

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

# BOOKS IN CANADA

## THE MORAL VISION OF MATT COHEN



Reviews of new books by Timothy Findley,  
Erika Ritter, Leon Rooke, and Rick Salutin  
And our annual roundup of gift books

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## CONTRIBUTORS

Toronto artist Helke Blohm's drawings appear throughout the issue. Lesley Choyce's first novel, *Downwind*, is reviewed on page 29. Doug Fetherling writes frequently about poetry in these pages. Mark Gerson is a Toronto freelance writer. Douglas Glover's first novel, *Precious*, was published recently by Seal Books. Douglas Hill writes a column about paperbacks for the *Globe and Mail*. Alberto Manguel is the editor of *Black Water: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature* (Lester & Orpen Dennys). Paul Orenstein's photographs of literary personalities appear frequently in these pages. John Oughton's most recent collection of poetry is *Gearing of Love* (Mosaic Press). H.R. Percy's most recent novel is *Painted Ladies* (Lester & Orpen Dennys). B.W. Powe is the author of a book of criticism, *A Climate Changed* (Mosaic Press). Joyce Wayne is a freelance writer in Waterloo, Ont. Paul Wilson is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. Morris Wolfe teaches film history at the Ontario College of Art. Rachel Wyatt's most recent novel is *Foreign Bodies* (House of Anansi).

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# From battlefields to Beulah: the promises and pitfalls of adapting words to film.

## Eyes averted

WHEN WE SPEAK of film adaptations, sooner or later someone always asks whether a movie is "faithful" to its source. But whether we talk of adultery or remarriage, most agree that the cinematic and literary muses are dissimilar ladies.

Marital relations figured in "Eyes Write," a film series sponsored by McClelland & Stewart at the recent International Festival of Festivals held in Toronto. The eight Canadian films were followed by authors' readings and panel discussions in which the writer and director often claimed that they had loved, honoured, and cherished.

Greg Gatenby, the Harbourfront literary co-ordinator who programmed the series, said, "Adaptations from book to screen are full of promises and rife with pitfalls." True. Rare is the film-maker who transforms a work — as a pleased Julio Cortazar said of his story "Blow-Up" at the hands of Michelangelo Antonioni — into something "rich and strange."

There were no Antonionis in Gatenby's series — no Cortazars either — but it usually drew large and perhaps unduly respectful crowds. And it was a significant part of the Festival's overall emphasis on Canadian cinema (about 65 per cent of 400 films were Canadian, a strategy vindicated by favourable reviews and increased ticket sales). I caught six films, skipping *Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe (sans sous-titres anglais)* and *Snowbirds*, which wasn't an adaptation anyway, but a TV script Margaret Atwood worked up from her own scenario.

The series opener, *Le Sang des Autres (The Blood of Others, 1984)*, came laden with heavyweight promises: Claude Chabrol (director), Simone de Beauvoir (author), Brian Moore (screen-writer). Viewers thus lured were treated to two hours of priggish morality and sentimental mush. De Beauvoir admitted, Moore said, that her second novel "was not very good." Of course, bad books have made good movies; not so with this France-Canada production, which might have been called, like the canned spaghetti, Franco-American. So limp is it that even the star, a plump and static Jodie Foster, seemed dubbed. From the

lugubrious voice-over that begins the film (Paris, 1938: trouble brewing) we trail behind a politically uncommitted young Frenchwoman as she falls in love with a Communist, is in turn loved by a Nazi, and ends up a Resistance heroine. After her Nazi shoots himself she stands over the body while the Communist urges, "Come on, let's go." A heckler in the audience justly commented, "Big Mac attack."

Moore wrote the adaptation ("an enjoyable experience for me") during four months as a writer-in-residence in Toronto, making "very large emendations" to de Beauvoir's book. Lamentably for the viewer, Chabrol didn't change much en route to the screen. After the film, Moore read from "something completely different," a novel scheduled for spring publication in which a 17th-century priest and a young boy accompany Indians on a journey from Quebec to the Great Lakes — on the scant evidence, a dull rehash of the *Jesuit Relations*.

We then marched to *The Wars* (1983). The film is not as bad as some critics have claimed: the occasional humour works; the acting is often of high quality, though sometimes oppressively so; there is Glenn Gould's music and much visual beauty — an autumnal tone poem. Yet there's no denying that it's a tedious two hours to sit through. The narrative implausibilities that the author's eloquence makes credible in the novel here become as clangorous as the First-World-War battlefields on which Lieutenant Robert Ross stumbles through mud and makes an apocalyptic dash on horseback. The fault seems less with Timothy Findley's script than in Robin Phillips's direction. It's as if Phillips lusted to freeze stage action at crucial moments; equipped with a camera, he is free relentlessly to frame close-ups that turn movement into a geriatric fugue. Each close-up quietly clamours: *This is a symbol; this minor character is vitally important; look at this actor's face registering the entire range of human emotion — wonderful, no?*

No. Still, writer and director were pleased with each other. Phillips called Findley "a colossally important writer," his own task "to match courage for courage." When asked if he would consent to someone else remaking *The*

*Wars*, Findley said, "This is the film it is. As long as I was in control I would say absolutely no."

With *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974) the equation seems simple: when a novelist and a film director — experienced, talented artists who are old friends and former roommates — get together, it virtually guarantees a fine adaptation of a fine book. The rapport between Mordecai Richler and Ted Kotcheff (taking time off from filming *Joshua Then and Now*) was obvious during the discussion, and they took playful shots at each other. Kotcheff: "Some people think that *Duddy Kravitz* was a better film than a novel."

At least parity: even the novel's weaknesses are echoed. Richler has yet to write a persuasively sympathetic female character, and the film Yvette — despite Micheline Lanctot's talent and beauty — is no exception. Of course, Richard Dreyfuss is physically very different from the novel's dark, pimply, scratching Duddy, as Kotcheff explained, not an Eastern European but a German Jewish type ("blue-eyed and pear-shaped"). When Dreyfuss auditioned, "he was totally wrong with the idea of the character I'd had in my head for 15 years." But the director's choice triumphed in a personal force and cascading energy that Dreyfuss has not shown since. Which only goes to show that in the translation of book to film, wrong sometimes becomes right.

W.D. Valgardson's involvement in *Gentle Sinners* (1984), the CBC-TV film made from his novel (to be aired in January), was restricted to an 11-hour consultation in the lobby of Victoria's Empress Hotel. Yet Ed Thomason's adaptation and Eric Till's direction satisfied the author: "I think in images. Watching the film was like watching my imagination work." Three years in the writing, the book "was written in many layers like a piece of Greek pastry." Till, who first heard of the book in a Vancouver newspaper review, retains the layers, though not without some mishaps in the bakery. For example, there's a bad moment near the start when the young hero, having run away from fanatically religious parents, gets tricked into parting with his money — and clothes. This happens at a roadside in bright daylight: cut to pitch darkness,

and he's *still* looking for his clothes. As well, a silly scene in which the images of the teenager's parents spookily appear in bottles he is using for target practice provoked audience guffaws.

But it was the book's central situation that could have brought calamity. Young Eric fetches up with his Uncle Sigfus, and over a summer learns, in the words of the CBC blurb, "the value of friendship, common sense and compassion and experiences for the first time the freedom to love." What a recipe for disaster! One expects another of those ghastly tutor-tyro arrangements with which the reader and viewer are wearily familiar: wise old chief instructs callow young brave. Yet the film surmounts the peril, thanks to discreet Christian symbolism, an invigorating Manitoba landscape of prairie and lake, the freshness of some new young actors, and the saga-like quality of the story. I fear, though, that the film's virtues will vanish once it reaches the small screen.

The Festival guide hilariously described *Back to Beulah* (1974), a TV adaptation of W.O. Mitchell's stage play, as "a story of a young boy's passage to adulthood." It is not, of course, but concerns three mentally ill women in a group home who at Christmas fantasize that

the Christ-child doll is a baby and imprison their medical case worker. At the film's close, the doll is shattered and so are viewers' hopes. From the obtrusive "Amazing Grace" theme music to the coy, cloying dialogue and the lumpish symbolism, this was a script to inspire pity for the actors. (Presumably TV watchers could switch off their sets.) In the discussion the director, Eric Till, remarked that the piece suffered in being cut to less than half its stage length. But even a valiant struggle by Erika Ritter (who chaired the panel) to make Till and Mitchell say something stimulating could not disguise the fact that the play not only suffered, it died, and the film we'd just watched was the flickering Last Rites.

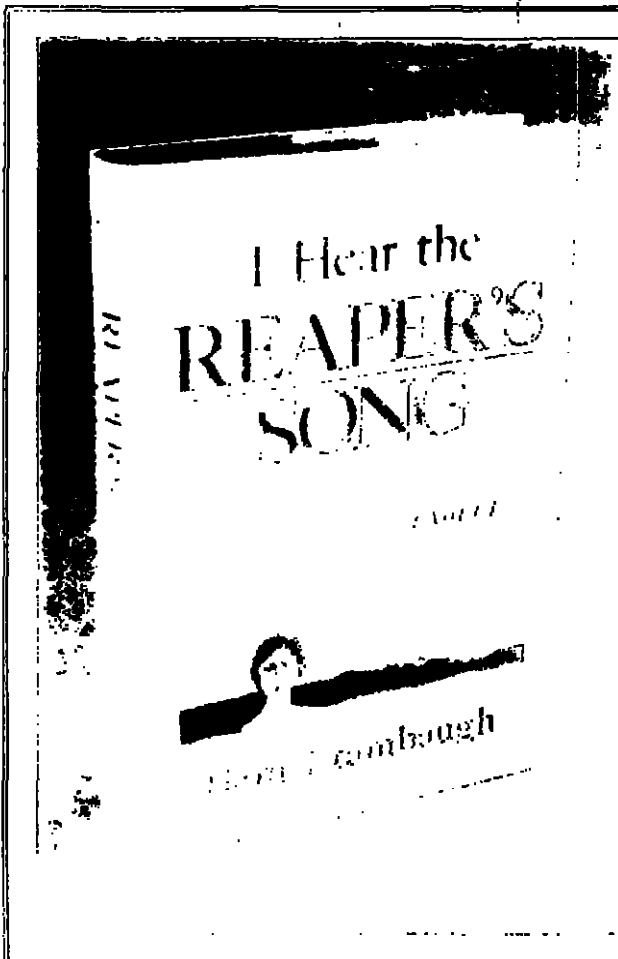
After *Beulah*, it was a relief to watch the charmingly ingenuous *Now That April's Here* (1958), Norman Klenman's little-known dramatization of four Morley Callaghan short stories: "Silk Stockings," "The Rocking Chair," "The Rejected One," and "A Sick Call." Set in that Belfast of the spirit that was 1950s Toronto, the film gave us High Park, street signs, all the particularities of place that Callaghan so assiduously avoided for fear of alienating U.S. readers.

Despite — or perhaps because of —

the occasionally awkward acting and stilted dialogue, the film oddly did preserve Callaghan's strengths. At the time of the Papal visit, "A Sick Call" had special resonance: a priest gains time to administer Extreme Unction to a dying young woman by tricking her anti-Catholic husband into leaving the sick room. A simple, but morally sophisticated story, it was Callaghan and the film-makers at their best. Afterwards, the loquaciously name-dropping Callaghan, accompanied by his son Barry, displayed a memory dazzlingly retentive of film options hinted at, taken up, or dropped by such as Louis B. Mayer and Sean Connery. (James Bond in *The Many Coloured Coat*?) "The hardest thing in the world to get out of the movie guy is an honest dollar," Callaghan cracked.

On that note, "Eyes Write" ended. Throughout, one conspicuous ghost presided over it, that of a barrel-chested alcoholic named Malcolm Lowry. The adaptation of Lowry's *Under the Volcano* had just been released. And somewhere exists what is by all accounts a magnificent film script of Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. Lowry wrote it; the film remains unproduced.

— FRASER SUTHERLAND



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# BEYOND THE PALE

Whether writing about rural misfits or confronting the plight of Diaspora Jews, Matt Cohen ponders a world of epical good and evil

By JOYCE WAYNE

MATT COHEN is not the kind of writer who describes his fictional characters as if they belong to anyone but him. They are his, and his alone — as close to him as the lines of his own palm. Simon Thomas, the main character of *The Disinherited*, which he published 10 years ago, is as fresh and alive within him as is Avram Halevi, the protagonist of his latest novel, *The Spanish Doctor*. For Cohen, and for those who are willing to risk: the always surprising, always disconcerting leap of imagination into his fictional world, these characters are not small people living small lives; instead they live out their dreams and nightmares on a grand, baroque scale. Simon Thomas, and Avram Halevi force us into the deeper, often more frightening sides of our own natures.

The intense style of Cohen's work has, for the most part, not stood him in good stead with his critics. With the exception of frequent favourable reviews by George Woodcock, Cohen has been denigrated in the press. It seems odd that his writing, which explores the questions of the good and evil in men's hearts, has been labelled formulaic and even shallow. In a review of *The Spanish Doctor* in the *Globe and Mail*, Bronwyn Drainie's kindest comment was, "I suppose we should be grateful he has broken away from the dry and ironic Canadian subject matter he has usually chosen up to now." Having published seven novels and four collections of short stories in the past 15 years, Cohen is trying to be philosophical about public response to his work. "I suppose," he says, "I haven't hit upon the way to be Jewish and be a writer in this country."

Clearly he believed that *The Spanish Doctor*, his first novel to deal exclusively with Jews, would put an end to the question he has often been asked: "Why don't you write about your own background instead of a bunch of dirt farmers north of

Kingston?" Perhaps then, like Mordecai Richler, Morley Torgov, or Adele Wiseman, he would find a more comfortable place in the spectrum of Canadian writers. Instead, the opposite seems to have happened. *The Spanish Doctor* rankled the reviewers every bit as much as did Cohen's Salem novels, *The Disinherited* (1974), *The Colours of War* (1977), *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone* (1979), and *Flowers of Darkness* (1981).

*The Spanish Doctor* is Cohen's lushest, most extravagant novel to date, the story of a 14th-century Marrano Jew whose

life bridges the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It follows the Jews of Western Europe from the beginning of the Spanish Inquisition through their expulsion from Spain, France, and Italy to their final exile, in the 15th century, in the impoverished ghettos of Eastern Europe.

Technically, Cohen takes on enormous risks in the novel. Not only does he move the action through almost a century in time, but he manages to make each centre of activity — Toledo, Montepel-lier, Bologna, and Kiev — come to life as he explores the dilemma of the Diaspora Jew. He agrees that the mechanics of a novel of this scope are extraordinarily daunting, and adds with uncharacteristic pride that few novelists could handle it. Throughout our interview, it was the only moment that Cohen defended his own work.

We were talking in Cohen's one-room, shabby office in Markham

Village in Toronto. The office is furnished in 1968 student cop-decor, remnants and rejects from other houses, other times. Nothing matches or blends. The one huge, grimy window opens onto an alley where stray cats and dogs wander among heaps of garbage, and a pervasive flurry of dust and exhaust fumes permeates the air. But inside the room the surroundings



Matt Cohen

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By Ted Bissland

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fade as Cohen discusses the ways and means of his craft. As we drift from the Salem novels to his short stories to *The Spanish Doctor*, we could be anywhere: on an old farm in rural Ontario, in a café in Paris, even among the massacred Jews of Toledo.

Quietly, and with some uncertainty, he ponders the realization that yes, he is writing about Jews, about his own people, his own faith. Yes, he is writing about a Jew, Halevi, who tries desperately to escape the fate of his Jewishness. And yes, he was raised in the west end of Ottawa, where he was often the only Jew in his class or even his school. His parents, both the children of immigrants from Russia, provided him with a typical Jewish education: Hebrew school, a Bar Mitzvah, family services during the High Holidays. But Judaism was not a driving force in his home. His father acquired a Ph.D. in chemistry, and Cohen says that his father's retreat into science was probably a way of breaking free of the strict orthodoxy of his devout grandfather.

Like most Jews of Cohen's age who strayed from their community, his connection with it today is non-existent. But he is still very much a Jew in spirit, and the dilemmas that Halevi must deal with in *The Spanish Doctor* are often very modern questions. Although Halevi lives his life on a grand scale, he resembles in many ways a German Jew of the 1930s. The comparisons are inescapable. Halevi considers himself a Spaniard first and then a Jew, strangely unwilling to accept that signs point directly to the disaster that the Jews will face. Even as he moves from Spain to France, he remains the doctor, the rationalist, the early Renaissance man who will neither accept the irrational evil perpetrated upon his people nor embrace religious salvation in the Jewish God. He is waiting for the great age of reason. But ultimately what he discovers and endures during his long tragic life is not reason but its antithesis. What he discovers is the 14th- and 15th-century equivalent to Auschwitz. In the end what saves him is his own turning to Judaism and his faith in the God of Abraham.

"I certainly haven't found the light, if that's what you're wondering," Cohen says. It is the day after his father's funeral, and the event alters every question and reply. The funeral was held in the old Jewish synagogue in Lower Town in Ottawa — Norman Levine country. Tomorrow Cohen will return to Ottawa to sit *shiva*, the seven-day mourning ritual of the Jewish father.

At the end of *The Spanish Doctor*, Avram Halevi dies. His son, the child of Avram and his Christian wife, is by his side. Joseph, Avram's son, will be the Jew that Avram could never be. Joseph will live by his faith.

COHEN IS ambivalent about the ending of his novel, as he is about most things. In fact, ambivalence seems to have both propelled and plagued him throughout his life. As a student at the University of Toronto in the 1960s, he studied political economy, but completed his master's thesis on the writings of Camus, Sartre, and de Beauvoir; his thesis adviser was the renowned Marxist critic C.B. MacPherson. At university Cohen was one of the prime movers behind the Canadian Universities Campaign Against Nuclear Armament. He travelled the country, giving speeches and writing articles to promote the peace movement.

But he was becoming bored with liberal economic theory as it was taught at U of T. He began writing short stories — an activity, he says, of which his political friends disapproved. ("It just wasn't allowed.") Though he may still discuss in elaborate, precise detail the similarities he sees between Adam Smith and Karl Marx, he left university dissatisfied with strictly political answers to why the world is the way it is.

A career counsellor assured him that he would be perfectly suited for employment in an insurance company. "I went for an interview, and of course I was like I am — I haven't

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 — Louis Del Grande and Martha Gibson *Seeing Things*

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 Johnny Wayne & Frank Shuster *The Wayne & Shuster Show*

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 — Knowlton Nash *The National*

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 — Dave Broadfoot *Royal Canadian Air Force*

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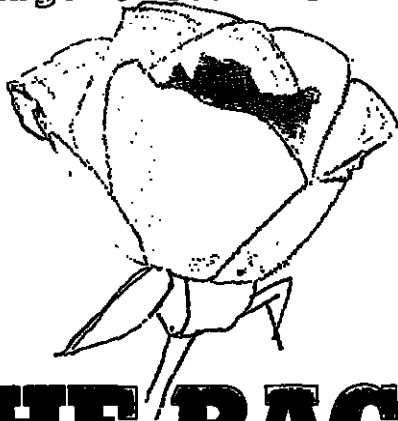
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changed much. My hair was too long, my clothes were ridiculous. Everyone there was all in blue — blue suits, blue ties. Shaved to within a thin wedge of their lives. Of course, I didn't get the job."

After his fourth year at university, Cohen left for Europe, where he began to write a novel. An English patron was willing to support him and promised to get his novel published, but Cohen turned the offer down. "I didn't want to be so dependent on anyone else, and I didn't want to become a British writer. Anyway, I wasn't sure I had anything to write."

After returning to Canada, Cohen didn't write fiction for another five years. Instead he completed his master's degree, began a Ph.D., and by 1967 had a tenure-track position in George Grant's religion department at McMaster University. Grant was impressed by Cohen's intellect, and in Grant Cohen found the kind of thinker — the iconoclast, the man of pure moral convictions — that he had been searching for. Of all the people Cohen mentions, it appears George Grant affected him most profoundly. Although an academic, Grant allowed Cohen to connect with his own fictional gift. "I was very close to Grant. He made me realize that what you think is important to you is important, and that you are responsible for your thoughts. What goes through your mind need not be out of control."

OUT OF CONTROL. He repeats these words several times. We open a couple of beers — they taste warm and dusty, like the late afternoon light that filters through the alley window. Cohen controls his own writing, I realize, but the one quality all his major characters exhibit is how out of control they are. Whether blocked by the forces of passion or of history, the characters in Cohen's novels do not control their lives, although they often fall victim to the desire to do so.

During his year at McMaster, Cohen began to realize that he had something to say as a writer. At the age of 26 he left the university to write fiction full-time. Now, at 41, he says, "Grant taught me that there was no separation between the abstract and the personal, and so I knew the only way I was going to write was if I was forced to write."

At graduate school, Cohen believes, his consciousness was overtaken by intellectual concerns. "I was very good at it, but it didn't mean that much to me. I couldn't see why philosophical questions couldn't be explored in fiction — perhaps explored more fully." In the last 15 years he has hardly taken a day away from his work. He began in 1969 with *Korsonilaff*, a surrealist tale about a neurotic philosophy teacher who is caught between the cold reason of what he teaches and his own amoral and destructive passion. This was followed by the experimental novel *Johnny Crackle Sings* and his first collection of short stories, *Columbus and the Fat Lady*.

By 1970 he had not only discovered that he did indeed have something to say, but he found a part of the country that would become his own, both in personal and fictional terms. Making his home in the rocky, marshy country north of Kingston, Ont., he began the struggle of writing *The Disinherited*, the first of his Salem novels, all of which tell stories of an odd, vanishing community of misfits — people as tough as the district they inhabit and as soft and loving as the land at its most beautiful.

While writing *The Disinherited* (a task he describes as one that almost destroyed his sanity), Cohen unearthed his true imaginative world, one that does not rest on his surrealist skills but on the depth of his characters. The Salem inhabitants are Old Testament characters, larger than life, biblical in the scope of their loves and hates, joys and angers.

From the beginning of *The Disinherited*, where a father and son have sex with the same woman, passion becomes the centre of Cohen's novels. The wildness of their landscape dries their skin and ages them, but inside his characters never become city



people. They remain as unpredictable, frightening, and large as the countryside they inhabit. All of Cohen's writing is about passion, he says, "because it is at the centre of life, it is what matters. People write about or live such minuscule lives. I don't."

In many ways, *The Spanish Doctor* is not so much a departure from the Salem novels as a further opening of Cohen's vision. He is facing his own Jewishness and exile from the Jewish community, and he is confronting the larger-than-life quality of his characters by placing them in an historical epoch that matches their attributes. In a sense, history has replaced the landscape, and it is history that now propels his work.

In the Salem novels good and evil revolve around the passion in his characters' hearts. With *The Spanish Doctor* Cohen is reaching for something larger: why evil afflicts a whole peo-

ple; why genocide occurs; why history shows barbarism triumphing over good. In *The Spanish Doctor* Cohen asks why the God of Abraham created the forces of darkness.

After leaving Cohen's office, I remember that the Jewish New Year is approaching: Rosh Hashanah and then Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. Like most Jews who live outside the Jewish community, I understand Cohen's ambivalence toward his faith. I wonder if he will find his answer in his fiction; I wonder if he will help the rest of us. I know he will not take the easy route. If he is searching for the ultimate leap of imagination that removes one from the rational, will he find it in religious faith? What I do know is that he will force us to think about good and evil in our own lives. For us, as for the characters in his fiction, the conclusions will be both beautiful and painful. □

#### FEATURE REVIEW

## Out in left field

Rick Salutin's view of left-wing theology as 'a way of looking at the world' lets him preach Marxism without having to practise it

By PAUL WILSON

**Marginal Notes: Challenges to the Mainstream**, by Rick Salutin, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 314 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88619 050 9).

RICK SALUTIN is an unusual figure in Canadian writing. In some ways, his position in the world of Canadian letters bears a vague resemblance to that which George Orwell had in England. Like Orwell, Salutin is a left-wing outsider and like Orwell his writing skills, at their best, have gained him honour and recognition in the mainstream. *Les Canadiens*, a play he wrote ("with an assist from Ken Dryden") about Quebec and the Montreal Canadiens, was a genuine hit and netted him a Chalmers Award for the best Canadian play of 1978, and another play, *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, created in collaboration with the actors of Theatre Passe Muraille, has justly become a classic in the canon of modern Canadian drama. His regular "Culture Vulture" column in *This Magazine* (with which he has been closely associated for more than a decade) afforded him the kind of forum for casual, critical comment on politics and the arts that Orwell's "As I Please" column for the *Tribune* in the mid-1940s afforded him. There are even times when Salutin's prose rises to the Orwellian ideal of apparently effortless clarity.

But here the tenuous (some might say absurd) parallel ends. Orwell was writing in a different time and place. He belonged to an intellectual community that had a powerful sense of its own traditions, one of which is public controversy, an area where, to the detriment of writers like Salutin, Canada is notoriously weak. And his major theme was one of the most important problems of this century: how to salvage common decency, which for Orwell was embodied in the ideals of a humane, democratic socialism, from the murderous clutches of totalitarianism disguising itself as real socialism. And that is a problem that Salutin, along with many of his fellow Canadian leftists, wilfully ignores.

The pieces gathered in *Marginal Notes* — most of which originally appeared in *This Magazine* — cover the range of topics that have engaged Salutin's interest over the past 13 years. He is fond of sports and writes with great feeling about hockey and its relationship to Canadian history and national character. He plunges into the thickets of Canadian cultural politics and grapples, gloves off, with the origins, trials, and tribulations of the CBC and the National Film Board. He castigates the follies of Hollywood North, that infamous attempt, a few years ago, to build a Canadian film industry by mak-

ing surrogate American movies in this country. He writes with a keen sense of malicious delight about the demise of C-Channel. He profiles Canadian working-class heroes like Kent Rowley and Bob Gainey, and chronicles social and political changes within the Canadian Jewish community in which he grew up. He launches fiery salvos at "mainstream" media figures like Robert Fulford and Barbara Amiel and deals with a host of other minor topics, including Joe Clark jokes, Marxism in Margaret Atwood, the McKenzie Brothers' humour, and an intriguing piece on how fear of communism in Stratford, Ont., led indirectly to the establishment of the Shakespearean Festival.

By his own confession, Salutin is a preacher *manqué*. He says that in his youth he was "a teenage existential theologian," and he spent part of his 10 years in the U.S. studying theology in New York. He describes his discovery of Canadian nationalism as a "conversion," and much of what he writes is propelled by a strong tendency to sermonize. Too often, he yields to the temptation to ruminate aloud on the meaning of what he is describing, rather than allowing the reader to come to his own conclusions. His profile of Bob Gainey, for example, has some wonder-

fully entertaining and revealing moments (Ganey is a frequent patron of the Longhouse Book Shop in Toronto, which carries only Canadian books, and is avidly interested in the history of Peterborough, his home town), but the article is weakened by Salutin's attempt to turn one of the best defensive forwards in hockey into a symbol of "the earnest, achieving English Canadian."

A piece on the rise of the New Right, "In Search of the Majority" (which originally appeared in *Quest*), begins promisingly as Salutin introduces us to two real people, one a rural housewife and the other a worker and former NDP supporter, both of whom espouse New Right views because they are worried about the state of the world. Salutin finds much in them to admire as people, but he quickly dismisses their views as the product of an exploited ignorance without really examining whether there is any objective reason for their fears. And when he starts examining another outpost of the Right, the religious talk show *100 Huntley Street*, his argument flounders in quasi-scientific speculation about the sexual basis of mysticism. It is maddening to see a writer with Salutin's power of verbal clarity slipping so frequently into explanations that only *appear* to explain.

At the centre of Salutin's work is a dogged search for a national identity he

can embrace without feeling embarrassed and a concern for the abuses of political and economic power in Canada. His main strength as a commentator, I would suggest, is that he never allows us to forget how closely our culture is related to the facts of our political and economic life.

The question of which comes first, of course, is one of the great chicken-and-egg debates of the century, and Salutin, who is a self-avowed Marxist, opts for the standard Marxist view that economics and politics determine culture. Curiously enough, the emotional thrust of his book is exactly the opposite, for he seems to be arguing — and his work in the theatre supports this — that if Canadians could take themselves seriously as a people (which is a cultural act) they would be able to deal far more independently with their political and economic problems. The argument between these two positions, although slightly out of focus, is contained in the scene from his play *Nathan Cohen: A Review* at the end of the book.

Salutin's Marxism, however, presents a serious problem. He defines it, rather innocuously, as "a way of looking at the world," as opposed to the more standard definition of Marxism as a way of changing it. In effect, this gets Salutin off the hook. It allows him to treat Marxism as a theology, to preach it

without having to practise it. Like many Marxist theologians, he is a creationist. He rages against evolutionism, the "mingy and tentative solutions for tinkering with things as they are" and longs for a ready-made, global solution to replace the "system" that has failed. And because he steadfastly refuses to look at the ways Marxism has been abused, he has been able to erect his demonology of the world on a single pillar — anti-Americanism — while utterly failing to take into account all the dirty work done in the name of Marxism by "the other side," by China, the Soviet Union, and their colonies.

The one-sided nature of Salutin's unexamined Marxism leads him furthest astray in his "Notes on a Week in Cabo Delgado," an account of a trip he made to Mozambique in 1978 as a guest of the ministry of information. Salutin was taken around the country by Francisco, a Soviet-trained party cadre who was in the middle of a campaign to "restructure the party." He was shown the achievements of the revolution and introduced to crowds of people to whom Francisco, with Salutin's approval, passes on a comic-book version of Canadian history. ("First the French ruled Canada, then the British expelled the French, then the British retired . . . leaving deep roots that remained. Then came the Americans. This people has lived under colonial domination for four hundred years.") He even talks to a Canadian-educated internee in one of the country's "re-education camps," but implies that the fellow probably deserves his fate. Salutin sees all this and more, but because he has never bothered to study the techniques of Soviet imperialism, he can't recognize the Soviet handwriting when it's staring him in the face: party purges, the systematic, enforced elimination of potential opponents from public life, the deliberate distortion of history for immediate political ends and, the most obvious of all, the use of innocent foreign sympathizers like himself, armed with a convenient double standard, to bolster a regime's legitimacy.

Ultimately, Salutin's uncritical Marxism is more like a sledgehammer than a scalpel. It is all but useless for making important distinctions. Or perhaps Salutin is just being inconsistent. On the matter of nationalism, for instance, he is quite willing to admit that there can be good and bad varieties. He would probably even admit, if you pressed him, that there can be good and bad socialism. He is not, however, willing to extend the same courtesy to notions like business or government. In Salutin's cosmology, business is always bad; government, especially when it intervenes on behalf



## CANADIAN LITERATURE

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of the arts, is generally good. But there are, after all, good and bad ways of using capital, good and bad ways of running a business, good and bad legislation and, to hit at the heart of one of Salutin's bugbears, good and bad ways of applying business principles to the arts. At their best, the small Canadian theatres that have nurtured so much new drama, including Salutin's own work, have managed to evolve a delicate mesh-

ing of entrepreneurial skills with artistic vision, a tremendously important development that should be encouraged. Salutin's Marxism, however, allows him to see only the negative potential.

And this, in the end, is the real problem. Salutin doesn't really have a positive vision. You don't sense that he is really interested in the world becoming any better than it is. His main belief, when you boil it down, is that real power is in the

wrong hands and need only be transferred to the right ones for justice to be done.

Obviously, the best that can be said about *Marginal Notes* — and it is not a small thing — is that it is a stimulating and provocative book. With a fine clarity, Salutin embodies the best and the worst of current left-wing opinion in this country, confirming something I've felt for a long time, that the most interesting things usually happen on the fringes. □

#### FEATURE REVIEW

## Apocalypse then

Timothy Findley's astonishing retelling of the story of Noah sounds a timely warning of the imminent destruction of our present world

By DOUGLAS HILL

*Not Wanted on the Voyage*, by Timothy Findley, Penguin, 352 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 80305 7).

NOTHING IN Timothy Findley's distinguished career — nothing and everything — prepares a reader for the wonders of this new novel. In an amusing introduction to the recent Penguin collection of his stories, *Dinner Along the Amazon*, Findley speaks of his fictional obsessions: "Why are the roads always dusty in this man's work — why is it always so hot — why can't it RAIN?" *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, a quite astonishing reinvention of the story of Noah and the Flood, takes care of that drought once and for all. But even as Findley charts his newfound exotic terrain and the waters that obliterate it, the landmarks, all his colours and configurations of human passion and animal instinct, assume shapes that will be recognizable to anyone who's spent time with the earlier novels and tales.

In *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*, Findley showed that his imaginative grasp hardly lacked for ambition. Here he does not merely take history, as before (that's a pretty substantial "merely"), and build an impressive fictional structure upon it; now he reframes a myth and sails through and beyond it, into a daring and sustained flight of timely philosophical significance. Findley remarked last year, in an interview, on the freedom available to a writer in reworking a story set so far in

the past as Noah's and yet so familiar. The world's vast store of mythic possibilities notwithstanding, few writers of any country or reputation have had the nerve to attempt a book like this.

The bold outlines of the plot are approximately as we know them from Genesis. Findley divides his version of the story into four parts. In the first, a weary and disconsolate God (Yaweh) makes a visit to Noah (Doctor Noah Noyes, believer in "alchemy and miracles"). Yaweh comes from the disintegrating cities, from "the great world . . . overcome with madness." With Noah's help, Yaweh is restored to temporary equanimity and hatches his plan to cleanse the world of evil by destroying it.

Book Two details the building of the Ark and the preparations for the voyage. Three tells of the Flood itself, and the trials of crew and cargo. The final section, shortest of the four, pulls Findley's themes and tensions together in a conclusion so full of surprise and triumph it would be unfair to summarize it. But to insist immediately that throughout its length *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is engrossingly readable is certainly fair; it is filled with excitement and suspense and elemental energies even as it opens up its most powerful, disturbing, and difficult meanings. It's a hard book to put aside, and once set down, harder still to escape.

A number of sources account for the story's strength. Findley has always been

a novelist of striking characters. Here he's come into a new flexibility and mastery. He has never given the people of his imagination so much room to live, not got so much from them in return. And a reader has no suspicion of anything preconceived, no sense of formulas applied or actors manipulated. The believability, the sheer humanness of these characters — minor and major alike — is one of the pre-eminent accomplishments of the novel.

Findley's Noah, with his wooden teeth and his 600-odd years, is a complex man. A sycophant of Yaweh from the start, he is overwhelmed by the mission he has been entrusted with and veers toward megalomania, compulsive behaviour, and finally madness. Initially honoured at being chosen to assist in a divine task, he soon comes to consider himself simply the Chosen One, and the trappings and delusions of grandeur take hold. He feels Adam's responsibilities are now his alone: "the survival of the human race, the subjugation of nature, the establishment of law and order." But he puts his trust in his own technological skill, not Yaweh's omnipotent if paradoxical love. When his calculations and systems start to break down, when his faith in Yaweh starts to waver, he becomes a pathetic figure, a tyrant whose plan and rule are demonstrably not potent at all, a navigator of the future without a moral compass.

His wife (never called anything but Mrs. Noyes) seems at first, with her soft-

hearted irresolution and gin-tipping, to be playing a comic role in some pop-medieval mystery play. But her strength quickly shows, and her ability to resist Noah provides the primary balance of human forces in the novel. A wilful, resourceful, pragmatic pantheist, she repeatedly confronts her husband and blocks his designs. Battered and scorned, but in each crisis borne up and prevailing by virtue of the love she gives and inspires, she is an original, but with resonances everywhere in Western literature and cultural tradition.

Then there's the rest of the family: Shem the stolid, the Ox; Ham the dreamer; Japeth the compulsive, the youngest, damaged and dangerous. Hannah is Shem's wife; she becomes Noah's lieutenant and chief prop. Emma, barely a teenager, is married to Japeth, but with a child's fear will not let him touch her. And Lucy, 7½ feet tall, of mysterious ancestry and possessed of deep knowledge and occasional magic: she captivates and wins Ham, and becomes Mrs. Noyes's closest ally. Each of these six has a distinct and fully fleshed personality, and the struggles and shifts in domestic power that entangle them keep the novel's action constantly on a short fuse.

That leaves the animals, and the Faeries. Findley achieves an empathy with his beasts and birds here that is neither precious nor cloying, but simply charming, often poignant, often profound. It all seems perfectly natural that the animals have an important part in the story; the implication that their stake in this strange venture of the Ark is no less than that of the Noyes family, and in the long run at least as valuable for the survival of the world, makes good sense. The Faeries are marvellous. No one really can see them; they are a "sheet of noise," "ripples in the grass," a sound "like crystals forming." None of this feels exactly like fantasy or beast-fable, but rather like a special wave-frequency of awareness Findley has tuned and amplified for himself and the reader.

The novel's prose is as rich in its effects as the characterization. Findley employs a variety of idioms and rhythms. In places the cadences are biblical and stern, in others elegiac and moving. But in the next paragraph Yaweh may have to deal with a "horny" cat. Or his lightning bolts "bamboozle"; or walking down the hill from the Ark is a "cinch" for the animals. Mrs. Noyes in the depths of her bitterness looks up and cries to Yaweh: "Why not drown them, too — you son-of-a-bitch! Drown the stars!" This seemingly unconcerned mixing of classical and contemporary styles is com-

plemented by the alternations in tone — variously lyric, comic, tragic, heroic — that Findley employs, and his several levels of humour, from cynical to absurd to whimsical to slapstick.

The novel's use of colour is lavish and brilliant. The story begins in sunlight, endures the 40 days and nights of storm and rain, then breaks again, at the last, into clear skies and stars. There is scene after scene of horrific violence and improbable beauty in the book. Japeth's encounter with a band of ruffians is so strongly written as to be nearly nauseating; the efforts of the Faeries to breach the Ark ends limpidly when "the last few strands of brightness fell — and were extinguished — silenced and removed from life and all that lives forever."

One would have to say that Timothy Findley's vision is apocalyptic. The end of the Winslow family in *The Last of the Crazy People*, the devastation of sanity and reason in *The Wars*, the collapse of an epoch in *Famous Last Words* — and now the end of civilization itself. *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, by revivifying the myth of the Flood so extravagantly, turns the deliberate destruction, by Yaweh, of that ancient death-wish world into an illuminating metaphor for the likely accidental but all to imaginable destruction, by us, of this present one. The perceptions and images of beauty in the novel — the evocations of what must



always be lost and left behind — give Findley's story an authority and an insight into our shared predicament that transcends all the statistics of doom. Do we dare hope (one more time) that art can succeed where science seems determined to fail? □

## Paradise upended

By DOUGLAS GLOVER

*Sing Me No Love Songs I'll Say You No Prayers: Selected Stories*, by Leon Rooke, General Publishing, 290 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88001 036 3).

IN THIS VOLUME of 16 selected stories, the *crème de la crème* skimmed from Leon Rooke's numerous previous collections, the reader is presented with about as harrowing a black comic vision of the world as I have ever come across.

In the first story, "Friendship and Property," we meet Leopold, a malignant con-artist, a blackmailer, a bully, a pariah shunned and feared by friend and foe alike. Everything Leopold touches is tainted; he has an almost preternatural knowledge of the sins, vices, and foibles of his acquaintances. Only Aimée (the beloved), his friend Rodin's recently deceased wife, has ever bested him. Leopold despises her saintliness; he sneers at Rodin's grief. And at the close of the story, he sets out to destroy the distraught widower's very memory of idyllic love.

"Friendship and Property" has all the Leon Rooke trademarks: a colloquial and breezy style, a grim gallows humour, a hint of the magical or surreal, a despicable protagonist, and a complete reversal of traditional values. ("Rodin would do anything once he was convinced it was the moral, honourable thing to do, the jerk.") It has a fabulistic feel to it. Leopold is evil incarnate (not Satanic but banal, venal, conscienceless); Aimée is a saint. But the world is the playground of the devil; goodness is at a disadvantage. Love (Aimée) is dead, and we are in the process of corrupting even the dream of love.

There are two stories about children, those eternal symbols of frailty and innocence. But in the world of Leon Rooke, in the world of "Some People Will Tell You the Situation at Henny Penny Nursery Is Getting Intolerable" and "The Shut-In Situation," the protagonists rather cheerfully kidnap, enslave, beat, and starve youngsters.

You're going to *hate* the darlin' little rascals. You're going to learn that these little brats, up to and including your own, are the ugliest, rottenest, stupidest, noisiest, most venal, selfish,

hurtful, *dangerous* sonsofbitches ever put on this planet since God was himself and ape. And you're going to want to *hurt* them, to *menace* them, to *wreck* the little bastards while they're still in their pants. . . .

This is the voice of a contemporary insanity, the calmly reasonable mass murderer. (These stories have a remarkable timeliness about them when one considers the recent rash of day-care centre exposés in the United States. And James Huberty, the mass killer who rampaged through a California McDonald's, is the quintessential Rooke hero.) It is pure vitriol distilled from impotent anger.

Likewise, there are two grace stories, both somewhat reminiscent of Flannery O'Connor. But for Leon Rooke there is no God, and grace comes in the form of an infusion of evil energy ("Mama Tuddi Done Over") or a vision of terrible sorrow ("In the Garden" — yes, the Garden of Eden turned inside out).

Harold's music . . . had put the Garden of Eden into her mind. A kind of dreamy, springtime garden. Yet now several hundred men, no larger than bees, were erecting a barbed-wire fence around the place. . . . Men with rifles were up sniping from their towers. *Plunk! plunk! plunk!* Bullets stirred up

soft puffs of dust in the arid soil. . . . Off in the corner, darkened, the Tree of Knowledge hunkered down, like a rat gone fat from too much wine and cheese. . . . Two or three hundred of the small bee people began to fall. They rolled down into the grass, kicked and lay still, or they screamed and went limp, snagged on the wire.

This is Rooke's universe. Black is white. Good is evil. Humanity was never expelled from the Garden of Eden; we're still in it, and it's a concentration camp.

To my mind there is enough evidence in this book to show that Rooke takes a profoundly religious view of life on earth. The world is evil, corrupt, fragmented. Man is sinful and his chief sin is vanity (the explicit theme of "Mama Tuddi Done Over" and "Narcissus Consulted"). Obsessed with self, he is unable to commune with nature or spirit ("The Woman Who Talked to Horses") or to love other people. We are all solipists; the atmosphere in these stories is amazingly claustrophobic. That Rooke loathes the state of contemporary culture is obvious — his response is vituperation and laughter. He makes a specialty of the splenetic epithet. And he reminds me of those self-disgusted satirists of antiquity: Petronius, Lucian, and Menippus.

If you read stories for escape, for humour, for realistic preservations of everyday life, for romance, for sad or happy endings, then reading this book will be a little like getting hit on the head a few times with a board. It's an acquired taste. Rooke's humour, his talky style, cannot make up for the unrelenting bleakness of his theme. He hasn't the lightness of touch of some other postmodernists like Coover and Barthelme. (I am talking about Rooke's stories here — in *Shakespeare's Dog*, his much-praised novel, the canine hero is vouchsafed a form of redemption that lifts him out of the rut of cynicism and rage. Also, I would be unjust not to mention that his title story "Sing Me No Love Songs" — really a novella — is much different in tone from the rest of the book. The devil threatens but love and fidelity triumph.)

There is no doubt that, when he wants to, Leon Rooke can lay down a fine line of prose. And I am convinced that he is a writer with a singular and consistent vision. It is the paradox of the cynic, the black comedian, that he or she is the person who loved the most, expected the most, hoped the most, and wanted the most. It is this idealism that stands behind and informs these stories. □



## Queen's University Fellowships in the Humanities

From funding generously provided by the Webster Foundation, Queen's University offers two fellowships in the Humanities to begin 1 September, 1985. The purpose of the Fellowship is to support younger scholars engaged in humanistic studies that demonstrate originality and imagination, a breadth of perspective and a concern to situate 'specialized' enquiry within a larger intellectual or cultural context. While some applicants will have completed or be about to complete doctoral studies, the University also encourages applications from candidates of outstanding merit who lack a Ph.D. and from those whose educational background is unconventional. The Fellowships are tenable for two years and carry a stipend for the first year of \$28,000. An expense allowance of \$2,000 will also be payable. Fellows will be expected to reside in the Kingston area. Inquiries and applications should be addressed to:

Dr A.H. Jeeves, Associate Dean  
Faculty of Arts and Science, Queen's University  
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Each applicant should submit a curriculum vitae and an essay, not exceeding 1,000 words, outlining his or her objectives in seeking this Fellowship. Three referees should be asked to send supporting letters directly to the same address. The deadline for completed applications is 21 December, 1984. Les francophones, ainsi que les anglophones, sont invité(e)s à poser leur candidature.

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# The far side

The season's art and picture books carry readers from the raging Nahanni to Gull Harbour, N.S., by way of Toronto the Good

By JOHN OUGHTON

THERE IS MORE traffic between illustrations and text in books than the old saw "A picture is worth a thousand words" suggests. A photograph may be meaningless to the reader without a caption to explain it or place it in context. Illustrations can flesh out a reader's mental image of fictional characters, creating a greater whole. *Winnie-the-Pooh* might not have become such an enduring classic without Ernest Shepard's sketches of the characters; Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast fantasies create an interdependence of art and word.

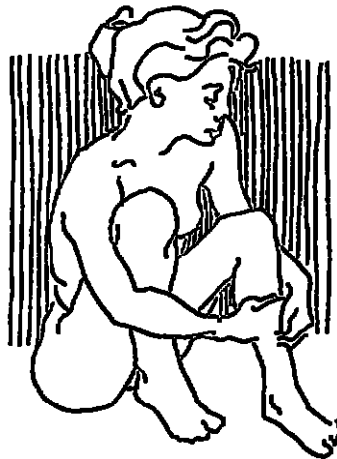
In experimental work, the illustrations can spin parallel but separate narratives of their own, as Greg Curnoe's drawings do beside David McFadden's words in *The Great Canadian Sonnet*. They can ignore or even contradict the text. But in gift and art books, usually one medium is subordinate to the other. Many showy books either present a well-known literary work with splashy but derivative art to illustrate the words or concentrate on visual images with a token leavening of language.

The books reviewed here fit into many places on that continuum. Two names already well-known to book collectors for visual excellence, Glen Loates and Lorraine Monk, weigh in with heavy-weight contenders for the Christmas sales fight. *A Brush with Life* (Prentice-Hall, 192 pages, \$50 cloth) is the third collection of nature paintings by the 37-year-old artist who vies with Robert Bateman for the title of Canada's best wildlife artist. Loates generally works in watercolour, but this compilation of his production between 1977 and 1983 includes sketches, etchings, and even a few commissioned pewter sculptures.

Physically, the book is sumptuous. Glen Warner's text on Loates's career and art is printed on blue paper with a laid pattern, distinguishing it from the section of colour plates on white semi-glossy stock. Words and plates alike are enclosed by box rules. The reproductions are faithful to the delicacy of colouring and attention to detail of the originals.

The artist's work is sufficiently familiar — thanks to its reproduction in *The Canadian*, postage stamps, prints, and greeting cards — to need little description. Loates usually finds the balance between scientific accuracy and artistic impression, conveying both the body and the spirit of anything from a trillium to a grizzly bear. He avoids striving for the illusion of photographic realism by softening or even ignoring a detailed background.

Glen Warner writes engagingly, and retails some surprising facts about Loates in his text (important early influences ranged from Walt Disney to Oriental painters, and Loates, at the age of 12, designed the plastic daffodil pin that the Canadian Cancer Society still sells) but at times ventures close to hyperbole. He argues that "by the age of 22, Glen Loates had created a body of work comparable in quality to anything produced by the very best of his contemporaries — indeed, to the very best nature art of all time." That depends on



how "nature art" is defined; the claim may be accurate if we consider only artists who specialize in wildlife, but Loates's early work hardly stands beside, say, Durer's etching of the rhinoceros or Monet's water-lilies for originality and intensity of vision. Some of the artist's very early work (circa

1961) is included, which does show how far Loates has progressed.

Canada's best-known editor of photography, Lorraine Monk, has produced *Ontario: A Loving Look* (McClelland & Stewart, unpaginated, \$39.95 cloth) to commemorate the province's bicentennial and to show how far it has come. Intriguingly, the accompanying texts are largely from pre-20th-century writers such as Susannah Moodie. Selected by the ubiquitous John Robert Colombo, these are placed beside contemporary photographs of the same, or similar, subjects. The colour photographs are chosen from work by both renowned professionals and unknown amateurs.

This combination of word and image resonates in unexpected ways: a snapshot of joyful children pirouetting under a sprinkler is captioned by John Howison's stately and ornate description of the "sanguine temperament" of Upper Canadians. The occasional acid comment, such as Rupert Brooke's note on Toronto ("It will always be what is, only larger"), is met only by beauty and light in the photographs. After all, images of downtown derelicts can hardly expect a place in a book with a message from Premier Bill Davis.

Given that restriction, Monk's eye for telling images that evoke the people and space of this country is as sharp as ever. There are stunning shots of downtown cities and pure wilderness, flowers and faces. Appropriately, this book (unlike Loates's) was entirely produced in Ontario, and generally exhibits excellent colour reproduction. Occasional minor press problems — vertical streaks and "hickies" — showed in my copy, but didn't detract much from the book's elegance.

Other parts of Canada are featured in books by two photographic teams: *Adventures in Wild Canada*, by John and Janet Foster, and *The Gulf of St. Lawrence*, by Wayne Barrett and Anne MacKay, with text by Harry Bruce. Of the two, *Wild Canada* (McClelland & Stewart, 160 pages, \$29.95 cloth) is the more memorable, perhaps because the

St. Lawrence is easier for most of us to visit than the Nahanni River or Ellesmere Island.

The Fosters make documentary nature films, so their still photography is in a sense a sideline during their journeys. But they are both expert photographers. Whether capturing the frozen, fluted curves of an iceberg or the rage of a charging bull muskox, the images of untamed nature are strong.

The text conveys the exhilaration and danger of travelling through places like the white-water paradise of the Nahanni. Thanks to companions experienced in canoeing, the Fosters made it down the river that roars past such cheerful places as Headless Range, Deadman Valley, and Hell's Gate. Another visitor wasn't so lucky; all the park rangers found of him was a bent canoe and a rifle. This book reawakens one's hunger for the wild spaces of Canada and gives some good advice on getting and surviving there, including equipment lists and a recipe for bannock.

Water from the St. Lawrence flows past five of our provinces. The Gulf drew in Canada's earliest explorers, and still borders some of the nation's most beautiful spots. Send *The Gulf of St. Lawrence* (Oxford, 100 pages, \$19.95 cloth) to exiled Maritimers to tempt them home for Christmas. Barrett and MacKay, who live in Charlottetown, have a native's love of the area, as does Nova Scotia writer Harry Bruce. The photographs of land and waterscapes, wildlife, and people have the deep-toned, saturated colours achieved by slight underexposure, and the book's reproductions are particularly good at holding detail in the deep shadows created by this technique.

Bruce's captions are at once chatty and factual. A lot of history — on both the human and the national scale — has happened in the St. Lawrence, and he does his best to convey it. Concerning lonely Bird Rock, a precipitous six-acre island off the Magdalen Islands, Bruce relates: "The first lighthouse keeper went mad. The second, with his son, was lost on the ice. The third, with *his* son in turn, was killed when a keg of gunpowder exploded. The fourth was nearly killed by the fog gun. One of their successors remarked of his own eleven-year stay, 'I didn't miss it when I left. Not one bit.'"

A more intimate view of life in the Maritimes informs a strange and entertaining little book, *Far Out Isn't Far Enough* (Methuen, 176 pages, \$19.95 cloth), by artist and children's author Tomi Ungerer. Ungerer has led a wandering existence, ranging from his birthplace in Alsace-Lorraine to New York City and, now, a farm in Ireland.

# NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE

*Timothy Findley*

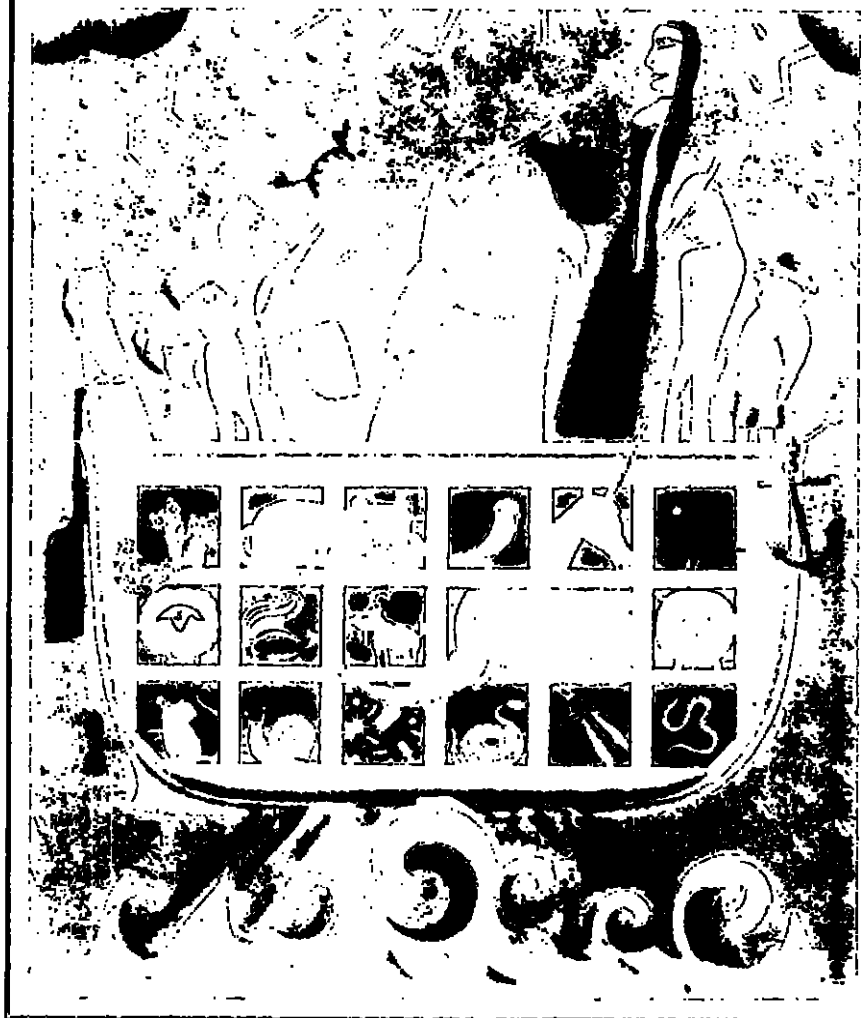
"This marvellously fantastic fable . . . is abundant in implications and questions for our own hurting and threatened world."

— Margaret Laurence

A dazzling journey through time and biblical mythology, this brilliant retelling of a story as old as mankind weaves an unforgettable spell.

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*Far Out* is a journal and sketchbook from several years he and his wife spent on a farm near tiny Gull Harbour, N.S.

Immediately, Ungerer dispels any thought that a children's writer might have a sentimental approach to his neighbours and surroundings. Ungerer takes pride in his rifle collection (useful for potting at sheep-killing dogs and trespassing goose-hunters), and he and his wife boast of their ability to kill, butcher, and cook the farm animals they raise as pets. Yet they also admire the beauty of the ocean and landscape.

The vignettes of his neighbours catch their individuality and contradictions. One is quoted as saying: "I hate them goddamn niggers. Of course I only know Tom Brown here in town, and he is all right." Or take this description: "Slinky McWire looks like Donald Duck. Skinny, wispy, cross-eyed. He holds his nose up in the air to keep a pair of bottle-bottom glasses in balance. He works hard and drinks even harder to make life worth living."

The illustrations run from quick, sure sketches to full-fledged paintings. They are well integrated with the words. As an outsider's view of a corner of Canada, this offbeat book has considerable interest.

Another foreign-born artist with a much different approach is Naoko Matsubara, a master of Japanese woodcut technique now living in Oakville. In *Fraize of Trees* (Mosaic, 90 pages, \$14.95 paper) takes poetic statements about trees from many different authors and illustrates them with powerful monochrome prints.

To make the poems visual, Matsubara works with texture as much as lines and mass, using such unlikely implements as pastry cutters and nails to get the finish she wants on her blocks. Working in a single colour, she conveys the feeling of a spring tree bursting with buds, a grove of supple bamboo leaning in the wind, a stark trunk with snow howling around it. This well-designed book should delight poetry and art lovers alike.

The life and art of the aboriginal inhabitants of Canada's West Coast, who respected each tree so much they would speak to it before cutting it down, occupy the next five books.

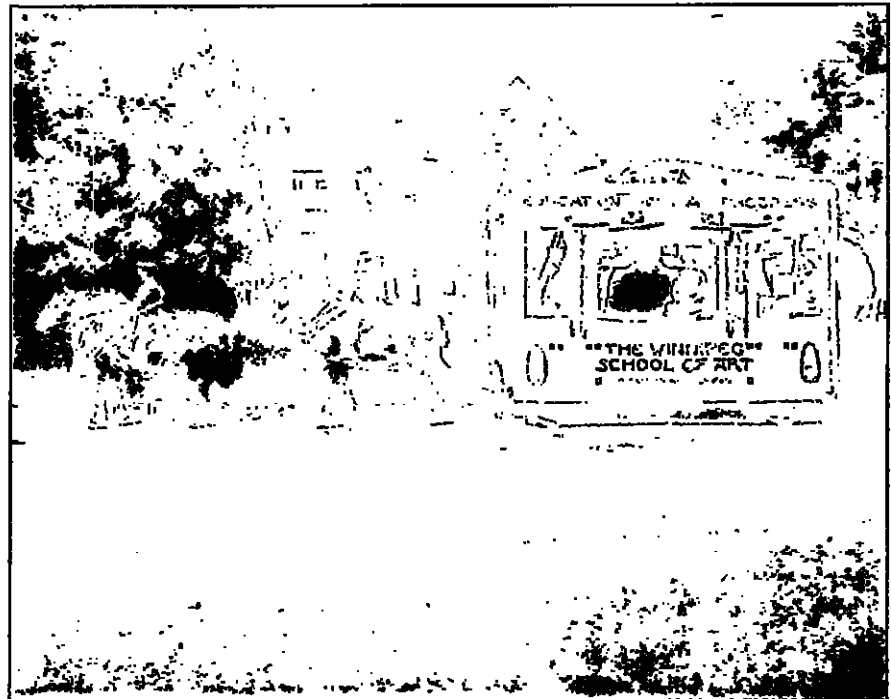
The strong design and fine craftsmanship of Kwakiutl and Haida masks, totems, and implements have become world-famous. Less familiar is the complexity and sophistication of the traditional cultures of the tribes that settled along the southern B.C. coast and Vancouver Island. Their ancestors arrived here more than 7,000 years ago, and developed societies with complex status relationships, intricate mythologies, and effective ways of living on the rich

natural resources around them without destroying them. To our shame, "civilized" Canadians have largely destroyed that culture, taken the tribe's lands, and have almost eradicated the forests that once stood there too.

The most comprehensive of these books is *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* (Talonbooks, 176 pages, \$14.95

we can't match today, and the masks combine horror and humour in a style from which Steven Spielberg could afford to learn. Holm includes essays on specific art forms by five other scholars. This is a good gift for collectors of native arts, or aspiring artists.

The same is true of *Smoky-Top: The Art and Times of Willie Seaweed*



From *The Winnipeg School of Art: The Early Years*, by Marilyn Baker, University of Manitoba Press, \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88755 135 1) and \$16.50 paper (ISBN 0 88755 613 2).

paper), by anthropologists Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard. The *Sliammon* are a group of Salish Indians who live in the northern Strait of Georgia area. The authors detail everything from their diet and language to their folklore. Several delightful myths are included, as are records of early contact with Europeans and a photographic essay on how to prepare dog salmon for smoke-drying. Maps, historical photographs, and a bibliography supplement the somewhat academic text.

*The Box of Daylight: Northwest Coast Indian Art* (Douglas & McIntyre: 184 pages, \$24.95 paper) is one of two annotated catalogues by Bill Holm, a U.S. authority on the subject. *Box of Daylight* celebrates an exhibition that he organized to bring together pieces by all the major tribes of the Pacific Northwest from many private and public collections.

Whether such humble implements as halibut hooks or magnificent ceremonial masks, the selections are uniformly striking and painstakingly made. Iron daggers made before contact with Europeans show metal-working techniques

(Douglas & McIntyre, 184 pages, \$29.95 cloth). This is unusual among collections of West Coast Indian art since it concentrates on the work of a single carver, Willie Seaweed, whose surname is an Anglicization of Siwid ("paddling owner" in Kwakiutl), and who was also known as "Smoky Top."

Since native artists early in this century seldom signed their works, which in turn were sold to many different collectors, it is usually difficult to identify a major collection of work by one of them. But Holm finds Seaweed's variations on tradition, developed during the most extreme period of cultural change his people have known, distinctive enough to serve as a signature: "His approach to his art was an intellectual one. No carved or painted line was ever random. Each was planned, with a draftsman's accuracy, so that each form took its perfect shape and held a precise, balanced relationship to its brother shapes and to the space around and between them."

Seaweed, who died in 1967 at the age of 89, was a chief as well as an innovative and valued artist to his people. His



versions of such traditional masks as Thunderbird and Crooked-Beak are haunting carvings that convey both mythic power and an individual vision. The biggest ones, like the totem poles, dwarf the rotund man that wrought them. The only shortcoming of this book is the relatively small number of colour plates — 21 — among the 150 illustrations.

*Ninstints* (University of British Columbia Press, 68 pages, \$8.95 paper) is a guidebook to a deserted Haida village at the southern end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1981. A treasure trove of totems, longhouse ruins, and archaeological information, *Ninstints* was once the residence of the Kung'hit (the southernmost tribe of Haida). Two thirds of the tribe were killed by smallpox and other imported diseases.

As author George F. MacDonald writes, *Ninstints* was one of the "places where the struggle between nature and culture is locked in a suspended state, where it is hard to say whether man or nature prevails." Since the last Kung'hit left, nature began to prevail again, eroding the totems and levelling the houses. With increased archeological attention culminating in the UNESCO declaration, efforts are now being made to preserve the site from further decay. For those unable to visit the Queen Charlottes, this book is a good introduction to a melancholy and impressive place.

Instead of the past, artist and photographer Dorothy Haegert concentrates on the future in *Children of the First People* (Tillacum/Pulp Press, 128 pages, \$18.95 paper), a collection of black-and-white photos of West Coast Indian children. She is skilful at finding the moment that reveals a child's emotions, so that even such a hackneyed subject as a cute kid with a puppy holds the eye. Her technique is not always faultless; some of the pictures seem unintentionally fuzzy, and the exposures are not always bang-on. But she exhibits a sensitive, unobtrusive presence as a photographer.

She also has the grace to let the children's elders describe in their own words their lives and the culture that the children are now learning. Ten of these give their thoughts in interviews printed without interpolations, as straightforward statements about life and the process of maturing. "We grew up in an area where things were really changing and yet when I look back, I can pick out the good that happened too. It can't be all negative," says Ruth Cook, with an wisdom the others seem to share.

Another West Coast look at the past has more limited interest. *Antiques Afloat: From the Golden Age of Boatbuilding in British Columbia* (Panorama

Publications, 116 pages, \$14.95 paper) features some of the larger motor yachts built during 1900 to 1940 and still in use today. Author Peter Vassilopoulos, a powerboat owner, has evident love for these slow but graceful teak-and-brass toys of the rich, and follows their history through changes of name, owner, superstructure, and engines.

A few of them have served as something other than floating pleasure palaces, having been fishing boats, government vessels, and even a floating hardware store. There are bits of human interest here: the owners of *L'Illaway* (I'll away — get it?) took a cruise in 1914 and kept the logs in awful verse: "The weather remained all we could wish. We swam and we shot though little we got, except Harry who landed some fish."

Polished wood and brass also gleam in another book about entertainments of the past: John C. Lindsay's *Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving: The Story of Canada's Theatres* (Boston Mills Press, 176 pages, \$35 cloth). Lindsay's subject is movie theatres during the golden age of Hollywood, and he has assembled a marvelous compendium of photographs, old showbills, interviews, and trivia, accompanied by notes from Mary Pickford and her husband Buddy Rogers.

The grandiose architecture and art nouveau or rococo appointments of these monuments to moviedom were lush, and put today's austere minitheatres to shame. A few, such as Montreal's Outremont and Toronto's University Theatre, are still in service, but most have disappeared or been remodeled. Incidentally, the title is taken from a sign at Toronto's old Runnymede Theatre, referring to machines that projected moving stars and clouds on the ceiling.


Lindsay spends considerable time on Toronto's Wintergarden Theatre, which slept in silence for 50 years and now is being renovated. Generally, his research is extensive. The book does show evidence of being largely a one-man effort. Better editing, design, and photo reproduction would have helped. Given the subtitle, there's rather extensive coverage of American movie palaces. But there's plenty here to entertain older movie fans and devotees of the days when movie stars were larger-than-life, and live orchestras, or Wurlitzer organs on hydraulic lifts, accompanied every throb of their Hollywood hearts.

The most unusual book in this bunch deals with another bygone entertainment (although the industrious Japanese still practise it). *Ice Palaces* (Macmillan, 132 pages, \$39.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper) is a study of a special winter mania that attacks inhabitants of cold climates.

Before television and aerobics classes drained the energy of the populace, people in Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa, and St. Paul, Minnesota, spent a lot of time and money building palaces with dimensions as large as 217 by 194 feet and towers up to 140 feet high — entirely of clear ice cut in blocks from rivers or lakes. These shimmering, magical, wonderfully impractical edifices, lit from inside, became the centerpiece of winter festivals 100 years ago.

As authors Fred Anderes and Ann Agranoff reveal, the first recorded ice palace was part of an extensive — and cruel — practical joke in 1839 by the Czarist Empress Anna. To further humiliate an unfortunate nobleman who was already a court jester, she forced him to marry her ugliest serving woman and sent them to spend their honeymoon in a magnificently detailed three-room ice palace on the River Neva. Birds roosted in trees outside, carved from ice as were the beds, pillows, and dishes. Somehow the couple survived this frigid joke.

North Americans had more wholesome fun with the idea. The first ice palace on the continent was built for the 1883 Montreal Winter Festival. Spectators watched with fascination as blocks were cut into shape by masons, hoisted



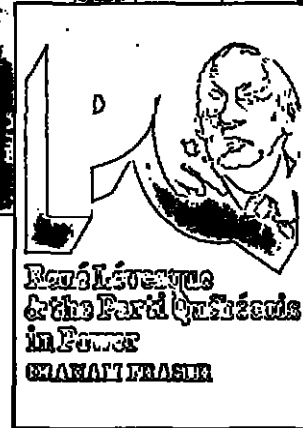
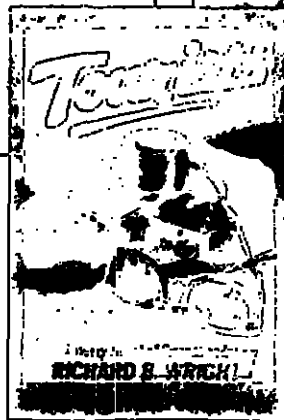
Award-winning author Bill Freeman continues his young adult adventure series about the Bains children. The story is set in the Toronto of 1875. Meg and Jamie Bains start out selling newspapers on the street, but they fall in with a lawless gang of street kids.

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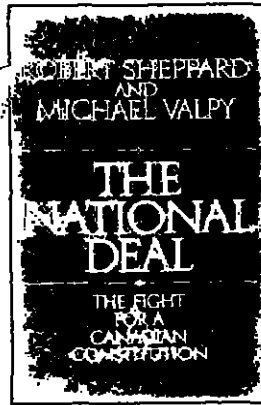
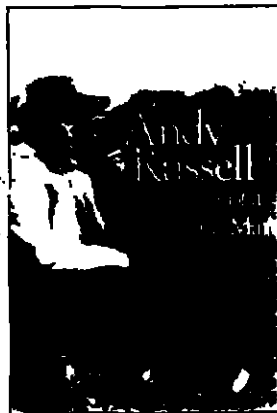
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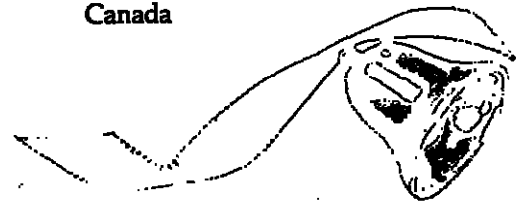
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onto the walls, and mortared in place with water. (Ice is almost as strong as concrete as a building material, as long as cold weather holds.) The highlight of the festival came with the "storming" of the palace by snowshoe clubs and Indians armed with fireworks, who were answered by colourful cascades from the palace. This became a ritual with the many other North American ice palaces built in the next years.

Unfortunately, cost factors and the seduction of new entertainments, such as movies, largely ended the Canadian ice palace tradition by the 1940s. But Sapporo, the capital of Japan's northernmost island, still produces exquisite ice palaces each year — and perhaps this well-illustrated study of frozen folly will inspire some new efforts over here.

The last three books are of interest to present or former Toronto residents. *Toronto In 1918*, by J.M.S. Careless (James Lorimer/National Museum of Man, 224 pages, \$26.95 cloth), is a scholarly account of Canada's largest metropolis which 200 years ago had only one permanent resident, a fur dealer named Rousseau. Although not quite as much a bargain as the island of Manhattan, the Toronto Land Purchase of 1787 was a pretty good deal, obtaining a 14-by-28-mile section of land for £1,700 in cash and goods.

Careless points out the strategic and geographic reasons for Toronto's early growth, and includes copies of many maps and historical documents to buttress his story of how Muddy York became Toronto the Good. This is a comprehensive study, with attention given to political, industrial, military, social, and cultural factors. Careless writes well, although his footnoting system might have been streamlined a bit for the general reader. Some chapters boast up to 130 of the little devils for readers to look up in the back of the book.

Queen City (Oberon, unpaginated, \$27.95 cloth) is a poetry and photography approach to Toronto by Raymond Souster and Bill Brooks. Souster's reflective, sensitive poetry has always had a strong local flavour, so he is the appropriate poet for this assignment. Yet although he recalls childhood hockey games under the Old Mill Bridge, not all the poems are nostalgic; many capture the sense of loss of a middle-aged office worker today.

Brooks takes a contrasty and grainy tack with his black-and-white photographs. Many are powerful statements that accompany Souster's words without subordinating themselves. Those words, incidentally, are in white on a black background, a little hard on the reader's eyes. For a modestly produced black-

and-white book, the price is high.

Obviously aimed at proud alumni and recent grads is *The University of Toronto: A Souvenir* (Oxford, 106 pages, \$19.95 cloth). Ian Montagnes's text is brief; the book's main appeal lies in Rudi Christl's crisp colour photography and the archival pictures assembled in its early pages. Christl does work some wonders with U of T's architecture: he makes the massive Roberts Library (known to students as Fort Book) into a slender, golden-hued tower of learning, and adds a twist to the blank walls of New College with an extreme wide-angle lens. He is also sensitive to the harmony of the university's oldest corners, such as the Trinity Chapel. This is a reasonable graduation gift. □

## REVIEW

# Pith and vinegar

By RACHEL WYATT

*Urban Scrawl*, by Erika Ritter, Macmillan, 182 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9810 6).

I WAS EAGER to read Erika Ritter's *Urban Scrawl* to find out whether much has changed since I used to write and broadcast essays, vignettes, and comment for the CBC 20 years ago. Those were the days when we got excited because very soon the CBC was going to build a huge place to house all its departments and studios. Jarvis Street, however, is still the home of radio programs like *Stereo Morning*, to which Ritter is a contributor.

Almost everything else is different, including the language, but the use of "us" and "we" remains the same. In Ritter's book, much use is made of the plural pronoun, as though to embrace all the world. Yet it tends to have a special and local application.

Twenty years ago "we" were leading a dark-age life. "We" lived in Don Mills on the outskirts of Toronto. At age 33.3 all of "us" had 1.75 children, with a promise of making it four or five in that fertile breeding ground. We worried a lot about hot and cold wars and having no future, and on weekends we drank whisky and barbecued red, raw flesh. If

we had known that time was leading us toward spritzerdom and a veggie heaven we might have stayed put.

So what has become of "us"? We have moved into the city, into high-rise buildings or shared houses in Toronto's Beaches district. We cycle about looking for love or listening attentively to the beeps of our friends' answering machines. We are a rootless lot, we pre-middle-aged, middling folk. We lie there in society wedged between the powerful rich and the interesting poor like a jurassic layer in the rocks of time. We lack connection.

Put this book in a time capsule to be brought out in the year 3000 by the survivors. What will they make of "us"? When they have deciphered the glyphs, will they praise our courage and admire our ability to concentrate on burnishing our bodies or on purse-gazing as chaos closes in on us? Will they hold up our society as an example of perfect living; "everybody" equal, nicely off, and eating 7.5 meals out a week?

The picture that Erika Ritter paints is clear and detailed if not totally desirable. We can run for cover and shout that "we" are not like that. But the book is shot through with moments of recognition.

Writing for the unsighted, capturing the listening ear fast, is an art that Ritter understands well. (The dreaded switch-off is ever present in the minds of radio and TV writers.) It is those tricks of beginning in the middle, of creating an instant picture, of employing a relaxed, chatting-to-friends style, of moving on quickly and occasionally startling people out of their socks that mark the real radio writer and modern essayist. Nobody will sit still long enough nowadays to listen to reams of pith on matters of moment. That demanding audience out there wants instant gratification. And that is what, in *Urban Scrawl*, it gets.

The shorter pieces are the best. "Bicycles" and "The Invasion of the Airline Stewardesses" are good examples of the cock-eyed look at this tiny segment of the world that we are promised on the book jacket. In some of the longer essays the humour and the ideas are stretched thin, and occasionally there are touches of the whimsical and the cute. But readers will argue about this book, each making a case for his or her favourite piece.

I will stand up for "Club Dread." I think I've been there. I was a little worried when it changed course in midstream and took on heavy, almost Conradian overtones. Then I began to recognize those put-upon holiday-makers, playing their awful games to win approval, eternally seeking love. On

the other hand, I couldn't make myself care what happened to Holden Caulfield in "Catcher in the rye-and-water." The essay called "GUILT" has much that is pertinent to say about our my-guilt-is-heavier-than-yours society, with its background cries of *mea culpa*. I was a little disappointed when it came to the essay's section on beavers and geese ("Guilt in Nature: A Special Consideration") but know that this is entirely my fault.

I didn't hear much music in this book, or poetry, or love of any kind. What I could hear was the plaintive voice of the time asking, "What have we done to deserve this?" And the answer is there on those pages.

I wonder what "we" shall be doing 20 years from now and who will be putting together the electronic chronicle of those times. That remains to be seen. From Don Mills to Downtown to where?

Meanwhile, we all need mirrors, even distorting ones. I hope that Erika Ritter will continue to cast her beady eye over the world she lives in, and tell us what she sees. At the same time, I hope that if there is another edition the publishers will do something about the last line on the back cover and change that Windsorish "we" to "some of us." □

## REVIEW

# Honey from old poisons

By H.R. PERCY

**Will Ye Let the Mummings In?: Stories** by Alden Nowlan, Irwin Publishing, 164 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7720 1451 5) and \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 7720 1407 8).

THIS VOLUME confirms an ancient assertion of mine, that the short story at its best is more closely akin to poetry than to the novel or to other prose forms. It is not merely a matter of language, although compression is obviously essential, and a little lyricism always helps. Rather, it is a matter of conception and process, the mental stance of the writer as he explores the possibilities of the germinal idea and then nudges it along to its implicit, ineluctable conclusion. As for the reader, it leaves him with the same sense of rightness and inevitability. In many of these posthumously published stories of Alden

Nowlan the posture of the poet is clearly discernible. Some of them, indeed, might easily have emerged as poems.

"One Cold Bright Afternoon" tells, in less than three pages, of the surprise of a young man who "considers himself to be a very harmless person" at the discovery that two aging women in the neighbourhood are afraid of him. There is a poet's precision, too, in the way Nowlan pins down his people. The two women "waddle onward, their bodies . . . neutered by the years." The young man has "allowed himself to be elected" secretary of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. And in this, as in several other stories, the closing words might well be the ending of a poem of the same name: "But he is not really angry, except at himself for being so absurdly ashamed."

In "Cynthia Loves You" with thoughtless cruelty a group of teen-age boys persuade a retarded youth that a certain girl is in love with him. Skilfully, through this brief compassionate glimpse into the mind of the youth, Nowlan reveals the character of the tormentors and at the same time fills the reader with apprehension of potential violence and tragedy as "He laughed and went over to her, intending to touch her gently, wishing she would speak to him."


The collection, for all it is superficially "regional" in setting, covers an extremely wide range of human insight and experience, from the anguish of childhood's disillusion in "The Fall of a City" to the obsessive desire of an old man to return to his birthplace to die, in "The Persistence of Theodore Roosevelt." (Echoes, here, of Nowlan's poem "Remembrance of Things Past.") There is, too, the aching isolation of the man in "Hello Out There," who, because "the people I knew, I knew too well," found solace in late-night conversations with telephone operators across the continent, and for whom "what was said didn't seem important . . . because the words aren't part of a message, but only another kind of touching."

Much of the experience is clearly and unabashedly the author's own, as in the operating-room close encounter with death in "Walking on the Ceiling." Once again, it is the poet's voice that lingers when the last word is said. Learning anew to walk, "As soon as he can breathe without gasping, he turns to look out at the grass."

A compassionate irony pervades the whole book, as it does almost all of Nowlan's work. Both the compassion and the irony stem from the rigours and constraints of life lived, and later shrewdly observed, in the depressed small-town environment of the Maritimes. The stories throw light from

many sometimes surprising angles, not only upon that environment and the people it produced but upon what Robert Weaver in his preface calls "the sophisticated, well read, quirky, independent, and stubborn mind" of Nowlan himself. It was no small triumph to have dropped out of grade school from economic necessity and, through guts and dogged persistence, to have developed and exploited such a mind to attain the front rank of Canadian literary achievement. The story "Skipper" is a poignant glimpse of what might so easily have happened to the young Alden. Skipper, a sensitive, potentially creative boy, given to day-dreams, is his mother's last hope of seeing one of her five sons rise above the tyranny of brute labour and booze. At first he "entered into a wordless pact of mutual defence" with her, not only against the father but against the pressures of environment and example. But the pressures triumph. For her there is "only the emptiness of defeat."

These are the stories of a man for whom life seldom came easy. Even at their most purely imaginative, portraying characters far removed from Nowlan's own, they in some sense mirror that life and the lives of the less fortunate around him. But although they depict loneliness, servitude, and sometimes wretchedness, they are never depressing. Through humour and compassion they transcend all that, distil




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from it the satisfying stuff of literature. One detects that, looking back upon his origins, Alden Nowlan wrote with a sense of privilege, that it was no mere whim that prompted him a few years ago, to adapt in English Tudor Arghezi's poem "Legacy," which contains the lines:

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until they were transformed into visions  
and icons.  
Out of their rags I made wreaths; and  
from old poisons  
I made honey. □

## REVIEW

# Critical conditions

By B. W. POWE

**Clearing the Ground: English-Canadian Literature After Survival**, by Paul Stuewe, Proper Tales Press, 110 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 9690381 9 4).

FIRST ADMISSION: "I never read a book before reviewing it: it prejudices a man so." Thus spoke Bishop Berkeley (supposedly), and I've often found this to be good advice. However, I had mixed feelings when approaching Paul Stuewe's little book, since it deals with a subject I am not unbiased toward. Stuewe's work is a critical reevaluation of the CanLit taste for Northrop Frye and thematic criticism, and a polemic on behalf of sharper critical methods. I read the book, agreed with almost everything he says, liked his spirit. This cannot make me objective. Stuewe's efforts are directed toward creating a more vigorous, tough-minded, truly conscious culture in Canada. This I found agreeable. I feel, then, as if I have been asked to judge a fellow misfit.

SECOND ADMISSION: That said, I did find things in *Clearing the Ground* to recommend and that are worthy of discussion. Stuewe's argument is a straightforward plea for common sense, intelligence, and wide reading; he is arguing in favour of cosmopolitanism in

Canadian writing and thinking. In this middle part of the 1980s, you might as well be pleading for Ronald Reagan to turn socialist. Faulty education, incompetent editing, criticism that isn't criticism at all, apathetic readers, and publishers interested in — well, who knows what publishers are interested in — do not a vital scene make.

Stuewe's rather mild tone exudes intelligence. He is concerned. He seems (almost) angry. He is consistent, orderly, factual, reasonable; he offers some valid pointers on how to improve our perception of the literary enterprise. He begins with an assault on Frye in "Northrop Frye and the Perils of Literary Transposition." He immediately addresses the problem of Frye's influence on thematic criticism and on the suspension of value judgements. Various proponents of the CanLit thematic approach are skewered, most notably D.G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock* and John Moss's *Patterns of Isolation*.

In Part Two, "Critical Reputations," Stuewe encounters the reputations, inflated or otherwise, of certain well-known authors. He attacks Morley Callaghan, defends Ernest Buckler, attacks Frederick Philip Grove, defends Hugh MacLennan and Sinclair Ross. His primary complaint against Callaghan and Grove lies in their dullness and their lack of attention to such things as words, sense, verbal energy. Stuewe gets properly stewed up over all those literary theoretical methods (minor point: they are systems, because based on theories, not methods, which are usually open-ended, and based on perception), which promote Canadian cultural propaganda over literary excellence.

The question, that is begged here is just what, precisely, constitutes literary excellence. What is literature? Language charged to maximum intensity (Pound). It is words *moving*. Stuewe of course knows this, for it is the hidden assumption behind his book. A Canadian ideology or identity doesn't matter to him — literature only!

In Part Three, "Critical Issues," he moves into other suggestive areas: readers, subsidized literature, book-selling, and the role of writing today are examined. The essay concludes with a ringing endorsement of the craft of writing in our semi-literate times.

THIRD ADMISSION: How closely does *Clearing the Ground* live up to its own standards?

Let's take a look. Average sentence length per paragraph is three to four lines. His sentences are long, seldom with any variation. A sample:

The preceding discussion of thematic criticism and its effects upon Canadian literature has necessarily been somewhat

abstract and generalized, although I trust that the specific examples provided in conjunction with the reader's applied experience have supplied sufficient grounds upon which to estimate its degree of accuracy. The major points in this analysis can be equally well discerned in critical writing about our two more prominent authors, and an examination of several such literary reputations demonstrates the influence of the thematic approach as well as other singular qualities of the Canadian milieu.

Repetition creates monotony: the extended sentences tend to blunt their own message. After a while, the voice becomes "somewhat" (to use a favourite word of Stuewe's) monotonous. He also has a penchant for rambling self-referential intros and exits. (See above.) He summarizes and introduces every thought or example at the beginning and end of each chapter with dependable regularity: "As indicated at the beginning of the last chapter" . . . "I think that this conclusion will be reinforced in the following chapter" . . . "The preceding mass of evidence and argument had as its purpose . . ." And so on.

Stuewe's tone carries a hint of gentle condescension in those repeated self-referring passages. It is as if he cannot trust the reader to get the point. He seems to think we are a very dull lot indeed. Sample:

The effects of a debilitating critical theory, severe structural weaknesses and a general absence of understanding and sympathy among writers, critics, and readers have produced a situation in which only the most radical proposals are likely to achieve even modest effects, and it is in this spirit that the preceding analysis has been offered.

The remarkable thing about *Clearing the Ground* is that Stuewe's style generally tends to resemble that master of steady dialectical prose in Canada: Northrop Frye. How could this be? Perhaps the source for this troubling paradox can be found early on in the book, where Stuewe is busy frying Frye, as it were, and goes on to say: ". . . if we turn to examples of Frye's practical criti-



cism . . ." Now, unless Stuewe has been reading a different I.A. Richards, I have always understood Practical Criticism as the study of audience response to verbal energy. Frye seldom refers to readers at all. His *Anatomy of Criticism* exists in

an idealist void. Frye is interested in themes, genres, conventions, structures in texts; he examines connections within works, not responses in his readers. This is why those influenced by his brand of myth criticism seldom take into account existential friction.

But these are minor quibbles, especially when you consider how much courage it must have taken for Stuewe to break out of the tradition-bound intellectual milieu in Canada.

FOURTH ADMISSION: *Clearing the Ground* actually does not exist in a critical void. John Metcalf's *Kicking Against the Pricks* goes after some of the same targets. Both books are attempts (0 lost cause!) to make Canadian readers and writers better critics and a better audience for each other. Stuewe's work is planted firmly in the ground of the tradition of dialectical opposition. He has many hidden assumptions: he seems to be a populist, fond of unions and public protest, and certainly does not want to see literature (or "Literature") become the property of the few.

Still, he does not push far enough to see why the literary milieu is as it is. Ultimately, it is the language that must arrest and address the reader and make him/her alert. It is of no use at all to be dull when attacking dullness, and of little use to sound sober and solemn when attacking solemnity and thickness. When you have a literary scene that finds a Samuel Beckett every day, a Pound every week, and allows one well-known novelist to say that he is Canada's Tolstoy, Proust, and Joyce all rolled into one, new strategies must be found to gain back the attention of shell-shocked readers. The unfortunate fact is that provocative ideas and intellectual energy can be generated from sources that are neither commonsensical nor even the faintest bit sympathetic. I cite the examples of Chesterton, Pound, and Orwell. The usefulness of a piece of writing is often found in the degree of opposition and debate it engenders. My criticism of Frye rests in the charge that he has taught a generation of writers and critics to avoid in literature that thing which makes it essential to our condition: its unfettered humanity expressed through vital language. The point is in the contact and friction with the words on the page in the book. When there is a breakdown of the intricate matrix of writer-reader-editor-publisher-critic, then the result must inevitably be bad, boring, and predictable books.

FIFTH ADMISSION: The preceding paragraph was not meant to sound testy about a work whose spirit I do admire. I'm certain *Clearing the Ground* will have a salutary effect on those readers who manage to find it. Like Richard

Kostelanetz's *The End of Intelligent Writing*, Stuewe's essay attempts to correct an imbalance and to criticize a milieu badly out of touch. This short book should be, I hope, yet another salvo in the war against the smug complacency, dullness, and timidity of the Canadian scene. ("I never go to literary parties. It interferes with my brutality" — George Orwell.) Perhaps *Clearing the Ground* will inspire what Stuewe so lucidly refers to as "a good deal of nerve." □

## REVIEW

# Three hits and a miss

By LESLEY CHOYCE

*The Thrill of the Grass*, by W.P. Kinsella, Penguin, 196 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007386 8).

*Melancholy Elephants*, by Spider Robinson, Penguin, 239 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007427 9).

*Champagne Barn*, by Norman Levine, Penguin, 253 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007255 1).

*The Pool in the Desert*, by Sara Jeanette Duncan, Penguin, 189 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007457 0).

W.P. KINSELLA'S *Shoeless Joe* performed one of the rarest accomplishments in my reading history: it successfully sucked me into one man's private modern vision of ecstasy, and that vision wrapped itself like soft calf leather around the sport of baseball. *The Thrill of the Grass* promised to do it all over again, this time with 11 short stories, each knitting a revised vision of the universe as potential but never fully realized no-hitter.

Penguin wisely allowed three of these four writers to provide their own introductions (S.J. Duncan not being around for the revival of her work), and Kinsella's pitch is this:

Someone once said, "Those who never attempt the absurd never achieve the impossible." I like to keep attempting the impossible. I like to do audacious things. I like to weave fact and fantasy. I like to alter history.

Kinsella is at his best when he lets the fantasy overtake the facts. In "The Last Pennant Before Armageddon," for example, Chicago Cubs manager Al Tiller has been informed from on high that his

team will finally win a pennant but that when it wins (according to some inexplicable holy design) it will signal the end of the world by nuclear war. For Tiller, it's a conflict of interests. For the reader, this unlikely plot works like pure magic.

TV baseball always bores me stiff, yet here's this West Coast Canadian writer, former Edmontonian, ex-life insurance salesman, and retired pizza parlour manager successfully selling me his personal euphoria over baseball. Even in the title story, I genuinely care about the absurd conspiracy to plant patches of real grass, tuft by tuft, back into a big-time ballpark, replacing the synthetic turf and thereby making a stand against the creeping artificiality in contemporary life.

Behind the ecstasy and the magic, however, lies an undercurrent of sadness whenever the real world takes a big enough chunk out of "the game." "The Baseball Spur," "Barefoot and Pregnant in Des Moines," and "Nursie" exhibit the melancholy of professional (public) players trying to live out private lives with minimal success. "Driving Toward the Moon," the only story actually set in Canada, does a masterful job of conveying the *angst* of a rookie leaguer willing to sacrifice the game for a woman he falls in love with. These are the sort of trade-offs Kinsella worries about when he keeps his fiction down to earth.

Kinsella's baseball world is populated by few genuine winners, and he makes little use of any Howard Cosell play-by-play narrative. He admits in his introduction that stories about athletic heroics bore him. "Ultimately, a fiction writer can be anything except boring," he states, and since *The Thrill of the Grass* packs many surprises, it is freighted with no boredom.

Another adventurous move in this new series is Spider Robinson's *Melancholy Elephants*. I've always had a soft spot in my heart for those editors who let slip into print Robinson's quirky puns, eccentric revelations, and his slightly paranoid yet optimistic visions of the future.

I don't fully understand his defensiveness, however, as he takes pot-shots in his introduction at folks who still see SF as Sci-Fi — that is, "rocket ships and ray guns and cute li'l robots." He rightfully insists that "SF examines fictions which are *imaginary but viable*" and goes so far as to point out that it "mediates between the scientist and the poet." But he seems to lose his footing when he goes further to argue that SF is even *more* legitimate than small-press literary publishing.

Speaking of the benighted, high-paying SF mags, he reminds his readers that "they pay cash on the barrel — none of this 'free copies and vegetables when in



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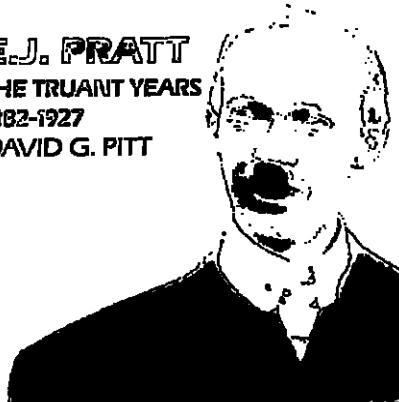
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season' nonsense found elsewhere." I think that's hitting below the zucchini. Besides, whether he likes it or not, Robinson is quite a *literary* writer. He fiddles around with the fine tuning of the language until he makes it do what he wants, and that's probably why Penguin wanted him in the flock.

"Satan's Children" is a teasing reminder that we might someday hit on a really good drug — one that makes anyone who takes it tell the truth. (The kids learn quickly that straightening out the world is never easy, but they get to work as best they can turning on Haligonians, a judge in Saint John "with more wrinkles than a William Goldman novel," a Conservative MP from Montreal, mayors, a car salesman, and even "the aging Peter Gzowski.") "It's a Sunny Day" feeds off Robinson's idealistic if not quite idyllic days living in rural Nova Scotia. The planet of "New Home" is modelled after the Annapolis Valley.

Beware of the didactic in the book. In one of the least appealing stories, "In the Olden Days," a near-future grandfather explains to his grandkids how the world got to be in such shambles:

Between the anti-teckers and the no-nukers and the stop-fusion jerks and the small-is-beautiful types and the appropriate technology folks and the back-to-the landers they managed to pull the plug, to throw away the whole goddam solar system.

Such a simplistic view toward those who worry about technology will probably offend most serious SF readers who don't necessarily always read *science* with a capital S.

Yet, if you'll forgive him his weaknesses, this author will charm the socks off you with a story about the resurrection of John Lennon ("Rubber Soup"), a few serious karma-twisters, and my personal favourite, "High Infidelity," wherein an over-sexed female protagonist, married to a brain-transplant specialist, finds herself enjoying sex more while fantasizing about her hubby's close colleague, Sam Hamill. Come anniversary time, the unsuspecting wife allows herself to be seduced by her object of desire and somewhere near the crucial moment of consummation "she clutched at the top of his head and felt where the scalp flap had been resutured."

*Champagne Barn* pulls together "a retrospective of Norman Levine's finest work" written between 1958 and 1978. If Robinson's concern is the future and Kinsella's the magical alteration of the present, Levine is more occupied with what happens "when the present, unexpectedly, confronts the past." His fiction works in quiet, subtle ways, focusing on the beneath-the-skin, minor revolutions that direct our lives. His sim-

ple stories are unexpectedly readable and moving simply because he is (or convincingly appears to be) so intimate and honest with himself.

Levine almost always writes close to home, beginning "In Lower Town," set in the Ottawa of his childhood, and moving on to his expatriate life on the Cornish coast and visits home to Canadian soil. The preoccupation with the subject of writing suggests in itself that Levine prefers to write more about the life lived than the life imagined.

"We All Begin in a Little Magazine" dips into the subculture of anxious poets and fiction writers finding (or failing to find) a publisher and an audience. "By a Frozen River" and "Thin Ice" are probably already Canadian classics worthy of another read here. If you've been reading Levine all along, there will probably be few surprises, but *Champagne Barn* is a valuable distillation of work by a writer whose persistently uncomplicated style allows him to reveal so much by saying so little.

Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Pool in the Desert* was first published in 1903. In an excellent introduction to this somewhat difficult reissued volume, Rosemary Sullivan explains that, "As a feminist, Duncan was neither a suffragette nor a political activist believing that women would achieve equality through individual effort and education." She avoided the advice of an elder who had told her that "Novel-making women always come to some bad end," and instead carved out a successful career as both a journalist and a fiction writer.

Sullivan also points out that this pivotal Canadian woman writer "was an elitist and a monarchist." The stories in this volume, all set in British-occupied India, examine women engaged in personal struggles for emancipation in a very claustrophobic world of colonial social impediments. While Duncan exhibits almost no sensitivity to the plight of impoverished Indians, she does explore rather convincingly white women's attempts to break free, if only briefly from the constraints set upon their emotional and intellectual development.

In "The Pool in the Desert," perhaps the most eloquent story in the book, Judy, a 37-year-old married woman, becomes emotionally entangled with her friend's 26-year-old son. The potential for emotional release and fulfilment is examined by the narrator, but for Judy the struggle must ultimately be abandoned. When a globe-trotting traveller suggests to Judy, "I think you Anglo-Indians live in a kind of little paradise," she sums up the plight of the captive British women of India by adding, "with everything but the essentials." □



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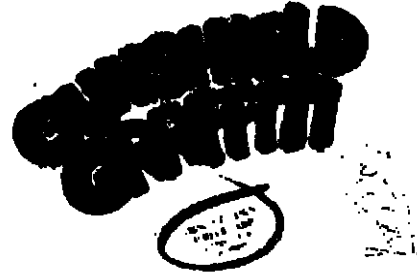
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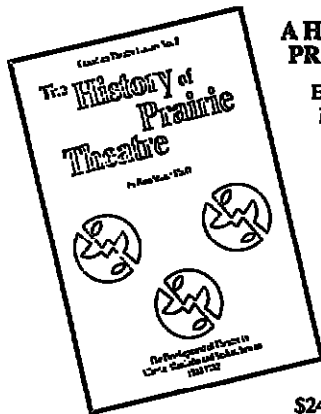
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# John Ballem

'Richard Rohmer makes no secret of the fact that he is writing fiction to convey a message. I'm trying to tell a story, nothing else'

By MARK GERSON

FICTION IS a sideline for John Ballem, but that hasn't stopped him from producing six thrillers in the past decade. *The Devil's Lighter* (1973), *The Dirty Scenario* (1974), *The Judas Conspiracy* (1976), *The Moon Pool* (1978), *Sacrifice Play* (1981), and *The Marigot Run* (1983) were all written around a busy career in oil and gas law. Several, including his current work, *Oil Patch Empire*, draw on his experiences in the energy field, and he is the author of a standard law text, *The Oil and Gas Lease in Canada* (1973). Born in New Glasgow, N.S., and educated at Dalhousie and Harvard universities, Ballem now lives with his wife and three children in Calgary, where he is a senior partner in the law firm of Ballem, McDill, and MacInnes. On a recent promotional tour to Toronto he was interviewed by Mark Gerson:

**Books in Canada:** *What's a well-known energy lawyer doing writing novels?*

**John Ballem:** It's just something that appeals to me, something I enjoy doing. I don't think the two are mutually exclusive. In fact, to some degree, they've supported each other. While my last two books had nothing to do with the oil industry, some of my previous novels — notably *The Devil's Lighter* and *The Moon Pool* — are very much involved with that industry and rose out of my experiences in it.

**BiC:** *Do you consider yourself to be a lawyer who writes novels or a novelist who happens to practise law?*

**Ballem:** I think I'm still a lawyer who writes novels. I've structured my life so that the law comes first. It has absolute demands and deadlines. When you're in-

involved in a hearing about a pipeline, for example, it requires all your energy and dedication. I've learned to put the book down for a while and know that I can go back to it without too much frustration. In some ways, it's not a bad thing, because it gives me some distance from the manuscript.

**BiC:** *Do you often find yourself compared to that other successful lawyer/*

Rohmer makes no secret of the fact that he is using fiction to convey a message. I'm trying to write fiction because I want to tell a story, nothing else.

**BiC:** *Yet your books convey distinct points of view. For example, you predicted the National Energy Policy and warned of its consequences. And The Marigot Run makes some clear statements about less developed countries.*

*Are these accidental?*

**Ballem:** Oh no, they're all intentional, and I want them to be picked up. But I don't want them to become the *raison d'être* of the books. The message is there, but that's not the reason I'm writing the book.

**BiC:** *As a busy lawyer, you must find it difficult to maintain a regular writing routine.*

**Ballem:** I write on weekends and two nights a week if it's possible. Quite often neither is possible, but when I have the time that's what I like to do. I write for four or five hours at a stretch, which is all I find I can hack. Years ago, I was very much involved in horses — showing them, jumping, and so on — and I think I'm using just about the same block of time for writing as I used to devote to horses.

**BiC:** *When you sit down to write, are things fairly clear in your mind or are you struggling with a blank page?*

**Ballem:** It depends on the stage I'm at. Once I'm well into a book, I have a pretty good idea of what's going to happen. Sometimes, when I have a mental block about how a certain situation is going to be resolved, I've found it useful to

just let the characters spill out on the page. It's astonishing what they can do and how things will come together, sometimes in ways that you haven't



John Ballem

*novelist, Richard Rohmer?*

**Ballem:** I've run into it quite a bit and I'm sure Rohmer has as well. I think our objectives are a little different, though.

predicted or thought possible. Usually what I have before I start a book is an idea of the setting, pretty good descriptions of three or four of the main characters — three or four pages of descriptions — and some idea of the plot machinery. And with that in hand I've got enough to get started. But I never know the ending, never.

**BiC:** *How long does it take you from the day you begin until you have a manuscript with which you're satisfied?*

**Ballew:** *Oil Patch Empire* was started in June of 1982 and finished in April, 1984. But that's longer than average. I would say that my books take me 12 to 14 months to write, but bear in mind that I'm not at it all the time.

**BiC:** *When did you start writing fiction?*

**Ballew:** I started sometime in the late 1960s. Although I'd thought about it several times, what probably got me started on fiction was a job doing the narration for a CBC film shot in Africa. When I came back from Africa and worked with some of the professional scriptwriters who were putting the thing together, I realized that there wasn't a great deal to it and that I could probably write just as well. The first story I selected was one that had been on my mind for years and goes back to what I was saying about my two careers. As a result of practising oil and gas law, I had been on the site of two wild wells, wells that were out of control. The memory of that was unforgettable and led to the setting and central theme of *The Devil's Lighter*. I embellished it with all sorts of chicanery, but the central theme relates back to those experiences.

**BiC:** *Why, when you started writing, did you choose the thriller?*

**Ballew:** I'm interested in things that happen and not terribly interested in interior landscapes. I like stories of adventure and just find them easier to cope with. I'm at ease with the thriller genre. For what I wanted to say, for the audience I wanted to reach, it seemed natural. But I've just finished a manuscript that departs from that. It's what I would like to think of as a mainstream commercial novel. This one also involves the oil industry, but instead of using violence to resolve the plot, there's a lot of normal life in it.

**BiC:** *How would you define "mainstream commercial novel"?*

**Ballew:** I don't want to flatter myself, but this book might be compared with something Arthur Hailey would do, where you're not in the thriller genre, but where there's still a lot of action in it. This book is about the oil industry in that golden era that may never return again. The sky was the limit then and there were very fascinating doers and achievers out loose.

**BiC:** *Are all your books based on something you've done or somewhere you've been?*

**Ballew:** Yes. You take situations and change them around, then you take some characteristics from certain people and you mix them up. But the inspiration is usually fairly close to something you know about. As I said, *The Devil's Lighter* came from the experiences with the wild wells. *The Moon Pool*, which involves drilling in the Arctic and native rights, came from a long experience I had with the Berger commission and other tribunals that were agonizing over whether a northern pipeline should be built. I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time in the Arctic, listening to these native people talk about their life.

The last two books, *Sacrifice Play* and *The Marigot Run*, result from my extreme interest in the Caribbean. Over the years, I've spent a lot of time there, but I've done more than lie on the beach. I became curious about the plight of the

people and talked to many of them. They see all this tourist money coming in; they know they have to have it, but they resent it. And you can't blame them for their ambivalence toward the whole thing. Another aspect I used in *The Marigot Run* is the idea that these little islands are their own little republics. I remember talking to John Compton, who was about to become the prime minister of St. Lucia, just before independence, and he said that the only thing he really worried about was that they were vulnerable. Anybody could organize a bunch of desperadoes to go down there and take it over.

**BiC:** *Are you interested in branching into any other kinds of writing?*

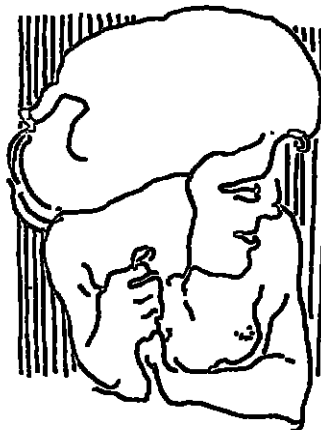
**Ballew:** Well I already do a fair amount of on-camera TV work, which involves a certain amount of writing. And just for fun, I recently started writing short stories, which I like because you can do them quickly. A novel is a marathon run. You're in it for a long time. □

## FIRST NOVELS

A fine madness: from a hilarious post-hippie picaresque to the unforgiving vengeance of a jealous God

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

JOHN GRAY's *Dazzled* (Irwin, 224 pages, \$18.95 cloth) begins not in the 1960s — that great New Romantic Age — but 10 years later, when the characters have had time to be embarrassed out of their Indian shirts and Khalil Gibran paperbacks. "I was an asshole in 1974," is how Gray's modern hero, Willard, defines himself in the book's first sentence — and no one contradicts him.



Willard is a kept man: kept by his wife Wanda, a dentist's assistant. Willard is also an idler because Willard is a child of the '60s, and in the '60s "idleness was a non-act of great moral courage." Offended by one of Wanda's remarks, Willard threatens her with going out to work; Wanda calls his bluff and he finds himself launched in a career as a salesman. The fates who rule our lives (even those of down-and-out hippies) have made Willard fall into a trap. But the fates are also kind: the job Willard lands is not just any job. In the midst of Chuck Queasy's Men's Wear ("Clothes for the Discriminating Male") Willard is hit by *The Revelation*. Like Teufelsdröckh in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Willard discovers that life is but a corollary to fashion: that everything hinges on what we believe we must wear, or on what others *make* us believe we must wear.

This secret kingdom has almost mythical inhabitants: Queasy, the Schopenhauer of men's clothes, who has theorized every aspect of the business

and come up with startling conclusions such as, "A good salesman turns dogshit into caviar, Bill. A good salesman is like a good Roman Catholic priest." And Jake, whose smile can charm flies off the wall, but whose nose operation (the one he had to improve his appearance) turns him into a dangerous weapon when he snores, so no woman will sleep with him. And above all, Ogden Oliver Opp, the tailor-poet, the Alexander Pope of the sweatshop, whose inspiration is our second skin:

*Lost days, lost ways devour the heart,  
Demean the haberdasher's art;  
Lapels grow narrow, ties grow thin:  
Leave shirt out or tuck it in?  
Breasted double, ties grow fat:  
The Fedora or the Homburg hat?  
In time we weave with shaking hand  
The tap-tap-tapestry of Man.*

But even this state of affairs does not last. Wanda, sick with Willard's transformation into a super-salesman, has a fling with her dentist. (Somebody should write an essay on the dentist as villain in Anglo-Saxon literature.) The dentist, after driving Wanda home, has an accident: his car leaps off the road and he goes — in Gray's poetic phrase — "to fill his last cavity." Wanda decides that Willard must leave and Willard, after resigning his post in the empire of clothing, turns to a friend from the hippie days.

The hairy creature is called The Scrapper — "born ugly and legally deaf and blind, . . . a freak, long before freaks were fashionable and cute" — who switches off his hearing aid when he wants to switch on to his artificial paradise. The Scrapper's house is crawling with other bizarre creatures: the Trashman, whose eating habits would have disgusted John Belushi; Ethereal, who makes Willard mad with love and yoga; Terra Firma, a huge old widow and her thug cat. In this house Willard and The Scrapper plan a revolution.

It is impossible to sum up all the adventures in this hugely enjoyable novel. It belongs to the tradition of the picaresque, with its worthless hero and his ghastly deeds; it is also a *Bildungsroman* (to give it a grand title), a novel of trial and learning in modern-age Canada; it is rooted in the history of social satire, as serious in its comedy as Oscar Wilde's comedies were serious.

*Dazzled* achieves the almost impossible: it is consistently funny over more than 200 pages: I found myself giggling over the first chapter, stifling with laughter toward the middle, and almost choking to death when I got to the last page. It is difficult to imagine how this book will age, whether its references to the plastic world around us will, in 50 years, be as dead as Alice's Dodo, and

whether we shall still be able to read it for the sake of its more enduring qualities: the richness of its imagination, tender understanding of its characters' fine madness. I think we shall. A good humorous novel is perhaps the rarest of good novels, and *Dazzled* will, in all probability, outlive the memory of the times it sets out to map.

MAN'S READING of God's acts is at best shaky: the signs are too ambiguous, the intentions too uncertain. Sara Stambaugh's *I Hear the Reaper's Song* (Raincoast, 222 pages, \$12.95 paper) attempts one such reading. In a small Mennonite community — Pennsylvania, 1896 — an accident occurs: a young unmarried couple, returning home from a party, is hit by a train at a dangerous crossing. For the church elders, the meaning of the accident is clear: God, that unforgivingly just Father, has crushed with His finger those who have chosen to disregard His commandments. The community is shaken. Never overwhelmingly zealous, they now turn to the church to seek quick atonement for their sins. In the eyes of the Church, the youngsters' death was a warning to all: God wants faithful obedience because He is a jealous God. But to the bereaved families, to the girl's life-loving mother and skeptical father, God's act is an immense injustice, incomprehensible and revolting.

Sara Stambaugh has chosen to tell the story in the words of Silas Hershey, the dead girl's brother. The starting point is an old people's home where Silas, looking back on the past, finds himself unable to talk to anyone about that accident of long ago, not even to his cousin Biney, "just down the hall." "Biney and I don't talk about the accident," he says to himself. "Nobody does, but it's still with me, even if I was only fifteen back in 1896 when it happened."

Silas begins the chronicle of his life in Mennonite country: the wonderful fields, the difficult Sundays ("Pap didn't approve of Sunday schools"), the locust trees that signalled the moment to go barefoot because "when those white flowers started hanging in the rows of spiny trees, it was summer." Then the accident happens and the invisible God presents Himself to Silas, incomprehensible and heartless. But, as time goes on, Silas learns that there are other versions of the truth, of the Reaper who is both the bread-maker and Death.

Sara Stambaugh is a careful, unpretentious writer: her prose, like that of Laurie Lee or Jean Giono, flows through a perfectly structured plot that is almost imperceptible in its subtlety. At times one wishes that her characters had a little more depth; one wants a glimpse



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at the shadier moments that their lives must have and which the author seems to shun. What moves the bishop, for instance, that man whose desire is to lead souls "by the hand to heaven"? Or what are Mammy's thoughts when she is left alone? Where is the source of her strength?

But these requests for more do not spoil the pleasure of what is already there: the exploration of the Mennonite world, that almost undiscovered country. *I Hear the Reaper's Song* is a quiet achievement, a pastoral novel that rings true.

*Downwind*, by Lesley Choyce (Creative Publishers, 140 pages, \$9.95 paper), can be read as a thriller. The Americans are trying to set up a nuclear reactor in Nova Scotia: a young teacher-cum-journalist, Warren Chandler, almost single-handedly opposes the project. Politicians, bureaucrats, the rich and the powerful try to stop Warren from fulfilling what he sees as his mission — but Warren, convinced of the rightfulness of his cause, battles on.

At first Warren is concerned, but not fully convinced of the danger. A hippie friend from the '60s, Roger, while smoking "some real nice Lebanese stuff recently come through," tells Warren about the American plans. "You know they wanna plant a few CANDUs here in beloved old Nova Scotia. Got a lot of money tied up in the Ontario nuclear industry and we send our boys off to Ottawa to sit around in Parliament and find out how to bring a few back home for the wife and kiddies." Warren reacts: "Roger, what do you think we could do about it?" Quite a bit, as it turns out.

Unfortunately, in spite of the novel's earnestness, the result is unconvincing. The thriller plot is not suspenseful enough; the characters are foreseeable or trite; the political reality it describes reads like an anti-nuke pamphlet. Throughout *Downwind* the message disturbs the telling of the story, becomes too blatant. From the blurb onwards, the reader is preached at, and a novel with a message preaches only to the converted. A political stand alone cannot sustain a piece of fiction: anger can serve as a point of departure, to investigate broader, more secret realities, but left on its own it is meaningless; it ends up being simply a convention of the times, a cliché.

*Downwind* is disappointing because Choyce can certainly write: the first half of the opening chapter sets a mood and scenery with concise effectiveness; later in the book, Warren's dream, after he seeks refuge in Ronnie's house, is beautifully crafted and does more to ex-

plain Warren's character than many of the previous pages full of conventional dialogue, perhaps because it allows a certain breathing space between the author's own thoughts and those of his creatures.

I FOUND no such redeeming qualities in *Fisherwoman*, by Veronika Ross (Pottersfield Press, 96 pages, \$6.95 paper), which reads like *Dallas* among the working classes. The mother, Margaret Campbell, is seemingly in love with her son Norman and hates her daughter-in-law Mona; it is rumoured that Mona got herself pregnant just to marry Norman; Margaret is an orphan whose adoptive parents, Hiram and Adelaide, would not allow her to date until she rebelled at the age of 23; Margaret got herself pregnant by Lew so she could marry into the proud Campbell family; an old girlfriend, Molly, who has just left her husband, entices Norman away from Mona; Mona is shattered but decides to leave; Norman repents, leaves Molly, comes

back and finds Mona gone; Margaret, in spite of her hatred for Mona, convinces her to return to Norman; Mona reveals that her child is not Norman's; Margaret embraces the baby and whispers "my bastard child."

In spite of the convoluted, improbable plot, nothing seems to happen in this novel: the characters are limp, static. Even Margaret, the narrator, the "fisherwoman," skips from tongue-in-cheek humour to distress and back, in barely 10 lines, without any credible evolution or change. Here is one example of the staccato narration: "He had a red beard like a pirate and posed his devil-may-care attitude before his friends. On the beach he whimpered and moaned in my ear. I wrapped my strong legs around his back and forced his sperm to stay inside of me. I became pregnant." *Fisherwoman* provides the reader with no sense of Nova Scotia, no psychological or historical background for its characters: simply a soap-opera intrigue. □

## POETRY

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Between the lines: beyond the details  
of bibliography, two new studies provide some intimate  
reflections of the lives of the poets

By DOUG FETHERLING

THE POET Bruce Whiteman, who works as a librarian at McMaster University, published a short article in the *Globe and Mail* not long ago concerning his third role, that of bibliographer. He wrote in defence of the tradition of the authored bibliography, citing the primary function of such books as "the writer's memory and the critic's or student's guide" (he might have also said the collector's or dealer's Bible). He was speaking of the sort of bibliography that in some quarters it now is fashionable to call a checklist, as though to illustrate how the form has been corrupted. A genuine bibliography, annotated and with as much detail as possible about editions, states, and first appearances, is a thing of beauty in itself and often a revealing mirror of to the person whose works are being scrutinized. This is certainly the case with Whiteman's own *Collected Poems of Raymond Souster: Bibliography* (Oberon Press, 208 pages, \$35 cloth) and Fraser Sutherland's *John Glassco: An Essay and a Bibliography* (ECW, 121 pages, \$8.95 paper). Both

have significant value as reference works but offer more than that. The Souster one can be read as a partial biography of its subject, the Glassco one as a revisionist criticism.

To use the Souster bibliography as a narrative one needs only remember a few basic facts: that Souster was born in Toronto in 1921 and that he fell in with Canadian and foreign modernists not too long after joining one of the major banks where, except for time out during the Second World War, he has laboured since 1939. The pattern of his literary career is quite bankerly in that the power of his verse lies in the decades-long process of accumulation and the ledger-like neatness with which the poems are tallied in book form at regular intervals. But it pleases many to see the fact that he's a poet and a bank worker as somehow indicative of contrary strains. Anyway, in 1935 Souster began publishing verse in both the *Toronto Star* and the *Mall and Empire*, papers diametrically opposed in everything, it would seem, except their willingness to accept his

work. He appeared more often in the *Star* than in the *Mail and Empire*. He also published in the *Globe*, where he signed himself Sappho, possibly because it sounded literary to the 14-year-old mind.

The sort of poetic career that could flourish perversely on a life in banking found no obstacle in the armed forces. Quite the contrary, to judge from a letter Whiteman quotes. Souster is in the RCAF, stationed in Nova Scotia, and writes to a friend, "Since I've been posted here at Sydney I've had plenty of time on my hands for writing — more even than I had in civilian life. I've started a novel and the poems come now and then — altogether it keeps me busy." Bibliographies often reveal how writers in one form crave renown in some other, and Souster wrote two novels about which Whiteman gives all the tantalizing details. The first, in 1950, was *The Winter of Time*, published under the name Raymond Holmes by a sleazy Toronto paperback house that also brought out pseudonymous work by Hugh Garner and Brian Moore. The second, in 1973, was a starkly realistic RCAF novel called *On Target*, this time as John Holmes. It was done by Martin Ahvenus, the Toronto bookseller, in a trade edition and a limited edition, the latter signed not as Holmes but as Souster. For Souster of course had long

since gained some popular acceptance after 20 years as a fixture of the small presses.

His first book publication was *Unit of Five* (Ryerson Press, 1944) in which he shared space with Louis Dudek, Ronald Hambleton, P.K. Page, and James Wrexford. Whiteman quotes from Lorne Pierce's correspondence to show that the grouping was not necessarily inspired by poetic compatibility. As an editor, Pierce had been receiving manuscripts from a new generation of poets and for some reason felt he couldn't publish them separately in the Ryerson Chapbook series. Further correspondence suggests that the book sold very poorly indeed. Also, it seems to have been reviewed in, of all places, the *Toronto Board of Trade Journal*. Various other small books and booklets followed. One of them was *New Poems* (1948) of which only one copy could be located.

It seems that in 1947 Souster started up a little business called the Enterprise Agency to distribute literary magazines and small press publications, including some he himself planned to mimeo. These were the "forerunner of the Contact Press mimeographed books of the 1950s," before that press graduated to properly printed books with Dudek's edition of *The Selected Poems of Raymond Souster*. The Enterprise Agency was run in connection with a newsletter

called *Enterprise: A Monthly Review*, a more obscure one than either his later *Combustion* or *Contact*, and it seems not to have lasted long. Whiteman believes that the Enterprise publications were "intended more for friends and colleagues than for the public." Souster himself, in a letter to Irving Layton, sees such methods as "one way of getting your stuff around to the other half a hundred people or so who are interested." But he published some of his work in an edition of only 25, feeling that number sufficient to satisfy the market. Through this bibliography emerges a clear picture of Souster coming home every day, retreating to some basement or back room, scratching away at his poems and then bucking the world's indifference as to whether or not the flame was kept alive. It is a timely picture.

A bibliography such as this is important for its confirmations of what's already known but also for its fresh tidbits and new connections, since all such information together shows the pattern of a writing career. It's interesting to learn, for example, that in 1946 Souster should have appeared in a Communist anthology entitled *Spirit of Canadian Democracy*. Or to see proof of the extent to which by the early 1950s he was in touch with, and in league with, the international poetry underground as typified by Robert Creeley and, especially, Cid Corman.

Throughout this period he would seem to have received mainly intramural or local notice. Some of his books were being reviewed in a journal called *The Deer and Dachshund*, and as late as 1962 one of his important collections, *Place of Meeting*, was published by the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto rather than by any remotely mainstream publisher. But all that changed when Ryerson brought out *The Colour of the Times* in 1964 and followed up with *Ten Elephants on Yonge Street* in 1965. Then he began getting reviews in newspapers outside Toronto and in *Maclean's* and *Saturday Night*. He began getting a non-professional audience, and the books were reprinted more than once. When his church masters sold Ryerson Press, in what seemed the most cold-hearted assault on the arts since the dissolution of the monasteries, Souster was luckier than most. He had already found a steady publisher in Oberon Press, which has made a tremendous commitment to publishing his work, a commitment now rounded out with this fine bibliography, which is certainly no less than such a selfless and good man deserves.

The Glasco bibliography is of a different order and has a different lesson to teach. The first part of the book is a bio-

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graphical sketch of Glassco, an appreciation of him as a stylist, and an argument for higher rank. It is a credible job, written with great affection for the work and the person. Sutherland avoids controversy in dealing with someone who was a pornographer as well as a poet, albeit a pornographer of the *fin de siècle* literary kind. The bibliography comprising the second portion of the book, including an inventory of the Glassco papers at McGill and other repositories, cannot escape some implied controversy, though it is presented without comment.

Glassco's most famous work, of course, is *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, the on-the-spot autobiography he began writing in Paris in 1928. Fragments were published at the time but the work was not completed, Glassco claimed later, until 1932. The whole manuscript was not published until 1970. At that time, many suspected it was of more recent vintage than he suggested, as it was written in a fully mature style; Louis Dudek took the trouble to compare the originally published fragment with the same section in the completed book and found them almost wholly dissimilar. But that was only one chapter. Sutherland's work in the Glassco papers, however, does tend to show that Glassco was perhaps less than candid in not suggesting that *Memoirs* was, to a good extent, a work of the 1960s inspired by something older.

Of course, that detracts from the book: not at all. But it does speak to the central critical notion that seeps up between the lines of this bibliography: the fact that part of Glassco's art was his playing with text, his playing with the very *idea* of a text. There is some question whether what he maintained were his first two books, *Conan's Fig* (1928) and *Contes en crinoline* (1929), ever actually existed; no copies are known to have survived. But this is fitting for someone who practised pornography in a certain environment and at a certain period and mixed it with literature. It was subterfuge as much as style perhaps that links Glassco the writer of poems and translations to Glassco the writer of dirty books. Glassco might even have found that deception was the greater part of prurience.

It was typical of underground writing and publishing generally that he should have found it necessary to describe *Temple of Pederasty* as a translation from the Japanese when in fact it was his original work. But it was typical of him particularly, with what now seems his pronounced bump of impishness, that he should have published something called *Fetish Girl* under the pseudonym Sylvia Bayer while dedicating it to one

John Glassco. It does not seem that he shared any impulse with Frederick Phillip Grove in such matters, and to do further detective work is probably to miss the point. The point is only that the poet and pornographer was also sort of — what could the term be? — a self-inflicted forger. Readers knew this was an obvious piece of his equipment as a stylist; that's what made it possible for him to finish Beardsley's unfinished *Under the Hill*. But it was also, we know now thanks to this bibliography, a more important part of his outlook and his art.

Fraser Sutherland synthesises reviews of some of Glassco's books. Of the poems in *A Point of Sky*, he quotes a 1966 review by Bill Bissett in which Bissett states, "They all look like bad trips to me," advising Glassco to "get the air thru yr window no english literature its du you/feel good." Certainly Glassco seems just as well anchored to "english literature" as ever (that is his strength, surely). But he now also appears to have been more of an antiquary and, in his almost post-modern relationship to text, more of an experimenter, too. □

## THE BROWSER

### Strange bedfellows: the life of Igor Gouzenko, the death of Herbert Norman, and things that go 'wok wok wok' in the night

By MORRIS WOLFE

OCTOBER 19 was the 30th anniversary of Robert Weaver's literary program *Anthology* on CBC-Radio. In honour of that event Macmillan has published *The Anthology Anthology* (224 pages, \$17.95 cloth), a selection of poetry and prose broadcast on the show. Weaver had begun work at the CBC in 1948, but even before that he was already leaving his mark. In a recent essay "Has Anyone Here Heard of Marjorie Pickthall?" Henry Kreisel describes how Weaver introduced him to modern Canadian fiction when they met at the University of Toronto in 1943. A year later, Weaver, James Reaney, Robert Sawyer, and Kreisel organized *The Modern Letters Club*, which met once or twice a month to discuss modern literature. "Weaver arranged for places where we could hold our meetings . . . It was all very informal . . . Word got around and we usually had twenty or thirty people at our gatherings. These were always lively. People could read anything they liked — poetry, fiction, dramatic sketches, or critical articles. Some professors showed up, too; Norman Endicott quite frequently, Northrop Frye and Barker Fairley occasionally, but they never imposed their presence on us." Weaver's *Anthology*, in a sense, became a continuation of the *Modern Letters Club*.

THIRTY-NINE YEARS after its original publication, *The University of Waterloo* has produced a *Concordance to Gabrielle Roy's Bonheur d'occasion (The Tin Flute)*. The *Concordance* by

Paul Socken, the first ever undertaken for a Canadian prose work, runs 1,136 pages and sells for \$85. According to the publisher's catalogue, "This concordance uses the Key Word in Context (KWIC) format. The concorded words are listed down the centre of the page, with the immediate context given on either side. For easy reference, each listing is preceded by the headword, and the total number of occurrences is also shown. On the extreme right side of the page, the user of the concordance will find the listing of the chapter, page, and line of the novel from which the concorded line was taken." Terrific. But could someone please explain to me who will use this book and why?

MY SON recently returned from living and working in a remote village in Indonesia under the auspices of Canada World Youth. While there he spent long hours learning the local dialect. He tells of walking through the jungle toward the end of his stay and being startled by a loud "wok wok wok" sound coming from the trees ahead. "What's that?" he asked. "*Binatang wok wok itu*," replied one of the villagers. (Translation: "That's the animal that goes 'wok wok.'") Sometimes, it turns out, knowing the language isn't enough.

GEORGE SADOUL'S *Dictionary of Films and Dictionary of Film Makers* are essential reference books for anyone seriously interested in movies. Both these dictionaries exist in English-

language editions translated, edited, and updated by Queen's University professor Peter Morris. As might be expected, Canadian film receives almost no attention in these two volumes. Now Morris has made up for this omission by producing *The Film Companion*, a comprehensive guide to more than 650 Canadian films and film-makers. *The Film Companion* (Irwin Publishing, 352 pages, \$16.95 paper) immediately becomes the first aid to which one turns for basic information about Canadian film. No Canadian library, no one seriously interested in Canadian film, should be without it. Of less value is the simultaneously published *Take Two*, a collection of essays on Canadian film edited by Seth Feldman (Irwin Publishing, 320 pages, \$14.95 paper). Unfortunately, *Take Two*, unlike the earlier anthology, *Canadian Film Reader*, edited by Feldman and Joyce Nelson, is less than the sum of its parts. Although I teach a course in Canadian film, I would not require my students to buy this book. It's too diffuse. And, in any case, all the articles in *Take Two* are listed in *The Film Companion* and readily available. So why buy it?

ACCORDING to the Russian embassy the most popular Canadian writer in the USSR is Ernest Thompson Seton. A Russian translation of his animal stories sold 500,000 copies in 1983. A 1984 translation into the Kazakh language is expected to sell more than 400,000 copies. The illustrated, 319-page hardcover edition sells for two roubles or about \$3 Canadian.

THE TROUBLE with Gouzenko: *The Untold Story*, by John Sawatsky (Macmillan, 352 pages, \$19.95 cloth), is that its author hasn't so much written a book as shown us his research. This collection of interviews with people who knew Igor Gouzenko, or who have made a study of him, is not without interest. But Sawatsky owed it to his readers to shape this material into the kind of narrative he provided us with in his excellent *Men in the Shadows* and *For Services Rendered*. His failure to do so here, and his failure to draw obvious conclusions, is puzzling. One such conclusion, as James Eayrs puts it, is that the great irony of Gouzenko "was how completely he had sold out to the worst aspects of the society he had defected to."

NO ONE who reads the essays in E.H. Norman: *His Life and Scholarship*, edited by Roger W. Bowen (University of Toronto Press, 206 pages, \$24.95 cloth), or who has read Charles Taylor's chapter on Herbert Norman in *Six Journeys: A Canadian Pattern*, can

doubt that a full-length biography of this fascinating man is needed. There are no ironies in this story as in that of Gouzenko; there's only tragedy. Herbert Norman was a Canadian diplomat who had been a Communist in the 1930s. Norman was hounded by American McCarthyites until he committed suicide in Egypt in April, 1957. It seems clear that without Norman's efforts in the months preceding his death Lester Pearson wouldn't have won his Nobel Peace Prize. What the McCarthyites failed to realize is that people can change. Bowen writes that during his short life, Norman "changed from a classics student into a published Japanologist, from a graduate researcher into a provocative scholar, from a language officer into a skilled ambassador, from a doctrinaire Marxist into a Jeffersonian liberal, from an ideologue into a philosopher, from a hopeful lover of life into a suicide . . ." □

## LETTERS

### Letters from the editors

AS A FORMER editor of *Grain*, I read with interest Cary Fagan's article on literary magazines in Canada ("Small beginnings," August/September). One of Fagan's conclusions — "a literary review with greater prominence than the current offerings would be a valuable addition to the scene" — will receive little disagreement. But Fagan's grasp of the literary scene in Canada, how it works and how it might be improved, seems to me to be about as wrong-headed as it is thin.

Fagan can't make up his mind about the impact that literary magazines have. His major criterion of impact seems to be that publication in literary magazines lead to publication of a book by a major publisher; a minor criterion is that it lead to "almost instant recognition" for the writer. The example he gives of the latter is one, and foreign; the examples he considers with respect to the former are ambivalent at best. To be sure, such a notion of impact as Fagan has might have been used to measure the "effect" of literary magazines; but the lack of rigour with which Fagan conducted his research could lead only to his vapid conclusions. No attempt has been made to survey the relationship between publication in a literary magazine and either publication of a book or public

recognition. More tellingly, given that very few writers reach the top, however "top" is defined, no literary magazine can have any significant impact at all by Fagan's criteria. Perhaps the concept as well as its use lack rigour.

The *raison d'être* of the literary magazine is neither the offer of instant recognition nor the possibility of book publication (though both may follow naturally, if infrequently). Literary magazines exist to publish new writing, by new and established writers, for an audience that (one assumes) is interested in learning to read it. That is, literary magazines serve the cause of writing first, not the causes of recognition or book publishing.

Despite its thinness and wrong-headedness, Fagan's article does serve one function: it raises, by begging, the question of how to increase the readership of new writing in Canada. It is time for the literary community to address this question, and I make the suggestion because I believe that a great deal of the new writing, as it appears in the literaries, is good enough to appeal to a popular (not just literary) audience. The interests of writers, readers, magazines, and book publishers would be well-served by a regular, national showcase of new writing drawn from the existing literaries.

How might this be accomplished? Would a "high profile" or "prominent" literary magazine do it? I think not, but the question requires serious study. Is it time for a national literary supplement? Such an idea has been discussed by a group of editors of literary magazines associated with the Canadian Periodical Publishers Association. It deserves further study and, no doubt, refinement. Above all, something needs to be done: the writers are there, the literaries are (by and large) doing their job, and only faint-heartedness by the literary community prevents us from testing our new writing on the larger public. What are we trying to hide?

One last comment on Fagan's article: some of John Steffler's fine poems have been published in at least one literary magazine — *Grain* (August, 1981). Do tell McClelland & Stewart, in case they read *Books in Canada!*

E.F. Dyck  
Saskatoon

IF CARY FAGAN had taken a cursory glance at the magazine racks, then he would've been better equipped to write his article. Perhaps he should have spoken to more than one local magazine editor. If he had, he might have learned of Wynne Francis's comprehensive study, entitled "The Expanding Spec-



trum." in which she delineates the proliferation of small magazine production from the early '60s onward (*Canadian Literature*, No. 57). Francis's article could've provided essential historical background to a subject that Fagan is apparently unacquainted with.

Fagan's light-footed opinions on the role of the so-called small magazine in this country may have blundered along a well-known boulevard or two, but eventually his myopic meanderings led to commonplace cul-de-sacs. According to Fagan, there are no Canadian magazines that are considered "essential reading for the best and riskiest in new writing." I agree that there is a great diversity of small magazines in Canada, but let's not pretend that the grass roots hold no influence. Fagan seems blithely unaware of publications that have served as a support structure to the careers of the supposed "magic circle" of writers to which he alludes. Perhaps Pierre Berton and Peter C. Newman never appeared on the pages of *Tish* or *La Barre du Jour*. But then Berton and Newman aren't known for producing "the best and the riskiest in new writing."

I won't bother to list the superb talent that originally appeared in Canadian

literary magazines. I won't object to Fagan's argument that the small magazine is not a particularly great influence on the nation's more conservative book publishers. It's beside the point whether or not a magazine can launch a writer into some kind of "magic circle" if that circle is determined by publishers who, understandably, are as interested in making a dollar as in contributing to the culture of this nation. Fagan's argument ignores the fact that the *raison d'être* of the little magazine is not the same as the motive governing Maclean Hunter or McClelland & Stewart. He also ignores quality alternate presses that are very much in tune with new developments in writing and that are now an important part of the Canadian mainstream like House of Anansi and Oberon Press. These presses have traditionally drafted their best writers from the small magazine circuit. It is well-known that the larger, more established presses draw talent from the alternate press group.

I don't mean to disparage the work of the more established presses in the country, for they've done much to make Canadian writing available to the world. Nor do I mean to take away from more conventional magazines like *Tamarack*,

which served a useful function in their time. In fact, I could be dead wrong about all of this. It could also be that George Woodcock never edited nor lifted pen, and it could be that Harlequin Books are planning to launch a "post-modern" *nouveau roman* series. On the other hand, if Cary Fagan is on the right track, then we may soon be reading about "meta-fiction" in the "Canadian" edition of *Reader's Digest*.

Karl Jirgens  
Editor, *Rampike Magazine*  
Toronto

### Missing the boat

JOHN GODDARD's biographical article on Edith Iglauer (August/September) is the best piece of writing I've read in *Books in Canada*; perhaps the most interesting biographical sketch I've read in any magazine. So absorbing, in fact, that when I began to reread the descriptions of Iglauer, I missed the ferry to return home and had the pleasure of poring over the entire article again.

Susan Yates  
Gabrioloa, B.C.

HARBOUR PUBLISHING, near Pender Harbour, B.C., is run by Howard White, known to his friends as Howie. I inadvertently called him Harold in my profile of Edith Iglauer. Sorry, Howie.

John Goddard  
Toronto

THANK YOU for your wonderful article on Edith Iglauer. It was greatly enjoyed, save for one omission. You failed to mention that Douglas & McIntyre is the publisher of that "important book" *Inuit Journey*; or that *Denison's Ice Road*, "which was published in part by the *New Yorker*," was published in full by Douglas & McIntyre. We know that it is easy to ignore the West Coast but we are here and we continue to publish excellent books.

Rick Antonson  
General Manager  
Douglas & McIntyre  
Vancouver

### TV or not TV

I HAVE TO take exception to Morris Wolfe's slap at *The Journal* (August/September) for its arts documentaries. The poor CBC; they can't win for losing. *The Journal* has a huge audience; these documentaries are intended to show that there is a living, unique individual behind the books, and to pique interest of readers and would-be readers.

Halya Kuchmij's entertaining and accurate documentary on me sold "the sizzle not the steak" and in eight minutes

## CanWit No. 97

AS THE YEAR slides toward its close, the end also approaches both for Toronto's 150th anniversary and (if we are to believe the government's hype) Ontario's bicentennial. Naturally, a number of books have been published to celebrate the virtues of the province and its capital, but we wonder how the rest of Canada feels about all this self-congratulation. Non-centrist readers are invited to compose commemorative verses that put Ontario or Toronto in their place. The prize is \$25. Deadline: December 1. Address: CanWit No. 97, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

### Results of CanWit No. 95

OUR REQUEST for expurgated book titles produced an orgy of *double entendre*, dutifully rendered tame. The winner is Stephen Elliott of Peterborough, Ont., for the following titles and their censored translations:

- The Swinging Flesh: The Pendulum*
- Balls For a One-Armed Juggler: Objects for a One-Armed Juggler*
- A Game of Touch: Tag*
- Pat of Silver Bush: Pat Who Lives by*

### *the Light-Coloured Hedge*

- Roughing It in the Bush: Country Life*
- Cocksure: Overconfidence*

### Honourable mentions:

- Death of a Lady's Man: Death of a Feminist*
- The Unquiet Bed: The Restless Pallet*
- Sowing Seeds in Danny: Planting Spuds in Danny*

— James Larsen, Vancouver

- Fruits of the Earth: A View from the Closet*

— James C. Read, Halifax

- The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant: The Fat Woman Next Door is Getting Fatter*

— Nicky Hood, Vancouver

- The Marriage Bed: A Guide to Antique Furniture*

— Yrjo Rikkonen, Iowa City, Iowa

- Private Parts: Theatre Without an Audience*

- A House Full of Women: The Convent*

— W.P. Kinsella, White Rock, B.C.

- Pandora's Box: Pandora's Container*

— Wayne Grady  
Chaffey's Locks, Ont.

accomplished far more than a two-hour documentary of "talking heads" mumbling about magic realism and religious symbolism in *Shoeless Joe*, which would not sell a single book, and be of interest to no one but the "300" on the inside of CanLit.

The *Journal's* documentaries on writers are good for book stores, publishers, and especially for writers like me, significantly increasing sales, allowing me to eke out a living as a full-time story-teller.

W.P. Kinsella  
Iowa City, Iowa

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## 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

Since Daisy Creek, by W.O. Mitchell, Macmillan. Mitchell takes some severe chances in his latest novel, but compared to its strengths, its weaknesses are minor. Irreverent, touching, life-affirming, it is everything we have come to expect of a consummate story-teller.

### POETRY

Mountain Tea, by Peter van Toorn, McClelland & Stewart. Admiring, moved, greedy readers, haunted by the burden poetry sometimes bears for van Toorn, can only hope that his typewriter — his "bell-twanging letter and ink box" — sings, rings, and twangs out more books as extraordinary as this one.

### 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:

- Against the Tide, by Kenneth McMillan, Image.  
Anamath, by Nella Benson, Avon.  
Anastasia Morningstar and the Crystal Butterfly, by H.J. Hutchins, Annick.  
Angel in Babylon, by Jill Downie, PaperJacks.  
The Bequest & Other Stories, by Jerry Wexler, Véhicule Press.  
Between Two Worlds: The Canadian Immigrant Experience, edited by Milly Charon, Quadrant.  
The Big Secret, by Jed MacKay, illustrated by Heather Collins, Annick Press.  
Bon Voyage, Banbee, by Dayal Kaur Khalsa, Tundra.  
The Book of Matthew, by Betty Jane Wylie, M & S.  
Bonded by the Heart, by Marsha Caham, Avon.  
Bourgeois Pleasures, by Ken Stange, Quarry Press.  
Brenda and Edward, by Maryann Kovalski, Kids Can Press.  
Calgary Architecture: The Boom Years, 1972-1982, by Pierre Guilmond and Brian Sinclair, Detselig.  
Canadian Fairy Tales, by Eva Martin and Lazzio Gal, Groundwood.  
Canadian Folk Art, by Michael Bird, Oxford.  
The Canadian Prairie: A History, by Gerald Friesen, U of T Press.  
Christopher Carter of Hazelton, also known as Bear, by Antoine Lalleit, translated by Wayne Grady, Methuen.  
Collected Poems of Raymond Souster, Volume 5: 1977-83, Oberon.  
Coming Attractions 2, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon.  
A Companion to Under the Volcano, by Chris Ackerley and Lawrence J. Clippert, UBC Press.  
Confessions of a Harvard Man, by Harold Stearns, Puget Press.  
Consensus: A Liberal Looks at His Party, by Roy MacLaren, Mosaic.  
The Crime of Ovide Plouffe, by Roger Lemelin, translated by Alan Brown, M & S.  
Curing Nuclear Madness, by Frank G. Sommers, Methuen.  
Dance of the Partridges, by Tom Marshall, Quarry Press.  
Denedeh: A Dene Celebration, The Dene Nation (M & S).  
Difficult Magic, by Marla Singleton, Wolsak and Wynn.  
Earthen Vessels, by Ann Copeland, Oberon.  
Educational Administration in Canada (3rd edition), by T.E. Giles and A.J. Fyouldfoot, Detselig.  
84 Best Canadian Stories, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon.  
E.J. Pratt: The Truist Years, 1832-1927, by David G. Pitt, U of T Press.  
Emergency Aids: Children and Household Materials, by Arthur V. Tester and Glen B. Tester, Detselig.  
Entering Space: An Astronaut's Odyssey, by Joseph P. Allen, Spacart.  
Eye on America, by Michael Ruetz, M & S.  
A Fair Shake: Autobiographical Essays by McGill Women, edited by Margaret Gillett and Kay Sibbald, Eden Press.  
Fanny Essler, Volumes I and II, by Frederick Philip Grove, Oberon.  
Fatal Beauty, by John Godey, Irwin.  
Fighting Back: Tax Evasion and the Great Canadian Tax Revolt, by Paul Malvern and George Vandenberg, Methuen.  
A Friend Like You, by Roger Pace, Annick.  
Friends of a Feather, by Allan Stratton, Playwrights Canada.  
Frederick H. Varley, by Peter Varley, Key Porter.  
Fury, by David Watmough, Oberon.  
Gentlemen-Bishops and Foulon Fighters, edited by Cyril J. Byrne, Jespersen Press.  
Getting to Know the General, by Graham Greene, Lester & Orpen Dennys.  
The Golden Age Hotel, by David Lewis Stein, Macmillan.  
Happy Birthday, Banbee, by Dayal Kaur Khalsa, Tundra.  
The Horbligers, by Douglas Barbour, Quarry Press.  
A Hard Act to Follow: Notes on Ontario School Law, by V.K. Gilbert et al., Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.  
Harvesting the Northern Wild, by Marilyn Walker, Outcrop.  
Heartlands, by Philip Kreiner, Oberon.  
The Heroin Merchants, by Vic Phillips, Methuen.  
The Hockey Sweater, by Roch Carrier, illustrated by Sheldon Cohen, translated by Sheila Fishman, Tundra.  
The Illness That We Are, by John P. Dourley, Inner City Books.  
An Innocent Millionaire, by Stephen Vizinczey, Seal.  
It's Late, And All The Girls Have Gone: An Annesley Diary, 1907-1910, by Kathleen Cowan, Clilde Thursday Press.  
Jenny Greenleaf, by Mary Alice Downie, illustrated by Barbara Reid, Kids Can Press.  
Just One More Ring, by Lynn Johnston, Andrews, McNeil & Parker (U.S.)  
John Grierson and the NFB, ECW Press.  
Just Watch Me: Remembering Pierre Trudeau, by Larry Zolf, James Lorimer.  
Last Message to Berlin, by Philippe Van Ryndt, Stoddart.  
Law and Anarchism, edited by Thom Holterman & Henc Van Maarseveen, Black Rose Books.  
The Lie, by Marion Mizeau, Black Moss Press.  
Life Cycle, by George Whipple, Houslow Press.  
Matthew and the Midnight Tow Truck, by Allen Morgan, illustrated by Michael Marchenko, Annick.  
Memorial Day, by Karen Brownstein, PaperJacks.  
Merry Christmas, Banbee, by Dayal Kaur Khalsa, Tundra.  
Millicent and the Wind, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Suzanne Duranceau, Annick.  
The Molson Saga, 1763-1983, by Shirley E. Woods, Jr., Avon.  
Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Any More, by Kathy Stinson, illustrated by Nancy Lou Reynolds, Annick.  
The Money Labyrinth, by W.E. Woods, Doubleday.  
The New Wind Has Wings: Poems from Canada, compiled by Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson, illustrated by Elizabeth Cleaver, Oxford.  
Nobody, by Medardo Zola and Angela Deyreime, illustrated by Wendy Wolsak, Pemmican Publications.  
An Old-Fashioned Mystery, by Russ Fairleigh, Avon.  
Only One Life: The Story of Dr. Jack Scott, by Arnold Dallimore, Image.  
Orif, 27 Dragons (and a Snorkell), by Betty Waterton, illustrated by Karen Kulyk, Annick.  
Panopticon, by Steve McCaffery, Blewainment Press.  
Pirates & Outlaws of Canada, 1610-1932, by Harold Horwood and Ed Butts, Doubleday.  
Playing with Fire, by Tom Marshall, Oberon.  
Polychronicon, by Polly Fleck, Wolsak and Wynn.  
Publishing: Advice From Those Who've Done It, edited by M.K. Williams, Amene Publications.  
The Restaurant Book, by Richard Ware and James Rudnick, Methuen.  
Rideau Reflections, by G. Clare Churchill, 1,000 Islands Publishers.  
Russian Spring, by Dennis Jones, Stoddart.  
Secular Socialists: The CCF/NDP in Ontario, by J.T. Morley, McGill-Queen's University Press.  
Selected Tales of Jacques Ferron, translated by Betty Bednarski, Anansi.  
Sometimes a Great Notion: A Photo Album of Canada, 1850-1925, by Edward Cavell, Altitude Publishing.  
A Spider Danced a Cozy Jig, by Irving Layton, illustrated by Niro Malish, Stoddart.  
The Square Root of Female, by Gillian Chase, Ragweed Press.  
Summer Island, by Phil Murphy, Oberon.  
The Sunday Before Winter, by Marilyn Bowering, General.  
Swiss for Your Life, by Don Bailey, Oberon.  
Talking Out of Crumley, by Ted Stuntton, illustrated by Tina Holtzroff, Kids Can Press.  
Tootle, by Johan Sorenzin, illustrated by Avelin, Tundra.  
Translation Into Fiction, by Claire Harris, Goose Lane Editions.  
Uncle Jacob's Ghost Story, by Doan Kustner, Macmillan.  
Walker Scott: The Making of the Novelist, by Jane Millgate, U of T Press.  
Welcome, Twins, by Dayal Kaur Khalsa, Tundra.  
Who Goes to the Park, by Wanabe Aska, Tundra.  
Will the Bounty End?: The Uncertain Future of Canada's Food Supply, by Garry Lawrence Fahlbalm, Western Producer Prairie Books.  
Wilks de Wit: The Lord of the Ring, by Michael Beaudin, Avon.  
Wine and Wheat, by Joan Davies, Western Producer Prairie Books.  
Winners, by Mary-Ellen Lang Collura, Western Producer Prairie Books.  
Winter Journey, by Allan Brown, Quarry Press.  
Your Money and How to Keep It, by Brian Costello, Stoddart.



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