an interesting point. "Writing on a computer," he says, "takes the process of writing — which on paper is like a monologue — and turns it into a dialogue." Studies made in the U.S. have shown that students who use word processors tend to have a dialogue with themselves as they write, although they are not always aware of it. "With a word processor, it is much easier to shift your perspective to that of the reader. You view the work as a fluid landscape rather than as something fixed and immutable." Lancashire also believes, on the basis of practical experience in the classroom, that the computer has a great potential for teaching technical people and civil servants how to write clearly.

Enthusiasm for word processing among writers and scholars is far from unanimous. When I heard a rumour that Northrop Frye was writing the next volume of *The Great Code* on a word processor, I wrote to ask him what his feelings were. "I'm afraid I'm still a Luddite in regard to computers," he replied. "I start all my writing in longhand, eventually graduate to the typewriter, and after a series of revisions on typed copies I get what I am after. What bothers me about composing on the typewriter, and would continue to bother me on a word processor, is seeing what I have written facing me. I write so slowly that early drafts look like a kind of accusation."

Frye's response echoes the feeling of many established humanities scholars and writers who feel that their own writing and researching patterns are too set to change, and there is probably no real reason why they should, particularly since writing habits are so strongly individual. But the new technology has raised a host of other concerns as well, especially among those who are sometimes called "heavy users." The problems are well known: many secretaries who have to spend long hours each day in front of a video display terminal complain of back and eye strain, migraine headaches, menstrual cramps, spontaneous abortion, and a curious form of distress described as "a sense of disembodiment" or "loss of body perception." The usual explanation is that it has something to do with the electromagnetic radiation emitted by the screen. Frank Zingrone, a founding member of the degree program in communications at York University, and communications consultant Eric McLuhan feel they have found a physiological explanation having to do with the different functions of the right and left sides of the brain.

Zingrone told me that when the eye is presented with a pictorial image it tends to range widely and wildly over it, looking for detail that interests it. When presented with print, however, it fixates, and jerks forward as it reads. Once a

reader loses interest in the material, the eye tends to resume the wandering that is its natural state. Each of these eye activities is related to one hemisphere of the brain — the wandering mode to the right, the fixed, linear mode to the left. Zingrone and McLuhan speculate that if you spend long hours a day at a terminal doing boring work, the two modes are in constant conflict, thus causing stress, which in turn leads to other, more familiar symptoms. If few writers complain of the ill effects of using computers, Zingrone suggests this is because they are interested in what they are writing on the screen, thus minimizing the stress.

LIKE EVERY new technology, computers are provoking a lot of questions. Is this the dawn of a new age of information, or are we simply in for an era of unprecedented information pollution that threatens to smother our culture in banality and may even endanger individual freedom as we know it? The stage for great changes has already been set, and a wide array of computing power once reserved only for large institutions now is available to individuals and groups, both through the marketplace and through a growing variety of public institutions and

networks. Those who feel that computers are a threat to culture or human freedom would have a stronger case if the technology were being deliberately held back for exclusive use by governments and police forces, as it is in the Soviet bloc, for example. In this context, the growing interest of small business and members of the cultural community — writers, journalists, academics — in computer technology is a hopeful sign, provided, of course, that its great potential is used for more than just self-aggrandizement.

At the moment, the present trends to exploit the technology culturally in this country seem entirely natural in the Canadian context. Enterprises like *Swift Current*, Stan Bevington's on-line printing and publishing operation, and Dave Godfrey's championship of large, easily accessible computer networks all reflect a view of the Canadian tradition in which railway lines, national broadcasting systems, and complex communication between artists and their audience are felt to be essential to the country's problematic integrity. Of course such problems are never solved by technology alone. The important thing, as always, will be what gets communicated. And that, as always, depends on minds of flesh and blood. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Strange bedfellows

The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature — in many ways CanLit's representative abroad — combines comprehensive criticism with fascinating irrelevance

By RUPERT SCHIEDER

The *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, edited by William Toye, Oxford, 843 pages, \$45.00 cloth (ISBN 0 19 540283 9).

WITHIN EIGHT YEARS, three landmarks in the history of Canadian writing in English appeared: R.E. Watters's *A Check List of Canadian Literature* (1959); the *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, edited by Carl Klinck (1965); and Norah Story's *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (1967). Each has been a key work, despite differing judgements on individual authority and quality. It is significant, and typical of the 1960s, that all three were supported and subsidized, the first by the Humanities Research Council, the second by that body and the University of Toronto Press, and the third by the Canada Council.

There was a distinct difference in the numbers involved in production. Watters listed 16 "assistants"; Klinck referred to five editors and 29 "other

scholars"; Norah Story's book was described by her successor as "the impressive achievement of one person." Another difference can be inferred from two introductory statements. Watters, as the bibliography has come to be known, was "frankly a check list . . . designed to furnish a starting point for . . . further research." One of the aims of Klinck's *Literary History* was to "encourage established and younger scholars to engage in a critical study of that history before and after the appearance of the book . . . Some items . . . will inevitably require correction." There was no such prefatory statement in Story's *Oxford Companion*.

The predictions have been confirmed; all three have had to be replaced. The revision to Watters appeared in 1972; the revised edition of Klinck, with 12 new contributors, came out 11 years after the first; a supplement to rather than a revision of *The Oxford Companion* appeared within six years, in 1973; and now 10 years later, not merely a revision or a second edition, but a new,

differently titled volume has been published, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*.

These renewals have been made mandatory in part by the increased literary production and publication of the last three decades. An additional third volume of Klinck was required to cover the 1960-1973 period alone. In the supplement to the original *Oxford Companion*, editor William Toye spoke of 1967-72 as "a six-year period that gave rise to an unprecedented number of publications and a remarkable flowering of literary accomplishment." In the introduction to this new work he speaks of "the subsequent development of literary criticism on all periods, an enormous outpouring of new and important creative writing in both English and French, reprints of countless little-known works, a great increase in translations from the French, and a growing interest in Canadian works abroad." Almost as important as the expanded production has been the growing consciousness of and interest in a Canadian

literature, an expanded CanLit industry, both at home and abroad. (Unkind commentators might attribute some of this activity to empire-building at home and the search for novel teaching and thesis materials abroad.)

This new work, limited now to Canadian literature, is important in a quite different way. Its title, its position on the long shelf of more than a dozen other *Oxford Companions* (to English Literature, to French, Spanish, German, Classical, etc.), lends it, regardless of its own quality, a respectability, an "official" status. In addition to its standing in Canada it is the nearest thing we have to an international literary representative. As such, it is important that it be comprehensive, balanced in its selection and assessment, and accurate.

William Toye brought to the three-year project a combination of 35 years of writing and editing, his long participation in Canadian literature through the *Tamarack Review*, his *Book of Canada*, *The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature*, and, most germane, his involvement in the original *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* and its supplement. Funded only by the Oxford University Press, he commissioned a great gathering of 192 scholars and paid assistants, selected from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland. (Somehow Prince Edward Island was neglected. Lucy Maud Montgomery was, interestingly, put in the hands of one of the staff of the Royal Military College.)

A great deal of the energy of editorial sessions must have been consumed by efforts to compress. For whereas the new editions of Watters and Klinck expanded, the former by about a third and the latter by about a half, the new *Oxford Companion* has about 100 pages fewer than its predecessor. Of course, material on Canadian history has been excluded. This reduction, however, is balanced by the increase in specific areas, some in keeping with Toye's acceptance of the concept of "the Canadian mosaic": Indian, Inuit, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and Acadian literatures, as well as six blocks of "regional literature," which produce some overlapping (Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies as "Ontario writers"?) and new categories such as children's literature, science fiction, and fantasy.

Toye points out that the genre surveys have been greatly expanded. One of these "overviews" — "Novels in English" — has been doubled because of "the sudden flowering of the genre after 1960." The decision to use the term "novel" instead of "fiction" means that the short story is treated separately, making for further overlapping and a

peculiar imbalance. Two examples. The general article on Alice Munro, occupying two and a half columns, ends: "See also Novels in English," where *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Lives of Girls and Women* are discussed. In the overview "Short Stories in English," there are merely scattered bits on her work, including again *Lives of Girls and Women*. The general article on Mavis Gallant (three columns), having stated that "Gallant's talents have always been best deployed in short fiction," refers the reader only to "Novels in English," where one of her two long fictions is discussed in detail. This overview raises the question of just how light or how heavy was the hand of the general editor. Each of the five contributors here takes his own approach to the novels of his section. Although his use of the term "literary renaissance" for the 1960s and '70s is odd, the skilled compiler of that section displays a virtue not always present throughout the volume: he constantly relates Canadian to international writing.

There is another difference between the present volume and its predecessors. Whereas Norah Story was usually content to state, Toye's aim was for a work that would combine "useful infor-

mation and thoughtful and illuminating (though succinct) literary discussions." The entries on Ethel Wilson illustrate the difference. In the 1967 volume the writer commented on Wilson's urbanity, ironic wit, and "considerable narrative skill." In the present work *Hetty Dorval* is "accomplished," "remarkable," although the plot is "a trifle forced"; *Swamp Angel* is "perhaps Wilson's finest artistic success." It may be on these evaluations that readers disagree most, but the contributors constantly soften pronouncements by the use of "perhaps" and "probably." With so much overlapping, disagreement or indecision was inevitable. On page 578: "St. Urbain's Horseman, Richler's best novel since *Duddy Kravitz*"; on page 705: "St. Urbain's Horseman — generally regarded as Richler's finest work."

Another source of disagreement is foreseen by Toye: "The relative lengths of entries may prompt the most immediate comment." He also points out that there is "a heavy emphasis on writers and their works of the last forty years." If readers who skip his introduction were to judge by space alone, they would infer that Robertson Davies and Margaret Atwood are the chief

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Sex and death

By GEORGE GALT

The Only Son, by David Helwig, Stoddart, 244 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2019 7).

THE FIRST QUARTER of David Helwig's new novel is by itself a little masterpiece. Set in the 1940s on the opulent estate of James Randall, wealthy Ontario capitalist, it achieves a magnetic authenticity of voice and period ambience. We feel the mysterious power of the very rich through young Walter, the servants' son, a sensitive boy alert to the barriers and contradictions implicit in his place. Walter is a soft stone on which are carved for a lifetime the painful impressions of power roughly used. Through the detailed memories of Walter's childhood on the estate Helwig sets up the tensions and deep textures that promise to make a brilliant novel. The portrayal of sensuous perceptions, logical distortions, dreams, and fears brings Walter's early years close enough to touch. This is exceptionally fine fiction.

As Walter reaches early manhood the novel's energy abates, though the story remains compelling. He marries Eunice, a servant girl whom he knew from the Randalls' kitchen. By now intent on a university career, he is escaping his early humiliations through a superior intellect, yet remains tied to his past through Eunice and his parents: an escape more compromise than confrontation. The curious, uncowardly little boy becomes a retiring, rather passive professor of philosophy.

Growing up away from the city in the shadow of the rich and powerful Randalls, seeking fulfilment in Toronto through a life devoted to books and teaching, haunted by his past, Walter invites comparison to Dunstan Ramsay in Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business*. Helwig's promises to be the better novel, and I mean that as very high praise for the beginning of his book. *The Only Son* possesses less dramatic artifice than *Fifth Business* and more natural psychological energy. Davies is a wonderful maker of magic, but sometimes his tricks are transparent and incredible. Helwig at his best is not so much a magician as a supernatural

figures in Canadian literature. The former occupies seven and a half columns in the "author" article, one half in "Novels to 1960: Ontario," one in "Novels 1960 to 1982," space in "Drama in English" and "Essays in English," and one column for *Fifth Business* in the "famous titles" category. (With such eminence it is suitable that the *Globe and Mail* asked him to review this volume.) Atwood occupies almost as much space in five categories. But Northrop Frye gets only four columns under his name and nothing at all under *Fearful Symmetry* or *The Anatomy of Criticism*. Poetry as a genre warrants about half as much space as "Novels." I must stop this calculating assessment. One does not judge by space alone.

Nor is it profitable to linger over the question of who and what should have been included or excluded as Canadian. Like Watters and Klinck, Toye must have found decisions difficult. The "famous title" category, those works singled out for special eminence, obviously presented as many questions. Every reader and reviewer will have an opportunity to disagree here. Of course the inevitable "Akhoond of Swat" and *The Four Jameses* turn up again. (I wonder whether anyone actually reads these "famous" works.) I found some surprises in this category: *Altham: A Tale of the Sea* by John Swete Cummins; *The Last of the Erics* by "H.H.B."; and *The Victims of Tyranny* by Charles E. Beardley. Check those on your friends. Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* as a "classic"! Two Morley Callaghans, yes; two Hugh MacLennans, yes; but no Richler — not *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*? I do not disagree with the inclusion of *Jalna* by Mazo de la Roche and *Sunshine Sketches* by Stephen Leacock, but *Songs of a Sourdough* or another work by Robert W. Service ought to be included, if only because, until the last one or two decades, if readers abroad recognized any writers as Canadian, it was usually these three.

Each reader will have other hobby-horses to ride. I checked the articles on two writers about whom I have reason to be specific. The geography of the writer on Jack Hodgins is a little imprecise; the Comox Valley is hardly "Northern Vancouver Island." *The Barclay Family Theatre*, which includes some of Hodgins's finest work to date, is too facetiously dismissed. With compression a necessity, it hardly seems important or even relevant to the immediate issue to point out that the great-grandson of Francis William Grey, who is included only because of his literary contribution,

succeeded to the family title in 1963. This isn't Peter C. Newman's *Debrett's Illustrated Guide*. Inaccurate and slightly Freudian is the shift in the title of Grey's *Sixteen-Ninety to Sixty-Nine*. Although I did not have time to check thoroughly the living arrangements of more Canadian writers, I was fascinated by some imbalance and irrelevance. Graeme Gibson "now lives in Toronto with Margaret Atwood and their daughter Jess." It did not seem necessary in the article on Margaret Atwood to note a reciprocal domesticity. Timothy Findley writes "plays and documentaries, many of the latter in collaboration with William Whitehead, with whom he lives in Cannington, Ont." Neither domesticity nor collaboration seems to necessitate the following details: "After completing *Civic Square* [Scott] Symons went to Mexico with a young male lover, whose parents sent the Federales after them."

But these, like the inconsistent use of large capital letters, are small particles in such a comprehensive work. Toye is justified in making his introductory claim: "In spite of all weaknesses . . . there is offered here a wealth of detail and commentary, and many new insights." There should be no hesitation about putting it on the shelf with the other *Oxford Companions*. Official or not, it will serve readers at home and abroad. Equipped with it, Watters's revised bibliography, and the new edition of the *Literary History of Canada*, general readers, students, and scholars



who need the fundamental facts should be helped in forming more balanced conceptions of Canadian writing than have resulted from some of the thematic and nationalistic criticism that has been so highly publicized. □

DOUBLEDAY'S SPRING BOOKS

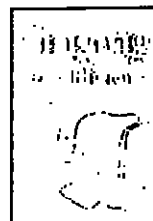
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Harold Horwood is a well known writer and popular historian, author of *Bartlett: The Great Canadian Explorer*. This is a delightful and informative collection of tales from the underside of Canada's history.



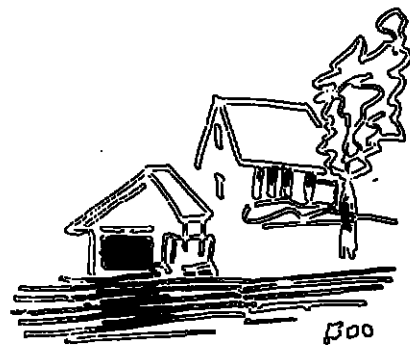
cameraman, taking perfectly framed pictures inside the mind and out.

Despite the initial superiority of *The Only Son*, in the end Helwig does not succeed as Davies does. Having established a complex set of relationships, Helwig proceeds to kill off most of his major actors. The Randalls' son, who might have made an interesting foil for Walter, simply disappears from the story. Where Davies continues to paint a rich palimpsest throughout his book, Helwig gives us in his second half only two figures against a bleak background of compulsive sex and self-disgust.

The professor, still mourning his wife after three years, finds a hot lay in one of his classes. She torments him (and us) for a hundred pages. Anyone interested in the psychology of sexually repressed philosophy professors might want to look at this part of the novel. Set in the 1960s, it includes all the totems of that period: upper-middle-class students in rebellion, dope, Vietnam, and sexual experimentation. I think Helwig throws his masterpiece away in this concluding half, but those who believe there is anything left to say about university life in the '60s may disagree.

Walter, sad to say, turns out to be a very boring fellow, an affliction few novels survive. He is greatly troubled when he finds himself wantonly screwing Ada, his undergraduate tormenter. The fact that he likes to sodomize her shocks him even more. She touches his past, her aunt having been one of James Randall's neighbours and also one of his philandering conquests. So there is a sexual full circle to the wild coupling. But psychological truth cannot lift these passages above the tedious solemnity of Ada and Walter's obsessions.

The professor loses his concentration and his bed-mate, but not his job. Readers may be forgiven for wishing he would take a sabbatical, leave Toronto, expand his possibilities. His limits



become the novel's limits. What promises to be a large, rich canvas shrinks to a sad little story about a sad, dispassionate intellectual who has rejected the material world for fear of having to

serve it. In the final scene, after a final parting, the professor leaves us with a comment that is as close as this novel comes to an abiding optimism. "I turn back into the house, and there is a moment of loneliness and loss, but if the love of wisdom means anything, it means that such moments pass, and it is what continues that counts." □

REVIEW

Strangers in a strange land

By JOAN GIVNER

The *Axe's Edge*, by Kristjana Gunnars, Press Porcépic, 93 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 210 1).

SINCE KRISTJANA GUNNARS has published four books of poetry, this collection of short stories would seem by its antecedents to be destined for the category of "a poet's stories." Certainly, these are lyrical pieces that work chiefly through the texture of their imagery. Gunnars, however, explains their form otherwise:

I wanted, since I had that kind of ear, to hear what a *Canadian* story sounded like. Since life on the Prairies seemed to be a constant and slow plodding against the wind, would there maybe be no rising action, no climax, no dénouement? Would the European voice begin to cry monotonously in response to the expanse of sky and plain?

"Monotonously" is a dangerously suggestive word to use in a preface. It shows that Gunnars knows exactly the artistic risk she is taking, and it poses the critical question of what gives these plotless, seamless, rhythmic stories their considerable impact.

The 10 stories form a series, but not such as we have come to expect from recent series linked by a common narrator who is the author's fictional representative. The stories have different characters, indicated in their terse titles, which consist of the name followed by a key image — "Gudfinna: Bells"; "Fridrik Sveinsson: Mice"; "Kolla: Ticks." (Names for Gunnars have a magical, talismanic quality, and she reels them off like the genealogies of the old sagas). The link between the characters is their Icelandic background. Some are native Icelanders, most are immigrants to the

Prairies, and one, by a reverse process, is a Canadian tracing his Icelandic roots in Reykjavik. They vary in age, sex, occupation, and historical context, some belonging to the 19th century and some being near-contemporaries. Most important, they have distinct personalities and distinct voices.

In the first story, since the central character lacks speech ("she never learned to talk while they lived in Bildudalur"), the narrative voice records the roar that is the other side of her silence. In another, a daughter tells from hearsay her father's story. The narrator in a third is the articulate observer of an older, more taciturn, fellow countryman. A priest's story is related in the formal diction of his letters; the epigraph alone hints at their sinister context.

Each story records the struggle for survival in another country. Sometimes the country is "other" in the literal, geographical sense, and sometimes in the figurative sense of a strange, hostile, alien environment. The people fight for life on the most primitive terms, buffeted like Lear on the heath by savage elements of nature and human cruelty. Images of barbarism abound: "all the other chickens were waiting to see if they'd get a chance to pick it to death when the blood came"; "what I don't like about mice is if you get three or more together in one trap, they always attack one of the group and eat it up." In this desperate world the available means of survival and self-protection are pitiful. They consist of old wives' tales, superstition, folklore, misinformation, charms, and religious mumbo-jumbo. On all this lore Gunnars is amazingly knowledgeable. She relates the properties of grasses and herbs, the means of procuring good luck, success in childbirth. This esoterica is one of the fascinations of reading *The Axe's Edge*.

Gunnars has said that the one limitation she feels when writing in English rather than Icelandic (she is fluent in Danish, English, and Icelandic) is that the humour is lost. It is not lost completely, as witnessed by the following instructions for dealing with obstreperous ghosts:

Grandpa said one way of getting rid of them is to spit into the east and fart in the ghost's face. Some people recite a paternoster or a prayer . . . Some people had bedpots with piss in them by their beds every night. That way they'd be ready to meet a ghost anytime. I suppose you could simply pee straight at it too, if you had to. Another thing they don't like is poetry. A good verse drives them off.

It is Gunnars's good fortune as a writer that she has, in her Icelandic heritage, a totally original, overwhelm-

ingly powerful and coherent mythic framework for her art. It is her genius that she knows exactly what to do with it.

Recently an Australian reviewer of her poetry commented on her descriptions of "a level of superstitiousness and ignorance that would be difficult to parallel even in the proverbial tribal rites of aborigines a thousand years ago." True perhaps. But to see Gunnars's world as astonishing and "other" is to miss the point. Like all important writers, she uses her postage stamp of native soil to image the universal. The bleakness of her vision, the sinister nature of her imagery, coincides with that of many modern artists. One thinks particularly of such women writers as Sylvia Plath, Margaret Atwood, Adrienne Rich, all describing the desperate struggle for identity and survival in an irrational world. □

REVIEW

Something hidden

By DAVID HOMEL

Shulamis: Stories from a Montreal Childhood, by Shulamis Yelin, Véhicule Press, 158 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 919390 52 0).

THE BOOK we write is as much about what we leave out as what we decide to include, and nowhere is this maxim truer than in the case of the personal memoir. When the memoir tackles the family, that little knot of jealousies and complexes, the maxim becomes doubly true, as in Shulamis Yelin's book of 32 short stories about growing up Jewish in immigrant Montreal in the 1920s and early 1930s. The tone is humorous, warm, and wistful — as wistful as the beautiful cover painting of a Montreal streetscape by Ghitta Caiserman-Roth — but behind it all are the politics of the family and the conflicts that remain unresolved, even after the actors' death. The result is an unexpected sort of suspense as we feel that something hidden is lurking behind the surface telling of events.

Shulamis Yelin was a feminist before her time, a university-educated woman who made a career of teaching. Her tell-

ing of how life was some 50 or 60 years ago makes you feel every crack in the sidewalk. The young heroine in *Shulamis* recounts the rites of passage from girlhood into adolescence, and only the most hard-hearted could reject the sense of nostalgia. The transcription of the Yiddische English spoken along Prince Arthur Street is hilariously accurate as the young Shulamis recounts sibling rivalry, childhood illness, finding a "kontra" (a place in the country in the Laurentians north of town, once Montreal's answer to the Borscht Belt), and the discovery that "Shekspir" was not Jewish after all, despite the Yiddish versions of the Bard on the dining room bookshelf. Shakespeare in the home of these recent working-class immigrants goes a long way toward explaining the importance of education among the Jews new in this country. Since many came from places where they were forbidden to practise normal commercial activities or own property, education was their only way up.

The stories go beyond anecdote to show Shulamis and her comrades working their way into the Protestant school system, encountering Quebec-style Catholicism, and learning the facts of life, the knowledge of which was always acquired in the alley. The book is really about everybody's immigrant experience, including those who are living on those same streets and playing in those same alleys in today's Montreal.

Yelin has her young heroine make a clear distinction between her grandparents (her Bubbie and Zaida) and her parents. The former are heroic figures; her grandfather, a carpenter, is an elder in the temple and actually helps put up the structure. More important, her grandparents are a generation older and, as such, that much less assimilated, that much closer to Old Country life. They incarnate the true Hebrew spirit; her parents have to deal with living in this strange new society and the compromises it entails. Obviously the first image is more attractive in its authenticity.

Once the author takes her character out of young childhood she seems to lose touch somewhat with her strength. Toward the end of the book, Shulamis, as a young woman, braves the Depression to enrol in a teachers' college. Against all odds she gets a job. We learn of her success and her family's pride, but less of her reaction to it, which is a contrast to the intimate tone of the other stories. Significantly, she returns to her grandmother's death as a way of ending the book, being more at home with the past.

The book is shot through with the distant image of the narrator's mother: "Mother was often ailing," she tells us.

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The mother represents the xenophobic part of Jewish culture, always protecting and brooding, the voice of imminent disaster. On the other hand, Shulamis's father gives her permission to take classes in New Testament Scripture, at her school to "see how they do by other

people." The mother's distance, her unnamed, probably psychosomatic ailment, coupled with Shulamis's natural desire to be closer to her, makes for most of the book's tension. Impatient readers might want everything revealed, but we should not forget that the book's

spirit is based in another era, when psycho-talk did not exist. The author never chooses to reveal the conflicts in her family setting, but then perhaps *Shulamis* is an introductory volume, a preparation for another excursion into the past that will go deeper. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Fables of identity

Two thick and rich anthologies that bring together the best of a vast and surprising body of fantastic literature

By I.M. OWEN

Black Water: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature, edited by Alberto Manguel, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 987 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 330 281410).

Illusion One: Fables, Fantasies and Metafiction, edited by Geoff Hancock, Aya Press, 166 pages, \$12.50 paper (ISBN 0 920544 27 4).

Illusion Two: Fables, Fantasies and Metafiction, edited by Geoff Hancock, Aya Press, 147 pages, \$12.50 paper (ISBN 0 920544 28 2).

THE SUBTITLE OF Alberto Manguel's anthology may lead some to expect it to be something that it isn't: a collection of the kind of fiction that is nowadays usually classified under the heading of "fantasy." Manguel makes a careful distinction between this and "fantastic literature," possibly related to Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and Imagination (or what Peacock called his "seven hundred pages of promise to elucidate it"), but briefer and clearer:

Unlike tales of fantasy (those chronicles of mundane life in mythical surroundings such as Narnia or Middle Earth), fantastic literature deals with what can be best defined as the impossible seeping into the possible, what Wallace Stevens calls 'black water breaking into reality'. Like the ghost train at the fair, it takes us through the darkness of a real world, from terror to laughable terror, diving into walls that swing away at the very last minute, racing under eerie nothings that touch us with cobweb fingers, suddenly slowing down and lengthening that last encounter (with what? with what?), using our expectancy of horror more effectively than horror itself.

And he fills out his definition by listing

the main themes of fantastic literature:

Time warps: where Time leads two separate existences — one for us, one for the rest of the world, in the tradition of Rip Van Winkle.

Hauntings: by the dead (usually) — for revenge (like Banquo's ghost); to make a belated announcement (like Hamlet's father); to love beyond the grave (like Dante's Beatrice).

Dreams: which become part of reality (like Caedmon's dream in the beginning of English literature); which issue a warning (like that of Caesar's wife); which tell us we are such stuff as dreams are made on (like the Red King's dream in *Through the Looking-Glass*).

Unreal creatures, transformations: like the creature in Kafka's "Metamorphosis";



like Circe's swine; the frog prince; and the many foxes of Chinese ghost stories. *Mimesis*: seemingly unrelated acts which secretly dramatize each other (the strange

events that take place during King Duncan's murder, the cracked mirror of the Lady of Shalott). Also, a totally alien happening can provoke a tragedy somewhere else, as if all the threads in the universe were connected.

Dealings with God and the Devil: not of course theological writings, but stories which make use of that misty borderland of belief to frame a fantastic tale (as in the tragic history of Doctor Faustus). Usually this theme overlaps others, such as time warps or transformations.

These many strands make a fine-meshed net; and it catches a wide variety of fish. In spite of the first passage quoted above, don't expect unmitigated horror. Manguel's definition of the fantastic is broad enough to include two exquisite turn-of-the-century jokes: Beerbohm's "Enoch Soames" and Saki's "Laura," which get charming fun, the one out of the Faustian theme, the other from the notion of transmigration. In extreme contrast, out of the same country and the same generation, is Walter de la Mare's "Seaton's Aunt," perhaps the most hauntingly terrifying story in the book, achieving its effect with no more than a remote hint of supernatural possibilities. I'm especially glad to have this story brought back into my life. It was a feature of Alexander's excellent anthology *Short Stories and Essays*, which used to be prescribed for Ontario senior matriculation, or Grade 13 as it came to be called. (What happened to my copy?)

In his introductory note to "Seaton's Aunt," Manguel quotes Chesterton as comparing the thrill he got from its "suffocating vividness" to the effect of his first reading of "The Turn of the

Screw." Personally I belong to the tiny minority that is unmoved by "The Turn of the Screw," and was pleased to find Henry James represented in this book instead by "The Friends of the Friends," which I had quite forgotten about.

Manguel, who to our good fortune now lives among us, is Argentine by birth; and one of the great services this book does to the English-reading public is to present eight Latin-American writers, most of them Argentine, most translated by Manguel, and all except Borges entirely new to me. They are all striking, but apart from that they fascinate me by the glimpses they give of a group of long-established communities of which we hear little except when one of them has an abrupt change of government.

The introductory notes prefaced to the stories, partly critical, partly biographical, occasionally autobiographical, make an admirable feature of *Black Water*. From one of these it appears that it was under the direct influence of Borges that Manguel became a profound admirer of Kipling. I'm one too, but I can't help feeling that his admiration distorts his judgement, in the selection of what to me seems a third-rate Kipling story — and also in a review in the *Globe and Mail* a few months ago, in which Manguel, if I remember correctly, denied that Kipling was a reactionary. Well, it's painful to admit that our literary swans can be political geese, but he was one — close to the lunatic fringe, in fact. If he were alive today he would probably consider Thatcher and Reagan as dangerously liberal as his cousin Stanley Baldwin.

The writers in English that I most readily associate with Borges are Stevenson (who is here, very properly, with "The Bottle Imp") and Conan Doyle — who to my real surprise isn't here at all. If Manguel, who appears to have read everything, doesn't know Doyle's non-Holmesian stories, I commend to his attention two thrilling time-warp stories, "The Silver Mirror" and "Through the Veil," and also "How It Happened," which achieves with great economy some of the effect of the longish Daphne du Maurier story he has chosen, "Split Second."

When I first read Manguel's distinction between fantasy and the fantastic I made a mental note that he was talking about the difference between Tolkien and Charles Williams, and it's something of a coup to have found for this book what is apparently Williams's only short story. It's not Williams at his best, even though the main, indeed the only character is Lord Arglay, the dominant figure in the brilliant novel *Many*

Dimensions. Still, it's nice to have it on record.

That I have said as much as I have without even mentioning the presence of Pushkin, Kafka, Maugham, Lawrence, Greene, Yourcenar, and many more may help to convey the richness of this packed anthology. To quote a memorable Mordecai Richler anecdote, Canadians like thick books. In this case, they'll be right.

Geoff Hancock's two-volume anthology *Illusion: Fables, Fantasies and Metafictions* is a kettle of quite other fish from Manguel's. Which are the fables, which the fantasies, and which the metafiction (that word's the nastiest barbarism to be imposed on us since "television") I'm not sure. But they include many kinds of non-realistic fiction, ranging from the excellent to the tiresome. The first volume starts with Mavis Gallant, the most distinguished contributor to almost any anthology she happens to be in; but she's doing the kind of thing I wish she wouldn't — a correspondence between Maurice Ravel and C.L. Dodgson in which Ravel is a Basque poet and Dodgson an avant-garde composer. The notion is good for a brief smile; the same kind of thing embedded in a vast novel like Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* can have a marvellous comic effect. But laboured over several pages and presented as a thing in itself, it just seems heavy-handed.

The volume contains good stories, though. Sean Virgo's "Haunt" is beautifully written. "Niagara Fall" by David Sharpe, about a man obsessed by water because he was conceived at Niagara Falls, is itself a beautiful conception. Leon Rooke may be disturbed to learn that I like his "Hanging Out with the Magi." Virgil Burnett has done cover drawings that remind me rather of Heath Robinson in the more romantic of his two styles, and he also contributes a medieval tale in the same agreeable manner.

The second volume starts with W.P. Kinsella's admirable "Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa" and ends with P. K. Page's disturbing vision of a possible future, "Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . ."; in the middle is my favourite story in the whole anthology, "The Steps" by Gary McKeivitt. Like most stories of the kind, it would be ruined by summary, which leaves the reviewer at a loss for words. No such handicap afflicts the anthologist, who contributes a blustering introduction to each volume:

Canadian literature has been transformed . . . The new fiction is a map of terrain earlier writers neglected to traverse . . . Their institutionalized works came to us as archaeological remnants of a past civilization. But now the ancient monsters in our psyches are waking up.

It must be the awakened monster in Hancock's psyche who is responsible for his images:

Fiction follows the natural meridians in the body of our language. Consider these stories as acupuncture points, places in language where the energies erupt as flames.

Illusion One and *Illusion Two* are good enough anthologies to have been allowed to speak for themselves without all this editorial noise. □

REVIEW

Waking up in Dream City

By ANTHONY BUKOSKI

The Trouble with Heroes and Other Stories, by Guy Vanderhaeghe, Borealis Press, 70 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88887 929 6).

Chameleon and Other Stories, by Bill Schermbrucker, Talonbooks, 154 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 208 8).

I REMEMBER W.P. Kinsella two summers ago telling me about Guy Vanderhaeghe's wonderful stories. A little later that summer, in a review of *Man Descending* in *Books in Canada*, he wrote that Vanderhaeghe "displays a deftness of touch and maturity of vision seldom seen in first collections," and called *Man Descending* "stories to be reread and remembered." Unfortunately, I can't say the same of this slim, leather-bound volume, *The Trouble with Heroes and Other Stories*, which apparently was written before *Man Descending* and held until now by Borealis. The one memorable piece here, "Parker's Dog," is marred by sloppy editing. In fact, what Borealis has done is a downright shame: 24 spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors detract from this otherwise exceptional story.

"Parker's Dog" takes place in what to Vanderhaeghe appears to be a familiar world — greasy spoons, third-rate hotels, guys down on their luck. I appreciate his ability to capture that milieu. Vanderhaeghe is a "bump-and-a-beer" kind of writer, judging from "Parker's Dog" and several other stories here. Not for him tea dances and white wine. After Roy, one of the lost in

"Parker's Dog," despoils Kliber's car outside the Dream City Motel, he heads for an Al-Anon meeting. "My name is Roy," he says, "and I'm an alcoholic," and so begins his attempt at self-respect. "Parker's Dog" is a funny, tough-edged story that succeeds partly because of Vanderhaeghe's ear for dialogue and irreverent, inventive phrasing. The sleazy Kliber is so cheap, for instance, "he'd crowbar Christ off the cross to get the nails." Parker, who sells his dog for a bottle of booze, has a touch of the poet himself. He makes up greeting-card verse. "It was true . . . Parker wrote them out on motel stationery as they came to him, and stashed them in an old shoe box. When he was in a good mood he would recite them at Roy's prompting, beginning, perhaps, with Christmas (Things is tight and times is hard/So here's your _____ Xmas card!) and concluding with Easter."

Three other stories exhibit a tough-guy sensibility. Though captivating in its dialogue and black humour, the title piece ends so abruptly it remains a vignette. "The Trouble with Heroes" deals with returning Second-World-War veterans, one of whom, a burn victim, wonders whether to wear the rubber nose they've given him in the hospital. The protagonist's dilemma is deliberately ironic: how to make his return to Saskatchewan appear heroic and triumphant when in reality he'd lost his nose falling under a car after a drunken sexual encounter:

I suppose I was strutting, having been officially and indisputably delivered from the stigma of virginity. When I saw the two tiny beams, which were all that were permitted in the blackout, I tried to scream. I felt a terrible jarring shock . . . then I was grappling with the undercarriage of the car. I could only think, "Oh God, I'm dying in a state of mortal sin."

More fully developed, this story, like "Parker's Dog," would have been a thoroughly memorable journey into a world without heroes.

All seven stories deal with failed heroes of one sort or another and vary widely in time: "No Man Could Bind Him" takes place during the time of Christ; "Cafe Society" during the Paris Exposition of 1889; "The King Is Dead" during the November of John Kennedy's assassination; and "Parker's Dog" the present.

Vanderhaeghe possesses great talent and promise, but in this early work he has fallen a bit short.

On the other hand, Bill Scherbrucker's *Chameleon and Other Stories* left me spellbound. His narrator Alistair, having left Kenya years earlier, recreates in the countryside of Nairobi and out past Eldoret and Hoey's Bridge

at Mile Eighteen what Robert Sherrin, in an interview with Scherbrucker in a recent issue of *The Capilano Review*, calls "an environment of memory." Asked in the interview about the autobiographical nature of *Chameleon*, Scherbrucker responded, "Now . . . I see quite clearly that everything we do write is autobiographical . . . the whole thing really has to do with story-telling. If you're sitting down with some people and you're telling them a story, they have to believe somehow in the reality of that story at some level. Now, whether you're making the story up or whether the story is an attempt to actually transcribe the events that happen doesn't matter so much as whether the person is interested in the story."

Scherbrucker's *Chameleon* stories at times gain their strength from this tension between fact and fiction, between autobiographical and non-autobiographical fiction. One accepts the fictive universe, while at the same time remaining aware that Scherbrucker has lived through the events he describes. From the safety of British Columbia, author and narrator recall their African past. In "Versions," an inquiry into the deaths of 10 Mau Mau detainees at a government camp "in the Coast Province of Kenya," the line between fact and fiction is all but obliterated as author and narrator uncover different accounts of what happened. "After all these years," Alistair writes, "I want to be able to know and say finally what in the hell was going on, not that constant lie from the officials." He finds in the end a version he can trust.

As one might expect, violence arises from both natural and socio-political landscapes here. Along the natural landscape, the "geo-botanic cosmos," as Jose Ortega y Gasset would call it, mammas curl in trees. On the political front, the British sail into Mombasa and Kilindi Harbour and Mau Mau hide out and make peace with the animals who later help them in their struggle. To Alistair, the emotional landscape is just as precarious and threatening. For years his father rises early, the dawn provoking "thoughts in him that he *must* share. And he did not know how. He struggled to speak . . . and it came out rainfall, brake linings, or a complete explanation of the workings of an electric bell. . . ." Alistair's relationship is no better with his brother Calvin who, like other characters, reappears throughout the stories.

"Aga Dawn," "Mile Eighteen," "Muriuki's Mother," "Afterbirth": all are extraordinary stories deserving recognition. My one reservation is with the title story, the sixth of eight in the collection. By this time a device Scher-

brucker uses earlier in "Roger Ash or the Year We Built the Golf Course" and "Another Movie," a device whereby he introduces an image or symbol early in the story only to have it reappear with ironic significance at the end, has begun to wear thin. But why quibble with such fine stories as these? □

REVIEW

Fact and fantasy

By TOM MARSHALL

E.J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry, edited by Susan Gingell, University of Toronto Press, 218 pages, \$30.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5614 8).

I NEVER THOUGHT that E.J. Pratt and I had anything much in common beyond being poets and professors of English literature with an interest in history. Now I discover that his first versifications were "schoolboy lampoons on his teachers" for the amusement of his classmates. I believe some of my own lampoons (such as the one that likened my grade six teacher to Walt Kelly's Albert the Alligator) still exist in one of my more ancient files. It makes me wonder how many other Canadian poets began in this essentially social fashion.

E.J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry is a very useful book for the serious student of Pratt. For other readers it will, I suspect, be only intermittently interesting. It is often very repetitive, since Pratt's favourite sayings, phrases, and anecdotes were trotted out over and over again in his comments on his life and work; and in stretches it is downright boring. Editor Susan Gingell attempts in her introduction to refute the assertion of Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski that there was "almost no developed literary theory from E.J. Pratt," but in my judgement Dudek and Gnarowski are correct. Still, this book is quite illuminating about Pratt's methods.

It confirms among other things that Pratt was very much a poet of fact (with salutary flights into fantasy), a man very much concerned to get right and then to versify those details of science, technology, and heroic animal and human struggle that "took hold" of him

and fired his imagination. He was suspicious of a more introspective poetry: "If poetry just meant warbling, or just spinning fancies out of one's inner consciousness, there would be some force in the question [of whether poetry should be tied to humdrum fact]. A bird does the first; a spider the second." (It is worth noting here that Al Purdy has compared himself as poet to a spider who spins from himself webs to support his own existence.) The only Canadian poet here commended (or even mentioned) by Pratt is Earle Birney, his obvious successor as poet of fact (as Purdy is Birney's successor).

Pratt goes so far as to speak of the "task of beating a group of facts and impressions into verse." (It is only fair, I suppose, to allow that he, a playful speaker, may have been using the word "beating" somewhat facetiously. But the notion of poetic process suggested here is surely a rather naive one.) Pratt learned early that his poetry had to be made out of the concrete and the material; in this respect he departs from Victorian poetry just as much as the "imagist" Ezra Pound. His commentaries on particular poems offer much data about seals, whales, whaling then and now (without, curiously, any

reference to *Moby Dick*), disasters and adventures at sea, and other matters that he attempted to transform into poetry.

It is interesting at one point to overhear Pratt waxing enthusiastic about the "world attention" accorded to the heroic rescue operation of Fried, the captain of the *Roosevelt* who became an "international figure" in the late 1920s. For who remembers Fried today? I suppose the gung-ho astronauts of *The Right Stuff* have replaced naval heroes of the past in the popular imagination, though the fame of Charles Lindbergh, Billy Bishop, and other early heroes of the air has survived. And, anyhow, isn't "The Roosevelt and the Antioch," through which I suffered in high school, basically journalism in verse? Though it was apparently at one time Pratt's favourite among his poems, it is certainly not (as he admitted) as thrilling as Homer. A journalistic or fictional prose account would surely have been more gripping. Better yet, why not make it into a "disaster" film (and while they're at it, someone should reproduce the Halifax explosion of 1917 in filming *Barometer Rising*).

The documentary poem is, of course, an honourable Canadian tradition, and Pratt is its great progenitor. But such

poems sometimes sink under the weight of reportage. I am grateful, therefore that Pratt could sometimes forget about accuracy to develop such fantasies as "The Witches' Brew" and "The Great Feud." And it is interesting that the most powerfully imaginative and resonant of all his poems — "The Truant" — is also the most fantastic.

What of the man, as revealed here? Well, he was cagey, I suspect. There was someone else behind the camouflage of those anecdotes and sayings. Here he seems determinedly optimistic, folksy, jolly. His tone and style are Victorian and idealistic. He admits to a youthful, naive faith in technology. He stresses the "lighter" side of Newfoundland life even though he mentions the frequency of disaster and death at sea. Perhaps he felt there was enough darkness in the world and in himself that he need not dwell on it in his public utterance (outside the poetry, that is, where a deeper and more ambivalent self may be detected underneath the humanistic and not-very-convincing Christianity).

Pratt was not, I think, much of a poetic theorist, but he was possessed of immense good sense about writing. Both his good sense and his good will shine through this useful book. □

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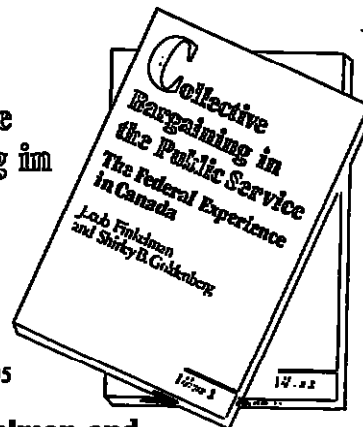
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Heat and light

After four violently sensational collections,
Lorna Crozier's new book of poetry offers the possibility
of turning bitterness into hope

By KRISTJANA GUNNARS

The Weather, by Lorna Crozier, Coteau Books, 81 pages, \$6.00 paper (ISBN 0 919926 24 X).

A CONSIDERATION OF Lorna Crozier's first four books of poems — *Inside Is the Sky* (1976), *Crow's Black Joy* (1978), *No Longer Two People* (co-authored with Patrick Lane, 1979), and *Humans and Other Beasts* (1980) — suggests that Crozier writes partly out of a desire to produce arresting poetry. Her latest volume, *The Weather*, shows a departure from a persistent search for effect and the emergence of some mellowing compassion.

Crozier's hallmark up to now has been the landscape of the Prairies taking on the features of the woman and poet. Her poetry has been a merciless self-inspection and has shed some light on how the Saskatchewan landscape can mirror the soul that struggles through life. The pain of love has become her special territory, over which she has travelled four times in four books. A fifth journey through the violence of love might have been monotonous but fortunately *The Weather* contains poems that reach beyond the sexual tensions and fears that occupy her former volumes.

Crozier's first book, *Inside Is the Sky*, is marked by highly developed imagery and metaphor, although the lines are not as skilfully manipulated as in her latest collection. The volume is concerned with woman as victim and man as torturer. At the time of its appearance the dynamics of male-female relationships may have been fresh, but now that cry is overdone. For all its mythical significance, the image of woman-as-earth has become a trap it is a relief to be rid of.

While Crozier touches on the real fears and sufferings of female sexuality in her first book, the problem of credibility persists. There is a flavour of the sensational about the poems, an aura of showmanship. A kind of female Dracula emerges, as does a female

Frankenstein in "Memory," in which the narrator pictures herself constructing a man, "at night/I build your face./I construct a skeleton. . . ." The concern is with the monstrous illusions we have of each other as lovers, but the imagery sometimes suggests a poem of its own at times in collision with the intended poem.

At times Crozier's emphasis on images of violence is overdone and renders a slightly bizarre effect, as in "Blizzard," where "Heavy with snow the sky collapses,/its chest flat against the hard earth. . . ." At other times Crozier's poems strike just the right note in their directness. This happens in a grand little poem, "Last Oasis," in which a young woman is forever being approached by men who are burdened by their families, irresponsible elderly men who think they are in love and are willing to abandon even their own children. The narrator has a gun, distrusts the professed love, and fights back at forces that persistently turn her into the muse. The muse's refusal to suffer is an interesting twist: "He came into the yard;/ . . . he was not the first./He carried his home/on his back./Chairs hung on his belt;/children squirmed under his hat./His wife bowed on his shoulder/. . . I tried to freeze/the words in his throat/. . . 'No.' No more . . ."

The final poem of *Inside Is the Sky* contains the statement that most matters to Crozier's early work. In "Inner Space" the woman who is always turned into earth and muse declares almost matter-of-factly that she is a person, claiming that "i look small/and earth-bound/but inside/is the sky," thereby signalling the themes to come in her next four books. The body is turned inside-out, the inside becomes the sky, and the outside is within the body itself.

Crow's Black Joy contains an occasional purity of expression that stands out. In "Dependence," for example, the relationship between narrative voice and image is skilfully balanced:

The maple dry and leafless

*leans towards the creek
Its roots dig only toes
into the wrinkled bank
One day it will topple . . .
When you feel me leaning
push me upright
and walk away.*

The transition is clean, and violence has given way to vulnerability and stoicism. The ceremonies of love between men and women are expressed with clarity as well. "Ablutions" is an example, even though it acquiesces to the poet's insistence on necessary violence. The lover says, "after you stand cleansed/and water weeping/before me/i anoint you/with the oils of wounds."

The violence of love in *Crow's Black Joy* suggests a repressed anger in the narrative voice, motivated by a will to suffer. The poems are at gunpoint, so to speak, and the desire seems to be to kill. At times the reader absurdly becomes the intruding lover. The line between truth of soul, aesthetic power, and pathological sensationalism is sometimes stretched thin. In the end the repetitious tension between love and hate risks monotony, and the reader may become immune to it all. Sometimes what amounts to an underlying hatred for her subject emerges. This happens in "Paper/Weight," in which the narrator claims she wants "to write a poem/that sucks you dry and weary/into the reddening ball of sky." She wants to write "a poem to cave/your buffalo skull."

The disturbing aspect of her second book is the emphasis on what appears to be a form of necrophilia, as in "Patchwork," where "The bed grew./The empty half lay as stark/as a body confined/on the dining room table. . . ." The concern with death is repeated in "Deep Well," in which the narrator says, "When I die/do not bury me/. . . When I have stiffened/drag my body to the highest hill/. . . Let my body twist and turn. . ."

"Back Cover Picture" is perhaps most indicative of the poetics Crozier succumbs to so completely in her early books. For a cover photograph, nothing

but a sado-masochistic sex-act will do: the narrator poses "behind/my typewriter," she sits "beside/the Hawaiian Ti plant," they try "outdoor shots," until she finally lies "with arms and legs spread/my fingers clawing at the nails. . . ." The photographer labels this shot "Woman as Poet," suggesting/that even in art women have to become sex-objects. Poetry is sex sometimes in these books, and the poem is a sex-act, both the writing and reading of it. "Conclusion" spells this out: "there is nothing better/than poetry/poems are better/ . . . than sheets/stained white. . . ." All this leads to the nagging suspicion that Crozier is mainly concerned with her male audience.

The fourth book, *Humans and Other Beasts*, is a little different but not a radical departure from the first two. The violence is toned down and the language plainer, the intensity faded and the pain muted. We are presented with a slide-show effect of various forms of freakishness, but the unreality of the cases renders them almost dull. After the first two books, in which Crozier edges so close to psychological abnormality, necrophilia, and torture, the lightweight nature of some of the beast-poems is anti-climactic. There is a confusion of

lyrical, narrative, imagistic, and satirical poetry, and the impression is that the poet is searching for a new way of saying things.

One poem in this collection stands out. "Let me Have an Honest Sadness" is effective, clean, and genuine, and perhaps the finest poem in all the first four collections:

*I am tired
of the slow sadness
that sits on my shoulders
with the weight of memory
Let me have an honest sadness
that breaks through skin
like shoulder blades, sadness
trailing blood over snow
like a fox dragging its belly
from the roar of the Arctic Cat*

The "Returning" section in general is a relief, some of the sensationalism is gone and the reader is left with hope for something more positive to come.

That hope is justified by the present collection, *The Weather*. At first it seems Crozier has chosen to declare rather than evoke, to tell rather than create. In the title poem the narrator claims that "the cold follows us," and "A hand moves across/a pencil drawing of the world/and smudges everything," but the beginning of the poem bathes the reader in heat and light, and there is

nothing in the poem to evoke the chill of what she has to say. Repeatedly she turns around and simply makes the statement in contradiction to her own poetics.

While *The Weather* bears the mark of maturity and poetic fulfilment for which the first four books were searching, some of the old agonies remain. In "The Foetus Dreams," for example, the narrator becomes her own foetus. It is a lonely thought: she wants to go into her own womb, so to speak, to make herself conceive by herself. The poem can only be read with a sense of humour. "Letter to a Lover Far from Home" maintains its aesthetic until the last stanza, in which a poetic bathos occurs with "This is all to say:/such singing there will be/when you return." For someone as conscious of technique as Crozier is, this explanation at the end is an odd twist. "This Is a Love Poem Without Restraint" is symptomatic of the changes that have occurred between this and previous books. The narrator declares that "This poem/is full of pain," with some humour. Yet it is hard to believe the declaration; the poem does not seem anything but happy.

On the whole there is more striking beauty and consistent imagerial patterning in *The Weather* than before.



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The City of Toronto Book Awards consist of \$5000 presented annually to authors of books of literary excellence that are evocative of Toronto. This year's winner(s), selected from the above list, will be announced on Thursday, February 23, 1984.

"Pavlova" has a touch of humane pathos, with evocations of beauty within horror and horror within beauty. This seems to be what Crozier has been attempting all along, nowhere as successfully as in this poem. Pavlova is a beautiful dancer whose final thought is of children: the possibility arises that she made the wrong choice in life. In the end she gives birth to pus as the doctor performs surgery on her lungs and lets in "the sky." The woman who goes into herself in art, turns herself inside out. "Even you, Pavlova, you/with the beautiful feet and arms,/even you did not die/with grace or beauty." In "Mid-February" the narrator and a bird are watching someone split wood. The speaker becomes the bird, "song rises in the snow," and the poem becomes the song. The theme of poet as bird who takes the "other" with her continues throughout the book. All the variants of the soul in flight are touched on.

As the book progresses the poems comment on one another. After Pavlova's lungs are cut open to drain the disease, after the foetus is rolled out of its mother's womb "like an avocado" seed, we find the husband in "Between Seasons" stitching himself (his jeans) up again after giving birth to his wife, so to speak, who "left him," and "the thread is bright and clear —/brave, uneven hypens of colour/joining him precariously/to the morning." Another dimension is the rupture of the seasons that gives birth as well. In the title poem, for example, the narrator wants to believe in the birth of two lovers as seasons change, saying, "I want to believe in you," but instead, "Even our faith in seasons is misplaced."

In Section Two, especially after "Draught," the poems deal with disappointment and broken song. In "Last Days of Fall" the nights "grow longer," the bird of the soul has a broken wing and "will drag its wing across our eyes." "Somewhere there is a man/who can kill," she claims, intimating that the lover can break the wings of the soul. Section Three contains the story of Marie Anne Lagimodière, the "first white woman in the West." This section continues from earlier books, where the narrator struggles with the prairie as if she were the "first white woman" there. In a sense everyone is the first pioneer through life, and poetry itself is a wilderness to be crossed. The themes of love in death, violence in tenderness, of entering the land and turning the self inside-out, are repeated here. The speaker comments on "the man who sleeps with you/under the skins of what he has killed . . .," externalizing the lover's pain and making it part of the experience of the West.

The unifying integrity of the first two sections is expanded in the second two parts, dealing with the first white woman, history and the characters of a rooming house. The wilderness is pitted against the confined rooming-house space and the juxtapositions of inside and outside continues. "Main Floor Rooms," for example, has the image of "loneliness" that "drags itself/across the floor above me . . .," which is a version of the bird with the broken wing dragging itself "across our eyes" in "Last Days of Fall."

A certain regeneration occurs at the end of the book as the avocado-seed foetus becomes the pebble of hope and hidden love that the prisoner in "Monologue: Prisoner Without a Name" manages to keep in his pocket until his release. She suggests that ". . . when you leave, if they let you go, there is something left of you/like a pebble you have hidden/all these months in your pocket,/a pebble you've polished in the darkness. . . ." The process of turning bitterness into hope has been a long one, but now Crozier, no longer fighting, offers us a voice with a vision. □

REVIEW

Starlight and lechery

By JAMIE CONKLIN

Branch Lines, by Kim Maltman, Thistledown Press, 66 pages, \$16.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920066 50 X) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 49 6).

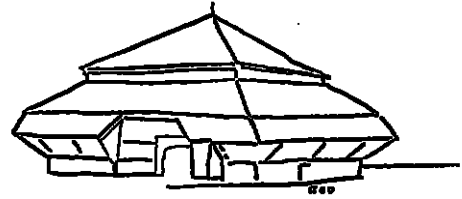
White Noise, by Garry Raddysh, Thistledown Press, 58 pages, \$16.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920066 54 2) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 53 4).

Running Into the Open, by Pamela Banting, Turnstone Press, 32 pages, \$3.00 paper (ISBN 0 88801 165 6).

KIM MALTMAN and Garry Raddysh have recently published books of poetry in which they betray a strong interest in the relationship between line and voice. Maltman uses long, prosaic lines in order to approximate the voice of the prairie storyteller; Raddysh, on the other hand, uses short lines and brief stanzas in an understated rendering of

the tensions of human relationships.

Branch Lines is Maltman's second book, and in it he presents a series of vignettes — reminiscent at times of the vignettes Hemingway used in *In Our*



Time — to develop a sense of both the deprivations and the abundance of prairie life. The title offers a clue to his concerns. He writes of the decay that follows the abandonment of branch lines and of decay in a number of common human contexts, and against this decay he juxtaposes an irrepressible abundance of prairie life: "all that life seethes up, begins again,/out there under the smoldering starlight."

In most of the poems Maltman makes the subject of the action an unidentified "you." In "The Antelope Hunters," for example, he writes about the plight of the antelope — tended by hunters during the winter, slaughtered during hunting season. He thinks of how hunters drive their prey against barbed wire, and concludes: "And you think/of all the ranchers in their pickups, with their gunracks and/their checked jackets, you think of them sitting back some-/where, and you take the pair of wire-clippers from your pocket/and you just start cutting." Aside from lending authenticity to the voice of the storyteller, his use of the pronoun is an effective way of drawing the reader into the action. Maltman invites us to experience the prairie with him, to help put out grass fires, to kill a rattlesnake, to walk upon the overgrown roadbed of an abandoned branch line.

While most of the poems deal with an individual's experience while isolated on the prairie, some take the form of brief character sketches. The best of these is "Raymond," in which the speaker describes his own frustration at witnessing Raymond's destructive relationship with his girl: "You think about him,/bad teeth, bad breath, only 23 or maybe 24 and already/fat around the middle and listen to them till you can't take it/anymore, not so much the yelling and the bitterness, or even/knowing that they're almost sure to get married next year,/but them somehow needing all this, wanting it." Maltman finds other examples of human decay: a spinster schoolteacher impregnated by one of her students, the foreman whose wife hammered three white scars into his skull, the cripple who endures repeated sessions with faith healers. He uses the

vignette in a masterful way, conveying slight yet precise impressions of prairie experience.

I have only one reservation about his work. In four of his poems he concludes by abruptly departing from his prosaic lines and using a few very short lines. This works well in "The Uses of Snake Oil," where the departure parallels the introduction of some sinister speculation; but in "Owls" the departure is gratuitous, presumably lending dignity to a sudden insight into the nature of things: "You move on,/past familiar places. In a small field by the road a man looks up/and waves, then turns back to the binder, having failed to/recognize your face. The cycle/continues./The cycle/continues." This leads an inconsistency to his voice, which, I think detracts from the effect of the poem.

While Maltman is concerned with placing himself and his readers in the context of the experiences and objects that are characteristic of the prairie, Garry Raddysh's *White Noise* is an attempt to map out a tumultuous inner region: the feelings, thoughts, and turmoils that surround a series of tenuous relationships between men and women. Raddysh's technique is the very opposite of Maltman's. He uses short lines and brief stanzas to convey sparse impressions of sparse relationships: "hesitantly passing through/the hands of the woman/who loves my words,/what they say of her,/what they do not say/of me, the vacancy welcome."

The cumulative effect of this technique of understatement is white noise, the silent knowing that underlies the relationships. As Raddysh writes, "put your hand on the stone/it is white and hard, unmoveable/do not speak of your touching/it is white noise." The touching itself defies speech, yet in his poems Raddysh persists in trying to bring the hope and uncertainty of love to words.

It is notable that Raddysh does not write of happy relationships. Deceit is his most common theme, and relationships are described as "disasters of our own making." He muses on whether or not these disasters stem from the attempt at establishing something permanent within the variety and motion of life: "when the hand falters/and falls back, stung, shamed,/unable to reach across/to a face which turns/and turns toward you."

But Raddysh sees the poems themselves as reaching across to the other, as confronting the contradiction of variety and permanence: "to set down/in order/this wildness,/the furious pink:/underside/of the evening sky." His tone is elegiac, mourning the failed relationships, and this lends a consistency

of pessimism to the work: "nothing/I have said/touches/the root of man." The disappointed lover resorts to speech, to poetry, but finds only further disappointment. Raddysh is very successful in maintaining this tone, and the result is a muted rendering of failed love.

This consistency, however, highlights a problem. Raddysh's tone becomes tedious, partly because the speaker is continually showing off the depth of his insights. In "These Failures," the speaker claims that "these failures/bewildered and amused me,/left me encumbered,/and restless." This world-weariness is not a sympathetic trait, and at times the reader may conclude that the speaker of these poems deserves the fate he is complaining of.

Consistency of tone is clearly lacking in Pamela Banting's first work of poetry, a chapbook entitled *Running Into the Open*. In it she experiments with a number of different voices and stanza forms, with varying degrees of success.

Some of the poems are ineffective. In "The," Banting is presumably presenting an impressionistic rendering of a sexual experience, but it could also be a record skipping or a lecher stuttering. She begins "To Gabriel Dumont" by proclaiming her need to know her past, but soon drifts into a lurid sexual fantasy that produces giggles — and Banting probably did not intend this. Her "The Erotics of Space," in which she portrays love as "turning the world/outside in" after which the lovers "begin again/the saying/recalling our world," is more successful; but her diction and her manipulation of line and stanza lend a dignity and elevation to the subject that it does not seem to warrant. She ends this poem by highlighting the silent breathing of the lovers, yet the importance she vests in the breathing — "our breathing is/an answer to a question/we do not have" — remains uncertain. If she had dealt with the breathing simply as an image, instead of hinting that it is redolent with ineffable meaning, the poem might have been more satisfying.

But some of the poems are dazzling, and once she has found a voice that suits her she will be a very accomplished poet. In "The Moment of Fruit" Banting gives a controlled evocation of harvest. She piles up her images, making the poem seem to ripen with the season she describes: "The air falls down/around me like apples./Dusky plums gather in/like clouds from the west./And the winds rush in/to turn the year around." Her "Skating Poems" detail precisely the weariness and longing of the experience, and in "Once, in Alberta" she gives a precise and compelling account of a remembered evening. □

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Poetic activity is at a high point, says
Irving Layton, but there are few great poems,
because society has smothered passion

By DONALD MARTIN

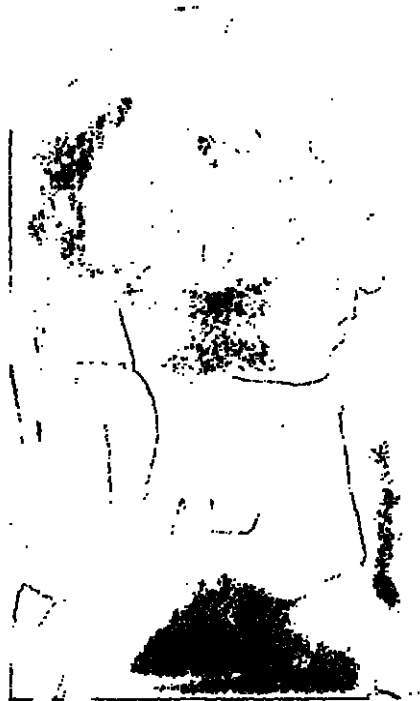
IRVING LAYTON, at 71, hardly needs an introduction. Throughout a tempestuous career that spans more than 30 years he has never shrunk from the public eye. Vividly outspoken in his celebrations of sensual love and his contempt for "shekel-chasing society . . . a technological civilization, leading to another kind of barbarism," Layton published his first poems with *First Statement* and *Northern Review* in Montreal, where he had moved with his parents from Romania when he was a year old. He was educated at Macdonald College and McGill University, and in 1952 helped found Contact Press with Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster. In 1969 Layton moved to Toronto to teach English at York University, and remained in Ontario until last fall, when he decided to return to Montreal. His first book to receive wide acclaim was *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959), and among his 30 or more other collections are *Lovers and Lesser Men* (1973), *The Pole-Vaulter* (1974), and *For My Brother Jesus* (1976), as well as numerous volumes of his selected poems. His most recent book is *The Gucci Bag* (McClelland & Stewart), which he discussed in the course of an interview with Donald Martin:

Books in Canada: *Is The Gucci Bag a completely new work, or is it just a revamped version of the previous limited edition called The Gucci Bag?*

Irving Layton: It's not quite accurate to say that *The Gucci Bag* is an old collection, though I can understand how that notion would arise, because there is an earlier version of *The Gucci Bag* that was never put in any of the book stores. It was only a collectors' item, because McClelland & Stewart did not want to bring out a hardback. Now there is a somewhat revised and larger version of *The Gucci Bag*. I took out about 20 poems from the first edition, minor pieces. I substituted about 35 poems for the ones I had taken out. But they all belong in *The Gucci Bag*; in no sense is there a hiatus between these new poems and the first limited edition.

BiC: *Why call this collection The Gucci Bag? It's such an odd title.*

Layton: That's an accident. My in-laws went to Italy and decided to bring back a Gucci bag as a gift for their son-in-law. I looked at the thing — much too small to be useful, not very attractive. I thought of Goethe or Byron sporting one of these Gucci bags and broke into gales of laughter. So I put it away. Then when we had a falling out — we're separated now — I took the Gucci bag and nailed it against the outside house wall as a talisman. It's there to keep away the vampires of materialism, just as the Transylvanian peasants are known to nail bats to the wall to keep away vampires. The Gucci bag is my symbol for the consumer society. Let's face it, the only thing that counts in our society is



Irving Layton the possession of money. Not talent. Not decency. The Gucci bag is my warning to other people not to become entrapped in the shekel-chasing, so they will not lose their souls.

BiC: *Layton is not your real name — it's Lazarovitch. Why did you change it?*

Layton: Very few people were able to pronounce the name, and in those far-off days to have a foreign name was to

be put into the category of the un-touchables. Not like today. Lazarovitch means "son of a leper." The name had been given to my forebears when a census was taken in Romania for the first time. When Jews appeared, the most odious names that could be found would be foisted on them. That's the main reason for changing my name. No recognition was taken of the fact that they all had had honourable Hebrew names — not at all. I used to call myself Irving Lazar, because I was able to end a poem, "And from near or far, you have the love of Irving Lazar." I stuck with that for quite awhile. Then along came Layton. I like Layton because it rhymes with Satan.

BiC: *Why did you choose poetry over other literary forms?*

Layton: I could say that poetry chose me rather than the other way around. I remember writing verse at a very early age. I wrote my first poem for a teacher who sexually aroused me. I was no more than 11 or 12 years old. The second poem I ever wrote was a very sarcastic poem for a girl who had first favoured me by allowing me to carry her books. She then bestowed that favour upon the class hero, the captain of the basketball team. It's interesting to see that these two aspects of my talent manifested themselves immediately — first, a love poem; second, a hate poem. Here I am now, 71 years old, and I find myself doing exactly the same things. In *The Gucci Bag* you'll find poems of love and hate. The successor to *The Gucci Bag*, which I'm working on now, is called *Poems for Jack the Ripper* — again, love poems and hate poems.

BiC: *There's some speculation as to why you have moved back to Montreal. Does it have to do with the separation from your wife and all the problems that ensue?*

Layton: That's one of several reasons. It's not the only reason, and I wouldn't even say it's the most important reason, but certainly the separation from my wife — and my child — is a very important reason. Had I been successful in securing regular access to my child I would never leave Toronto. I would have perhaps left Oakville, because it's a rather dull place. You know, Oakville is one of the richest communities in Canada, and the dullness, of course, is proportionate. Richness seems to have a terribly dulling effect on the human mind, and people there are a perfect illustration of that. So it was a toss-up between Toronto and Montreal.

I debated the question a great deal. Toronto has been very kind to me. Ontario, in general, has been a very favourable place to me. But I find Toronto a sterile city. I find it a

spiritually deadening city. Toronto is a city for young people, who are ambitious, who are striking out in their careers. I am not young, and I've never had that kind of ambition anyway. I just naturally rose, but not through any effort on my part.

ElC: *Does Montreal offer you more of a spiritual and creative inspiration?*

Layton: I like the Catholic humanism of Montreal. It's not a Presbyterian setting, like Toronto. Toronto is anti-erotic. The French Canadian is a much more joyful, witty, and fun-loving creature than the Anglo-Saxon. He's not as much of a snob as the Anglo-Saxon. He has affiliations with Europe that the anglophone simply does not have. Mon-

treil is an older city. It enables me to dream in a way that Toronto does not. There are certain streets, lanes, and parks in Montreal that are very conducive to dreaming. Toronto certainly has its beauties, but I have never felt anything other than alien in Toronto.

There's a difference too between the Montreal Jew and the Toronto Jew. The Toronto Jew I call a WASH — White Anglo-Saxon Hebrew. The Jew in Montreal still retains a lot of his Jewishness. It's a centre of an ongoing cultural evolution. That's why Montreal became the centre of poetic activity in this country, because you have three solitudes living side by side with very little intercourse between and among them. To the

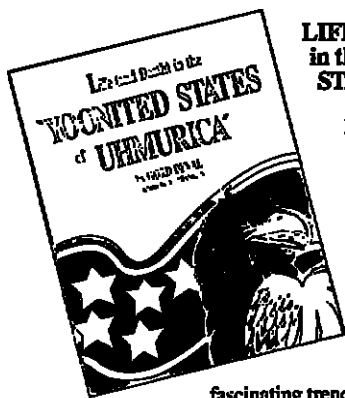
artist, the friction between and among these three groups — the English Canadian, the French Canadian, and the Jewish Canadian — has been extremely stimulating.

BIC: *As a man who has been involved with Canadian literature for so long, what do you think of the writing that has been coming out over the past 10 years?*

Layton: On the one hand, there seems to be a tremendous amount of poetic activity. There are more magazines now than ever before. And look at the poetry readings — this is a feature that few Canadians appreciate fully. When I tell Europeans that the Canada Council subsidizes its poets for readings they can't believe it. There's a great deal of poetic

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activity — that's on the black side.

On the red side — and this perplexes me — while there is a great deal of activity, I fail to see the products, the great poems. What I see is what I have begun to call the competent poem, the workshop poem. It looks good until you try to smell it, or taste it, or touch it — and then you see that it's ersatz, it's just competent. Why? Because it lacks passion. It lacks that special feeling, that magic, that transformation, that only a true poet can give to his experience. I can see the poems, but I do not see the poets. I see the same phenomenon in the United States. I don't see any poets rising to take the place of a Robert Frost or even e. e. cummings. What I see is a host of very minor, minor, minor poets with rather small voices.

ELC: *Why do you think such a situation exists today? Is it merely a product of the times?*

Layton: If what I say is true — and I have to preface this with that, because I may be too close and therefore see only the shrubs — it may very well be that the

literary sensibility is disappearing. The sensibility that enabled us to enter into the world of a Charles Dickens may have been killed off by the critics, or our secular society, by our technological civilization, which is really most unkind to imagination and intuition and, above all, passion. That may be one factor.

The other factor is that the literary sensibility, the sensibility that wants to give us a synoptic vision of reality, has been channelled into film-making. Now when I go to see films by Coppola, or by Buñuel, or Malle, I find that these are the ones that give me that metaphysical bang. They are the ones who are calling attention to the dangers of the poisons in the atmosphere of the 20th century. They are today's great poets.

Today's poem, unlike "The Wasteland," is usually a minimal lyric — it's usually very personal. As far as Canadian poets go, there seems to be no or little social or political awareness. As far as Canadian poets are concerned, Gulag never happened; there was no Holocaust. □

This unknown father becomes even more important to Paula as Rosa becomes increasingly friendly with Hans Kruger, a man she meets at a German Club party. A strain develops between Paula and her mother, growing when Paula locates her Ukrainian grandmother and begins to spend much of her free time with her. Paula begins to take Ukrainian dancing and language lessons; Rosa forbids her to mention any of this at home, and the two of them find little to talk about. It takes some wise advice from Paula's grandmother, as well as a rather hackneyed crisis — Rosa's sudden, serious illness — to effect a reconciliation and to bring Paula to terms with her dual heritage.

Hughes is good at setting up the conflicts that create a good story, but somehow the total effect here is disappointing. There is an unevenness and strange imbalance in the episodes. In a long opening sequence Paula tries to bleach her hair in hopes of becoming blonde like her mother. This does explain something about Paula's self-image and about her relationship with her mother, but the event itself has so little relevance to all that follows that it seems awkward and out of place. The amount of space it gets is disproportionate.

By the end of the story, significant events are dealt with too briefly. For instance, Paula's Ukrainian dancing lessons are very important to her, and she has to win major concessions from her mother to be allowed to take them. And she must be extraordinarily good at them. She moves through several classes to catch-up with her age group all in one short paragraph, and then the lessons are barely mentioned again. Quibbles, perhaps, but Hughes has set her own high standards and we can't help but hope she will always live up to them.

In the past several years Bill Freeman has developed a successful series of historical novels, for readers from nine to 13, about the dramatic adventures of the Bains children, a fatherless family living in the 1870s. Events in his first three books took place in an Ottawa Valley lumber camp, on board a square-rigged ship bound for Jamaica, and on a fishing schooner on the East Coast. While following the adventures of the peripatetic and resourceful Bains children, his readers pick up quite a lot of information about life in the Canada of that period. Freeman's latest book, *Trouble at Lachine Mill* (James Lorimer, 128 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper), is set in Montreal, where Meg Bains, now 14, and her younger brother Jamie have taken work in a clothing factory in order to help support their mother and the younger children back

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The young and the restless: from a child abduction in British Columbia to a perplexing chase through time

By **MARY AINSLIE SMITH**

YOUNG READERS are often insatiable. If they have the reading bug, they consume material avidly, during meals, in bathrooms, under bedcovers, and in the back seats of moving vehicles. That is why it is so difficult to keep their habits supplied. There are a number of new titles, all attractively presented, all with brightly illustrated covers, that attempt to meet this demand.

My Name Is Paula Popowich!, by Monica Hughes (James Lorimer, 150 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper), has a lot going for it. Hughes is, I think, the foremost Canadian writer for children in the 10-to-14 age group, and she has proven in such previous books as *Hunter in the Dark*: that she can be as effective in contemporary settings as in the science-fiction stories with which she is more often associated. Her readers should like Paula, the heroine of this recent book, and be sympathetic to the situation she faces. Whereas small children may prefer stories that confirm and con-

solidate their own identities and positions in the world, older children, it seems to me, want change. They dream of being better, more exciting people and therefore enjoy books in which this chance is offered to the hero.

Paula faces not only a new home in another part of Canada, new friends, and a new school, but also a brand-new identity, or at least, a great expansion of the identity she previously knew. She moves with her mother, Rosa Herman, from Toronto to Edmonton to live in the house that Rosa has inherited from her German-Canadian parents. There in the attic Paula uncovers a wedding photograph and other evidence of her mother's failed marriage to a Paul Popowich. Rosa has never talked to Paula about her father and Paula knows nothing about the Ukrainian side of her family. She creates an idealized image of her father and, in spite of learning later that he was never the hero she imagines, she clings to her dream.

home in Ottawa. Their pay is a mere \$1.50 a week; they can afford to rent only a miserable attic room; and, under a brutal foreman, working conditions are terrible. Worst of all, Meg and Jamie soon learn that they have been hired as scabs to help break a strike of male workers at the mill. Much as they need the work, they can only be sympathetic with the causes of these desperate men and their starving families.

Perhaps Meg and Jamie seem unbelievably resilient to all that they must endure, and certainly the solution they find to the problem of the strike is simplistic, although satisfying from the workers' point of view. But the book does provide valuable insight into the appalling factory conditions, the sweatshops and the poverty of living conditions in the industrial cities of 19th-century eastern Canada. And it's good to know that even workers could have some fun in Montreal, tobogganing and skating on their day off, or just sight-seeing in that fascinating, growing city.

At the end of this book, Meg and Jamie are boarding the train for Toronto where they hope to find better-paying work — a sign, we hope, that this excellent series will soon have a new installment in a new setting.

Stuck Fast in Yesterday, by Heather

Kellerhals-Stewart (Groundwood, 135 pages, \$6.95 paper), also takes place mostly in a historical setting. Jennifer, a modern child, is visiting a museum exhibit of historical photographs with her parents when she is catapulted back to the turn of the century, to the world of the photographs. There she is pursued by Mr. Blackwood, an evil photographer, who says he will gain some sort of power over time if he can get her photograph for his collection. Jennifer is taken in by a doctor's family in rural southern Ontario and becomes good friends with the children, Benjamin and Thomasina. They somehow understand her situation, rescue her from several encounters with Mr. Blackwood, and help plan her return to her own time period. Jennifer's confused reactions to the world of her great-grandparents is the best part of the book. She lives for almost a year in the past and has difficult adjustments to make to the different clothing, different school procedures, and different expectations of what is proper for young girls.

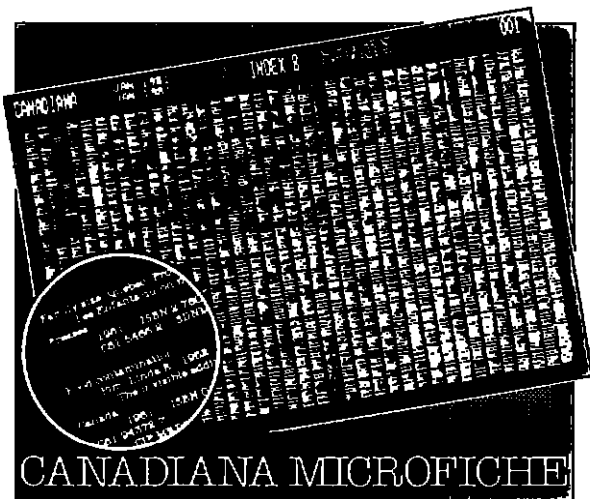
But the plot is confusing. It is never clear to me just why Mr. Blackwood is such a terrible threat, or what will happen to Jennifer if he does take her photograph. Nor is it clear how he managed to get her back into the past in

the first place. Thus at the climax of the story — a visit to the Toronto Exhibition where Blackwood is hot on the children's heels, and suspense should be building — it isn't exciting for me, because I don't know what is going on. Time-travel books can be fun, but if the basic contrivance that puts the hero ahead or back in time isn't convincing enough for us to suspend our disbelief, then the impact is lost.

The Kootenay Kidnapper (Collins, 97 pages, \$10.95 cloth) is Eric Wilson's latest Tom Austen mystery. The wise-cracking, young amateur detective is a familiar figure in Canadian children's literature, and his many admirers will be glad to follow his latest adventure, set in southern British Columbia, where Tom is on the track of a child abductor. While Tom works toward a triumphant solution of the case, Wilson manages to work in some messages about the folly of accepting rides or talking to strangers. This is no accident. It is part of Wilson's commitment to the type of young reader he hopes to reach through his high-interest stories.

Could Dracula Live in Woodford?, by Mary Howarth (Kids Can Press, 159 pages, \$4.95 paper), is one of the nastiest little stories I have read in some time. The answer to the rather catchy

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title is no, but two bored school girls spend their summer holidays tormenting an old blind recluse in an effort to prove that he is the famous vampire. They hide in his bushes, spy constantly on him, gain entry to his house, and when they finally realize their mistake, they have few guilty feelings. He is justifiably annoyed at them, and so they conclude that he is an old grouch. The fact that much of this story is told from the point of view of Sam, a sheepdog, does little to redeem it.

The *Canadian Children's Annual*, edited by Robert Nielsen (Potlatch, 160 pages, \$15.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper), marks its 10th anniversary with its latest issue. This year the popular magazine-format annual contains 18 pieces of fiction, 11 poems, and 22 articles providing information on such diverse topics as Canada's longest swinging bridge, glassblowing, Dungeons and Dragons, Pauline Johnson, and soccer. The cover art, always a striking feature of the annual, is "Bonnie," a fantasy painting by Rick Bentham. Missing this year are the puzzles, games, and comics of previous annuals, but there is certainly enough content to keep young readers busy for several days at least.

The *Book of Canadians: An Illustrated Guide to Who Did What*, by Carlotta Hacker (Hurtig, 240 pages, \$19.95 cloth), is a dictionary of biography of more than 700 Canadians, historic and contemporary, written especially for children eight to 14. Most of the entries have accompanying illustrations, some of them a little strange. Mavis Gallant, for instance, looks as if she is about to fall out of an airplane, while Karen Baldwin (Miss Universe, 1932) descends the steps of another plane, greeted by a fanfare of trumpets. Frederick Philip Grove stands almost up to his knees in snow, his face pretty well obscured by his muffler and fur hat.

Of course no one is going to be completely satisfied with the choice of entries, and so I might as well name a few of the people that I feel should also have been included. Steve Podborski is quite rightly there, but what of cross-country skiers' hero and legend, Herman "Jackrabbitt" Smith-Johannsen? Jacques Plante is in, but not Ken Dryden. Ann Blades and Dennis Lee, so why not Robert Munsch? How can Jack Hodgins be excluded when Michael Ondaatje is in? And is it really equitable to include Pierre Laporte and not Pierre Vallières? But this book does begin to fill a need, and anyone involved in elementary school research projects — assigning them, doing them, or offering advice and assistance on the side — will find it a useful addition to their reference shelves. □

Despite the increasing violence, a Canada in the throes of anarchy seems an impossible conceit to believe

By PAUL WILSON

THE WORLD depicted in *Tolerable Levels of Violence*, by Ottawa professor Robert G. Collins (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 241 pages, \$17.95 cloth), is set a short distance in the future, in 1999. For some reason the law-enforcement system has almost completely broken down. Cities like Ottawa have been turned into ghettoized war zones, where bombings, arson, and random gun-fights are everyday occurrences. Things are no better in the countryside. Marauding bands of heavily armed thugs on motorcycles, called Wanderers, terrorize the population. Towns have become medieval fortresses; country dwellers have turned their farms into armed camps protected by electronic surveillance devices and, if they can afford them, hired security guards. People travel in convoys to protect themselves from highway robbery. It is as though the world had suddenly been plunged into another dark ages.

The most astonishing thing of all, however, is that society somehow

manages to limp on. Farmers till the fields with shotguns at the ready; people still go about their daily business armed with plastic guns that metal detectors cannot pick up; and university students, always on the alert for mischief makers, attend lectures on literature and philosophy, and presumably graduate and have careers.

What makes this possible is a neat piece of social engineering: a way has been devised to predict major outbursts, and the expected levels of violence are announced on the radio each day, along with the news, weather, and pollution index. When the levels are above a point deemed to be tolerable, the schools close, public transport shuts down, and people stay at home behind their steel doors and wait for the frenzy outside to subside. In short, they have learned to cope with violence in the same stoic way as they now confront bad weather.

Collins's hero is John Cobbett, a professor of English at what is now the Na-

First novel awards

LAST SEASON was a good one for Canadian publishing — a state of affairs that was reflected in 1983's crop of first novels. The year introduced a number of new names and interesting experiments, some of which are becoming increasingly difficult, strictly speaking, to classify as fiction. But, as is often the case, conspicuous on the list of new novelists are again writers who are experienced in other forms. Among the finalists for the eighth annual Books in Canada Award for First Novels — which offers a prize of \$1,000 for the best first novel published in English in Canada during calendar 1983 — are several writers already widely recognized for their non-fiction or plays.

The five titles on the short list are: *Tolerable Levels of Violence*, by

Robert G. Collins (Lester & Orpen Dennys); *Willie: A Romance*, by Heather Robertson (James Lorimer); *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, by Susan Swan (Lester & Orpen Dennys); *Not Working*, by George Szanto (Macmillan); and *Figures on a Wharf*, by Wayne Tefs (Turnstone Press).

This year's panel of judges is chaired by writer-translator Paul Wilson, who regularly contributes a column about first novels to *Books in Canada*. The other judges are: novelist and short-story writer Matt Cohen; Dan Mozersky, manager of Prospero Books in Ottawa; Leslie Peterson, book review editor of the Vancouver *Sun*; and novelist and playwright Rachel Wyatt. Their verdict and comments will be announced in a forthcoming issue. □

tional University in Ottawa. He lives with his pregnant wife and young son on the family farm near Arnprior and commutes to Ottawa by convoy when the levels of violence permit. Cobbett's wife, who writes books for children, has just shot and killed a Wanderer who was raping their son, and they are afraid, with some justice as it turns out, that the man's gang will return to exact revenge. The story that frames the book is about how Cobbett deals with that threat.

Collins's real interest, however, is in how people raised in Canada and educated in a humanist tradition might behave if peace, order, and good government were suddenly to collapse, forcing them to deal with violence directly and personally, without the protection of coddling layers of government and police.

His characters are brave but helpless. They know exactly what kind of world they are living in, but they can't think of anything to do about it. Cobbett writes learned dissertations on subjects like "Moral Illusions in Renaissance Literature" and discusses "reality ethics" with his students; his wife writes children's books that turn into grotesque parables of reality; commuters tell each other stories like the Canterbury pilgrims as they speed through the hostile countryside. But over all there hangs a powerful sense of paralysis that is more oppressive and more terrifying, in the end, than the violence. Not only has the government lost the will to govern, but people have lost their vision, their ability to imagine that life could be any other way. The biological instinct to survive is still alive, but otherwise the coping is all.

Collins's writing is vivid, and his story (apart from an annoying habit of getting sidetracked in long passages of speculation) is grippingly told. But the book has an interesting flaw, if that is the right word for it. Like all anti-utopian novels, *Levels of Violence* aspires to be a novel of ideas, but to work well as such the most important ideas need to be embedded in the substance of the book. To put it another way, the world in which the characters live should be felt as an imaginative extension of trends already visible in the present. Superficially, this would appear to be the case, since violence seems to be on the increase everywhere. But when you look closely, most of that violence is anything but random. And to suggest that Canada itself is on the brink of sliding into anarchy — in other words, that its police forces are about to give up the ghost — strikes me as pure literary conceit. I would say that our problem is just the opposite, and that the real danger is slipping into a benign and efficiently

policed bureaucratic dictatorship.

This is not a flaw that makes the book any less interesting to read nor its final effect any less shattering. But it does unleash a whole set of questions about why, to make his story believable and to explore the theme of individual integrity and courage in a Canadian context, Collins felt he had to resort to creating a situation that is patently unbelievable. In most other countries in the world, and at most other times in human history, his story would have been entirely credible without the trappings of

fantasy, and indeed Collins edges close to making that point himself. The same themes, in fact, are exploited almost *ad nauseam* in American movies and popular fiction — the only difference being that when it comes to doing something about it, Americans don't see themselves as being quite so helpless, either collectively or individually. All of which makes me feel that Collins's book tells us more, in an oblique way, about the absence of strong, popular literary archetypes in Canada than it does about present social trends. □

IN TRANSLATION

Grace under pressure: in Hungary's short stories, if not in the Ukraine's folk tales, there is art to be found in artlessness

By PAUL STUEWE

IS TRANSLATION POSSIBLE? No, but if we're going to experience the world at its fullest it needs to be attempted anyway, as editor John Robert Colombo's afterword to George Faludy's *Learn This Poem of Mine by Heart* (Hounslow Press, \$8.95 paper) cogently argues. The several translators involved in this selection from Faludy's writings in Hungarian from 1937 to 1980 have dealt with an extremely wide range of material in an equally disparate variety of ways, but the sum total of their efforts is a consistently interesting and often very affecting volume.

Faludy's poetry derives much of its power from the struggle to preserve humanistic values in an increasingly totalitarian world. This is most evident in poems such as "Starving," which describe life under fascist and communist regimes, where idealists are forced to become realists in the ultimate test of the concentration camp:

*The fleas are doing somersaults,
And banquetting upon my member.
Why do I hold fast to such luxury items
In this labour camp? Tomorrow I will
throw it away.*

*Love? Beauty? Freedom from fear?
Good only for dreams. I yawn.
My pelvic bone hurts like broken glass.
To sit is terrible. To stand is better.*

But Faludy's insistence upon man as the measure also requires that he condemn such less dramatic and yet perhaps even more pervasive phenomena as the so-called progress of industrial civiliza-

tion, which renders our cities "Concrete, glass and metal/on the outside. Inside we will have/nightmares, claustrophobia and fear" ("I Play Chess with an Arab Professor"). His values transcend political specificities and seek to remind us of the attractions of a world where "There would be long walks, crafts,/Impecuniousness would be appreciated,/As it had been upon a time" ("Some Lines on the State of the Universe").

In contemporary North American society such notions often stand for nothing more than a kind of sentimental nostalgia for a world that never was, but in Faludy's case they represent a solid core of ideals and visions forged in some of our time's most traumatic experiences. *Learn This Poem of Mine by Heart* charts the development of these principles in verse that harries the truth with exhilarating passion, and faces consequences — including the author's candidly confessed inadequacies — with the classic courage of grace under pressure.

According to recent press reports, Hungary's rulers now have decided to tolerate a wider freedom of cultural expression in exchange for artists' tacit agreement not to engage in unsanctioned political activity. The contents of *Hungarian Short Stories*, edited by Paul Varnai (Exile Editions, \$9.95 paper), certainly exhibit a much more astringent brand of social criticism than do similar anthologies from other Eastern-bloc countries, and there's little evidence of direction from higher authority.

The 15 stories are of a very high standard. The book opens with Peter Dobai's "Mondays and Kitchens," which combines poignant, naturalistic slices of life with a baton-passing narrative strategy reminiscent of the great Austrian writer Heimito von Doderer. Ferenc Karinthy's two contributions, "Requiem" and "The Birthday of Emil Dukich," make even subtler use of naturalistic techniques in conveying broad social landscapes through first-person narrators, and Tibor Déry's "The Circus" is a beautiful, dreamlike tale recounted in a magic-realist mode. For light relief, György Moldova's "The Sixth Book of Moses" brings the prophet back to a less than understanding reception from the publishing industry, whose final verdict on the Ten Commandments is "needs work."

The impact of the anthology as a whole can perhaps best be indicated by comparing it to the Penguin and Oxford collections of Canadian stories, with which it shares the format of one or two excellent stories from each of the country's major authors. *Hungarian Short Stories* is a delightful gathering of unfamiliar and exceptionally worthwhile writing that will richly reward readers willing to venture off the beaten track.

Mar'ko Vovchok was a 19th-century Ukrainian writer whose graphic tales of life under serfdom are considered one of her people's literary treasures, but I'm afraid that *Ukrainian Folk Stories*, edited by H.B. Timothy and translated by N. Peden-Popil (Western Producer Prairie Books, \$19.95 cloth, \$13.95 paper), doesn't substantiate this reputation. This is artless, dreary, flatly narrated fiction that may be of some ethnographic value — "rich in folklore elements" is how the editor puts it — but is otherwise bereft of literary values. There is such a thing as the artistic use of artlessness, as several contributions to *Hungarian Short Stories* demonstrate, but such sheer artlessness as this might better be allowed to rest in the vast potter's field of forgotten literature.

Guernica Editions in Montreal continues its noteworthy series of bilingual editions with the French/English texts of Éloi de Grandmont's *First Secrets and Other Poems*, translated by Daniel Sloate (\$7.95 paper), and the late Québécois writer's gently rhythmic cadences come across very well in translation. Since this is precisely the sort of poetry that gets drowned out by more strident voices, I'll quote "Summer Beauty" in its entirety:

*Slight sounds of morning,
Light sounds from farms,
Soft clatter of hooves
On the stony roads.*

*The priest with yawning eyes,
Soft splash of wine
In the hands of a child
And the cool church.*

*The sunlight comes calling
And in her chambers
Awaken the white arms
Of the beloved.*

Simple and straightforward — that is, until the final image resonantly captures the mysterious, meditative mood so quietly but firmly established by what precedes it. Grandmont's poetry is alive with such magic moments, and to those with ears to listen he offers a sensuous and subtle music. □

LETTERS

The state and the arts

YOUR JANUARY ISSUE carried an article by George Woodcock in which he twice refers to the "ossification" of the Canada Council.

He has examined the membership of our juries for senior grants in writing over the past three years and discovered that every juror was "palpably a member of the arrived establishment." Although the youngest juror was 44, the jurors' average age was 59. In each jury there were two men and one woman.

I wish it were possible to pick a jury whose composition would not be open to attack on some ground or other. The staff member whose job it is to assemble juries must take into account a long list of desirable qualifications. First and most important is the competence of each juror. Woodcock has "nothing to say against the literary credentials or the personal integrity of the eight people involved."

Then there are almost always problems of availability. Many obviously qualified potential jurors, such as Woodcock himself, decline to serve on juries as a matter of principle, or cannot free themselves for jury meetings.

We strive to achieve many different kinds of balance within a jury membership. It is desirable to include jurors who are particularly familiar with different types of writing, who come from different parts of the country, and who are of different sexes (although in any three-person jury there will be a sexual imbalance one way or the other). In many

juries we also try to find jurors of different age groups.

There is one other important consideration that we must keep in mind: the feelings of those writers who are being judged. In the case of our grants for senior writers, all the applicants must have made a substantial contribution to their discipline over a number of years. While there may be writers who have a different attitude, and Woodcock may be one of them, most of the writers who fall into this category prefer to be judged by other writers who have the same qualifications. Many writers who have already published a large number of books would be outraged to discover that they were being judged by someone who had published only one or two books and was at a much earlier stage in his or her career. It is because we feel we must respect this widely shared sentiment that our juries for senior writers are composed of other senior writers.

Had Woodcock looked at a complete list of jurors, including those for "B," short-term, project cost, and travel grants, he would have found a much larger number of young people. For example, the six jurors who have just adjudicated short-term, project cost, and travel grants were all under 40. (Four of them were women, two men.)

While I recognize that ossification is a danger against which any institution must guard itself, I do not believe that the symptom cited by Woodcock supports his diagnosis.

Timothy Porteous
Director, the Canada Council
Ottawa

For art's sake

MICHAEL TAFT'S comments (January) on Geoff Hancock's review of recent books on Canadian folk art (November) are, as he says, those of a "professional folklorist." Folklore cannot be equated with folk art. Folklore is an attribute of folk art — a part of it, but not the whole thing. Art is performed by artists, folk art is performed by folk artists, and folklore is performed by folklorists.

Taft says: "I spend much of my time trying to show how items of folklore are only meaningful if understood in the context of contemporary Canadian culture." Although there is not much to quarrel with in that statement, the remainder of his remarks indicate that he wishes the rest of the world would stop regarding folk art as "art" to be admired on its own merits, as is the case in any other style of art. Aesthetic criteria are not based on the racial origin and social living conditions of the artist.

The "contextual approach" to folk art, so much admired by Taft, can apply

only to a relatively small amount of folk art, because most early folk art is anonymous, unsigned, and often suspect as to area of origin. Museums that acquire folk art insist on a provenance with pieces they purchase, thus creating a vested interest for dealers to provide the desired information. To deal with folk art on a contextual basis, and to have credibility, a book would be limited to the discussion of the works of living folk artists, plus a few rare items from the past of which a complete and true provenance is available. This is the case for the book so highly admired by Hancock, *Les Patenteux du Québec*, which deals only with the yard art of living artists.

Blake A. McKendry
Elginburg, Ont.

Uc and 'they'

BOB BLACKBURN and Barbara J. MacKay are both mistaken. In his "English, Our English" of November, Blackburn claims that writers have been driven to "abominations" such as "If a person wants to do something badly, they will find a way," because they have been "cowed" by the feminist movement. In her letter in the January issue, in reply to Blackburn, MacKay states that this use of "they" is an attempt to overcome the sexism in language. Both assume that the use of singular "they" is a recent attempt to change the language. Blackburn mentions only "writers of the past decade or so." What about writers who used singular "they" prior to the current feminist revival? Were John Ruskin, Henry Fielding, and William Shakespeare "cowed" by the feminists of their day?

In reality, singular "they" is anything but a feminist attempt to change English. The usage is much older than the notion that it is ungrammatical, and it has survived in spite of continuous attempts over the past two and a half centuries to change the language in favour of so-called generic "he." (For the history of these attempts to change English see Ann Bodine, "Andocentrism in Prescriptive Grammar: Singular 'They', Sex-indefinite 'He', and 'He or She'." *Language in Society*, No. 4, 1975.)

I support efforts to correct sexist features of language, but the use of singular "they" is not an attempt to change language. It is a refusal to give in to long and concerted attempts to change the language. Anyone, including Blackburn, who thinks *they* can cow us into stop using singular "they" should take a lesson from history.

Howard Scott
Montreal

CANWIT NO. 91

PAUL WILSON'S article in this issue prompts us to wonder, as word processing equipment becomes more and more popular, whether writers are finding the program language "user friendly" or still in computerese. Will critics of future generations be known as "worth-weighters"? Or authors as "book-birthers"? Contestants are invited to compose glossaries of literary terms as they might be mangled into computer jargon. The prize is \$25, and an additional \$25 goes to Ron Robinson of Winnipeg for the idea. Deadline: April 1. Address: CanWit No. 91, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 89

THE OVERWHELMING response to our search for beavers in 19th-century poetry has confirmed our belief that many of the world's great poets drew their early inspiration from *Castor canadensis*. The winner is Eileen Morris of North Burnaby, B.C., for her

rewriting of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Rhodora":

The Beaver

On being asked, Whence is the beaver?
*In May, when sea-winds pierced our
solitudes,
I found the furry beaver in the woods,
Gnawing with sturdy teeth in a damp
nook,
To build a dam across the sluggish
brook.
The pine tree branches fallen in the
pool
Made the black water with their
needles gay.
Here spends the beaver, in the water
cool,
His little master-builder's busy day
Dear beaver! If the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the earth and
sky,
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made
for seeing,
The beaver is its own excuse for being:
Why thou wert there, oh beaver, no
one knows!
I never thought to ask, I never knew:
But, in my simple ignorance, suppose
The self same Power that brought me
there brought you.*

Honourable mentions:

The Beaver
By Edgar Allan Poe
Once upon a millstream dreary,

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While I pondered weak and weary,
 Over many an odd and chewed branch
 upon the forest floor,
 While I pondered nearly gasping,
 Suddenly, there came a rasping,
 As of rodent feet upon a nutty store.
 'Tis some beaver, I very quickly
 uttered,
 Chewing and chawing upon his
 logwood store,
 Only this and nothing more.
 Distinctly, I remember,
 It was in the bleak September,
 When each House of Commons
 member,
 Voted for a seal and beaver hunt
 dismember.
 Eagerly, the hunters swooped down,
 Vainly, they filled the town,
 With beaver pelts of wide renown.
 Suddenly, there were no more,
 Beavers died by the score,
 Of national symbols, we will have
 just one,
 The moose is fine, but weighs a ton.
 Quoth the Beaver, "Nevermore."
 — W. Ritchie Benedict, Calgary

My Last Beaver

By Robert Browning

That's my last beaver nailed to the
 wall
 Looking as if it were alive. I call
 That fur a wonder now: taxidermists
 Worked busily a week, and there it
 twists.

CLASSIFIED

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

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MYSTIC TESTAMENT. Shirley Therese Lewis' *My Quarrel With Myself*, poetry, 93 pp., \$4.95, Phoenix Press, Box 12, Georgetown Ont. L7G 4T1. "I was moved by her expressiveness" — James Reaney. Adds Northrop Frye: "... a remarkable intelligence and an extraordinary personality ... an astonishingly compressed process of development ... The poetry that she did have time to leave behind her reflects not only her giftedness but her courage both to live and to die with a rare intensity."

Will't please you go and stroke the
 pelt? I had
 Him stuff'd and mount'd by design,
 for never read
 Hunters like you that savage
 countenance,
 The depth of passion of its ferocious
 pants,
 Upon myself it turned (and leapt full,
 steady
 At my naked throat, fangs sharp and
 ready)
 And seemed as it would maim me, if it
 durst,
 But I, axe in hand, struck. So, just
 the first
 Are you to pet and stroke it thus. Sir,
 'twas not
 But yesterday I put it in that spot.
 — Diane M. Stuart, Vancouver

The Pondlover

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

I watcht this madly munching
 mammal, voracious
 as morning's monster, maple-magnet
 castor in his foray
 On the wanton forest up before him
 knotty wood, and away
 Hied home, waddling wetly on webbed
 foot, broad tail asplay
 Tree-filled incisors! then down, down
 in a spray
 As an arm's elbow bends back in
 Chug-a-lug: one more wall for chez
 Lui, held by marsh mud. My tiny
 hurray
 Went for a rodent — the achieve of,
 the mastery of the thing, eh?
 O my *Canadensis!*
 — Stephen Elliott, Peterborough, Ont.

My Heart Leaps Up

By William Wordsworth

My heart leaps up when I behold
 A beaver on a nickel:
 So it was when, as a Boy,
 A nickel bought a wealth of joy;
 So it is now when I am old,
 Tho' the coin's not worth a pickle!
 The Child is Father of the Man;
 And I would wish that, where five
 cents is,
 T'will always be emboss'd with *Castor
 canadensis.*
 — Kenneth W. Moore, Saskatoon

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

In the Shadow of the Wind, by Anne Hébert, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman, Stoddart. Hébert once again prizes open the unimaginable in an eerie, brilliantly elusive novel that (as *Les Fous*

de Bassan) won the Prix Fémina in 1982. The honour was well-deserved.

NON-FICTION

Reading from Left to Right: One Man's Political History, by H.S. Ferns, University of Toronto Press. Ferns's 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.

POETRY

Settlements, by David Donnell, McClelland & Stewart. At times expansively prosy, Donnell creates the kind of language we hear spoken every day, but carried by the force of emotion and will to a level that common poets could hardly reach.

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:

- Alberni Prehistory, by Alan D. McMillan and Denis E. St. Claire, Theytus Books.
- Connections Two: Writers and the Land, Manitoba School Library Audio Visual Association.
- Coordination in Canadian Governments: A Case Study of Aginc Policy, by Kernaghan and Olivia Kuper, The Institute of Public Administration of Canada.
- The Delaney Report on RRSFs, by Tom Delaney, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Directory of Interlibrary Loan Policies and Photocopying Services in Canadian Libraries (3rd Edition), Canadian Library Association.
- Forest Ranger, Ahoy!, by Michael Coney, Porthole Press.
- The Frolickers Send Out a Call, by Lewis Edwards, Zooty Enterprises.
- Genealogy, Sault Ste. Marie Public Library.
- Greenhouses for Longer Summers, by Heinz and Geneste Kurth, Prentice-Hall Canada.
- Hunter in the Dark, by Monica Hughes, Avon.
- An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Eity Hillecum, Lester & Orpan Danaya.
- Jobs for All: Capitalism on Trial, by Paul Hellyer, Methuen.
- Lasting Marriages, by Benjamin Schlesinger and Shirley Tenhouse Giffon, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
- Legendary Canadian Women, by Carol McLeod, Lancelot Press.
- Lords of Winter and of Love, edited by Barry Callaghan, Exile.
- Modernity and Responsibility: Essays for George Grant, edited by Eugene Combs, U of T Press.
- More Stately Mansions: Churches of Nova Scotia, 1830-1910, by Elizabeth Paocy, Lancelot Press.
- The Muffin Baker's Guide, by Bruce Koffler, Firefly.
- The Mystic North, by Roald Naggaard, U of T Press.
- No Man's Brother, by Charles Ewert, Avon.
- Opening Day, by George Stanley, Oolichan Books.
- Placent Songs, by E.F. Dyck, Brick Books.
- Reflections, by Orville E. Ault, Initiative Publishing House.
- The Second Mile Anthology, edited by William Pope, Lancelot Press.
- Take Notice: An Introduction to Canadian Law (2nd Edition), by Steven N. Spetz and Glenda S. Spetz, Copp Clark Pluman.
- To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada, by Albert Vandermay, Paidea Press.
- Tourists from Algol, by Tom Henlghan, Golden Dog Press.
- The West: The History of a Region in Confederation, by F. F. Conway, James Lorimer.
- A Whale Named Henry, by M. Wyllie Blanchet, illustrated by Jacqueline McKay Mathews, Harbour Publishing.
- What Can I Do This Summer?, by Darl L. Bedal, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
- Why Delinquency?, by Maurice Cusson, U of T Press.
- Wisemaking at Home, by Heinz and Geneste Kurth, Prentice-Hall Canada.

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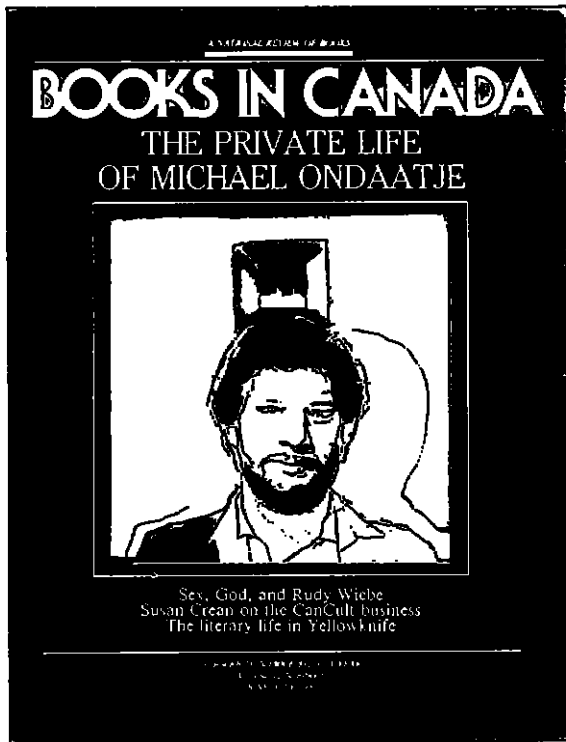
By Richard Plant

AFTER THE STORM

A review of Elizabeth Spencer's *The Salt Line*

By Leon Rooke

Plus reviews of new books by Mary Meigs, Lionel Kearns,
Mordecai Richler, and an interview with David Cronenberg



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