

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

BOOKS IN CANADA

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THE DARK ACTS OF
GEORGE F. WALKER

Geoffrey Ursell, winner
of our ninth annual
first-novel contest

Dramatic readings:
the year's published
plays in review

And an interview
with Rick Salutin

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CONTRIBUTORS

Brad Adams is a Toronto writer specializing in history and sports. Bob Blackburn is the proprietor of On-Line Editing. Carol Bolt's last stage play was *Love Or Money*, produced at the Blyth Festival. George Bowring has won Governor General's Awards for fiction and poetry. Mark Czarnacki writes for *Maclean's* and other publications. *Capital Tales* (Talonbooks) is Brian Fawcett's most recent work. Elisabeth Feryn, who photographed Rick Salutin, lives in Toronto. Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (Penguin) was reviewed in our November issue. George Galt is on the railroad, researching a new book about cross-Canada train travel. Mark Gerson is a Toronto freelance writer. Three Ralph Gustafson poetry collections will be reviewed in our May issue. Marla Horvath is a freelance writer in Toronto. Playwright Marcia Kahan, formerly of Montreal, now resides in London, England. Steve Lukits is a critic in Kingston, Ont., and Robin Metcalfe one in Halifax. The poet Daniel David Moses' last book was *Delicate Bodies* (Blewointment). The photographs of Marian Engel and George F. Walker are by Paul OrNSTEIN. John Oughton's latest collection of poetry is *Gearing of Love* (Mosaic). Our illustrations are by Toronto artist Jane Parker. Richard Plant's *Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Drama* is reviewed on page 21. Sherie Posesorski is a Toronto freelance writer. Glenn Gould is one of the artists discussed in the non-fiction book *B.W. Poole* has in progress. James Reaney has plays included in both theatre anthologies reviewed in this issue. Paul Roberts has embarked on writing a history of hatred. Veronica Ross's last work of fiction was *Fisherwoman* (Potter'sfield Press). Volker Strunk has taught dramatic literature at York University and the University of Augsburg. Paul Stuewe is planning a new book of criticism. Alan Twigg of Vancouver frequently interviews writers. The playwright Tim Wynne-Jones also writes fiction for children (*Zoom at Sea*, Groundwood) and adults (*The Knot*, McClelland & Stewart).

EDITOR • Michael Smith MANAGING EDITOR • Fraser Sutherland ART DIRECTOR • Mary Lu Toms
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Pillow talk

Beyond the perplexities of literary theory and liberal humanism lurks the critical question of how Northrop Frye performs in bed



WHO READS FRYE NOW?" Frank Kermode recently asked his audience at London's Institute of Contemporary Art. Judging by the silence in that crowded seminar room, the question was rhetorical, at least for academics on this side of the Atlantic. Immensely popular for more than 30 years, Northrop Frye has fallen out of fashion in scholarly circles, but the Master's name is also being taken in vain in more frivolous contexts. Frye has become a figure of fun on — of all things — British television.

Kermode, mandarin critic and retired King Edward VII Professor of English at Cambridge, was ostensibly debating the merits of French critic Roland Barthes with Terry Eagleton, Marxist critic and *enfant terrible* of the Oxford English faculty. But their discussion quickly ranged beyond Barthes. About the only subject on which they could agree was Frye's obsolescence.

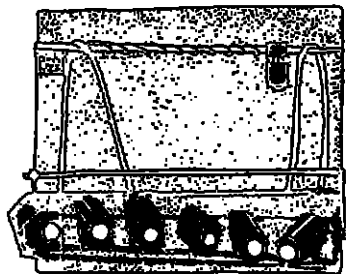
Eagleton was anxious to deliver an urgent message: that liberal humanism is bankrupt. By regarding literature as a place to escape from a "politically constructed society," it has run out of "rationales," he said, thus rendering itself irrelevant. Its insistence on "timeless values" and "unchanging human nature" is a lie that merely reinforces its own middle-class ideology. It is therefore rightly being replaced by a more ideologically committed (Marxist, feminist) school of criticism.

Kermode listened to Eagleton's diatribe with the patient indulgence of a tolerant headmaster. He proved too experienced a debater to fall into the trap of attempting to defend liberal humanism. Instead, he argued with cheerful cynicism that so long as university departments of English exist, students will continue to enrol in them. For Kermode, critical theories such as Frye's will simply pass in and out of fashion according to invisible laws of academic supply and demand.

The real question Kermode and Eagleton were grappling with was the difficult business of justifying the academic study of English literature. At the turn of the century, this newly established university course was frequently derided as the

"poor man's classics." What possible academic rigour, the old guard complained, could be involved in the reading of novels, plays, and poetry in one's own language? As Evelyn Waugh has recorded, in the Oxford of the 1920s the English school was reserved for "women and foreigners," unworthy of the attention of English gentlemen.

In the Cambridge of the '30s, this frivolous reputation was redeemed by F.R. Leavis and numerous disciples, whose "great tradition" of selected novelists and poets was used as a cudgel to beat the "mechanized," "commercialized," "withered," society of modern industrial England. After the war, however, Leavis's faith in high culture as a morally redemptive agent was sorely tried by reports of concentration-camp officers devoted to Goethe, Shakespeare, and Bach. And Leavis's nostalgia for an "organic society" — situated somewhere in the 17th century, where unalienated peasants spoke an English "crammed with the physical textures of actual experience" — was all very well if you lived in an ancient university town in East Anglia. But it was a harder pose to maintain — without seeming precious — in downtown Chicago or Toronto.



Something less tendentious, more scientific, was required if English literature was to flourish in the academy. It was provided in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) by Canada's own Northrop Frye. Frye's *Anatomy*, like Aristotle's *Poetics*, attempted to define the laws by which all literary works are structured. Literary writing was no longer to be regarded, as Leavis had wished, as a crude moral arbiter separating the sensitive from the crass, but as "an autonomous verbal structure."

With its four narrative categories, five "modes," three recurrent patterns of

symbolism, and its cyclical theory of literary history, Frye's system provided both a method and a rationale for the academic study of literature. Seminar rooms from Dalhousie to Simon Fraser rang with eager voices, classifying archetypes, distinguishing modes, identifying cycles. (I am personally guilty of a 20-page essay tracing "the operation of the *alazon*, *ieron*, and *bomolochos* figures in Jacobean city comedy.")

Frye's categories, like the best scientific theory, seemed unassailable; their all-encompassing nature offered an inexhaustible source of material; their apolitical nature was reassuring. Since all literature was autonomous — relating to nothing but itself, a "collective utopian dreaming" — it could be analysed with the detachment of a scientist and the appreciation of an aesthete.

That is just the problem, argues Terry Eagleton, whose *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell) surveys major critics from Matthew Arnold to Jacques Derrida and exposes the unstated, perhaps unconscious political allegiances and assumptions that underlie their theories. In Frye's work Eagleton detects "a deep fear of the actual social world, a distaste for history itself. . . . The beauty of the approach is that it deftly combines an extreme aestheticism with an efficiently classifying 'scientificity,' and so maintains literature as an imaginary alternative to modern society while rendering criticism respectable in that society's terms."

Frye, it appears, is a past master at the art of classifying one's cake before happily consuming it.

As if that were not enough, even Frye might have found detachment difficult had he watched an episode of Frederic Raphael's recent television series, *Oxbridge Blues* (BBC Publications), which features the following exchange between a civil servant and his wife as they undress for bed:

WENDY: . . . I know you're ridiculously jealous of Pip and you can't even bring yourself to accept his generosity without looking as though you'd much sooner be reading the collected works of — of — of — oh — Northrop Frye.

VICTOR: I would. Much. The *Anatomy of Criticism*, though flawed, was a

seminal work in some ways. Why did you happen to choose him?

WENDY: I wanted someone with a silly name.

VICTOR: I don't find Northrop particularly silly.

WENDY: Well I do. I find it very silly indeed. Not as silly as you're being, but still very silly. . . .

In or out of bedrooms, it seems, Northrop Frye remains seminal.

— MARCIA KAHAN

Between the lines

THIS IS A true story: yesterday an English professor asked me how I decided on the length of the lines in my poems. I said that it depended on two things — how I hear what's being said, and what size paper I'm writing on.

In all the years I have devoted to writing and reading literature, I have read only one discussion of the effect of the writing surface on the writing. That was the transcript of a discussion between Allen Ginsberg and Robert Creeley at the 1963 summer poetry extravaganza at the University of British Columbia. But I know from personal experience and talking with other writers that critics seldom consider such mun-

dane things as whether the author wrote his novel in a stenographer's pad or on custom-made vellum.

William Carlos Williams has been called everything from a social realist to a post-modernist grandpa. Yet it is no secret that he scribbled lots of his poems on prescription forms while the next patient was putting down the magazine in the waiting room and entering his office. That could explain two things: (1) why a thousand of Dr. Williams's poems are half a page long; (2) that the poems are generally recognized as good for what ails you.

When it comes to manuscripts, Robert Creeley is an interesting case. Creeley doesn't like to scratch revisions on his work in progress. If he makes a mistake, or gets a better idea, he throws away the page and starts over. It has something to do with getting into the right rhythm or head-space. He does the same thing with prose. When the U.S. Library of Congress acquired the working typescript of his novel, *The Island*, they got the same thing his publisher, Scribner's, got — 300 pages of perfect copy.

Allen Ginsberg, on the other hand, writes everything in notebooks he carries with him, on airplanes, in the front seat of a Volkswagen bus, in a cafeteria in Marrakesh. Every few years, when he

gets a prod from his publisher, City Lights, he goes through the notebook scribbles and extracts 100 pages of poetry.

I know a man who cannot write on anything but cheap yellow carbon-copy paper, with a 4H pencil. I know a composer who would be lost without her ancient typewriter, a machine so old and funny-looking that the keys are laid out in alphabetical order.

The Vancouver novelist Audrey Thomas sits and writes in ink on the ruled lines of yellow legal-sized foolscap. Her work, as many critics have noticed, is animated by a meticulous memory. When Thomas started writing her stories and novels, she was a housewife and college student, with a house full of children. In order to steal time for writing fiction, she would sit at her student desk, or rather table, and pretend she was writing an English assignment. That's a memory she has never forgotten. It might also explain why her books are so inviting for students who know how to handle them as English assignments.

Thomas still hires somebody to type her work from that handwriting. I have been trying for years to shame her into learning to type. But she knows how her imagination works, and she knows that



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the conversations her characters have get a little more room on that long page. She gave me an oblong notebook once, and I wrote short poems with long lines in it. People are always giving me nice notebooks, and I keep them till I find a poem that will fit. The poem is always as long as the notebook. This will perhaps encourage people to slip me single sheets of hand-made paper.

When it comes to essays, I like to use the 12-page booklets that university students get to write their exams in. Most of my essays extent to 36 or 48 pages of double-spaced handwriting. Despite what you may have heard, I take more than three hours to write them. I

usually write short stories the same way.

But when you are planning to write a novel you know you are in for a routine that will dominate your days for a year or two. With novels I like to set myself a routine I haven't learned before. Maybe I think that will make it impossible to write the same book over and over.

My first novel I just sat and typed with a manual typewriter on the kitchen table. When I was ready to do a novel about Captain Vancouver I took my index-card notes, bought three beautiful bound notebooks in Chinatown, and 10 of my favourite German felt pens, and flew to Trieste. There I sat every day and wrote a 1,000-word chapter, or as I like

to think of it, 10 pages of ink. My next one I did at home, on the same black nonsense hardback scribblers I do my diary in. Then I typed it up on my new word processor.

Last year I decided to write the novel I have been thinking of for seven years — a western that takes place in the Thompson Valley of British Columbia in 1889. Again I stayed home, but for a reason the reviewers will never bother to think of. I wrote it right on the computer screen. Now I am shopping for a little portable computer. The next novel is going to be written on the road somewhere. Maybe I can take it to the ballpark with me. — GEORGE BOWERING

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Butting in

'It is useful to know that what pedants think doesn't matter a hell of a lot, except when they are grading papers'

By Bob Blackburn

CHRISTOPHER C. COOPER of Edmonton is but the latest reader to ask about the propriety of beginning sentences (or even paragraphs) with conjunctions, particularly *and* and *but*.

I guess most of us have shared his youthful experience of having it drummed into him that this is an incorrect or, at best, vulgar practice. This dictum belongs in the class of schoolteachers' superstitions, along with bans against the split infinitive and the terminal preposition.

It is not wrong for grade-school teachers to drill us in this way. It is wrong for us to spend our lives believing that such rules are engraved in stone. It is useful for anyone who will not be doing very much writing to know that pedants may frown on those who violate these brittle precepts; it is more useful for someone who will be writing a lot to know that what pedants think doesn't matter a hell of a lot, except when they are grading papers.

When I was being taught that using initial conjunctions was in the same league as practising self-abuse, I was also being taught that the King James version of the Bible was one of the noblest pieces of English prose. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to even glance at one page of that work without noticing that the scholars who translated it had been denied the quality of education enjoyed in 20th-century Canadian schools. If you had a dime for every initial *and* in that volume, you surely

would not pass into heaven with such a bankroll.

I do not know the origin of this prohibition, and would be grateful for any authoritative citations. *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, considered authoritative by many (and obviously not given to overstatement), says this: "Despite a tradition of prescriptive teaching against the practice, it is not uncommon in written English to find sentences (and sometimes even paragraphs) beginning with the coordinate conjunctions *and*, *or*, *but*." And a lot more.

The fact is that, while it might be desirable only under very special circumstances to start a *book* with *and*, there is no sane reason for not starting anything else with it unless you are trying to impress a pedant.

And the judicious use of initial conjunctions can make your style much more lucid and forceful than that of one who would sooner die than break up a sentence.

TED CULP of Toronto has written to me more than once to seek support for an organization of which he is president: The Simplified Spelling Society Of Canada (SSSC). I cannot espouse his cause, but recognize that he has a right to pursue it.

It has been estimated that about 45,000 years have elapsed since humans began using graphic representations as a supplement to speech, and I am made nervous by those who suggest we adopt

their formulae (and there are many such schemes) to alter, drastically and instantaneously, the product of 45 millennia of evolution.

Spelling reformers have illustrious literary antecedents (George Bernard Shaw springs to mind), and they are honourably motivated. A person who wants to do something about an orthography that could permit (to use Shaw's classic example) *fish* to be spelled *ghoti* can't be dismissed as a crank. (If you are not familiar with that one, think about *rough women in action*.)

Some of the reforms sought by the SSSC have been implemented to a considerable extent already. Canadian newspapers have been using *-or* in preference to *-our* (as in *honor* and *labor*) for decades, although this magazine continues to drag its feet in this matter.

But our orthographic peculiarities are of no little value in reminding us of the history of our words, and they sometimes keep us out of trouble with homonyms. If people who now are considered (by some) to be relatively harmless when they write *nite* instead of *night* are allowed to go unchecked, how will we later distinguish between *might* and *mite*, or *right* and *rite* or *sight* and *site* and *cite*?

Anyone who is interested in learning more about the aberrant proposals of the Simplified Spelling Society may write to it at Suite 1407, 111 Ridelle Avenue, Toronto M6B 1J7.

And that, Mr. Culp, is as far as I'm prepared to go. □

How the West has won

Geoffrey Ursell's visionary epic of the history of the Canadian West is the best first novel of 1984

SASKATCHEWAN PLAYWRIGHT and composer Geoffrey Ursell has won the ninth annual Books in Canada Award for First Novels — and a cheque for \$1,000 — for *Perdue: Or How the West Was Lost*, published by Macmillan. With this year's short list dominated by books from the West, it was no surprise that a prairie writer should win the award. However, the judges' decision was far from unanimous. *Perdue* was the first choice of only two of the four judges on the panel.

The judges for this year's award were: Dan Mozersky, manager of Prospero Books in Ottawa; Leslie Peterson, currently on a year's leave from her post as book review editor of the *Vancouver Sun*; and novelists Leon Rooke, writer-in-residence at the University of Toron-

Geoffrey Ursell



to, and Carol Shields of Winnipeg. They worked from a short list prepared jointly by writer-translator Paul Wilson and editor-critic Alberto Manguel, both of whom have contributed columns about first novels to *Books in Canada* during the past year.

Besides *Perdue*, the books on the short list were: *Country of the Heart*, by Sharon Butala (Fifth House); *Precious*, by Douglas H. Glover (Seal); *Dazzled*, by John Gray (Irwin); *I Hear the Reaper's Song*, by Sara Stambaugh (Raincoast); and *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, by Armin Wiebe (Turnstone). As the judges' comments indicate, several were strong runners-up to *Perdue*:

Dan Mozersky: First, I had a much more difficult time this year in choosing a winner or first choice than last year. There seems less disparity between good and bad among these six novels, and at least four could well be ranked equally. I have disciplined myself to rank them from one to six rather than award, let us say, two books to second place or have two share first place. That strikes me as the coward's way out. Some degree of ruthlessness is required here.

Second, I am bothered, as I was last year, by the inclusion of so obviously a "genre" title, *Precious*. I have no reservations about the quality of this work but I did find it difficult to judge in light of the other "conventional" narrative or literary novels. Maybe it's time for *Books in Canada* to have a First Mystery Novel Contest? Or possibly exclude this genre from next year's entrants? (I hear the howls of protest already.)

Third, one cannot fail to be struck by the pre-eminence of the West and the rural in relationship to all but one of these six novels. With the exception of Glover, all of these authors were raised or now live in Western Canada. Could there be a sodality of Western Canadian writers, a brotherhood of neophyte novelists? And if there is, what does it mean? And should Eastern writers start packing their bags, head West, get back to the land and their typewriters? Rural themes predominate in four of these Western writers' works. *I Hear the Reaper's Song*, *Country of the Heart*, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, and *Perdue: Or How the West Was Lost* are largely set in rural environments where the farm and the land are significant landscapes.

I'll leave further explorations in these areas to the thesis writers.

Dazzled is subtitled *An Outrageously Funny Novel*. This novel is outrageous, but it is certainly *not* funny. It is outrageously bad. The plot is boring, characters are trite, small-minded, and uninteresting, language is ordinary and the subject matter is more appropriate to a *Chatelaine* article than a full-length novel. The first line reads: "I was an asshole in 1974," and although the author would like us to think differently by the time we get to page 245, I hadn't changed my mind one bit. I have little difficulty allocating *Dazzled* to sixth place.

Country of the Heart I began by disliking, but by the time I got to the end had grown to like very much. It is an ambitious novel with interesting characters in their own right, but overall

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resulting in a wild hybrid of Zane Grey and Salvador Dali. Ursell's sensual, tactile, highly charged prose flings us through history unrecognizably skewed, through Indian and buffalo massacres, beheadings, and a host of disasters both natural and unnatural. Mum, having first had sex with a giant, runs off with royalty; Dad, caught in an act of bestiality, is set ablaze by his son, our protagonist. It is history attenuated, compressed, manipulated for telling effect. Whole chapters of our past are condensed into a single, terse scene. The author dares everything, culminating in his staging of the First World War on a prairie battlefield.

Ursell, a songwriter, poet, and playwright, excels at metaphor and the sparse, elliptical use of language. His flights of imagination are at times brilliant; sifting fiction from reality is a canny task imposed upon the reader. Yet like his precursor, John Barth, Ursell's weakness shows in his excesses. Initially one is carried away by the sheer force of the material, until a surfeit of symbolism and hyperbole bear down upon the reader, inducing sterility and stripping out the human context.

Charting the common ground, while ostensibly a more mundane chore, demands consummate skill. In *Country of the Heart* readers witness no sleight of hand, experience no cataclysms, but merely participate in the simple lives of ordinary people. This work of fiction, while drawn to a small scale on an insignificant piece of canvas, succeeds best in presenting the human drama in all its intricacies, and so wins as Best All-Round Delineator of the Human Condition.

Like her 19th-century Brontë sisters, Butala presents us with a subtle, detailed anatomy of the daily events of a handful of people: a young woman of 19, her Uncle Barney and Aunt Iris, ranchers turned farmers. There are no external forces at work here, simply internal disruptions, flawed but vibrant human beings struggling with their passions.

Butala takes a painterly approach to her sensitive portrayals of small-town Saskatchewan people, deftly sketching in the seasonal shifts, with nature a lavish backdrop to the human condition. Expertly staging her drama, she dares even to introduce geriatric sex in the form of a 74-year-old seducer: "Everytime she touched him she was reminded of how little flesh stood between him and the white bones of his death."

Events are skilfully juxtaposed, lives manipulated with precision timing to bring about the denouement which, though predictable, is effective. Although Butala lapses occasionally into stilted phraseology and is as yet no match for the likes of Margaret Laurence, our most accomplished chronicler of small-town life, the promise is there.

Leon Rooke: More than our dollar is dropping if indeed we are to consider these the six best first novels of the year. My suspicions fester: what books have been left out? Not one of these finalists begins to approach the excellence of Ken Ledbetter's *Too Many Blackbirds* (Stoddart). Guy Vanderhaeghe's *My Present Age* (Macmillan), while a troubled work, also clearly rises above the standard set by this short list. In fact, these six titles appear to have been selected in the first place to illustrate the jaded reviewer's belief — bias? principle? — that first novels *must* have something grossly wrong with them, that they must be viewed as apprentice endeavours, that they must be a bit boring and awkward, while riding an implausible story-line, pursuing ponderous, improbable characters.

OK, so what of the six that made the list? Stambaugh's *I Hear the Reaper's Song* is the kind of book you will see described as "quiet" or "gentle." Quiet, it certainly is. I fear I'd have to call it lackadaisical, a novel for sleepwalkers. I would have thought it unpublishable; it was for me, with its one-note technique, close to unreadable.

Another prairie novel about a Mennonite community is Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*. Yasch represents a giant step forward (from *Reaper's Song*), and I have no doubt

much of the plot seems so implausible that the book ultimately does not succeed. Most obviously, one's credibility is strained to snapping regarding the affair between the 74-year-old James and the 42-year-old Iris. The novel could have been more tightly constructed as well. At times the story wanders and meanders between characters and chronology and sometimes I wondered exactly who this book was really about. This novel shows considerable potential — but stacked up against some of its competitors in this contest it does not do very well. It gets fifth place.

I am not quite sure what to make of *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*. I laughed out loud at times. But for an equal number of times I was confused by the story and just a little bit bored. On the one hand, I was charmed by the language of this novel; on the other, I was irritated by it. I wasn't always sure what some of the words meant, and although this may sound picayune. I would like to have had a glossary provided. This lack of glossary irritated me as I read this novel, and prevented me from thoroughly enjoying what is obviously a creative, inventive, and humorous work. I put this book in fourth place. I can see its potential, however. One can hope this is the first in a long series of Yasch Siemens novels: *Yasch Siemens Becomes President of Dome Petroleum*, *Yasch Siemens Goes to Ottawa*, *Yasch Siemens Reads Heidegger*. . . .

Precious is a fast-paced, well-written detective-murder mystery. Our detective is one Precious Elliot, an out-of-luck 40-year-old newspaperman who, in desperation, takes a job as women's-page editor on a small-town newspaper. The town, the paper, most of the characters, and Precious are seedy, tired leftovers from something bigger or better. Precious becomes involved in two murders, uncovers a land-purchase fraud scam, has an affair with the first murder victim's daughter, and so on and so on. This book is gripping. It reads almost flawlessly from the first page. A superb mystery in the hard-boiled school of detective writing, it falls into third place.

I Hear the Reaper's Song is a novel I liked immensely. This is a charming, pre-lapsarian story set in rural Pennsylvania in 1896 in a small Mennonite community. Although the main action of this story is a tragic accident that causes irrevocable change, the majority of this book centres on an almost pastoral childhood. Life for the 15-year-old main character is ordered, simple, harmonious, as it is for his family, friends, and community. This is a novel of nostalgia, of a longing for a better age. Set on a farm and in a farming community, everything is in simple harmony with nature. There is an emphasis on the closeness of family, the nearness of relatives, and the security and sense of community that gives comfort to all. These virtues are long gone today and that is what gives this novel a tone of nostalgic sweetness, a longing tenderness for remembrance of things past. This kind of sentimentality could easily become maudlin, but Stambaugh is successful in recreating the nostalgia without the corniness. We don't seem to mind that the mother and father are called "Mam" and "Pap" or that the horses are named "Bluebell" and "Star." This novel is charming, well-written, sensitive, and compassionate. An ideal book to recommend to a teenager or young adult. It gets second choice.

Perdue: Or How the West Was Lost is the most sweeping, literary, interesting, and intriguing of the six novels. It is magical, mythic, phantasmagorical. It is richly written and abounds with poetic, lyrical language. The main character is "Perdue" (which, according to my Oxford, means "post of sentinel in a very dangerous position or someone who is placed in an extremely hazardous position or ordered on a forlorn hope," or possibly more significantly, "one who acts as a watcher or a scout or a spy"); it is through his eyes that we see the history of the West from Victorian times through to the present and beyond. Perdue is an innocent who sees the world for the first time without knowing what it means. Objects now familiar to the reader are described in disarming and naive

terms: a piano, never named, is described as ". . . a very large, curving box, made of gleaming black wood. It balanced on three solid, carved legs. A cover on the top was propped open. A bench was placed at one end, before a row of white." and airplanes, again never named, appear as ". . . hundreds of little silver crosses that glistened when the light struck them." Thus much of the appeal of this book is in the almost magical descriptions that appear virtually on every page. They are sometimes puzzling and confusing but at the same time are a challenge to the reader's intellect and curiosity.

The language of the book is rich and poetic. In fact, the book consists not so much of chapters as prose-poems with language rich in symbolism, imagery, and power:

Under his bare feet, the warm earth felt soft and yielding. And sometimes Perdue would lie down on his side to peer into the jungle of thin yellow bones, or on his back to be entranced with the heads of grain swaying, swaying, swaying, a dance of gold against blue and white.

The language is enhanced by the story's grand and mythic proportions, particularly in the first part of the book. Part one deals with Perdue's early years up to the First World War and is the most successful of the three sections. Everything is huge and limitless. The land is sweeping, unknown, untamed. The animals and Indians are numberless and slaughtered endlessly until rivers and lakes of blood are drowning everything. A strange kind of magic is everywhere. In fact, everything is strange. From the houses described to the sexual indulgences of Sir and Gal Sal, Perdue's father and mother, we are entranced by this strange magic and we see the West, its settlement, and its growth, with a new kind of vision and with fresh insights.

It must be obvious by now that I think highly of this novel. For its richness of language, its power of imagination, and its ability to reveal the old in a new light, it is to be praised unequivocally. That is not to say the book does not have its flaws. When the author deals with post-First World War times, he is somewhat less convincing. And sometimes this book is too obscure and oblique. But on the whole, this novel must be awarded first place.

Leslie Peterson: If book awards were Academy Awards, life would be simpler by far. In fiction we'd have categories for Most Entertaining, Most Elliptical, Most Heartfelt, and so forth, broadening the scope immeasurably. Of this year's six finalists — a sensual array of poets and playwrights — three jostle effectively for pride of place: Gray's *Dazzled*, Ursell's *Perdue*, and Butala's *Country of the Heart*. Any of the trio could rightfully claim top prize.

Dazzled, a dippy, flashy, sociological romp, definitely deserves top marks for best-staged entertainment. Billed on its lurid pink dust-jacket as "outrageously funny," the novel, especially in its depiction of television as cultural scourge, frequently fulfils its immodest claim.

Gray's fortes are his quick wit and wonderfully inventive dialogue, which is completely attuned to his wacky, caricature characters. At his best, Gray approaches Salinger or faintly echoes Vonnegut. Among his finest specimens are supersalesman Jake Slider, a walking spare-parts machine, with his \$9,000 teeth, \$5,000 hair, and a devastatingly rebuilt nose. Or television host Bill Wheedle, a mocked composite of the species. While Gray's presentation is excellent, the quality is uneven. He falls prey to contrived cleverness, overreaching himself, abusing irony until it becomes didacticism. And in the end there is something lacking in these hollow men and women, who enter, strut their stuff, and then exit, leaving little trace.

In its sheer wizardry and unfettered imagination, *Perdue* is a romp. Cryptic, apocalyptic, surrealistic, this historical jigsaw puzzle tampers with the past with fiendish abandon,

that many readers will find it enjoyable, if only for its liveliness. For my money, however, after a wonderfully comic first chapter the novel deteriorates into a series of not-so-funny adventures related by a narrator whose fractured language grows tedious at about the same rate that the events he describes become inconsequential.

Butala's *Country of the Heart* is another of the four prairie novels on the short list. Butala writes with considerable sympathy for her characters, and her earnestness (though part of the book's troubles) is admirable. I found the plight of her heroines unconvincing, and the prose at times distressingly

'Ursell's conception is a daring one, and contained within the book are numerous brilliant scenes, and the language is carefully crafted, beautifully sculpted'

heavy-footed. I honour the writer's intentions, now know her to be a gifted writer, but was not impressed by the book.

Glover's *Precious*, a detective novel about a fast-talking, fast-drinking newspaperman, is periodically engrossing. Many of its scenes and some of its characters are perceptively drawn. But the plot is cock-eyed, and the pacing non-existent, a strain on the brain's wrong side. The writer was there: what the book needed was a demanding editor.

Irwin Publishing has produced perhaps the year's most unattractively designed book, Gray's *Dazzled*. *Dazzled* is called, almost as a sub-title, "an outrageously funny novel." I thought it not outrageously at all; it is sometimes funny. The novel offers a slap-happy look at North America's post-1960s culture. The trouble is that Gray's story line is thin, and neither he nor his characters are up to the long haul.

Nor is *Perdue* (would that the title had stopped there) *Or How the West Was Lost* a perfect book. The last and best of the prairie titles, it is 198 pages long; at half the length, it would have been stronger, even truly distinguished. For the truth is, the novel barely survives its listless second half. But *Perdue* gets my vote, even so. Ursell's conception is a daring one, and contained within the book are numerous brilliant scenes, and the language is carefully crafted, beautifully sculpted. It is the nearest we have, of these six, to a work of art.

Carol Shields: *Dazzled* is clearly my choice as best first novel of the year. It is a book brimming with rich, unsparring irony, an irony (some would say cynicism) so vivid and assured that the reader grieves a little — but only a little — when Willard, the central character, is rescued by such old nostrums as manual labour, respect for nature, and concern for others. The cure, thankfully, is only temporary; Willard, our hero, believing he has escaped the great enemy *fashion*, accidentally helps launch a new craze.

This punchy, picaresque novel manages to be serious without ever letting on. Often Gray goes for the easy targets — loutish clothing salesmen, greedy dentists, arcane Ph.D. theses, and the more absurd aspects of the human potential movement and CBC panel shows — but he shoots, too, at broader social ills, namely, the terrible truth that what we perceive as reality is no more than a peaking trend. Human activity with its vain scramblings and shameful trade-offs is only a flicker on an electronic screen, the real enemy being that existential 20th-century *bête*, nothingness. For Willard, recovering from a nervous breakdown brought on by acute embarrassment, there is nothing in the end but comfy nihilism and the odd glimmer of irony to sweeten up his despair.

The dazzling characters in *Dazzled* wear their allegorical skins lightly, and the point of view is cheerfully skewed at times. Gray writes a dancing prose and has an icy eye for

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detail. You know, for instance, that you're riding a new wave when you decide one day to frame your Woodstock poster or trade in your nylon socks for a pair of woolly argyles.

The overriding irony is that this sprawling, irreverent book manages to strike with such precision and only hurts when we stop laughing.

There is a great deal to admire in the deceptively simple *I Hear the Reaper's Song*. Stambaugh takes her time building toward the central event of the novel, a violent accident and its curious aftermath. The story, seen through the eyes of a 15-year-old boy, introduces us to an American Mennonite community of the late 19th century, its seasons and rituals, its

'Ursell has taken the western experience, which he clearly knows well, and attempted to liberate it from the strictures of linear history and naturalistic definition. Time in this novel is a kind of super-giant, holding the unfolding prairie drama in its outsized hands'

family life and, especially, the intricacies of courtship. The surface is so calm and the characters so agreeable, that when the accident finally happens, we feel the full horror of it. Some of the darkness is only hinted at — a funeral attended by thrill-seekers, and the suspicion that the victim of the accident may have contributed to her own death.

Stambaugh's writing is simple and straightforward, and because of her choice of narrator there is more reportage here than analysis; life in this community, for instance, is busy with church-going, but we hear almost nothing of religious ardour

or the metaphysics of belief.

The author has based her novel on real events, taking, she tells us, some novelistic liberties. I wish she had taken more. Her conclusions *do* set the events in a historical context, but perhaps rob them of their power.

Precious is a very likable crime novel, and Precious himself, Doug Glover's hard-drinking, tough-talking reporter, is a likable character, a man in the middle of a badly scarred life with three marriages and a sea of booze behind him. Fortunately he's too busy for self-pity; events in the small Ontario city where he works unroll swiftly — two murders, an old scandal, family rivalries, a clever cover-up operation, a land developer's grandiose scheme, and an off-stage jewel theft. Some of this meshes and some of it doesn't, but the language is lively and very often witty. Glover exploits all the delights of the genre — thick-muscled metaphors, cynical-tender sex, and immensely complicated revelations.

I found this the most difficult of the six books to evaluate since, more than the others, it has to be considered a genre work with a different set of expectations. Process in crime writing is almost always less important than solution, and the necessary and inevitable wrap-up precludes the more patiently unfolded truths of the other novels under consideration.

The Salvation of Yasch Siemens contains one of the most fanciful, fresh, and elliptical sex scenes I've seen in some time, and also a scene in which the ecstasy of spiritual life is wonderfully, clumsily glimpsed. In between there is a good deal of high-spirited bucolic bumbling by one Yasch Siemens, a Manitoba Mennonite youth who, giving new meaning to the word *callow*, seeks to improve his station in life. This generous-hearted novel relies heavily on Flat German inversions for its humour and on the groping of rural innocents in a less-than-innocent world. Some readers will grow thirsty for wit, but only the deeply cynical will fail to laugh out loud as Yasch stumbles and lurches toward true love, finding along the way a new and puzzling kind of salvation.

Butala is a good novelist who will undoubtedly become an even better one. She clearly understands that all human relationships are complex, and *Country of the Heart* emphatically fractures the simple stereotypes so common to prairie fiction. The middle-aged rancher Barney, his wife Iris, and their adopted daughter Lannie are linked not only by love, but by unvoiced alienation and unspeakable passions. Each guards secrets too painful for the others to bear, and the silences come close to undermining this novel by depriving it of tension and response. The problem is especially apparent in the case of the young Lannie who is suffering — silently — from an undiagnosed illness, depression, parental fantasies, an unwanted pregnancy and, finally, a suicide attempt — too much perhaps for one novel. But this silent willingness to take on burdens may be what Butala is writing about. "I don't know what life is for," Lannie says at one point; it is a question all the characters in this novel ask, and to the author's credit, no easy answers are provided.

Ursell has taken the western experience, which he clearly knows well, and attempted to liberate it from the strictures of linear history and naturalistic definition. The result is a highly original allegory in which mythic characters — giants, dwarfs, ghosts — mingle freely with farmers, railroaders, and buffalo hunters. Time in this novel is a kind of super-giant too, holding the unfolding prairie drama in its outsized hands.

There are some problems. Geoffrey Ursell likes short declarative sentences. And short paragraphs. And short chapters. Why, then, does this novel seem so long? Mostly, I think, it is weighted down by implied significance, and this is exacerbated by the use of mythic language that leans on a somewhat slender and repetitious vocabulary.

Nevertheless I can only admire Geoffrey Ursell for his risk-taking first novel and for the energy it promises. □

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Acts of darkness

One reads George F. Walker's plays the way a scientist studies bones. Details of structure are revealed that on stage seem to happen at the speed of thought

By Tim Wynn-Jones

The Factory has produced five major Walker pieces within a three year period. It is satisfying to reread the earlier works, not only to see how well they stand up, but also to see how he develops his themes from play to play. It is further satisfying to note that while three years have seen Walker growing in leaps and bounds, he is still at the beginning of what should be a major literary output.

— Ken Gass, Introduction to *The Factory Lab Anthology*, 1974

TEN YEARS and as many plays later, George F. Walker shows every sign of living up to Gass's enthusiastic prediction. His latest work, *Criminals in Love*, has won the Chalmers Award for Canadian play of 1984. He has been

George F. Walker



nominated twice before: in 1977 for *Zastrozzi* and in 1981 for *Theatre of the Film Noir*. When Rick Salutin's *Les Canadiens* beat out *Zastrozzi*, Salutin said he would gladly give up the prize money to have his play still running; *Criminals in Love* is the first play since the inception of the award in 1972 still to be running at the time of its announcement. As of mid-February, more than 16,000 people have seen the play. The houses are growing. Fittingly, *Criminals* is the opening feature for yet the latest location of Toronto's peripatetic Factory Theatre Lab, where it all began for Walker 15 years ago.

Walker was driving cab at the time. Born in 1947, he had been married since he was 18, and had a daughter, Renata. He knew nothing about play-writing at the time but was intrigued by a poster on a lamp-post inviting submissions. Walker wrote *Prince of Naples*, which was mounted by Factory in 1972. Naples indeed. For a guy who grew up in a working-class family in east-end Toronto (and who still hates to wander far from that part of town), it seems a bold move.

Many have followed. Walker has never been inhibited by what one can or can't write for the theatre. He reads widely and voraciously. He didn't go to university, so he hasn't been told what one should or shouldn't read or think. He is a literate writer and a cosmopolitan spirit, yet he has by no means rejected his working-class origin. On the contrary, to this day he feels self-conscious about his career "in the arts" and his burgeoning success.

Walker and his second wife, Susan Purdy, have just returned from Sydney, Australia, where Walker directed *Zastrozzi*. They were both white-knuckle flyers, but somewhere over the Pacific they lost their fear. It's just as well. People in places as near and far as Sydney, Houston, Halifax, and Glasgow — not to mention New York — are filling theatres to see his work and catch a glimpse of its author. Walker remains, to the best of his ability, a private man. In a profile in *Maclean's* three years ago, he said: "Who can take fame seriously in the age of *People* magazine?" Fame is time-consuming and he would rather work.

Walker seems to grow from strength to strength, honing his skill and zeroing in on his demons with a single-mindedness that comes from having few distractions. He does not teach. He does not write for magazines. He does not hopscotch the country speaking at conferences on the arts. He writes plays for the intimate stage. Sometimes he directs plays, but only his own. There was some movie talk once but it never got further than the lunch-at-the-Courtyard-Café stage. Struck by his powers of invention, I once asked Walker why he didn't try his hand at writing a novel. He replied: "I haven't used an adjective in years."

In 1974 Ken Gass already believed Walker to be "probably the wittiest and most thoroughly comic writer in Canada." The passing years have not blunted his wit. He is irrepressibly funny and, without compromising the dark vision that permeated his earlier works, has become increasingly accessible. Once considered violently anti-naturalistic, his latest plays

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take place in a world all too recognizably our own.

All this has greatly broadened Walker's appeal, yet a Walker play is not easy to watch. It moves along at an unremitting pace. The dialogue is brisk (no adjectives to bog it down). Memorable moments whiz by, leaving viewers laughing in the tail-wind, trying to catch their breath and the next line. Episodes are strung together with a minimum of connective tissue, and Walker isn't much on intermissions. It would be unthinkable for an actor to milk a moment in a Walker play. The ideas come at the speed of thought, and they are not always ideas one wants to deal with.

Although there is continuity to his work, it is not to be confused with sameness. No matter how recognizable the themes are from play to play, or how familiar the faces on the stage, we have come to expect extraordinary characters to do unexpected things in out-of-the-way places: a desert, the heart of the jungle, or Toronto's east end — in Walker's hands these are all equally foreign. Seeing Walker, no matter how entertaining it may be, is not the whole picture. *Reading* Walker, on the other hand, turns out to be not merely a supplement to the staged works but a rewarding experience on its own.

PLAYWRIGHTS CO-OP (now Playwrights Canada) has published Walker in workman-like editions from the start, although the very early works only exist in archival copies. Talonbooks included *Ambush at Tether's End* in its *Factory, Lab Anthology*. It's a worthwhile collection but not exactly an inviting read. But in 1978 Coach House Press published a particularly readable collection titled *Three Plays*, which included *Bagdad Saloon*, *Beyond Mozambique*, and *Ramona & the White Slaves*. It was an admirable idea: the three plays represent a distinguishable phase in Walker's prolific career.

The book now is in its third printing, though the print runs have been small. Publishing plays is not a lucrative business. Generally speaking, unless a play is taught on a university course or appeals to a particular interest group, sales are slow. But Walker is read. He is continually near the top on Playwrights' royalty payments (*Criminals in Love* has just been published), and Coach House has been satisfied enough with its own publication that it recently decided to bring out a second collection.

The Power Plays is a natural combination of material. *Gossip*, *Filthy Rich*, and *The Art of War* form a trilogy — the complete misadventures to date of journalist/failed novelist/private eye T.M. Power. The book's value to Walker fans and critics alike is considerable. For one thing, it is unlikely that many people have seen all these plays. The original *Gossip* came and went quickly. Although it has become one of Walker's most produced works it has not yet reappeared on the Toronto stage. In the introduction to *Three Plays* Ken Gass understates the situation when he says, "The publication of these works lends a permanence to the transient nature of their production history."

The two paperback volumes in front of me have the same dark cover: actors faces lit up on an unseen stage. The type is dropped out in white. On the back of each is a wallet-sized photograph of the author. On the back of *Power* Walker's hair is shorter. He squares his shoulders toward the camera. Half his face is in shadow. There is a deep cleft between his eyebrows not apparent on the younger face, but maybe it is just a reaction to the lights. There are no publicity blurbs on the jacket, although good reviews are legion by now. The restraint seems significant. After all, the reviews are for performances: this is a book.

It's interesting to compare Bill Lane's introduction to *The Power Plays* to Gass's introduction of seven years earlier. Lane addresses himself almost entirely to the plays — to theme, to the central vision of the trilogy: "the battle between art and artlessness . . . in which true humanity is no match for

inhuman craft." Gass tends to deal with the context in which the plays were written. It is not inappropriate: the early Factory Lab crowd were pioneers in what they perceived as a cultural wasteland. One senses from Gass's introduction that each of the early plays was a political act of defiance against the hidebound naturalism of the day.

There is, to be sure, nothing naturalistic about the *Three Plays*. Walker calls *Bagdad Saloon* a cartoon, but each of the earlier works is a kind of surreal comic strip; they read like the science fiction of J.G. Ballard. Ballard has said there is only one alien planet, the Earth. Walker maroons little bivouacs of haunted humans on this alien planet and then watches them go about the task of surviving each in his or her own sordid way. One attempts to survive with a certain amount of dignity or, failing that, some material success.

"I am a speculative writer," Walker has said. He writes without a map of where he is going — and without a net. These are not what Auden would call "feigned histories." The plays take place in the secondary world of myth, of fairy-tale. In *Beyond Morambique* there are many references to a border near Rocco's jungle retreat. There is a lot of traffic and illicit intercourse across this unseen frontier. It is, perhaps, the line between reality and the world of the play. It is not difficult to imagine that somewhere not far from Bagdad Saloon, out in the desert, in the wings, there is the rusted hulk of a landing pod. There is no mention of any such thing. The characters gave up talking about it long before the play began. Escape, salvation, is not an option in Walker's secondary world.

Survival is a prominent theme in *The Power Plays*, but now the secondary world is vanquished. *The Power Plays* are chillingly real. Times have changed. The introductions to these two volumes reflect the change. The politics no longer swirl around the making of the plays. Politics are their essence.

Thumbing through his books I take my time — something Walker is reluctant to let us do. There are photographs, familiar faces: David Bolt (who plays T.M. Power), Barbara Gordon, Peter Blais, Susan Purdy, a delightfully malevolent Steven Bush — some of the Walker irregulars. A collection of plays is an ossuary. These are skeletons.

A play on stage is an animate creature that struts around and changes nightly. It acts differently in front of different people. We read a play the way an archaeologist reads bones. By their size and shape we can tell where a muscle originates and is inserted, how large that muscle must have been, how the creature moved. The joints are exposed; it is possible to tell how articulate the creature was. From the skull we get a pretty good idea of the size of brain that motivated the creature for its hour on the stage.

Details of structure that are invisible in a good production invite our conscious attention. Lighting, for instance. It hasn't occurred to me until now that Walker's plays almost always begin in darkness: in shadows, a dry hard night, late evening, just before midnight, in a nightmare. . . Sunday in the dark with George. These plays are as vespertine like bats and some flowers. They seldom end in light.

I recall a hilarious scene from *The Art of War*. It was a kind of robotic yet animal dance between the insidious Hackman and the appalling Karla. Reading the play, I look for the scene, but it's not in the text. It was a piece of stage-craft invented by the director — Walker — and the actors, David Fox and Diane D'Aquila. This proves to be auspicious. Some very good plays are a job to read. What is engaging action on stage is disruptive italics in a script. There is plenty of action in *The Art of War*, but it is described with such economy as to be not at all distracting. This turns out to be true of *Filthy Rich*, though not of *Gossip*.

Meanwhile, something else has struck me. I remember roaring with laughter through *The Art of War* and yet being disappointed with the ending. Reading the play, it seems to end in

the only way possible. My curiosity whetted, I flip back to *Gossip*.

"Who killed Bitch Nelson?" says T.M. Power squinting into the lights. May, 1977. The first anybody has seen of him. Not a very prepossessing figure. What's more, he doesn't really seem to care much about Bitch Nelson or anything else. But *Gossip* is a murder mystery, whether Power likes it or not. And from the first line we know that he must find himself in the middle of it. Lane describes Power's role as that of a "reluctant stage manager with a deep dislike for the cast — setting demented traps for them, giving them unlikely scenes to

Power is a 'reluctant stage manager with a deep distaste for the cast—setting demented traps for them, giving them unlikely scenes to play, and putting outrageous words into their mouths'

play, and putting outrageous words into their mouths as he forces them to perform for an audience of their peers."

Gossip and *Zastrozzi* were written in the same year. They both adopt a popular genre — whodunit in the first instance, and Gothic melodrama in the second — and are Walker's most widely produced works. It was a time when Walker was reaching out for a larger audience. *Gossip's* popularity undoubtedly comes from its structure as a detective story: the movement of the story is recognizable even if the details get fuzzy — and they do. Multiple identities proliferate but it doesn't matter. The conventions are all in place, including the compulsory golden-age-of-crime gathering of suspects in the final act. But to what degree *Gossip* really is a straightforward genre piece can be ascertained by this summary at one point:

POWER: . . . Now what have we got so far. Pedro Puchinsky does not exist. Argentina does not really exist. The copper mine is not supposed to exist. And Phyllis Lazer and Norman Lewis were forced not to exist. Almost an existentialist's utopia, isn't it?

Whodunit? Walker. He has used the genre as a new setting for his dark preoccupations. Our reluctant detective has wormed his way into the heart of high society and found it in need of a triple by-pass. He can expect no reward for his meddling, and gets none. He is left friendless and drinking.

There have been three detectives in Walker's work. Power is the most fully developed but all three operate in a twilight world between realities. Chronologically, Power's creation comes between Inspector Cook, our tour-guide through the nightmare world of *Ramona & the White Slaves*, and Inspector Clair, our one source of illumination in the nether world of *Theatre of the Film Noir*. Power seems constantly to be involved in the dilemma of becoming part of the real world, a world he finds increasingly depraved.

In *Filthy Rich*, Power has long since lost his job as investigative reporter and appears to have been drinking solidly since scene nine of *Gossip*. He lives in a dump. He is trying to write a novel. He is neck deep in the slough of despond and Walker's writing is never better than in communicating Power's despair and his masochistic delight in it.

ANNE: . . . Are you all right? (*Power lifts his head slowly.*)

POWER: Death in the family.

ANNE: I'm sorry.

POWER: Yes you should be. It was *your* family. (*He laughs, pounds the typewriter.*) Got you didn't I. Teach you not to use artificial expressions of sympathy as a conversational tool. Make you a more acceptable person in circles where that kind of thing is noticed. Mental health clinics, line ups for European films —

ANNE: Please shut up.

POWER: What?

ANNE: I have no idea what you're talking about.

POWER: Oh. Small joke. Bad taste. Difficult times. No money. Everyone dying. Strange mood. And quite drunk too.

No play — no comedy — could survive the weight of Power's depression. Enter Jamie McLean. Jamie the pragmatist, the opportunist, is the sump pump needed to suck Power up out of the muck. In Lane's words, "his young cynicism is both a perfect match and a perfect foil for Power's more well-aged bitterness."

Greed is the central image of *Filthy Rich*. It is constantly underlined in the wrangling between Power and his ambitious apprentice. An irreverent Doctor Watson, Jamie helps to give

Walker has armed the wealthy and powerful with the minds to justify themselves. Although there is a lot of B-movie about the play, they do not seem to be melodramatic villains

us a better sense of Power. We also get a far better sense of the "enemy." Walker has armed the wealthy and powerful with the minds to justify themselves. They stand up well to the scornful tirades of Power. Although there is a lot of B-movie about the play, they do not seem melodramatic villains. Their dialogue with Power is taut, and not what one might call lament wit. You stop. Reflect. These people may not be villains, but they are deadly. In the end there is still no reward for Power — except, perhaps, Jamie McLean. Power has a friend. This is understood to be something of real importance.

With *The Art of War* we get to the core of Walker's concern, hinted at up until now. We begin in *Gossip* looking close-

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up at the fabric of the upper, ruling class. Gossip and rumour are seen to be the warp and woof of that shimmering cloth. In *Filthy Rich* we step back and see the loom itself — money — upon which the cloth is woven. In the final play (extending the metaphor to the tearing point) we are given an aerial shot of the vast dark cloak being woven.

The Art of War was commissioned by Simon Fraser University as the keynote address to the conference on art and reality, held in August, 1982. It was first produced professionally by Factory Theatre Lab at Toronto Workshop Productions in 1983. The antagonist, an aging general and former minister of defence, has been made special adviser to the minister of culture. Hackman is a maniac, or so Power believes. He sets out to find what he is up to. If Hackman is a maniac, he is compellingly lucid. Walker's laconic style perfectly transmits the man's decisiveness.

POWER: How did you escape.

KARLA: I got mad. It's easy if you get mad.

HACKMAN: She's right. Perhaps you should try getting mad, Mr. Power.

POWER: I am.

HACKMAN: No. You're indignant. You're outraged. You just don't understand do you. Anger is a weapon. Allowing you to be brutal. Brutality is another weapon. Allowing you to take action. In this way, you build your arsenal. Until you have the ultimate weapon. Immorality. Which allows you to take any action in any way at any time. Immorality is a great weapon. And you don't have it.

Note the punctuation. The syntax makes Walker's point. Subjects are separated from active modifiers. The man is liberated from his action. This is a truly dangerous man.

When I saw *The Art of War*, I was hoping Power would finally get his oats. But alone with the text, I know that it is unreasonable for a man of principles to win over a man of style. Style is ultimately what the play is about. Power has none. Victory would be gratuitous; so would tragedy. Walker believes that cynicism is just the other side of the coin from foolish optimism, and here it is. "Don't die," says Hackman. "It would be more interesting if you lived and we met again." This is not simply an invocation to the god of sequels, but the condition in which we live when we choose to put ideals ahead of more material wealth. "Don't die," says Jamie McLean for entirely different motives. And Power answers, "I'm not dying. I'm just depressed." Depressed is not to be sneered at. It is enough that he is not destroyed.

I RECENTLY MET Walker at a restaurant. He was drinking cider for a head cold in between numerous cups of coffee. We talked about worrying. Power is just one of a long line of Walker characters who worry too much. Does Walker worry too much?

"Not too much. Just enough," he said. "But the plays worry. The plays share their anxiety with the audience."

"And we laugh?"

"The laughter comes as exhaust," he said.

Exhaust and a kind of self-defence, I now find myself thinking. We talked about reading the newspaper. Walker is obsessive about reading newspapers, as many as he can.

"It keeps me alert," he said. "Not being destroyed has something to do with not becoming irrelevant."

The Art of War seems to have something to do with reading newspapers. The ultimate fear is always there, hanging over a Walker play. The fear of obliteration. But the penultimate fear we can work on. The penultimate fear is in not knowing what is going on. Being left in the dark. So many of Walker's plays end in the dark. The lighting directions for *The Art of War* specify that the last scene ends at dawn. So the darkness has been moved along a little bit. That's something to think about. Something that flew by me when I saw the play. Something I picked up reading Walker. □

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IN MEMORIAM

A man of horizons

As poet, civil libertarian, and friend,
for F.R. Scott (1899-1985) nothing was ever good
enough if it could have been better

By Ralph Gustafson

IN 1959 WHEN everybody poured into our small apartment on 168th Street in New York City after the first group reading by Canadian poets put on by the YMHA at Lexington Avenue — Frank Scott and Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen with cohorts Ron Everson and Jack McClelland and Jonathan Williams and CBC engineers — how the liquid refreshment went! How the small apartment creaked! (Wellaway, we were happy!) I thought the reading was great and historic. I asked Frank what he thought. "Could have been better," said Frank. "They could have listened better." With that he settled down, went to sleep. I have a snapshot of him asleep in that deep leather chair he sat in, like Cleopatra (not exactly) on her barge. That was that. The United States could have listened better.

Everything had to be better with Frank Scott: the poem just written could be better; the bird-feeder at the end of the verandah to his cottage overlooking Lake Massawippi at North Hatley in Quebec's Eastern Townships, which Frank dearly loved to the end of his exis-

tence — the bird-feeder could have been better, the squirrels outwitted; the laws of Canada could be better so that the poor need not be poor; the hut up Lake Massawippi that no one knew about except every poet in Canada (but who couldn't get to it without being better) — the prop could be counterbalanced with an old railroad tie (if he had one) so that the wooden terrace and hut wouldn't slide toward the lake after every winter. Frank Scott wanted the spirit of man to be better. Good was comparative. Well enough wasn't enough for Frank.

*To say
that this man is fantastic
is to be Frankly wrong.*

*Real
is the right root
for him.*

Those lines I wrote long ago, for a book dedicated to him and Marian, his ever-devoted wife and painter and helpmeet and chef of those roasts of lamb at their summer place in North Hatley whenever I and my wife Betty went up (Frank's house is on one level higher than mine above the Magog Road and a little northward of us). Frank was

always after the real; he felt that the truth is always the best way to improvement.

The only time I ever saw Frank non-plussed by anything from Jehovah (which he well witnessed, you remember?) to a red stop-light (which, using his glass eye, he often drove right through) was the time Frank tried to open a bottle of wine to go with the roast of lamb. He used the latest reality — a sort of neo-technical device that when applied to the cork of a bottle (by insertion of a needle, I suppose) lifted the cork serenely from the bottleneck. Used by Frank, the bottom blew off. He did not think the lap of his trousers comic. We did. We stayed solemn, though. Frank liked to be in control. Some time later, we were out together in Montreal to something. (Poetry somewhere? Music at the Place des Arts?) Frank couldn't open his own front door. He wouldn't let Marian try. This was at 451 Clarke Avenue, Westmount. We waited. Then, daring even Frank's expertise, Betty said, "Let me try, Frank." I don't know what made Frank concede the bunch of keys (but then, his admiration for Betty, a nurse, and an Order of Nurses of Quebec delegate, and an expert on letting Frank know when the ice on Lake Massawippi would go out so he could get his cottage plumbing laid on, was unwavering). Betty opened the front door with one twist. I remember those times when Frank ceased to pay attention.

But a man of horizons was Frank even when he already stood on one. He trod on the future. Horizons were what he liked — those with the sun coming up, especially when everyone said it wasn't. Like Nelson with *his* glass eye, Frank saw what he saw. It was an unsentimental sun he saw, one that had to rise just right, caustically, in place as it should be, noble but practical, not too overdone so that you just sat in it, not too familiar for surprises.

I have seen Frank cut down over-extension and pretension like a steel trap — that mind of his, the judgement snapping shut like a steel trap, not against unconsidered trifles but approaches of

F.R. Scott and Ralph Gustafson, 1981



considerableness, if the minute wasn't right for him. He was at the centre of the horizon and no nonsense about it. Sometimes, he would move off-centre if his wit and pun were adequately appreciated. But not often. And not if bad poetry was concerned, especially poetry that was not native to itself. He was ruthless amid alien corn.

I remember January 8, 1966. We all went back to Frank's place on Clarke Avenue. What was the occasion? A National Film Board showing? That film about Leonard Cohen? Does that date fit? We were Buffy Glassco; Eldon Grier and Sylvia, painter; Louis Dudek and Aileen Collins, former editor of *CIV/n*; Al Purdy; Irving Layton and Aviva; Doug Jones; Betty, who remembers details more vivid than I. What a concatenation of poets and privacies! Frank in his orange-upholstered chair and with meerschaum pipe. Al thirsty and Doug. Leonard Cohen and his friend joined us.

"The greatest poet in North America is Bob Dylan," said Leonard. An offering due respect. Frank wanted the evidence. He went out (some music shop was open nearby, though it was well into night when the pronouncement was presented). He came back and played the evidence. Dylan was terribly popular at the time. The world was changing, so

Dylan said. "Eight Canadian dollars," Frank said (I think it must have been about eight for the record), "for an American cliché."

He undid padlocks, he made the Quebec government give in, he knew what a poem was.

*Not to say
if this man is
God is.*

I once wrote.

All right. Just human. If he was austere on his horizon, he forever con-founded the austerity. I once accused Frank of being a romantic (that is, a man of sensational nearness). I say "accused" because everyone else declared him guilty of not loving intimacy. What of that poem of the little "Girl Running Down Hill" Frank wrote?

*All of a sudden my world gave way
as she pulled me into her field of
force . . .
Oh come oh come sang the old to the
young
as her eyes came glowing in smiles and
curls
then she flung all her rush in my wrap-
around arms
and our two worlds crashed with hurrah
hurrah*

Sure, he was poetic, Frank told me, in effect.

Simple enough. Poetry is the saving grace. To the end, dying on Clarke Avenue, Frank thought of himself first as a poet. The poem was the thing — the essential instrument for adjustment — to peace or liberty or comedy or whatever it is that is good. I can hear Canadian censorship tumbling down 21 years ago, Frank on his feet in Arthur Smith's parlour in his cottage on Drummond Point, Lake Memphramagog, Buffy Glassco giggling on the sofa, Frank nasaling (the proper word) "A Lass in Wonderland," revivifying Lady Chatterley from Jansensist pantomime:

*I went to bat for the Lady Chatte
Dressed in my bands and gown.
The judges three glared down at me.
The priests patrolled the town.*

I can hear him this minute read his poems, each syllable enunciated with care and sensitive accent until the very fact of hearing him made you part of the imaginative process of the creating. It was the moment as it should be, that musing "alone on Ararat," as Frank did; that watching the purpose in cell and galaxy, the glory of the life-thrust, until we should grow to one world through enlargement of wonder. It is all there, in Frank's poems. □

The full tragedy of Grassy Narrows now revealed

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Anastasia M. Shkilnyk foreword by Kai Erikson
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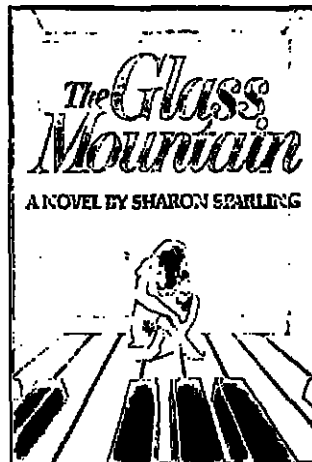
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A trial and a joy

'I write because I have always written,'
said Marian Engel (1933-1985) shortly before her death.
'I try again because I don't know what else to do'

By Timothy Findley

IHAVEN'T DECIDED, yet, what my adventure is going to be." These were among the last words recorded by Marian Engel, in an interview with Peter Gzowski in October, 1984, four months before she died. She was speaking of the various adventures she had been watching her friends undertake in the "last half" of their lives: adventures for those over 50 — people whose children had grown up, whose relationships were altering shape, whose obligations and ambitions were taking off in new directions. People who faced, in other words, plain old middle-age. They were also the adventures of those who had gained their maturity — who could now, by virtue of having made mistakes and learned their lessons, take a second look at life and say: "These are the things I really want to do in the time remaining," and "These are the chances I'm willing to take."

Life after 50 was limited for Marian Engel — and she knew it. She had known it would be limited for a number

of years, having made the discovery that cancer had invaded her body shortly after she returned from her stint as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta in 1979. But if life was to be limited, Marian's sense of adventure and her need for it were not. They were limitless. It was after the discovery of the cancer, for instance, that she set out to research *The Islands of Canada*, her "coffee-table book," published by Hurtig in 1981. This research entailed an immense amount of travel, some of it under difficult circumstances — but the adventure of it all, the travel, the discovery of new places, and the meeting of new people meant a great deal to her. It was also an adventure that gave her a chance to share new things with her children, one or both of whom accompanied her on some of her island journeys.

Because of her father's work, (he was a teacher of auto mechanics, kept on the move because of the Depression), much of Marian Engel's early life was spent as a nomad. But not an unhappy one. The effect of living in many different places

seems to have galvanized her imagination — and, as all incipient artists will, she watched and she listened and she took life in with relish. Born in Toronto in 1933, she lived out her childhood in a variety of towns and cities in south-western Ontario. Such places as Galt, Sarnia, and Goderich all turn up one way or another in her fictions — melded and given other names — but the essence of a *kind* of town emerges, unique to Southern Ontario.

Her portraits of these towns are always vital, caring, and honest to the last degree. Their streets, their stores, their restaurants and beauty salons, their houses and their lawns, their sidewalks and the people walking there are drawn with the sort of casual exactness that only comes when the subject is part of the writer's personal background. The air of research is altogether absent. This is what might be called *blood-writing* — when the details rise to the page as effortless and uncontrolled as heartbeats.

But nothing Marian wrote could even remotely be called simplistic: nothing was innocent of complexity, of wholeness. She never fudged the negatives of places or of people, because she knew the power of the negative to influence the line a person's life would follow. The leading figures in Marian Engel's books rarely lived in these towns of hers, but they were always returning to them, either in fact or in thought. Her characters always kept in touch with the past — with where they had come from, the good and the bad of it — and this was one of the salient factors that gave her characters their edge.

Marian graduated from McMaster University in 1955, then went on to McGill, where she wrote her master's thesis under the supervision of Hugh MacLennan. Its subject was *The English Canadian Novel Since 1939*, and the conclusion — both amusing and ironic — is unavoidable: all subsequent theses on this subject will, of necessity, give a central place to the novels of Marian Engel. Her relationship with MacLennan was a good one, both as a student

Marian Engel



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL GREENSTEIN

and friend; "healthy," because it made room for more than one philosophy. Receptive, amused, argumentative, mutually respectful, and enlarging, it lasted until her death.

Following her graduation from McGill, Marian took a teaching post in Missoula, at Montana State University, but this adventure ended after a year because she was not prepared to waste her energies on the internal politics of her department. She was interested in teaching and in writing; she was devoted to her students, but had no devotion whatsoever to the politics of who got to sit at the Master's right hand at high table.

Other teaching jobs ultimately led her to Europe, where she spent some time in the Balearic Islands (on Ibiza), the South of France (at Aix-en-Provence), and in London, Paris, and Cyprus. It was during this period that her marriage to Howard Engel took place, and most of her subsequent travels in Europe were geared to Howard's assignments with the CBC. It was also during this period — the late 1950s and early 1960s — that Marian began to write her novels.

She had written before, of course, having pretty well always known she wanted to be a writer. In fact, by 1954 she had already published a number of stories (under her maiden name, Passmore) in magazines such as *Seventeen* and McGill's *The Muse*. Her early novels went unpublished, and it was not until her return to Canada that her novel-writing established its own voice and began to find a serious audience.

For a while Marian's travels were over, and she and Howard Engel settled down to life in Toronto and the raising of a family. Twins — William and Charlotte — were born in 1964, and it was shortly after this that Marian began to "noodle around," as she said, with the ideas and the pages that would become her first novel, *No Clouds of Glory* (1968).

The decade of the '70s was perhaps the most vital of Marian Engel's life. It began auspiciously, with the publication of her second novel — and one of her best — *The Honeyman Festival*, followed in 1973 by the founding of the Writers' Union of Canada, in which she played a central role. It was a perilous time for Canadian writers. To begin with, our numbers were swelling and this meant more and more voices had to be heard. At the same time, our publishing houses were being taken over — or threatened — by outside interests. Contracts were hard to come by, and the terms by which they were governed were not, on the whole, in the writer's interest.

Culturally, our country was on the

verge of a new and powerful flowering. On the other hand, it was also on the verge of being swallowed whole. Lack of funding, lack of protective rights, lack of a collective focus threatened to cut us down at the very moment when we were learning to stand on our own. It was in this moment that Marian Engel, Graeme Gibson, and a handful of others gave articulation to these problems and the Writers' Union began to take shape. Marian Engel's voice was central among those that hammered out the collective means by which these problems could be solved. She was elected the union's first chairman at the inaugural meeting in Ottawa.

The '70s also saw Marian's separation and divorce from Howard Engel, and this meant a whole new way of life. Her children stayed with her — and this meant that Marian faced all the complicated problems of becoming a single parent. The housing, feeding, and schooling of her family were to remain her central concerns until she died. But she was also concerned that she should achieve these things exclusively by means of her writing. That she succeeded was a triumph.

Writers, not only in Canada, have a hard enough time just getting by on their own. But we do have extraordinary resources, because the whole field of writing can be open to us. Journalism, criticism and writing for radio all played a part in this period of Marian's life, as well as teaching. Having lost a house she particularly loved — on Brunswick Avenue, in Toronto — she subsequently bought another, which she came to love as much, on Marchmount Road.

It was also during this time that she wrote her last novels: *Bear*, *Joanne*, *The Glassy Sea*, and *Lunatic Villas*. When she died, she was working on yet another project — a single novel that was turning, almost against her will, into three separate books.

Marian Engel gained many honours in her life: a Governor General's Award, the City of Toronto Book Award and, latterly, the Order of Canada. But greater honours than these, perhaps, were — and continue to be — bestowed upon her by those who knew and loved her. These have to do, unavoidably, with the way in which she faced and endured her illness — the imminence of her death and death itself. I can think of no greater example of quiet courage in the face of more or less constant pain and of the desperate sense of losing life in a moment of creative resurgence.

Marian died with a teeming brain and a whole world of writing left to do. She died, in effect, with her pen in her hand and her notebook on her knee. About a year before this death, she had written

these words about her state of mind:

Time has done some work. We shall see if it is good or ill that has been produced, if impatience has been replaced by wisdom, and lack of energy replaced by richness. Anything could happen. I write because I have always written. I try again because I don't know what else to do. It is both a trial and a joy.

In July, Marian's last book of stories will be published in Penguin's Short Fiction Series. It is called *The Tattooed Woman*. And it is wonderful. □

REVIEW

A nation divided

By Mark Czarnecki

Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-1984, edited by Richard Perkyns, Irwin Publishing, 742 pages, \$24.95 paper (ISBN 0 7725 1501 8).

THIS COLLECTION helps fill a huge gap, not just on college reading lists but in Canada's theatre consciousness. In fact, that gap now is crammed to bursting with the recent publication of two other greatest-hits anthologies, Jerry Wasserman's *Modern Canadian Plays* (Talorbooks) and Richard Plant's *Modern Canadian Drama* (Penguin). Previous anthologies have been far more comprehensive than selective.

Omissions are the favourite ammunition when shooting down editors of anthologies, and Richard Perkyns, a semi-professional theatre director in Halifax and drama professor at St. Mary's University, barely survives an initial fusillade. The hard fact is that the following major Canadian playwrights are not represented at all: Marcel Dubé, David Fennario, W.O. Mitchell, John Murrell, George Ryga, Michel Tremblay, and George F. Walker. In his defence, Perkyns claims to have unearthed several buried treasures: Herman Voaden's *Hill-Land* (1934), Robertson Davies's *At My Heart's Core* (1950), Gwen Pharis Ringwood's trilogy *Drum Song* (1959-1981), Aviva Ravel's *Dispossessed* (1977) and James Reaney's *The Canadian Brothers* (1983) — each of which has only been produced once on stage.

These plays certainly do not deserve obscurity. But their absence from the stage does indicate the sharp division in knowledge and preference between theatre academics and professionals. The *Globe and Mail* recently conducted a poll of seven professionals and two

academics, asking them which Canadian plays deserved revivals; of the 43 plays mentioned, only three are among the 12 in this anthology.

Perkyns clearly has a lot of explaining to do, but his choices shed considerable light on several typically Canadian perspectives regarding theatre and culture in general. First off, *Major Plays* is aimed at teachers of Canadian drama — certainly at the university level, possibly in high schools in those provinces tolerant of the fact that, as Perkyns primly puts it, “four-letter words seem almost obligatory in contemporary drama.”

Since education is a provincial jurisdiction, regionalism has been the editor's fundamental criterion. All of Canada's main geographic regions except the Far North are represented. Further reflecting the ancient animosity of hinterland toward heartland, only four plays take place in a major urban centre — and in each case, the particular viewpoint has its own “regionality.” Ravel's *Dispossessed* is a rich poetic drama about orthodox Montreal Jews; David French's *Of the Fields, Lately* (1973) portrays a Newfoundland family in Toronto; John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (1968) is set in a reformatory; and Gratien Gélinas's *Bousille and the Just* (1961), though set in Montreal, incarnates Duplessisme in a malevolent family of small-town bigshots.

The plays are not diminished because they are “regional” in all the senses implied above. Quality control does not absolutely demand that such an anthology include scenes from Toronto life

— after all, the city's most successful playwright, George F. Walker, inhabits the regions of his own bizarre imagination, and in any case has built his reputation elsewhere.

But the egalitarian tendencies of regionalism when applied to Canadian cultural politics always run aground on the hard rock of Quebec. Whatever differences exist among Canada's regions, none is as significant as the distinction between Quebec and the rest. Omitting Tremblay from such an anthology is absurd, and Perkyns should have confined his brief to English Canada, at the risk of appearing less than comprehensive. Covering the territory has definitely been his major concern: the book is well-equipped with a historical overview of Canadian theatre, critical introductions to the plays as well as biographies and bibliographies for the playwrights. The textual annotations are quirky at best. Do “Wops” and “Kikes” really need explaining? And in what Bacchanalian country (surely not Canada) does the phrase “get her jollies” necessarily mean “orgasm”?

But Perkyns has cast his net across time as well as space, and six of the plays also deal with historical subjects. In emphasizing the diversity of his material, he makes a revealing statement; his introduction, he says, “helps to show how Canadian dramatists became so concerned about the need to portray the infinite variety of their homeland.” That “need” is in fact his alone — playwrights need to write about what they know, feel, and dream. It is critics who then arrange the products along any axis

they want — and one of them, in the case of a regional-historical editor like Perkyns, portrays “infinite variety.” Furthermore, as an academic, Perkyns is much more likely to view Canadian drama as classic literature than an artistic director who is more concerned with what will succeed — artistically or financially — on the stage.

In an ideal world, academics and professionals would be in close contact, exchanging suggestions and scripts. In fact, the few existing dramaturges in Canadian theatres spend most of their time reading new scripts from the mails. But classics are made, not just born, and government subsidies have not been earmarked for the specific purpose of helping dramaturges develop them by reviving old plays that might themselves improve in the process and also in-seminate the imaginations of contemporary playwrights. And because government increasingly urges theatres to make money in the short run, the opportunities for making real money in the long run from gradually evolved classics is even further diminished.

The disjunction between what the academics know and what the professionals actually stage has therefore grown alarmingly in the past decade. As a result, the most recent important plays by Reaney and Ringwood (who died last year at the age of 74 after a lifetime in the theatre), were not produced by professional theatres but by university drama departments: Ringwood's *Drum Song* at the University of Victoria in 1982, Reaney's *The Canadian Brothers* at the University of Calgary in 1983.

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Making connections

By Carol Bolt

The Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Drama, edited by Richard Plant, Penguin, 904 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 048188 5).

IN ONE OF my favourite moments from Richard Plant's anthology, we are seated at Mackenzie King's death bed. The play is *Rexy!*, by Allan Stratton. We watch King sustained and encouraged by exhortations from his mother and his grandfather and reminders that he will, after all, soon be joining his little dog Pat in Heaven. I thought I knew more than I wanted to know about Mother and Pat, but Stratton paces all the familiar elements of the King myth with such confidence and assurance that even as we, his audience, are happily congratulating ourselves on recognizing the cliché, we're forced beyond that recognition to an understanding of what those clichés must have meant to Mackenzie King and how we might be influenced by things as silly as the ghosts of dead dogs and dead ancestors. It's a scene that's so wonderfully comic and sad that reading the text can send shivers up the spine.

Stratton is a young man (he's 33) who trained at Stratford as an actor. Stratton's professional background and the earlier acting and directing experience of playwright Sharon Pollock provide two of the very rare connections to the Canadian theatrical history sketched affectionately in Herbert Whittaker's preface to this volume. Whittaker regrets what he calls "our Canadian trick of labelling every milestone the first one," and recalls the Dominion Drama Festival, the Montreal Repertory, "political burlesques, garrison japes and native rituals," but at least in respect to this collection, his argument is unconvincing.

The most striking thing about the plays in the first part of this anthology is the overwhelming and extraordinary loneliness of the central figures. They make so few connections — to their pasts or to their futures.

"I never did get any closer to my father," David French's protagonist reminds us at the close of *Of the Fields, Lately*. "Tom will be alone, but you'll be more alone. Believe me, I know," is the warning at the end of David Freeman's remarkable play, *Creeps*. Louis Riel in John Coulter's *Riel* is dead, of

course, reviled by the Trooper: "(hoarse with hatred) Son of a bitch! God damn son of a bitch!" We last see George Ryga's Indian (in the television play, *Indian*) alone on the stage. He's "trembling with fury," as is the young prisoner Smitty in John Herbert's powerful *Fortune and Men's Eyes*. In perhaps the blackest of these plays, William Fruet's *Wedding in White*, the final images from Sandy and Jeannie's wedding night give us an almost terrifying sense of isolation. The thought of any kind of human contact seems hopeless.

It is not until James Reaney's *Handcuffs*, first performed in 1975, that a playwright abandons these bleak, despairing images to give us any sense of a future or reverence for a past. At the end of Reaney's beautiful play we're told, "We should feel that around the Donnelly farmyard lies a big field of wheat ready for harvest," and Bob Donnelly says: "They told me it was the remains of my father. I knelt down and picked up his heart."

In the rest of the plays — which Plant has selected as representative of drama in the last 10 years — our heroes and heroines are consistently willing to affirm the value of their existence. "I will be remembered" says Stratton's *Rexy*. "To us, to all of us and to Canada," says Diana in the bittersweet conclusion of Margaret Hollingsworth's very touching *Ever Loving*. "We'll be together" Rachel tells Reuben in the warm and funny *Garage Sale* by Gwen Pharis Ringwood.

These are characters of a new complexity. They can act and take responsibility for their actions. They don't have to be victims. Look at the conclusion of Pollock's sophisticated retelling of the Lizzie Borden story, *Blood Relations*:

THE ACTRESS: Lizzie. (She takes the hatchet from Miss Lizzie.) Lizzie, you did.

MISS LIZZIE: I didn't. (She puts the hatchet on the table.) You did.

These are characters with new complexities and new possibilities, wonderfully illustrated in George Walker's savage, comic, passionate *Art of War*, which ends this volume:

POWER: We have to do better in the future. Promise me next time you tie someone up you'll do it properly.

JAMIE: I promise.

POWER: And I promise next time I go to war I'll win. . . . Or at least try to break even. I'm tired of losing. It's so . . . depressing.

Perhaps the only playwright ill-served by this collection is George Ryga. The adaptation of the short television play *Indian* for the stage is not altogether successful, and though the character of the unnamed Indian is developed, his oppo-

Reaney's case is especially telling. His Donnelly trilogy in the mid-1970s was both an artistic and critical success, confirming his status as a leading Canadian dramatist. But because large, established theatres take fewer and fewer risks, his epic experiments in blending myth, ritual, and history now have to be carried on without the more stringent criteria that professional staging imposes on new work.

Perkyns has made an apparently quirky choice by including *Brothers* over the Donnelly trilogy. But his claim that it not only represents a milestone in Reaney's personal evolution as a playwright but marks the maturing of an identifiably Canadian theatrical tradition going back to Voaden is entirely justified. *Brothers* leaps off the page as a manifest classic. Located in a detailed historical setting (the War of 1812), the intricate mythical plot, magically inventive staging, and quicksilver characterization combine to make it a transcendent work of pure imagination.

Brothers has one fatal flaw, however — it is incomprehensible without a thorough explanation of the characters' genealogies and the events of the War of 1812. Quite unapologetically, Perkyns suggests reading John Richardson's novel on which the play is based. (Imagine that advice in the program notes to a professional production!) By contrast, the demands of staging the Donnelly trilogy professionally meant that each section was comprehensible in itself, yet the whole was still greater than the sum of its parts. Perkyns has stuck his neck out far with Reaney's play in order to make a point about the evolution of Canadian drama — too far, perhaps, since it seems clear that if trends in Canadian professional theatre continue this play may never realize its classic potential.

To a lesser extent, most of the other plays in the anthology fall in the same category. They all have the potential for greatness — and they all need work. Polishing promising dramas into classics is a mandate for a national theatre in the cultural, not political sense — but Stratford, Canada's closest approximation, is devoted to somebody else's playwright.

According to the Canada Council, indeed, a national theatre in Canada is an impossibility, given the country's rooted regionalism. But an anthology such as this one, based on the dogma of regionalism, shows that regionalism as an end in itself only rationalizes an insecure provincialism. Works like *Drum Song* and *The Canadian Brothers* are not merely part of an infinite variety but varieties of the infinite imagination toward which all playwrights, a *mari usque ad mare*, aspire. □

sition — Watson, his boss, and the anonymous Agent — are cut-out paper tigers. *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* belongs with the rest of these fine plays.

But there are, we hope, collections to follow *Modern Canadian Drama*,

Volume 1. There have to be. Editor Plant speaks in his introduction of the Canadian history of docudrama and collective creation as the subject of an anthology unto itself, and of course this volume is concerned only with drama in

English and includes no plays from Quebec.

Perhaps this book is yet another "first milestone" then, but it seems to me to be one from which we could, if we cared to, see much further than we used to. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Opening lines

Four recently staged scripts reflect their fledgling playwrights' varying attempts at mastering the demands of their craft

By Richard Plant

Voiceless People, by Marco Micone, translated from the French by Maurizia Binda, Guernica Editions, 92 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919349 44 7) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 919349 43 9).

White Biting Dog, by Judith Thompson, Playwrights Canada, 108 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 369 3).

Playing the Fool, by Alun Hibbert, Playwrights Canada, 61 pages, \$3.50 paper (ISBN 0 88754 370 7).

Geometry, by Rachel Wyatt, Playwrights Canada, 74 pages, \$3.50 paper (ISBN 0 88754 347 2).

The young have to break the wall of silence which surrounds us. They must tell the story of our humiliations and setbacks.

THAT'S A PLEA by Zio, an old Italian immigrant in Marco Micone's *Voiceless People* (originally in French *Les Gens du Silence*). If Zio were with us in the audience he would see *Voiceless People* answering his request as the play sketches the experiences of an immigrant named Antonio, from his leaving Italy and settling in Montreal to later years when his children are young adults. Much of what we see merely confirms what we already know of immigrant life: long letters to and from a wife and family in Italy, finding work as a bricklayer, saving money, friction with English-speaking bosses, resentment from *i Canadesi francesi* for stealing their jobs, trouble with separatism, language rights, and the church; in short, the problems of being a member of a doubly oppressed minority.

These are compounded as Antonio's children are assimilated into French society, getting ahead at the same time that they become painfully aware of the "hidden brutalities" of their disadvantaged position. As Nancy, his daughter, says:

Gino, I teach teenagers who all have Italian names and who have one culture, that of silence. Silence about the pe-

sant origin of their parents. Silence about the manipulation they're victims of. Silence about the reasons for their silence. . . .

We must replace the culture of silence by immigrant culture, so that the peasant in us stands up, so that the immigrant in us remembers, and so that the Québécois in us can start to live.

The children's attempts to escape the Italian ghetto leave their parents — particularly Antonio — isolated, troubled by feelings of inferiority and purposelessness.

The weight of Micone's own experience as an Italian immigrant in Montreal since 1958 gives his writing a strong emotional charge. Although in the early scenes his vehemence is restrained, it finally explodes into fierce and vitriolic conflicts. Antonio's wife, Anna, attacks him:

Look at me. When I'm not working to pay off this house, I'm working at cleaning it. We don't even allow ourselves to live in it. We live in the basement like moles, because we made a museum out of the ground floor. . . .

I'm afraid, Antonio, I'm afraid of only living just long enough to finish paying off the house, like Christina, like Rossa or like Antonietta.

Nancy joins in, accusing her father of providing Gino, the male heir, with a better chance in life. She lashes out in support of her mother:

Stop thinking you're rich because you own a house. The only thing Mama did for the past twenty years was supervise the poverty, this white brick crypt where the only time there's life is when there's an argument, and the only brave deeds are your sacrifices.

However, we also come to share Antonio's anguish, caught between his traditional, old-world values and his identity as an exploited immigrant:

The lighting intensifies on Antonio, who is transfigured and looks as though in a trance.

An immigrant worker is less than a

worker. An immigrant father is less than a father. An immigrant husband is less than a husband. My house had to be big to contain all my dreams. It had to be beautiful like Anna on our wedding day. It had to be warm like Nancy when she was still Annunziata. For an immigrant a house is more than a house. . . . When you feel the earth tremble under your feet, when anxiety never stops suffocating you, when your country and your family have abandoned you, then a house is much more than a house.

The play ends amid this raging battle, as if Micone sees no possible resolution of the hostility. Instead, there is merely a pause, then the final line, an ironic echo of the opening of the play, spoken by Zio, always outside the action: "Don't cry. Anna. Your Antonio is not going to prison, he's going to America."

As you have likely sensed, the strength of the play is not in its complexity but in the directness and force with which it reveals the anguish of immigrant life. Its style is episodic; it leans toward the one-dimensional and toward a presentational mode, all of which aid in expressing the playwright's outrage — a furious cry that shatters the immigrant silence.

A reader may feel he comes too suddenly upon the emotional outbursts at the end, since the early scenes are largely occupied with illustrating the different forces acting on Antonio. Only the last two scenes hold truly powerful conflict as the tensions forge together, trapping Antonio within his volatile family relationships. A sensitive staging, however, could pick out the undercurrents planted throughout the muted early scenes, and allow a natural growth of the dramatic tension into its final explosion. For a young dramatist (this appears to be his first professionally staged play), Micone writes with sureness of craft.

Judith Thompson is also a relatively young writer whose first play, *The Crackwalker*, showed notable promise. Her second professionally staged work, *White Biting Dog*, is as laudably ambi-

tious as it is stylistically removed from *The Crackwalker* or *Voiceless People*. Carole Corbeil has written in the *Globe and Mail* of *White Biting Dog*'s "orgiastic and poetic" qualities, and of Thompson's attempt to escape the confinement of a realistic mode, possibly of the kind she used in *The Crackwalker*. And to be sure, the play moves from one metaphor to another in a string of densely packed images apparently meant to illuminate the characters and action. (However, Thompson surely cannot mean for the characters and action to be as self-consciously symbolic as they seem.)

The imaginative nature of the play is evident from its first lines, spoken by Cape Race:

Did it happen? Sure it happened. It happened, I'm not crazy it's here (points to his head) all here. Yeah, I — arrive at the Bloor Street viaduct, and uh . . .

Cape is a "respected young lawyer. . . with a wife. . . who in the whole of four years of marriage I did not smile at once." Cape's mother says that he is gay and has left his wife. Whatever the case, he is pictured as hating living so much that he tries to kill himself, but before he can jump, a white dog arrives informing him that he's living in hell "cause you ain't done your mission" — which is to save his father from death (literal, metaphorical?), thereby saving himself from his own overwhelming hatred.

Turns out that his father, Glidden, is dying of a disease contracted from handling sphagnum moss. (Throughout the play Glidden pours/rubs moss on himself — a symbol of decay, death, moral or sexual penance?) Around Glidden are other characters: Lomia, Glidden's wife, who has left him for a punk rocker, Pascal, alias Gord from Oakville (Cape also has a fling with him); Pony, a psychic ambulance attendant with a "fix-it stand"; a white dog with ESP, and whom Cape calls an angel: "So NOW, you save lives on your own?" Soon Cape and Pony are in bed together, filling Cape with an ecstasy he has never experienced before.

On Pony's advice, Cape works at bringing Lomia back to Glidden as the "only thing gonna save your dad." He tries confronting her with what he feels is the truth, claiming she is corrupt and "fucked around" on Glidden because he was impotent. (Shades of the Gothic: he also says that she used to make him drink his own nosebleeds from "fruity jam jars.") But to no avail.

Cape's plan is temporarily aided when the hotel Lomia and Pascal live in is torched; she returns home, but still refuses to rejoin Glidden. Finally, the impasse is resolved with Glidden's death. Lomia and Cape come together,

sharing a moment at the very end of the play that Thompson describes:

They both feel, hope, that a change is taking place; deep within something has cracked. Maybe the only feeling they are experiencing is guilt, but that is something.

Seems a bit vague and contrived, doesn't it? I feel elfish suggesting this, but there is a current running through the play that urges me to see it all as comic. The stronger impression, however, is that Thompson meant to be serious. On either ground we can applaud her vigorous imagination, her theatrical sensibility, and her poetic gift — which is largely undisciplined in this play.

White Biting Dog is so overburdened with imagery that it is finally inaccessible. We can see the elaborate and convoluted metaphor struggling to express Cape and Lomia's flood of elemental feelings — sexual, moral metaphysical — which are brought to a crisis point by the impending, then actual death of the father/husband. Unfortunately, the imagery exists as a cloak, hiding the reality Thompson seems to want to explore, rather than as a metaphorical force organic to the subject.

There is no danger that Alun Hibbert's *Playing the Fool* will falter under an overload of poetic imagery. It's an off-the-wall farce built around two 70-year-old men, one of whom, Harry, cannot remember at the bottom of a stairway whether he meant to climb up or has just come down. John, his friend, arrives to attend Harry's wife's funeral. In her early years, she was lavish of her favours so that John and Harry, as well as many others, often spent time in her bed. Neither Harry nor John denies it — in fact, there is con-



siderable humour gained from their bragging about who serviced her better. When Ben, Harry's well-to-do businessman son, arrives in the first act, and Sheila, Harry's Red Brigade daughter, in the second, Harry denies he is their father. He claims at one point to be impotent from an old war wound. The responsibility is apparently John's, but he too denies it.

The orphan trauma Sheila and Bill experience — hers concerns a break-

down in her terrorist ideology, Bill's his reputation in business — creates hilarious incongruity. And there are even some serious overtones in it. Sheila's terrorism, John and Harry's war escapades, and Ben's unintentional financing of the Red Brigade (he has been sending money for Sheila's schooling) allow for oblique comments on socio-economic and political revolution. The characters' mixed-up sexual history draws attention to moral issues. But rest assured, none of these is greatly intrusive, if a trifle overwritten.

The major problem with the play is that the mistaken-identity situation and its implications are strong enough to sustain only a shorter work. After reading it, one feels that had the play been two-thirds the length, it would have been more satisfying. A second, smaller problem exists in Harry's Italian neighbour, Tonnelli, with whom he has an on-going shouting match (it was an Italian who shot Harry in the war). Simply stated, Tonnelli needs to be more tightly integrated into the action, or cut. At the moment he seems too much a dramatist's device creating some comic bits (largely unsuccessful), a few serious comments, and the play's curtain lines. But all things considered, Hibbert's play looks to be entertaining enough to gain it further productions, which may lead to further refinement. *Playing the Fool* augurs well as his second professionally produced script.

Like the works already dealt with, Rachel Wyatt's *Geometry* is among the writer's first scripts for the live stage. But her three successful novels and 30 or so radio plays provide a maturity of craft that the other writers included here do not yet possess. The happy signs are abundant. Her characters and their relationships are fully fleshed and clearly defined; her dialogue is highly speakable; the action flows with remarkable smoothness, and the world in which it occurs is deftly painted.

The setting, for example, an Ontario boarding school (present-day, not 1930s as one critic has suggested), is a suitably locked-in world for the geometrical relationships among its characters that give the comedy its title and central theme. Music teacher Ginny, who has always had an urge to leave the school, lives in hope that some day Scott, a pompous ass of a math teacher, will leave his wife Helen. (She has in fact already left him on at least one occasion.) Helen, reportedly a brilliant teacher, is smouldering away not just because she lost her job and potential headship to Scott, but also because their marriage leaves her unfulfilled. (She spends her time painting and as house-mother to the boys; it's a little like penance for

years earlier becoming enamoured of a boy at the school, a detail often brought up to irk her.)

Into this closed world comes Wayne Gibson, a physically appealing if nervous young man from North Bay who is a bit in awe of reaching the lofty perch and mannered ways of private-school society. Helen strikes up a relationship with him (they eventually plan to run off together) while Scott adds to his teasing affair with Ginny. Both liaisons are revealed; Wayne is fired and Helen leaves Scott. The final short scene, set after the Christmas break, sees Helen and Scott back together, waiting for the new term and exchanging candid, although ironic impressions of what has happened:

SCOTT [about Wayne]: I liked him. And he was doing all right to begin with.

HELEN: He shocked me. I couldn't have been more surprised when he made a pass at me. After all, I'll be forty-six in three years.

SCOTT: Two and a half.

Ginny has finally acted on her ancient plans to join CUSO and will be leaving in July. But Wayne's replacement is a young woman from Brampton who "jumped at the chance." Whether or not Ginny continues to take part, one feels that the geometry lessons are likely to start again with the new term.

Not much that is positive has been written about *Geometry*. Ann Saddlemyer's insightful but brief commentary in *Room of One's Own* (Vol. 8, No. 2) is almost alone in that respect. She points out that reviewers (none of whom liked the play in its Toronto production) were "cross because they sought rules of human nature rather than the elegant equations of comedy of manners." There is great value in that view since it directs us to the play's satirical intent and its attempted revelation of the folly of a mannered society.

On the other hand, even this approach fails to account for the fact that the play did not work in its only performances. It is at this point we can see that Rachel Wyatt's newness to writing for the live stage may have let her down — and that a flawed staging compounded the play's weaknesses, hiding what the script is really reaching for. The first act, about which the Toronto *Star's* Gina Mallet claimed "I could swear absolutely nothing happens," is largely exposition, atmosphere, and character sketching. An experienced playwright might have worked many of these details into the action as it moved along.

Once under way, however, the action is hindered in its effect on the audience since it lacks the highly intricate plotting germane to the type of society a comedy

of manners satirizes: the worlds of *School for Scandal*, *Way of the World*, and even David French's *Jitters* (this latter on a lesser scale) come to mind. Similarly, the characters are not witty and brittle enough to live in the same world's elegant veneer. They are not abstracted enough to lift them out of mundane affairs. As a result, we are forced to see Wyatt's carefully detailed world as one of psychological relationships and marital or sexual problems. If the stage production, as was the case in Toronto, follows an approach that emphasizes these latter characteristics, the comedy of manners is likely to disappear.

Studying *Geometry* makes one conscious of how difficult comedy of manners is to create — and stage. It is no great discredit to Rachel Wyatt that her play, so worthy in many ways, has weaknesses. There is enough obvious strength in the text to make me hope to see a stage production more sensitive than the Toronto one to what the playwright appears to be doing. □

REVIEW

Not much to say

By Alan Twigg

In Their Words: Interviews with Fourteen Canadian Writers, by Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, House of Anansi, 211 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88784 142 2).

YOU'VE DONE your share of author interviews. How do you rate this book?

Not so hot.

Why not?

Because the ping-pong ball of thought isn't rallied back and forth enough. Meyer and O'Riordan serve too many soft questions they already know the

answers to. They accept long-winded b.s. in return. Or else we're treated to informal chit-chat. Have another beer, that sort of thing.

What else?

Only one of the 14 subjects — Timothy Findley — is clearly at the peak of his career. James Reaney, Elizabeth Smart, Sheila Watson, Brian Moore . . . well, it's been my experience that most older writers tend to run on old tapes. It's the job of the interviewer to find new buttons to push for fresh responses. Meyer and O'Riordan do try. They like to dredge up some obscure points of reference. But Anansi could have made this a much livelier book by steering these two guys toward a few younger writers.

Who else is interviewed?

The bombastic Layton. The garrulous Purdy. The adamant Acorn. The cerebral Mandel. The ambivalent L. Cohen. The myth-obsessed MacEwan. The judgemental Livesay. . . . Nine of them are poets. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in Ontario, two in Montreal.

Any interviews you liked?

My favourite is the one with Raymond Souster. He talks about his Dad and baseball. He says, "I'm not a very adventuresome person. . . . I write a lot of low-key poetry. I don't give readings any more because for me they were empty exercises." And Roo Borson, the token under-40, comes across as interesting. They ask her, "What are the anxieties and pressures on a young writer today?" And she has the wisdom not to say much.

Maybe you're just irked because the book's introduction claims there's a lack of good background info on English-Canadian authors.

Are you kidding! The only lack of background info is on French-Canadian authors in English. If anything, there's too much of this polite, intelligent babble going on. That's why it's fair to apply tough standards. I'm sorry. But I think it's a dumb idea to have two people interview an author at once. It's hard enough to have an intimate, revealing chat between only two people.

You said it.

All I'm saying is that these two interviewers, in unison, come across like two well-mannered University of Toronto students getting their M.A. degrees. A professional journalist would have plotted, spliced, and shuffled these conversations more.

Isn't that cheating?

Cheating whom? It doesn't matter if an interview subject falls in love, finds God, explains the universe and says "mythopoeic" five times in a paragraph. If the reader doesn't get to the end of an interview, it's a failure. □



CRITICAL NOTICES

ARTS & CRAFTS

Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians, by Hilary Stewart, Douglas & McIntyre, illustrated, 192 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88894 437 3).

By John Oughton

THIS IS A gift book with an unusual depth of information. Hilary Stewart is a British Columbia artist and photographer who has written several books on Northwest Coast Indian art and artifacts. In *Cedar*, she looks at the countless ways in which the yellow and red cedar trees supported the life of British Columbia's coastal tribes, as she writes, "from cradle to grave." Cedar wood was worked into canoes, totem poles, houses, food bowls, masks; the bark became rope, woven clothing, towels, and even diapers. What makes her approach so valuable is that, unlike an academic archeologist, her fascination with the subject takes her beyond identifying, annotating, and theorizing about the objects.

"It intrigues me that people lived so well and for so long using almost exclusively the materials of their environment, and I am endlessly curious about the 'hows' and 'whys' of those materials, their technologies and uses," she explains. Her curiosity led her to experiment with many of those technologies. Working with only a hand maul (hammer) and several wedges, she and a friend found it easy to emulate the traditional method of splitting planks off a cedar log . . . although a puzzled gentleman with a chain saw came by, anxious to help.

Stewart's gifts as a writer match her control of black-and white-photography and line drawings. The knowledgeable and enthusiastic text is well-illustrated throughout, and the illustrations are placed where they belong in relation to the text (something that not all gift books manage). A short review cannot really do this book justice, but those with a taste for anthropology, woodworking, and native lore will find much to interest them here. ☆

NOTE

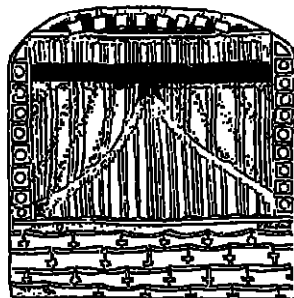
Particularly positive critical notices are marked at the end with a star. ☆

Toronto: Carved in Stone, by Margaret E. McKelvey and Marilyn McKelvey, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, illustrated, 144 pages, \$40.00 cloth (ISBN 0 99920 732 3).

By John Oughton

THIS MOTHER and daughter team celebrates the remaining examples of decorations carved from stone on Toronto buildings. Their aims are praiseworthy: "It is our hope that this book will stimulate Torontonians to look up, to open their eyes to the richness that surrounds them. Stone carving is a dying art. Let us preserve what remains of it."

Unfortunately, the production values of this book do not always live up to the authors' aims, or their diligent research. The black-and-white reproductions of photos by the McKelveys and others are muddy, often fuzzy, so that the grain and subtle tones of the stone carvings are lost. The colour plates are better, but often too blue. For the price, the quality should be better.



What the book can offer is a new way to see Toronto. By connecting stone decorations still visible on downtown buildings with the architects and artists who designed them and the artisans who chiselled them, the McKelveys help humanize historic architecture. We learn that University College, for example, is haunted by the ghost of Ivan Reznikoff, murdered by a fellow stonecarver.

The book is also an indirect tribute to Spencer Clark, who during several decades rescued many of the best pieces of carved Torontoiana from wreckers and had them trucked to the Guild, where they are preserved today. Toronto today is a city of few great buildings but many intriguing details, and those who have wondered about the carvings that adorn the old Stock Exchange, the Don Jail, or the post office at Bay and Front will appreciate learning more about them from this book. □

BALANCE SHEETS

Wings Over the West: Russ Baker and the Rise of Pacific Western Airlines, by John Condit, Harbour Publishing, 235 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920080 49 9).

By Steve Lukits

THE BUZZING DRONE of the airplane changed the sound of travel in the North and the other wilderness regions of Canada. For going long distances or crossing rugged ground, canoe, dog-sled, and snowshoe faced a new, unbeatable competitor. And the occupation of bush pilot became synonymous with derring-do, resourcefulness, and seat-of-the-pants flying in impossible conditions.

Russ Baker combined these qualities with the drive for profit and power to establish the small bush-flying company that has become Pacific Western, the third largest airline in Canada. Timely government contracts, publicity from a young Vancouver newspaperman named Pierre Berton, and streaks of luck just when his competitors were in trouble made Baker's airline grow and prosper. Although some considered him "bullshit from one end to the other," they still admired and worked for him. He courted the powerful in business and politics and won their contracts or influence. He drove himself so hard that he died of a heart attack at 48.

With Baker's death, John Condit's story of PWA becomes a corporate history, without much colour, contradiction, or character. In 1974 the province of Alberta, in what Condit euphemistically calls an act of "state capitalism," purchased PWA. That old free-enterprising bush pilot, Russ Baker, probably did a slow roll in his grave. □

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

The Confessions of Klaus Barbie, by Robert Wilson, Arsenal Editions, 314 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88978 153 2).

By Paul Roberts

TWO PROBLEMS arise in Wilson's collaboration with the infamous Nazi, Klaus Barbie: Can we believe anything Wilson says? And can we believe anything Barbie says? Wilson, a self-

confessed jewel thief and professional scoundrel, travelled down to La Paz, Bolivia, in 1971 with a view to stealing the jewelled cape from the statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe. After an alleged series of hair-raising near-death scrapes, worthy of Robert Ludlum, he ran into Klaus Barbie ("Call me the butcher"), a notorious war criminal twice sentenced to death in absentia for his brutal activities as SS commandant in German-occupied Lyon, France.

The book then is partly an account of the 15 years it took Wilson to put the book together and partly an assortment of writings by or interviews with Barbie himself. Wilson is at once fascinated by Barbie and repelled by him. Indeed he has such problems resolving his friendship with Barbie's deeds that it takes his wife to point out that killing children is probably evil. "Yes, you're right," Wilson muses, as if struck by revelation. If most of Wilson's account stretches our credibility, it certainly entertains.

Which is more than can be said for Barbie's sanitized version of his wartime activities, designed to portray their author as a "good soldier merely doing his duty." His duty consisted of murdering or deporting several thousand Jews, many of them children, besides the interrogation and torture of members of the resistance, including its leader, Jean Moulin. Were this the first piece of whining self-justification by an old Nazi it would be of some academic interest. Since there are already so many, and since, besides his own undeniably colourful personality, Wilson adds little more than loose ends, this book is only for the most ardent Nazi buffs. □

FICTION: LONG & SHORT

The Bequest & Other Stories, by Jerry Wexler. Véhicule Press, 94 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 51 2).

By Robin Metcalfe

MONTREAL IS THE setting for nine of the 10 stories in this small collection — specifically, the ramshackle inner-city ghetto of English-speaking Jews, artists, and students. Most of the characters are young men drifting aimlessly toward middle age. Dreamers and wanderers, given to vague, romantic musings, they will not amount to much. Unfortunately, neither do many of the stories.

Wexler affects a plain style to describe these scenes of ordinary life, but his prose, lacking rigorous precision, is often slack and listless. Too often he resorts to the conventional and the predictable. His younger women, in particular, lack substance. Viewed from

outside, they are reduced to abstract love objects of the male characters.

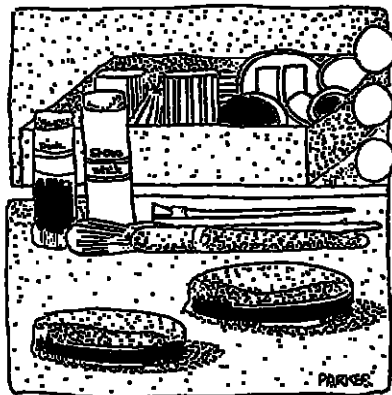
Wexler is much stronger in portraying that state of chronic mutual disappointment that so often characterizes relations between parents and adult children. "Two Years' Absence" is a careful account of a visit home by a wandering son, in which the generations slide past one another. The title story, "The Bequest" — about a tenant's difficult relationship with his aging landlady — is the longest and the best in the collection, a little marvel of conflicting emotions in which a surprising love is revealed. A convenient, but unconvincing, happy ending to a romantic sub-plot mars this otherwise fine story.

The author's love of mood sometimes obscures the deeper workings of his characters. One wishes he would take more chances with them, probe further, and resist the temptation of easy sentiment. □

Blood Ties, by Robin Mathews, Steel Rail, 175 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88791 030 0).

By Sherie Posesorski

THE BOOK JACKET tease describes the stories in Mathews's first collection as ones that confront love, sexuality, family ties, within their political, social, and economic context. The last phrase is the red flashing light of Mathews's global intentions — his inexorable drop-



ping of characters into their social doll-houses. In story after story, he develops psychologically precise characters, involves them in intense relationships, and then predetermines their actions by overdressing them in the swaddling clothes of their social context. Although in his better stories, some characters manage to waddle on to a psychologically credible resolution, elsewhere many of them lose their credibility. The reader is left with a story that is only useful as an exercise in Marxist, feminist, and sociological textual criticism.

However, several stories kick with life. In "His Own Son," Joel, a lawyer, visits a son he has never seen, upon learning of the death of the child's mother. Although he is terrified of any emotional demand, he manages to establish a tentative attachment to his son, but then flees back to Edmonton, hating himself. In "Blood Ties," a father recalls his fears and love for his daughter while reading a note she has left for her lover. When he encounters her on the street with her lover, his natural reticence returns, and he is incapable of expressing his love. Such short stories transcend narrow ideology. □

The Crime of Ovide Plouffe, by Roger Lemelin, translated from the French by Alan Brown, McClelland & Stewart, 408 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 5260 X).

By Paul Stuewe

THE FOURTH NOVEL in the saga of Quebec's Plouffes finds them coping with the post-war economic boom, which has strained the family's traditional cohesiveness by propelling some of its members into the ranks of the *nouveau riche*. The new opportunities and temptations afforded by a favourable business climate whisk Ovide Plouffe, a shy, intellectual clerk with an ambitious wife, into the centre of a mad-cap whirl of go-getters, gangsters, and good-time girls. When the dust settles we've been treated to a rollicking account of an innocent's education in the ways of the new Quebec.

If *The Crime of Ovide Plouffe* is in many respects an old-fashioned tale of virtue rewarded and evil undone, it is also an extremely well-fashioned example of mainstream story-telling. The large cast is quickly differentiated into heterogeneous individuals, who are manoeuvred through a complex, eventful plot with admirable finesse. Dramatic set pieces abound, among which an elderly officer's bashful unveiling of his uniform to female admirers and a climactic courtroom confrontation will stand for the author's ability to capture both the intense private moment and the panoramic public spectacle. Although this passion for the dramatically revealing scene occasionally results in melodramatic excess, this is a small price to pay for such a vivacious and stimulating narrative.

However, Lemelin's penchant for reflecting upon the sociological dimensions of the events is irritating. What happens to the Plouffes may well be indicative of broader social forces — in a sense *must* be, given that they are pre-

sented as typical Quebeckers — but each time that Lemelin asserts the normativeness of their experience, he encourages us to view them as statistics in a survey rather than as individuals. The rich, colourful milieu of the novel is itself a vibrant portrait of people interacting within society, and there is no need for additional sociological embroidery. *The Crime of Ovide Plouffe* carries on chronicling the Plouffes with laudable energy and acuity, and it will be interesting to see how the turbulent 1960s treat the members of one of our best-loved families. □

A Long Way to Oregon, by Anne Marriott, Mosaic Press, 105 pages, \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 99962 240 X) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 239 6).

By Veronica Ross

IT IS interesting to note that most of the eight stories in Anne Marriott's first collection have been read on CBC-Radio's *Anthology*, because behind the written words one seems to hear, like a whisper or an echo, the speaking voice of the story-teller. Or the poet. Marriott has published many collections of poetry since 1939. Her *Calling Adventurers* received the Governor General's Award in 1941.

With a practised voice Marriott tells her stories. Sometimes lyrical, often delicate, always wise and careful, she talks to us about what we have always feared and always known. "I stared around the hollow space, then upward into the thick nut trees and saw what would, however long I lived, be the most terrible sight of my life," says the young narrator in "Mrs. Absalom" upon finding her former piano teacher hanging dead from a tree. In "On a Sunday Afternoon" the description of a book read by the narrator as a child: "A book she dreaded re-reading and which fascinated her so that she read it over and over" might be describing this collection.

Death is the spectre in many of the stories. A recently ill young girl, fearing death, meets a healthy girl whose hobby is creating tombstones. A widow admitted to the same intensive-care unit where her husband died is present at another man's death. A woman barred from kissing the man she has loved silently for 29 years before he dies climbs into a dug trench.

This collection is a powerful work, an important addition to Marriott's poetry. Complex and intense, these stories are surprisingly not gloomy, perhaps because of the author's caution with hyperbole and overstatement. Carefully written, these stories leave echoes in the reader's mind. ☆

The Master of Strappado, by Negovan Rajic, translated from the French by David Lobdell, Oberon Press, 161 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 551 1) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 553 8).

By Paul Stuewe

THIS MIXED BAG of four stories, ranging in length from short to near-novella, arrives bereft of any identification of its author. Since such coyness sometimes masks a literary spoof — as those who took "Georges Zuk" and "Okira" at face value can testify — I'll tread cautiously in assessing a book that otherwise fails to arouse strong opinions of any sort. The narrator of the title story (which takes up almost half the volume) is the tyrannical ruler of a small, backward state wherein oppressed peasants and rapacious rats vie for the harvests he stubbornly defends. Its heavy political overtones — the master is a crude caricature of ruling-class mentalities; the peasants and rats form a kind of emerging proletariat — make it difficult to take it seriously as literature, although there are some vivid descriptions of the warfare between the antagonists. Likewise, the following very short sketch, "No Man's Land," is devoted to illustrating such an obvious moral that one can't help resenting its didactic monomania.

The remaining half of the book is devoted to more palatable fare. The narrator of "A Dog Story" becomes involved in an animal-rights crusade against a cruel dog trainer, with initially amusing but in the end horrifyingly obsessive results. The protagonist of "Three Dreams" undergoes a series of hallucinatory experiences effectively described in a style reminiscent of Simenon's psychological novels. If all of *The Master of Strappado* were on this level, the book would be warmly recommended. As it stands, however, the dead weight of the first two stories pulls the collection down into the realm of the mediocre, although the promise of "Three Dreams" would certainly lead me at least to sample further. □

Northern Comfort, by Martin Avery, Oberon Press, 86 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 558 9) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 559 7).

By Daniel David Moses

EVERY PREFACES the four short stories in this short book with two quotes, one from 1984 and an anonymous one that advises us to forget about 1984 and worry about the Millennium. Such is the modern world Avery writes about, whether it is peopled by kids and dogs,

or nihilistic rock-star terrorists from cottage country, or prisoners and park wardens, or a scholar obsessively preparing for the end of the world.

Avery's style is colloquial and nervous, whether it is serving a straightforward narrative or an essay-like story structure. The confusion of emotions it provokes is just short of hysteria, and though this discomfort is mollified by black humour, Avery too often awkwardly goes for the grotesque and not for the gut ("a tangle of dogs and toboggans that would have given hemorrhoids to an Eskimo").

Still, his comic ideas can be revealing (for example, he looks at the prison system through a Monopoly-like board game called the Corrections Game: "Go To Jail, Do Not Pass Go, Do Not Collect \$200"), and when he lets his characters develop and interact, the effect can be exhilarating. Though this book is not a success, it is a promise. Once Martin Avery's comic skills mature, we may see his horribly funny vision clearly. □

Tender Only to One, by Richard Taylor, Oberon Press, 106 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 548 1) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 550 3).

By Robin Metcalfe

THE STORIES in Taylor's first collection are very short, some as brief as three pages, but that brevity can encompass a universe of daily experience and frustrated dreams. The graceful and evocative prose has an economy that approaches severity. "Bachelors," for example, captures two intertwined lives in nine short paragraphs, with a minimum of action.

The central metaphor is that of painting. The author executes these still lifes with sure, disciplined watercolour strokes. Mostly these are about people alone: old people in high-rise apartments ("Solitary Confinement"), artists writing letters to distant friends. Stories of ordinary people, typically bounded by the barren isolation of a Canadian winter, are interwoven with those of artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, set against the myth-inspiring summer landscapes of France and the South Seas.

But these lives of artists are not aloof or otherworldly. Art is no escape from aging and loneliness — merely one possible remedy for a universal malaise. Van Gogh and Gauguin appear repeatedly — suffering, half-mad, they articulate the human need that propels their art: "Because of what I lack I must record the lives and places of others." The same need is expressed by a housewife,

who had once hoped to write, recalling visits to the home of Claude Monet: "Perhaps it is too late for me to get it down now that everything else is out of the way. For I need to be remembered too."

Despite their treatment of death and disappointment, these stories evoke compassion rather than despair, sometimes attaining a transcendent affirmation. Love and sexuality, in their myriad forms, are always present, although handled with a delicate touch, more often suggested than stated. A steady focus on detail grounds these small fictions, and breathes life into the characters, making them wonderfully real. In each of these specific lives, someone is dealing with the same human dilemma, living "with whatever comforts his art and his dreams could afford." □

FOLKWAYS

Purple Ironweed: A Canadian Legacy of Tales and Legends, by Sylvia Raff, Vesta Publications, illustrated, 176 pages, \$12.50 paper (ISBN 0 919301 85 1).

By Daniel David Moses

THE STORIES in this collection, like purple ironweed, are indigenous to that coast of the Gulf of the St. Lawrence known as the North Shore. For at least 10 years and on four freighter voyages, Raff gathered stories from friends her father and brothers had made as fur traders in the region early in the century, as well as from local members of the clergy and of prominent families. "For years it has been my dream to set forth for you these living legends that record an era that is fast disappearing," she writes in the personal notes that, along with a brief history, introduce the main text of three sections, one each for the tales of the French and of the English, and one more for the tales and legends of the Indians.

The language of the text is always at least as old-fashioned as that of the sentence quoted above. The reader's first reaction is to check the copyright date. Is this a reprint of some documentary value? No. The second reaction is to consider that maybe this language is direct quotation. Is this the authenticity and style of the told tale in oral history? No. So one looks for potential in the material, as in, say, a good ghost story, a tall tale, an adventure. But why must every character be another awkward variation on "The Noble Pioneer"?

The reader by now is working so hard that a sentence that describes the life of

"The Indian" with "Morals were loose and polygamy was common" forces a final reaction: the conclusion that the author's old-fashioned vision and her use of cliché crush the life out of these legends. The book's illustrations and design are also dead. □

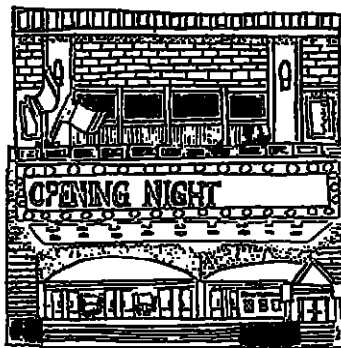
FOOD & DRINK

The Roman Cookery of Apicius, translated from the Latin by John Edwards, Hartley & Marks, 322 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88179 008 7).

By Paul Roberts

AS EDWARDS tells us in his concise and informative introduction, *The Roman Cookery of Apicius* is a compilation of the secrets of Roman and classical Greek cookery during the reigns of the Caesars. There were three gastrophiles bearing the name of Apicius over a 150-year period in Imperial Rome, and — beyond recording that the name was associated with the greatest and most hedonistically notorious of Roman writers on the culinary art — scholars have had little success in pin-pointing which one authored this manual.

The two manuscripts ascribed to Apicius are written in the Latin of the late fourth and early fifth century A.D. — a period of barbarian invasion and decline — and constitute more an attempt to record the glories of a dying era than to reflect contemporary conditions. What Edwards has done with his new translation is captivating and unique, making this book accessible to a far



larger audience than those just academically curious about Roman cuisine.

Beside the translated text he has placed modern recipes — with proper quantities and, where necessary, substitutions — that provide a close approximation of the original dishes. Now anyone wishing to duplicate, say, the glutton Trimalchio's feast from *Satyricon* can find expert guidance, although "Roast whole wild boar with dates, suckled by piglets made of cakes and stuffed with live thrushes" will

probably still cause a few minor problems. Exquisitely laid out and usefully illustrated, this delightful book provides a living glimpse into the lives and tastes of another world, educating the mind and the palate. The one recipe I have tried to date was a roaring success and I know I will be grateful to Edwards for his skill and scholarship for many years to come. ★

ON STAGE

The History of Prairie Theatre: The Development of a Theatre in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan 1833-1982, by E. Ross Stuart, Simon & Pierre, 320 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8892 4121 X).

By Mark Gerson

ANYONE WHO embarks on an undertaking with as much potential for frustration as a Canadian theatre history deserves praise regardless of the outcome. Records of half-forgotten plays, performers, and theatres are scattered, often muddled, and generally incomplete, where they survive at all. Some have left the country, and others remain hidden away in the boxes and trunks of the nation's attics and basements. Theatre historians spend much time rummaging through musty files, yellowed scrapbooks, and obscure family papers trying to recreate a theatrical past many have either refused to acknowledge or have dismissed as irrelevant. Not surprisingly, far too little has been published on a topic with a history spanning nearly four centuries.

Stuart's look at theatrical activity on the Prairies between 1833 and 1982 is therefore welcome. No aspect of the region's theatre heritage is neglected in this thorough and well-documented work. Besides the predictable look at the early days and the fairly recent development of a professional theatre, Stuart details the amateur and university theatre that came in between. Playwrights are also given their due.

Many readers will be surprised to learn that Saskatchewan had the country's first arts council, that "at the height of the [amateur theatre] movement there was more theatre in the prairies than in the rest of Canada," and that the country's first university drama departments were established out west, where "they are still among the largest and most active in the country."

Stuart's admitted emphasis on facts over anecdote and analysis is a pity, as is the unfortunate lack of illustrations. They rob the book of much of the drama

that is inherent in theatrical activity. Perhaps now that Stuart has laid the groundwork, someone else will come along to enliven the facts he has unearthed. □

THE PAST

The Automobile Saga of British Columbia 1864-1914, by G.W. Taylor, Morriss Publishing, 147 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919203 43 4).

By Brian Fawcett

DON'T BE put off at the title of this book. Even though it is about the early days of mechanized transportation in British Columbia, it makes fascinating reading. Not only is it impeccably researched and written, it is also first-rate historiography. It has as much to tell us about the early history of British Columbia as any of the more ambitious general histories that have come out in the past decade, and it does it without the usual horn-tooting and rhetoric.

The author, Geoffrey Taylor, is a retired journalist, accountant, and the author of three other books on B.C.'s early history. His opening sentence indicates that he understands how profound his subject is: "The growth of all past civilizations largely depended upon the type and means of transportation available." Even though he's obviously a car buff, he provides detailed histories of the early days of bicycling and public transit, the latter of which will leave B.C. residents wishing for the old days. But for all his evident love for his subject, he stays on track. He doesn't labour his point about the importance of transportation. In fact, he proves it so well he never has to repeat it.

The book, no doubt meant mainly for aficionados and libraries, deserves wider attention than it is likely to get. The photographs, more than eighty of them, are worth the price of admission by themselves. It is unfortunate that local historians like Taylor seem to be vanishing. With the changes that appear to be facing our cities, our need for this kind of record-keeping will grow. ☆

Mabel Bell: Alexander's Silent Partner, by Liliias M. Toward, Methuen, 220 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 98090 0).

By Maria Horvath

IN 1873 a young woman deaf since childhood went to Boston to study with a man using new methods to teach the deaf. He was Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, and his

young student, Mabel Hubbard, eventually became his wife. The substance of Mabel's life-story is told through the letters she wrote to her husband, family, and friends. What emerges is a moving account of the Bells' 45 years together. Their marriage was a loving union of two people each as remarkable and loyal as the other.

Alexander Graham Bell's achievements are well known; Liliias Toward here provides a full chronicle of Mabel's. Drawing upon her early childhood memory of sound and her skill at lip-reading, Mabel led a full life. Many who met her never knew that she was deaf. Her energy was seemingly boundless. As the wife of a famous inventor, she often entertained large groups of people. She encouraged and helped finance her husband's many business ventures. She assisted his experiments on hydrofoil boats and flying machines, and she worked with him in his studies of sheep genetics.

Toward goes beneath the simple facts of Mabel's life to draw a clear picture of her personality. She was frank, honest, able to admit serious faults. Most of all, she was charming and intelligent. Although this is a biography of Mrs. Bell, perhaps the author should have taken more into account the inevitable curiosity that readers would have about Mr. Bell and told us more about Alexander's reactions to the major events in Mabel's life. But this is a minor fault in an engaging, well-written book. □

POETRY

Country You Can't Walk In, by M.T. Kelly, Penumbra Press, 43 pages, \$6.95 paper. (ISBN 0 929806 56 2).

By Mark Gerson

THESE POEMS can make a reader wince. Civilized man's corruption of nature is hardly a new theme, but Kelly identifies with the north so deeply and feels with such painful keenness its destruction by men who are stupidly casual in their evil that he gives it a new urgency. This is a re-issue of a 1979 edition with seven new poems, and it's no joke to say that after reading it one wants to rush out and protest acid rain or leg-hold traps.

In the best poems, such as "Dance Macabre" and "Litany," descriptions of poisoned or injured animals sear the imagination. Kelly doesn't try to get inside an animal's head but acts as a human witness to another unhuman but vibrantly alive thing. Here is the poet bashing in the head of a hawk that has been hit by a car but hasn't yet been given the mercy of death:

The eye pushes out, the bird covers its head with a wing, a gesture so medieval, beautiful: I can't breathe.

Christine is another animal altogether, the kind of woman usually labelled a princess ("Disappointment"). Christine practises indifference but secretly "hopes you're watching." If this is what civilization offers, no wonder Kelly heads for the woods. There are some trite moments or just silly ones, such as the poet viewing the flat land around Regina and wishing to see lions, and occasionally Kelly's images are so powerful that his own expression of grief is redundant. Although the best poems use a quirky and effective juxtaposition, others seem merely disjointed. But the small handful of fine poems is enough; Penumbra is right in bringing back Kelly country. □

Veiled Countries/Lives, by Marie-Claire Blais, translated from the French by Michael Harris, Véhicule Press, 181 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 54 07).

By Paul Stuewe

THESE TWO BOOKS of poetry, originally published in Quebec in the 1960s, are in this single-volume, bilingual format a happy addition to the English-language corpus of Blais's work. Both are powerful, evocative, often exhilarating collections that resonate with mature poetic intelligence — which is to say that they are exactly what one would expect from a venture into verse by the author of *Mad Shadows* and *St. Lawrence Blues*.

Harris's translations are very accurate with regard to sense, but sometimes cavalier in terms of form. The poems of *Veiled Countries*, in particular, are often broken up into staccato patterns that differ radically from the longer lines of the originals. Since this is a bilingual edition, one can with a little effort rearrange the words into the forms Blais chose, although why Harris elected to make such alterations in *Veiled Countries* — while largely refraining from them in *Lives* — remains a mystery in the absence of any explanation of his methods of work.

But these idiosyncrasies do not seriously interfere with appreciating Blais's facility in moving between the particular and the abstract, the mundane and the mythic, as she delineates a state of mind in which intensity of focus charges language with auras of multiple meaning. Although her work has points of contact with magic realism, most notably in the way it treats natural phenomena as foreground rather than background elements, Blais's absorption

in the socio-sexual aspects of being a woman gives her writing real-world pegs denied to those who see literature as a process of playful fabulation. These poems are charged with the commitments and enthusiasms of an author involved in life at all levels, and they continually surprise us with their graceful transitions from personal history to social issues to matters of cosmic import. This is a marvellous book from a wonderful writer, and we owe a big *merci* to Véhicule for making it available to us. ★

POLITICS & POLITICIANS

Secular Socialists: The CCF/NDP in Ontario, a Biography, by J.T. Morley, McGill-Queen's University Press, 264 pages, \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0 7735 0389 7) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 7735 0390 0).

By Brad Adams

AT ITS BEST, *Secular Socialists* is a clear and wide-ranging history of the organization, policies, and leadership of the CCF/NDP in Ontario from 1934 to the 1970s. As such, it is a welcome addition from neglected Ontario to the study of socialism and provincial politics in Canada. Morley is especially effective in his treatment of the intellectual roots of the party and again in his analysis of the lasting grip of the "socialist generation" of the 1940s on organization and leadership.

He reports as well that Ontario's social democratic party has remained true to its past and has not sold its soul for illusive electoral gain: even in economic matters, its founding principles were neither so radical nor later incarnations as moderate as disenfranchised radicals would have it. Morley writes from the broad middle of the party, and brings to his subject considerable personal insight, innovative research, and interviews with past party leaders and officials.

But the book suffers when Morley doffs his historian's apron and dons the immaculate robes of the political scientist. Finding many current theories unhelpful, he applies to the past and present of the Ontario NDP Erik Erikson's notion of individual maturation as a process of "secularization" — whence the title of the book. This is, as an analogy, not without insight and reward. But frequent bouts with epidemic and cumbersome theorizing in *Secular Socialists* will defeat all but the most professional of his audience, and jade those who might otherwise admire Morley's achievement and craftsmanship as an historian. □

SOCIETY

1984 and After, edited by Marsha Hewitt and Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos, Black Rose Books, 234 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920057 28 4) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 920057 29 2).

By Daniel David Moses

IN 1982, as if at last taking the advice of that old graffito "Anarchists Unite!," a group of scholars interested in anarchist and libertarian social research founded the Anarchos Institute. This collection of essays on the subjects of the novel and the year 1984 is its first publication, an effort to affirm that Orwell's contributions to humanity amount to more than being a hot property for 12 months.

Eleven writers in areas such as religious studies, linguistics, sociology, and history have contributed perspectives on his dystopia and on authoritarian tendencies in the body politic. These essays use Orwell's ideas to shed light on systemic problems as obvious as the political use of prisons and hospitals, forced education, and the "arm's-length relationship" between the arts and the state. They also examine more organic concerns such as the tendency of governments as now structured to become totalitarian and the deterioration of consciousness and freedom that accompanies the deterioration in the use of language.

Though a few of these writers themselves at moments exhibit some deterioration in their use of language, slipping either into jargon or into a tone that is itself either pompously or whinily authoritarian (making judgements like "appalling" or "bad taste"), the essays are usually readable, revealing and, though disturbing, an encouragement. More books like this could give Anarchy a good name. The better known names on its cover include Noam Chomsky and George Woodcock. □

SPORTS & ADVENTURE

Of Mats and Men: The Story of Canadian Amateur and Olympic Wrestling from 1600 to 1984, by Glynn A. Leyshon, Sports Dynamics, 148 pages, \$20.95 cloth (ISBN 0 9691619 1 3).

By Brian Fawcett

WRESTLING MAY BE the human species' initial and most enduring form of sport. Leyshon, a long-time Canadian wrestling coach, the coach of Canada's 1980 Olympic wrestling team, has taken pains to establish its Canadian history from before European settlement of the conti-

nent to its current status as one of the country's more successful amateur sports. Canadian wrestlers have won more than their share of medals in Pan-Am and Commonwealth Games competition, along with eight Olympic medalists — most recently Bob Moïlle, who gained world recognition by winning a silver medal at the 1984 Olympics despite having had a serious back operation a month before the games.

Leyshon's coverage of the sport is extensive, but on balance rather uninformative to those who are not already conversant in the intricacies of the sport, or who may be confused about the difference between amateur wrestling and the variety most Canadians see — the professional behemoths who dress up in costumes and throw one another around a boxing ring like acrobats. His approach is alternately too academic and too quickly contemptuous of those who do not follow the rules — be they "primitive" Inuits seeking amusement during the arctic winter or today's entertainment-oriented professionals.

But Leyshon's attitude may be excusable in one sense. Demonstrably, this is Canadian wrestling's Golden Age, and the author, who has played a substantial role in bringing it about, might be forgiven his pride. His book, with its extensive records, will bring a pleasant hour or two to anyone involved in the amateur sport. □

Willie De Wit: The Lord of the Ring, by Michael Beaudoin, Avon Books, 223 pages, \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 89485 8).

By Brian Fawcett


CANADIAN OLYMPIC silver medal winner Willie De Wit recently turned professional, and his new management team is almost certainly behind this book. It is a 200-page press release aimed at exciting boxing fans in search of the latest Great White Hope, and if you can believe what you read here, De Wit is a sure bet for the heavyweight crown once he sharpens up one or two deficiencies in his near-perfect skills by beating up on a few not-very-threatening opponents.

Boxing is supposed to be in a lot of trouble, and if this is the level at which it approaches its public, no wonder. Life just isn't the way it is depicted in this silly book, and no one with a full deck will believe that a pro boxing title can be won by right-mindedness and a few slogans. Willie De Wit may be a nice guy and a fine Canadian, and he may even turn out to be a real contender, but he isn't making much of a start. His first bouts were turkeys and so, unfortunately, is this book. One hopes he will be better than it is. □

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War and peace

Foreshadowed in her childhood fantasies, Charlotte Brontë's famous grown-up writing began with a set of toy soldiers

By James Feaney

The *Poems of Charlotte Brontë*, edited by Tom Winnifrith, Oxford, 429 pages, \$48.75 cloth (ISBN 0 631 12563 9).

The *Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, by Christine Alexander, Oxford, 329 pages, \$62.50 cloth (ISBN 0 631 12991 X).

A BRONTË ADDICT since the age of 15, when with the profits from selling potatoes at the Stratford market I walked across Market Square and bought *Wuthering Heights* for 75 cents at the drug store, I would now like to share with you my enthusiasm for these two recent Brontë books.

Tom Winnifrith brings together more Charlotte Brontë poems that I recollect ever seeing together before, freshly edited and checked, wherever possible, with their parent manuscripts. I wish, though, that he had restrained the writer of his dust-jacket from saying: "Charlotte emerges as a poet of uneven quality, perhaps the worst poet of her talented family." As a Brontë addict, I find everything they wrote fascinating, and I also reject any notion of setting them against each other in contests they never knew they were in.

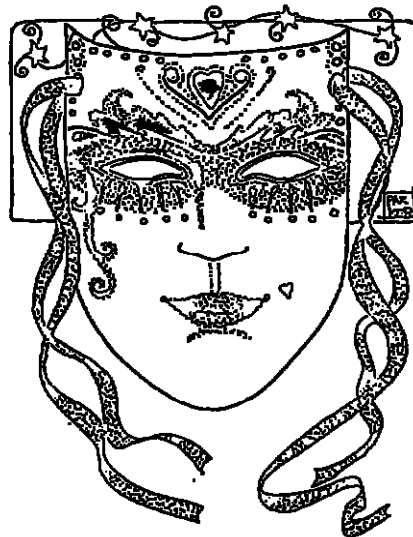
As a matter of fact, of the 139 poems Winnifrith reprints, one quarter, by my count, have some flashing lines, or some impressive intensities: "The landscape wears a mean and phaeton hue," or "The coral for the willow; for the turf the tossing sea." Charlotte is also excellent at mermaids who drag down false lovers to suicide, as well as Titaness figures who speak from the night sky ("Her dusky tresses, dark as night, / With crescent moon and stars were bound") to a votary whose thoughts have been "watered by [a] harp-like blast" of the same night wind as wanders through many scenes in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.

If in the other poems the gramophone needle doesn't quite seem to touch the record, I argue that most of these were intended only as pace-changers in the prose saga of Angria that Charlotte spent the first half of her life creating, and this brings us to Christine Alex-

ander's book, which for the first time accurately describes and organizes the vast, huge sagas of Glass Town and Angria, imaginary kingdoms in Africa where Charlotte and her brother Branwell spiritually lived from childhood till well into their 20s.

Since out of this fictional crucible came the famous grown-up works (Emily and Anne early branched off into a saga about an island kingdom in the Pacific called Gondal), this kind of meticulously researched and organized book is long overdue. For it provides very useful and thought-provoking family trees for many motifs and characters in the later, more public achievements.

Not just to an addict surely is it fascinating — and what literary experience is all about — to discover the Jane Eyre-Rochester situation occurring long before in Angria, centring on the story



of a young teacher variously named Miss West or Elizabeth Hastings. And it occurs in Angria complete with grave-stone inscribed "Resurgam" and the proposal by a young nobleman that, since he cannot marry a mere teacher, could she instead become his mistress? In *Jane Eyre*, of course, "Resurgam" is the epitaph of Helen Burns, the saintly school friend of the heroine; in Elizabeth Hastings's story it is written over

the grave of Rosamund Wellesley, a young woman seduced and abandoned by Zamorna, who is the king of Charlotte's Angria and, despite all this, one of her most beloved creations.

How did the Brontë children get started at creating a unique fictional world, a Tolkien *Fellowship* long before its time? Readers of Alexander's book will find that early in June, 1826, "Mr. Brontë attended a Clerical Conference in Leeds, returning home that evening laden with gifts for his children. He bought a set of ninepins for Charlotte, a toy village for Emily, a dancing doll for Anne and a set of toy soldiers for Branwell. None of the children appears to have been very interested in the ninepins, the toy village or the dancing doll, but the 12 toy soldiers produced an immediate reaction. Both Charlotte and Branwell record this famous event, and we can see from Charlotte's account, in *The History of the Year*, that she began this game with enthusiasm:

When papa came home it was night and we were in bed, so next morning Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed and I snatched up one and exclaimed, 'this is the Duke of Wellington! it shall be mine!' When I said this Emily likewise took one and said it should be hers. . . . Mine was the prettiest of the whole and perfect in every part. Emily's was a grave-looking fellow: we called him Gravey. Anne's was a queer little thing very much like herself. He was called Waiting Boy. Branwell chose Bonaparte.

The choice of characters by the children is significant. Charlotte and Branwell chose the two greatest historical antagonists of the age."

What happens next, to simplify, is that Charlotte and Branwell never stopped writing stories about the toy soldiers, whose first adventure was the founding of a settlement called Glass Town on the west coast of Africa. As the years went by, Wellington, in effect, turned into a young Byronic charismatic called Zamorna whom Charlotte once called a "demi-god in furs." After putting down a rebellion of natives led by his foster-brother Quashia, Zamorna

asks as his reward to have a kingdom all his own called Angria.

Branwell's Napoleon goes through even more changes: into Rogue, into a sadistic tormentor of children called Pigtail, seven feet high, but eventually settling down into a demonic nobleman known as the Earl of Northangerland, Alexander Percy. Percy, older than Zamorna, both loves and hates his younger friend, leads many rebellions against both Wellington and Zamorna, and eventually, in retaliation for Zamorna's causing the death of his own daughter, Maria Percy, has Quashia put out the eyes of Zamorna's illegitimate son, Ernest Fitzarthur.

To my mind that's part of a pattern Christine Alexander could have stressed just a shade more, but — although she does with great skill manage to imply and suggest what Branwell is doing with the Angrians — her book is, after all, a study of the youthful writings of Charlotte. What the many addicts now need is a study of Branwell's equally huge contribution to the saga. Alexander will, next evidently, bring forth an edition of Charlotte's juvenilia for which this study is introductory. How long will we have to wait before we can put together what all started with some toy soldiers?

And does it matter? It matters to me because I'm working with the composer John Beckwith on a two-part musical drama based on the Angria story. It may matter to others because, from my own reading of the transcripts kept at the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, I conclude that the end result of the toy soldiers was really an epic on the scale of *War and Peace*, an epic that indirectly concerns the cataclysmic changes Europe went through after the French Revolution — changes that have still not quite settled down. If so, I feel that the Legends of Angria have the right to be moved from the background of Brontë studies to the foreground.

For one thing, they are as fascinating and infuriating as Abel Gance's masterpiece, the silent film epic *Napoleon*, a classic recently revived after being pieced together in just the same patient and brilliant way Alexander has integrated the Charlotte Brontë manuscripts scattered so far and wide. Gance's film, once as dismembered, mixes camp humour, wit, sadism, poetry, politics, love in much the same disconcerting way Branwell and Charlotte do. It seems the only way to describe the strange and exasperating ambience of the "two greatest historical antagonists of the age."

Charlotte, however, outreaches Gance at one point when somewhere in the transcripts I read at Haworth she remarks that both the great leaders, both

Zamorna and Percy, are really charismatic "humbugs." Also, where Gance avoids the sticky parts in which the French Prometheus turns into a Jupiter tyrant, Branwell and Charlotte insist on taking their heroes on into disillusion, middle-aged spread, and well-deserved decrepitude. Still, Charlotte's Zamorna cannot resist a nymphet, in this case a love child of Percy's known as Caroline Vernon.

As I recall, it is Branwell who after emphasizing for years the homoerotic attraction between the two heroes finally shows Zamorna and Percy almost meeting once more at a deserted manor house — two extinct volcanoes — then deciding not to see each other again after all. Could these grisly psychological nuances actually represent the truth behind the social upheavals that have wracked us for the last two centuries? It would take children, no doubt, to spot it.

Winnifrith writes that "it is now so rare to find the young interested in poetry. . . ." I can't think of any more magnetic way to get them interested than to show them some of the vistas opened up by both the Brontë books. For the young Branwell has even, with great forethought, provided a friend of Quashia's called "Boy Jack." □

REVIEW

Under the vacuum

By Volker Strunk

A Portrait of Angelica/A Letter to My Son, by George Ryga, Turnstone Press, 118 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88801 086 9).

IN ITS WINTER, 1982, issue *Canadian Literature* published George Ryga's "The Village of Melons: Impressions of a Canadian Author in Mexico," a kind of coda to *Portrait of Angelica* that could have served well as the play's introduction. The introduction we get instead shows Ryga in his customary posture as public crusader, full of righteous indignation on the subject of a populist theatre in Canada. It bristles with such hair-raising pronouncements as "We must concern ourselves with strengthening the moral fibre of our various peoples" and the reflection (which would have done Goebbels proud) that "it is more important to

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have people with a positive and healthy regard and pride in their history and themselves."

As the introduction we don't get, "The Village of Melons" is a very moving if impressionistic account of Ryga's Mexican sojourn. Trying to avoid the "consumer fascination with this ancient world" — which he finds for instance in Malcolm Lowry — Ryga stares with horror into the world beyond the border-town brothels, and chronicles the misery of the peasants, their lives of drudgery ameliorated only by a spirit of generosity and humour. By staying in Mexico for a while Ryga has, I suppose, been "approaching nearer and nearer to the abyss of revelation about what it is to be human in a universal sense," though he is certainly no Ancient Mariner button-holing his listeners. In fact he is not trying to unload his story at all: his rhetorical strategy is to give his account the form of a prospectus of the kind by which "You will discover . . ."; "You will experience . . ."; "You may, if you are fortunate, stumble into a primordial darkness of spirit . . ." and so on. This strategy, which diminishes the "I" at the same time as it gives the voice a prophetic quality, implies that the experience cannot be rendered as a "story." I suppose this is what Ryga means when he says that the "deepening mosaic" of his observations "defied the sequence of time and chronology."

Ryga's decision to dramatize his doubts about form results in a dreadful muddle of a play. *Portrait*, like Ryga's earlier plays, shows the influence of expressionist principles, though perhaps his use of a quasi-epic narrator and such features as slides and sound effects are not so much a bow to Piscator as to the U.S. playwrights of the 1930s, with whom he shares a faint gesture towards social commitment as well as, alas, a distressing naïveté.

The "portrait" of the play's title has for its creator a young Canadian expatriate, Danny Baker, who in the end gets swallowed up by it. As Ryga's stage directions stipulate, the final tableau must have the effect of a three-dimensional holiday photograph in colour. The photograph, with its suggestions of a picture postcard, certifies the expatriate's experience; what renders the tableau ironic is that Danny had come to the Mexican town of Angelica not as a writer of postcards but of a book, and that the writing of a book remains a desideratum. For most of the action we see him writing letters to his mother in Canada (who, incidentally, foots the bill of her son's journey). The letters are never sent off. When he scatters his papers it testifies that the world of Angelica cannot be contained in letters

or books: there are too many contradictions.

Because Danny's views of things are not always uncontested — the cuckolded town cop José acts at times as a foil to Danny's grosser imbecilities — one is led to expect something more substantial than the vacuous results Ryga offers. The play's ambiguities cry out for a dialectical structuring, but Ryga seems content to leave the audience with a welter of disconnected truths to which, presumably, we are invited to give cohesion. Or are we? Are we not, rather, invited to accept that no conclusions can be had?

The play's suggestion that Angelica is a place that refuses to be "unified" — for instance by history — would no doubt be more acceptable if it weren't put in the mouth of an escapee from the prospect of having to take over the family's shoe-selling business. Ryga's hero is not much committed to anything, and rigour obtains neither in his woolly diatribes against capitalist enterprise nor in his sympathy for the third-world pure and poor.

What the play lacks most is the vision of a protagonist who would *live* the absence of insight in a manner less conspicuously determined by the author's own helplessness. Danny, Ryga's stumblebum of a protagonist, is an unlikely candidate for exposing the vanities of intellectual inquiry. And José, Danny's ostensible antagonist?



The implications of the fact that his uncle was "the first Marxist mayor of this town" are never broached; his chief role seems to lie in purveying such folksy wisdoms as "That which is real never changes." When an old peasant woman says "We are the people . . . we will endure," José seconds, for Danny's benefit, "Even when we fail to live up to your expectations. . . . Can you forgive us for that?"

That's fine, I suppose, as an injunction against the meddling of "half-lingos" like Danny in the affairs of other countries. But to put this injunc-

tion in the mouth of a Marxist (by affiliation) is a bit careless, and results in the homogenization of attitudes that one feels ought not to be homogenized. Judged with the yardstick of the Brechtian strategy of showing the world as alterable, Ryga's *Portrait* is a muddle.

Though Ryga, by his choice of title, has not promised anything more substantial than, well, a "portrait" of which one had better not demand an ideological prospectus of a model situation, the play does nevertheless deal with such issues as history, class, and property. These matters deserve more focused attention than Ryga provides in a play that all too readily accommodates itself ideologically and dramaturgically to José's dictum that it is illegitimate to judge or condemn one culture by the standards of another, let alone by universal standards. In the lingo of political science this is known as the "incommensurability thesis": a state of affairs logically invulnerable from outside and perpetually self-confirming from within.

A Letter to My Son, the second play in this collection, has as its theme the fears and self-doubts surrounding an old Ukrainian-Canadian farmer's attempts at drafting a letter to his estranged son. As Old Lepa evokes memories of his wayward offspring and a host of other figures who have peopled his past, they duly materialize on the stage. In a series of flashbacks in which the past gets re-enacted, the picture emerges of Old Lepa as the survivor of many hardships in the Timmins mines and on the Prairies. His reliving of crucial incidents from the past takes the form of a stock-taking if not a confessional: the man we see grappling with his small successes, his thwarted hopes, and little defeats of life is about to die.

As far as the government of Canada is concerned, he's already dead. Or that is what the social worker tells Old Lepa when he can't produce "a recorded date on which you were alive after your presumed death in the Timmins mine." Lepa's confrontation with the representative of federal officialdom provides some of the play's lighter moments. The method is of course transparent: what more convenient scaffold to hang one's exposition on than a social worker who says "It would help if you could tell me the names and whereabouts of surviving friends you once had," who wants to go "Back to the beginning," and inquires "what happened to your landing card?"

Ryga's encomium to a vanishing breed ends with his hero's defiant laughter: once a fighter, always a fighter. The author's sympathy for his subject is, alas, sabotaged by a spend-thrift amount of cloying sentimentality, a pull toward stereotype that only an

ironic dramaturgy could have redeemed. While one could wish that Ryga's language were less self-consciously "poetic," the real problem seems to lie elsewhere, in the tautological bathos foisted on an audience by lighting and sound effects that reveal Ryga's fondness for melodrama. It is not enough for Ryga to emphasize a strong speech gesturally ("Old Lepa throws up his hands"); he must call for "Warrior music" that "begins and builds softly," and let every nuance already quite sufficiently conveyed linguistically discharge itself totally. □

REVIEW

Hollow laughter

By Volker Strunk

Three Plays by Tina Howe, Avon Books, 221 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 380 05001 X).

"THE POWER of defining art is vested in art history, whose physical embodiment is the museum," Harold Rosenberg once said. "Critical theories notwithstanding, we know what is art by the place where we find it." Tina Howe's *Museum* will be a very funny play to an audience for which Rosenberg's message is news. To a large degree her spoof on contemporary art and its culture vultures appears indebted to Rosenberg, though the tone of her thinly veiled thesis-play on the foibles of the howling philistines who visit her museum ("pretty soon there won't be any fucking culture left") smacks suspiciously of the hatchet-jobs Tom Wolfe has recently performed on modern art and architecture.

Howe goes out of her way to demonstrate that hatchet-jobs can be fun — in a sort of middle-brow fashion predicated on the assumption that the clues to a culture are to be found in its manners and mannerisms. One of the dramaturgical liabilities inherent in indiscriminately taking the piss out of the boors is that it places the author securely on the side of Great Art. As a result, Howe's Kulchur-watch appears a trifle self-indulgent. Farce or not, one wonders why she should feel compelled to mow down only straw men.

The play's tone is set when a voice announces over the loudspeaker that Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* has been attacked by a gunman. But Howe's museum ("second floor gallery of a major American museum of modern art on the final day of a group show, titled

'The Broken Silence' ") isn't the Uffizi, and the exhibits — through which the audience is encouraged to walk before the play begins — aren't Botticellis. Much of modern art, to paraphrase Rosenberg, has the privilege of being commonplace and boring, but it has neither the right nor the power to coerce our interests by pretending to participate in a grandeur it does not possess. This puts Howe's doddering museum guard in a fix; for the museum in its function as a levelling institution cannot, of course, discriminate between a Botticelli and modern works conceived as rhetorical gestures.

Much of one's interest is dissipated in a series of vignettes never amounting to more than camp whimsy. The reason lies partly in Howe's cast of thousands — well, 38. The effect of their mischief gets diluted beyond recognition. For example, when one visitor sneaks up to an exhibit and scribbles on a corner of the canvas, his prank turns out to be gratuitous, since no one notices. Howe is a very clever writer, but her vandal's gesture is never allowed to make a larger impact. Representational art rarely tolerates accident or mutilation: the easiest way to destroy a portrait, Chekhov once remarked, is by cutting a hole in it where a nose had been and substituting

an actual nose. We know that in this respect, say, an abstract expressionist canvas "tolerates" what a Rembrandt couldn't. This cannot be news to Howe, who sadly passes up the temptation to develop the irony that her scribbling prankster "mutilates" a white canvas.

That the play itself tolerates such minor episodes is part of its problematics: it relegates it to the sphere in which works of art, including dramatic artifacts, become mere gestures, polemical acts whose rampant whimsy subverts more serious implications. But let's not respond to a joke with a sermon.

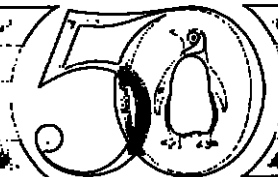
There is no hankering after profundity in *The Art of Dining*. True to its title, the play laudably attempts to reverse one's all-too-true impression that in comparison to its hospitality to boozers, the stage from Shakespeare to Pinter has been inhospitable to gluttons. On-stage, an actor may be allowed the occasional morsel but, for obvious reasons, the place to attack the roast beef is off-stage. For a playwright intent on showing that "truth will out," drinking is a time-honoured convenient short-hand. The fog in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* is an appropriate correlative to the characters' increasing inebriation. I haven't heard of plays in

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which pea soup or mashed potatoes have done the trick.

In *The Art of Dining*, Howe splendidly succeeds in creating a harmless action both sad and funny in its depiction of the attempts of a young ex-lawyer and his wife to run a snazzy restaurant in their living-room. Unfortunately, the man of law turned maître d' is pathologically incapable of taking his fingers out of the pot, slurping down the Hollandaise before his spouse and mistress of the oven range has a chance to dish it out.

Having worked in kitchens, I take a perverse delight in the play's realism, which goes so far as stipulating in the stage directions that "Ellen has planted a decoy pan of lemon yoghurt for Cal to drink [instead of the Hollandaise] so the actor won't die of heartburn." Howe shows considerable talent and wit in the writing of small scenes that scrutinize the foibles of the food faddists going ga-ga over Poulet Bonne Femme and Sole Florentine. But on the whole — and in spite of its ingenuity with respect to "real" salmon and "real" sauces — the play barely disguises its roots in the play-writing workshop. Dramaturgically, *The Art of Dining* is all fish and chips.

Painting Churches, the chef-d'oeuvre of this collection, is a sturdier play. Its opening scene is hilarious to a fault, but just as one suspects the dull thud of farcical routine to assert itself, Howe turns the action around and reveals that at the bottom of her desk drawer marked "easy chuckles" there lurks more serious business.

The play depicts the attempts of Margaret Church to do a portrait of her parents, the more than slightly daft New England poet Gardner Church and his wife Fanny. "Mags," in her 30s, teaches art in New York and paints portraits. "No one's doing portraits these days. They're considered passé. I'm so out of it, I'm considered in." It transpires that a lot of things are on the verge of becoming passé. By way of such lines as "We're under a time limit," the old Churches' preparations for their imminent move to their retirement place in Cape Cod accrete symbolic value. "I have some wonderful news . . . amazing news," says Mags as she is about to divulge that she's been given a one-woman show in New York: "You'll die! Just fall over into the packing cartons and die!"

The numerous references to death and dying give the daughter's homecoming the status of a "last call." Howe is a good wordsmith, and her linguistic versatility combined with a knack for theatrical antics almost makes us forget that we are watching an analytical drama intent on unravelling the complexities in

the relationship between successful artistic parent and artistic-yet-insecure child.

Much of the surface hilarity derives from the resolute refusal of the rebellious (protestant) daughter's progenitors — the pillars (or shall we say spires?) of New England high society with its insistence on catholic taste — to be "done," painted. "Do us. . . . What are you talking about? [. . .] While we're trying to move?" There's no thought of moving gently into that good night on the part of Fanny and Gardner Church, who are too busy to sit still for a portrait that would fix them for posterity. Under the threat of their daughter's brush, they revert to such antics as posturing as Grant Wood's couple in *American Gothic*, and the miming of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, with Gardner lying across Fanny's lap as the dead Christ.

The trajectories of the wayward daughter and the staid artist-father gone ga-ga (Mum, it turns out, is just *playing* crazy) are bound to meet. My reservation about Howe's play is that she translates its linguistic pandemonium of puns into stage action rather too well, too symmetrically to convince one that the warehouse of her linguistic and theatrical gimmicks serve some larger intellectual purpose. □

REVIEW

Through a glass brightly

By John Oughton

Private Realms of Light, edited by Lilly Koltun, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, illustrated, 336 pages, \$50.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88902 744 7).

A LOYALIST tombstone marked the critical point in my photographic career. Previously, I had been content with my membership in the legion of Kodak plastic-camera owners, specializing in tourist and family shots distinguished only by inadvertent special effects: heads and arms lost to cropping, the accidental double exposure, the vague invading thumb, the background flagpole rising out of a friend's brushcut like a unicorn's horn.

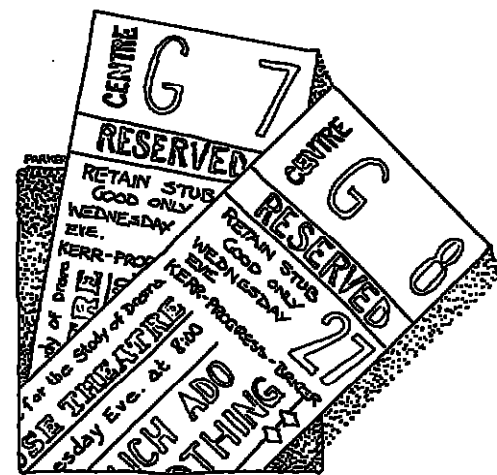
But one sunny morning in St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea, an 1827 tombstone in the little Loyalist graveyard I walked past every morning suddenly stopped me. Against the grey backdrop of its weather-beaten tree-of-life carving, a monarch butterfly and several

lichens made a dramatic colour composition. I ran back to the house for the battered twin-lens Rolleicord camera my father, an amateur photographer of long standing, had lent me.

The colour slide I produced and proudly entered in an amateur contest attracted only the judge's carping comment, "Can't tell whether the butterfly or the stone is the subject here," but no matter. I was hooked. More and more of the world around me suddenly gained a new meaning through the square ground glass of my view-finder. I began to find myself looking at nature for its photographic potential, not its own charms.

That obsession is celebrated in *Private Realms of Light*, a homage to Canadian amateur photographers who were active up to 1940. Seldom have amateurs of any art been accorded such a thoroughly researched and elegant tribute as this. These photographers are amateurs not in the pejorative sense but in the original one; this book (based on the exhibition of the same name by the National Photography Collection of the Public Archives of Canada) contains, the editor says, work "done 'for the love of it' with no eye for a commercial use." The members of the project decided to concentrate on a few individuals who played important roles in the advancement of photography and the amateur photo culture of clubs and salons.

The collection fills a previously invisible gap in the recording of our cultural fabric. The work of most amateur lensmen, however talented and technically proficient they are, tends to be known only to their peers who read photo magazines and attend exhibitions. It is



with justifiable pride that Lilly Koltun writes in her preface: "It is seldom that researchers discover a rich and unknown field of study. When they do, the zeal to explore it is matched only by an enthusiasm to communicate it to others."

Our history of amateur photography is also revealed to be longer than one would suspect. The first Canadian amateur, Joly de Lotbinière, got his hands on a daguerrotype camera just months after its invention in 1839, and went off to Egypt to photograph the ruins. Since then, many of his successors have concentrated on things closer to home: their own families, Canadian landscapes, and the flotsam and jetsam of domestic life. For images of how Canada and Canadians once looked, *Private Realms* is an invaluable storehouse.

Some of these photos — Alexander Henderson's landscapes, Richard Roche's photographs of ships and West Coast Indians, Henry Joseph Woodside's Klondike views — have already

been widely reproduced. But most have long been hidden in family or museum collections. They are reproduced here in warm duotone. There are to my eye some great discoveries — Harold Kells's dated but still powerful nude studies, Leslie Saunder's soft and sensual work, Clifford Johnston's powerful abstractions of traffic and ships, Johan Helder's magnificent Brooklyn Bridge, Geraldine Moodie's unpretentious portraits of Inuit.

The roughly chronological organization of the book shows that Canadian amateurs generally followed international trends. Photographic fashion began with delight in the detail obtainable with the new process, shifted to the impressionistic neo-painterly look of the Pictorialists, and returned in the 1920s

to the super-realism of the f64 group. However, many Canadian amateurs were ahead of their professional peers in trying new things, whether colour photography or the 35-mm camera. A collection of colour images using such forgotten processes as Omnicolor and Autochrome, ends with a carbonyl print of a woman in yellow sunglasses that could grace a New Wave album cover today.

The documentation, design, and production of the book confirm that it, like amateur photography, is a labour of love. It rates among the best of the gift books produced entirely in Canada that I have seen, and is a fitting testimonial to what one reporter called the "knights and ladies of the Kodak" who ventured forth to record our nation with no thought of financial reward. □

FEATURE REVIEW

The quirk quotient

With the death of Glenn Gould we lost not only a fine musician but also an essayist of wit, daring, energy, and elegance

By E.W. Powe

The Glenn Gould Reader, edited by Tim Page, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 476 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 080 0).

Conversations with Glenn Gould, by Jonathan Cott, Little, Brown & Co. (McClelland & Stewart), 160 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 316 15776 7).

WHEN GLENN GOULD died, on Oct. 14, 1982, his articles, reviews, liner-notes, conversations, self-interviews and polemics, were uncollected, scattered in magazines, reviews, and newspapers. I had kept over the years a small clipping file of Gould's public literary musings; they were random, out of order, seemingly disconnected in the variety of styles and voices Gould employed to attract or repulse his fans and critics.

Even in this haphazard form, Gould's written output had something powerful and real about it that made me hunger for more. And then there was Gould himself: the solitary outlaw of St. Clair Avenue. I had grown up watching him and listening to him on CBC-TV playing and explaining (and endlessly talking about) Bach and Scriabin and Strauss (Richard). His intense articulate expressions of ideas, his idiosyncratic opinions, even his appearance — with his sweaters buttoned up in a dishevelled fashion, his peculiar personae, like Ted Sloss, the New York City cab driver (doing Marlon Brando, doing James Dean),

and Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite, "the Dean of British Conductors" — made him, for me, irresistibly interesting.

Legends abound: Gould appearing at all hours of the night at 24-hour coffee and doughnut shops (I imagined a scenario: Gould in scarf, gloves, overcoat; it is July, and steamy and hot; the night people sulking over thick coffee and doughnuts that taste like sugared paper; and one of the premier interpreters of Bach rambling on about tape-edits, Wagner, and the writings of Hermann Hesse); Gould driving his car through the northland, always in the dark, over bumpy roads, gloved hands sensuously attached to the steering wheel so that he could "feel the vibrations"; Gould singing Mahler *lieder* to the giraffes at Toronto's Metro Zoo; his love for the suburbs, for Holiday Inns, for radios and televisions; Gould driving his motorboat in circles on the lake near his cottage to scare away all the fishermen; Gould's controversial refusal to appear on the public performing stage.

And then the irony of his recording career: he began in 1955 with a firm, fast version of *The Goldberg Variations*, and his career was completed with a second, slower, more meditative interpretation of the same music in 1982. The patterns seem planned; but Gould was a great believer in order and balance and clarity, in the Great Bass, or line, of music and thought. *Ratio*-nality, McLuhan called this. Glenn Gould was the rarest of

things: a serious artist. His life assumes the structure of variations, of themes stated, enlarged, countered by related times, developed, expanded and then, mysteriously, resolved.

Now comes *The Glenn Gould Reader* and *Conversations with Glenn Gould*. Previous contact with Gould's writings or words does not prepare you for the effect of reading these volumes. They are, to put it mildly, rich reads.

The books remind us that for the serious artist little can be finally resolved. Page has re-paged Gould's writings for the past 25 years, and gathered everything together that is "publishable." He has arranged the writings into a thematic order. They are grouped around inevitable headings — Prologue, Music, Performance, Media, and Miscellany. All the familiar pieces from the magazines are here: "The Search for Petula Clark," "Stokowski in Six Scenes," "Streisand as Schwarzkopf," "The Idea Of North"; the liner-notes for *The Goldberg Variations* and *The Art of the Fugue*; book reviews of biographies of Mahler and Schoenberg; his polemics against Chopin and the later Mozart. Iconoclastic quotables swarm in the interviews: "If I hear another bar of the *Eroica*, I'll scream"; Mozart's "G-minor Symphony consists of eight remarkable measures. . . surrounded by a half-hour of banality." There are philosophical reflections on recording techniques and the necessity

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of the studio; *mediations* on the role of art and artists today; apologies for Schoenberg, and assaults on Stravinsky.

What caught me unprepared about the book is that I was again made aware of how gifted and dextrous a writer Gould was, and, for the first time, of how subtle and slippery his tone is. He never himself saw a volume through publication. As far as I know, he never wanted to. He was content to leave everything in pieces. For a man who spent a lifetime reordering, reinterpreting, rethinking everything that had to do with music, this is a shock. For the writing throughout *The Glenn Gould Reader* shows that with his passing we not only lost a fine musician and controversial presence but an essayist of wit and daring, energy and elegance. The essays challenge, entertain, and in an unexpected way profoundly disturb.

The essay form is, other than the novel itself, the most flexible approach to prose. To *essai* (old French) is to test, to try, to examine. In a time when forms are intersecting, collapsing, interrupting each other, and essays now read like novels and novels read like essays (witness Milan Kundera's recent *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*), it has been the enormous malleable quality of prose that has given it the exciting, unexpected dash of hope for contemporary writing.

It has long been a pet conceit of mine that prose in Canada has been sadly undistinguished. There has yet to be a great prose line established as one may find a poetic line. There are few models. This leaves the aspiring prose-writer adrift. Curiously, the two Canadian intellectuals who have most influenced my own interest in the essay are Glenn Gould and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. They form an authentic tradition of probing, challenging and galvanized language. Yet the two are not studied in this light, or — as far as I know — even considered as literary men. They were indeed highly literary. And this was partly a source of their public fascination and influential power. For anyone who is literate in this late part of the 20th century is automatically a solitary outlaw. He is a dangerous desperado, a stranger in a strange land, indulging in what Gould himself refers to as "the Quirk Quotient."

All sorts of peculiar things happen when you are literate. You have, for instance, an assumed analytical ability that lends a degree of distance and clarity to your view. You are given a stand; you also, abruptly (it seems to others) have the ability to snap your audience into some participatory stance. Essay prose can serve this tactical function of managing the writer's and

reader's sensibilities and attention — which has, these days, for the latter, approximately the concentration span of a gnat. But for prose to serve this function, whether in fiction or the essay, it must have

- (a) A vital language in constant action (music);
- (b) A cultivated audience (reception);
- (c) The freedom in which to work, and be disseminated (transmission);
- (d) An intellectual and verbal inheritance (ideas, stories, myths).

If this seems to be too much of an aside, let me point out that throughout Gould's essays we are repeatedly reminded of the importance of what Gould calls the "rich tonal vocabulary of an inheritance." Gould has little to say about writing itself. He writes by analogy: his dissections and explorations of music and musicians and the phenomenon of recording have a deep relationship with the structure and conveyance of written communication.

For Gould's concern was communication itself. His rejection of the concert stage reflected a desire to, as they now say, "get into" the music — the "unsubstantial," "the disembodied" spirit of art, "the realm of technical transcendence," to find a style that has "unity through intuitive perception, unity of craft and scrutiny, mellowed by mastery achieved. . . ."

There is in his writings the desperado's need to shake up points-of-view and find some sort of astonishing union between projector, creator, and receiver. He seems to have fled contact to find a sounder contact; he seemed to be filling the airwaves with music, verbal jazz, and contrapuntal voices, asking (perhaps indirectly): Is anyone, anywhere, actually out there? Did he find the contact he desired?

These two books, structured on Gould's behalf by others, give us a strong sense of his stylistic and verbal inheritance, and of the rhythms of his communicative drive; for example, from "A Hawk, A Dove, and a Rabbit called Franz Josef":

In many respects, indeed, Schoenberg was the stuff of which Ken Russell screenplays are made. Despite a relatively quiet life on the domestic front (two wives, five children, several dogs, one rabbit), he gave full rein to an ego of Wagnerian proportions. In 1921, when he formulated the twelve-tone technique, he modestly declared that "I have ensured the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years." (Reviewer's note: Would you believe thirty-five?) A compulsive teacher and lawgiver, he became obsessed with the idea that his students would endeavour to usurp his authority and pre-empt his innovatory claims. "Told Webern about short pieces. . . Webern starts

writing shorter and shorter pieces — follows all my developments (exaggerates) Webern seems to have used twelve tones in some of his compositions — *without telling me* [italics Schoenberg's]. . . . Webern committed many acts of infidelity with the intention of making himself the innovator."

Here is Gould at his wittiest and his most cutting, using his own reputation to expert effect:

While alive, Webern was of interest only to colleagues; his posthumous canonization was primarily an acknowledgement of the ideas engendered by his work and only secondarily attributable to the works per se. (N.B. to G.G.: File under "Controversial Pronouncements" and prepare defensive posture.) Hindemith, on the other hand, always had a public — not, perhaps, the sort of public that would turn up presold for the premiere of a Shostakovich symphony, no matter what rebuffs Tovarich Dmitri's last effort might have suffered via *Pravda* and the Presidium, nor the sort that would attend at the Royal Albert while Sir Adrian had a go at RVW's new opus, secure in the knowledge that even if the Fourth did defy good breeding and voice leading as the academy decreed, the chap is one of us and, given that, Nostalgia Waives the Rules. (N.B. to G.G.: File under "Potential Puns" and prepare defensive posture.)

Not everything in the volume sparkles with such sarcastic splendour. The liner note from *The Goldberg Variations* has a sober serenity, and the notes on Schoenberg are filled with cool, acute analyses of that composer's ideas and forms. Indeed, one should pay particular attention to what Gould has to say about Schoenberg, because he is a musician that Gould, both in his ideas and recorded performances, closely identified himself with. Gould himself makes reference to the impact of Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*, and especially Mann's rendering of the demonically possessed artist figure Adrian Leverkühn on Schoenberg. We can draw inferences from this that Gould was fascinated by the isolated composer-visionary of Mann's imagination who attempted to transform the arts of his day, sold his soul to the devil, and ended in madness.

Gould's style is shaped for comprehension; he is conscious of who his work is for: the general reader. His tone is public and popular. As technical and esoteric as Gould can get, there is a tremendous readability to his words and ideas. Certain pieces explore the potential of writing by music: Gould employs shifting tones of voices, quotations, parentheses, jokes, teasing wordplays, alternating short sentences with lengthier ones, using preludes and codas, section cuts, ellipses, commas,

and periods for an oral effect (to mark the rests and stops), abrupt paragraph breaks, and — perhaps his favourite rhetorical device — the long, detailed list. Following the techniques of satire, he changes narrative personae, adopting an accented mask, and then criticizes his own excesses and failings. Turn to any page and you will find Gould jazzing up his diction and syntax, doing everything he can to make the prose involved, to make it individualized, to make it move.

Here is a sample from "An Argument for Richard Strauss":

The great thing about the music of Richard Strauss is that it presents and substantiates an argument which transcends all the dogmatisms of art — all questions of style and taste and idiom — all the frivolous, effete preoccupations of the chronologist. It presents to us an example of the man who makes richer his own time by not being of it; who speaks for all generations by being of none. It is the ultimate argument of individuality — an argument that man can create his own synthesis of time without being bound by the conformities that time imposes.

Which brings me to a fascinating uneasiness that results in the careful consideration of *The Glenn Gould Reader* and to a lesser extent, the *Conversations*. The turbulence of his prose style, the elaborate convulsions of meaning and innuendo, suggest a man locked into a struggle with something that is never quite said. There is a battle for attention going on in these pages. Gould repeatedly refers to his desire for repose and tranquillity. His rejection of the concert stage was determined in part because he disliked "exhibitionism" and "worldly hedonism" and wished to achieve what he calls "ecstatic contemplation." The effect of his style, however, is anything but tranquil. It is, on the contrary, tumultuously energetic, at times stormy, always full of forward movement. There are occasions throughout the *Reader* when the prose is at odds with the content.

The thick layers of 19th-century prose, with its extended paragraphs and innumerable asides, seems almost wilful in its attempt to arrest his own push. Paradoxically, it's as if in the latter part of his career he longed for something he could never truly achieve. . . . but what? Transcendence? Peace? When you recall the late performance of *The Goldberg Variations*, with its exaggerated dynamics and tempi, or the unreleased version of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*, conducted at a glacial pace by Gould, or his declaration that he was giving up the piano for composing and conducting, you cannot help but wonder what sort of psychological state he was in toward the end of his life.



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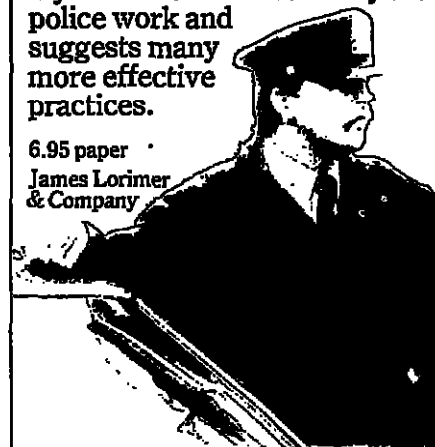
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These speculations are fuelled by Tim Page's arranging the *Reader* thematically and not chronologically. Dates are provided at the bottom of the page, so the reader can be left to do some detective work. What you find is that the essays written in the 1970s at the height of his reclusiveness are far more stylistically abandoned and reckless than those pieces written in the 1960s and '50s. If the *Reader* had been arranged chronologically, we would have been exposed to an explicit autobiographical pattern. The effect of this would have been, without a doubt, intriguing, and finally, saddening. For the later essays are indeed driven in part by Gould's desire to escape time, the judgement of history, "mere chronology." Gould spent his life putting on the European coordinates of culture. He wished to be ahistorical, a transcendent player.

Typically, when he refers to Canada, it is, generally speaking, only as ground — mere space, "The Idea of North," a sort of silent emptiness. And in the latter version of the *Goldberg Variations* we hear in the aria a concern for the space between the notes as we never have before. Arrest, rest. Enigmatically, disturbingly, he was "building into art a component that will enable it to preside over its own obsolescence. . . ." He was, it seems, looking for something beyond — trying to make Ezra Pound's "paradise/terrestre." With his telephone relationships, personal isolation, insistence on electronic recording, it's as if he personally aspired to a condition of music. But he could not stop what was, apparently, possessing him into an early grave. Thus the only possible rest was, and had to be, silence.

Cott's *Conversations* is affordable

and has some fine photographs. *The Reader* has a prohibitive cost; the typesetting is small and sometimes wearying to the eye; the volume itself is perhaps too bulky for easy access or transportation. Still, it is worth the expense: Gould has a vocabulary that makes most contemporaries look anaemic. Nor does one have to agree with all he says to find pleasure here. For to be in complete accord with his strong opinions would be to have missed the point.

Glenn Gould was pursuing, or being pursued by, "some primeval curiosity which seeks to uncover in the relations of statement and answer," as he himself writes, "of challenge and response, of call and of echo the secret of those still, desert places, which hold the clues to man's destiny but which predate all recollection of his creative imagination. . . ." □

INTERVIEW

Rick Salutin

'It's utterly irrelevant for an audience what an artist stands for. What you try to do is reveal the ways in which reality works'

By Sherie Posesorski



AS A PLAYWRIGHT, Rick Salutin is perhaps best known for *Les Canadiens*, written "with an assist from Ken Dryden," for which he won a Chalmers Award for the best Canadian play of 1978. The author of such other plays as *Fanshen* (1972), *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* (1973), and (in collaboration with novelist Ian Adams) *S: Portrait of a Spy* (1983), Salutin is also an outspoken social commentator, closely associated for the last decade with *This Magazine*, where much

Rick Salutin



of his journalism, collected in *Marginal Notes* (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1984), originally appeared. Born in Toronto in 1942, Salutin lived in the United States for 10 years, part of which he spent studying theology in New York. (He describes his discovery of Canadian nationalism — which preoccupies much of his writing — as a "conversion.") He now lives in Toronto, where he was interviewed by Sherie Posesorski:

Books in Canada: E.L. Doctorow has said that he considers it the writer's obligation to make the connections between his own inner life and the social, political, and economic circumstances of his outer life. How important is that to you?

Rick Salutin: There is the automatic assumption that social subjects are not topics for artistic treatment — that they make for bad art. Let's say that a journalist is trying to sell a piece — an exposé on the Canadian elite. He gets turned down by editors. Then he tries to sell a piece on someone's sexual identity crisis and it sells. So he gets the message — either he starts selling those articles that will make him a living or he turns to another profession. That leaves you with journalism that only legitimizes a preponderance of private themes. It's infuriating — the smug division people make between their private and social lives. They retreat — both on a personal

and national level — and become grateful that it is not as bad here as in the rest of the world. But we can't just isolate ourselves. All those forms of isolation are a method of self-mutilation, self-denial. It's like saying there are things out there that we don't want to know about — starvation in Ethiopia, the police state in Chile — so let's just not acknowledge them. People are snipping their beings in half, and so are left living only partial lives.

BiC: The articles collected in *Marginal Notes* explore the concept of marginality and its relationship to Canadian culture. Can you define marginality?

Salutin: In one form or another, all the pieces deal with what is distinctively Canadian about marginality. By marginality, I mean simply the holding of opposition views. In Canada, we have such a rigid and exclusive mainstream that any opposition viewpoints are consigned to the margin. There is no room for serious, principled opposition. It's embarrassing that we lack the alternative mainstream journalism that appears in the U.K. and U.S.A. Not only do we lack a *Village Voice*, a *Mother Jones*, but even magazines as mainstream as *The Atlantic*, or *Harpers*. Why? It's historically rooted. Canada was founded by those people who chose to move so they could defer to authority, rather than take a defiant stand in the American Revolution. I know that

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELISABETH FERRY

seems so long ago, but that attitude became the foundation of the dominant ideology in Canada — the respect for authority. If you search historically for the point at which that ideology was overthrown, I don't think you can find it. We are still living it.

BiC: *Is the examination of that ideology an aim of your work?*

Salutin: It is the work of a lifetime to confront that centrality. That's more or less what I'm interested in doing. All the pieces in *Marginal Notes* are my attempts to understand why people act as they do in our society, why they accept what they accept, and what are the forces that really move them. For example, in a piece on the New Right, I wanted to explore why a group of people supported projects that are fundamentally against their own best interest.

BiC: *How do you achieve such a clear, accessible prose style?*

Salutin: It's not a trick. Clarity in style comes from clarity of vision. I admire the style of Bertrand Russell and George Orwell because they manage to make any muddle-headed idea seem clear, and for their confidence in their writings. I guess when you are clear about what you think and why you think it, you write clearly. At that point, the distinction between style and content vanishes.

BiC: *What is the appeal in writing plays?*

Salutin: I have a resistance to writing poetry, novels, because their basis lies on the delusion of the author that he can control every aspect of his creation — which corresponds to the myth of individualism: that any individual is free to do whatever he or she wants to do. The creation of a play is a social action, in the face of all those forces that atomize and privatize our lives. It is an affirmation of the social character of our lives. You write a script, but the play doesn't exist until your script combines with actors, the production staff, audiences. Sartre has described theatre as the pre-eminent political force of 20th-century life. Theatrical experience asserts the insistently social aspects of our lives.

BiC: *In the 1930s, the German director Erwin Piscator declared that the prime aim of theatre in modern society is to make political statements. Do you agree?*

Salutin: No. You don't get anywhere conveying political or social messages. Suppose you chose a socialist message. You put on a convincing play. People watch it and are converted. The next day, they go to watch a play performed by a right-wing theatre group. Either they are reconverted or they become cynical about the whole process. It's utterly irrelevant for an audience what an artist stands for. What you try to do is reveal the ways in which reality works.

By revealing what is normally hidden, you provide audiences with a better understanding of how the world works, so they become better equipped to make decisions in that society.

BiC: *Roland Barthes has written that social myths give a natural and eternal justification to historical forces. All your plays examine a form of collective mythology, be it the mythology of the Family Compact in 1837 or the Montreal Canadiens in Les Canadiens. Why is that examination important?*

Salutin: The strength of any mythology lies in the fact that it doesn't appear as such. By writing about it, you try to make people aware that it is a mythology — only one possible response to a given reality. In *S: Portrait Of A Spy*, Ian Adams and I dramatize the effect on an individual of living out the mythology of espionage and what it does to him when he takes it seriously. It destroys his marriage, his job, his sense of himself.

BiC: *What is the attraction of writing historical plays?*

Salutin: History is a process that impinges on us daily and makes us what we are. The problem is that most people picture history spatially, regarding it as something back there in the distance. You can use the analogy of the process of classic psychoanalysis to explain the relationship. The resistance people experience in psychoanalysis is their refusal to acknowledge the fateful strength of their own individual history on the person they are now. The analyst fights their resistance, to make them aware of how their past is determining all their decisions. Extend that to Canadian history: people respond by negating the force of history, by belittling its effects. In my plays I want audiences to

experience history as something that constantly directs their present.

BiC: *In Nathan Cohen: A Review, one senses that you identify strongly with him.*

Salutin: I admire him intensely and think I understand certain things about him. But I don't feel like I want to carry on his mantle. What I admire about him is how strongly he cared about Canadian culture. Not just in relation to his own career or for recognition. He brought to his writings about culture a sense of exuberant solemnity.

BiC: *Why do your plays focus on aggregate personalities?*

Salutin: I grew up in the '50s, in a middle-class family in one of the smuggest suburbs in Canada. I had no sense of social totality or solidarity. One of the great revelations of my life was that I could connect beyond my own isolation. And in that social collectively become myself more. Bob Gainey [profiled in *Marginal Notes*] expressed this more eloquently and clearly than anyone I know. He had the perfect sense that he became the personal Gainey best by integrating himself with the Montreal Canadiens. I take delight in those connections. □

LETTERS

Putting us in our place

MAY I MAKE a few comments on George Galt's generally positive review of my latest book, *Canadian Literary Landmarks* (January-February)?

The price is given as \$35.00, and that

CANWIT NO. 101

*The Callaghan patriarch, Morley,
Labour'd at prose that was sorely
Out of fashion and dated
And yet irritated
A critical few:
Moralists who
Found his view
Of God
Odd.*

THE SPLENDID specimen quoted above is a nonet, a nine-line rhyming verse each line of which has one syllable fewer than its predecessor, so that the number of syllables descends from nine to one. Contestants are invited to compose similar nonets that comment on well-known Canadians living or dead, whose name must appear in the first line. The prize is \$25. Deadline: May 1. Address: CanWit

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Results of CanWit No. 99

RESPONSES TO our request for terms of political corruption drawn from Canadian politics were somewhat underwhelming. (Can it be that in Canada political corruption doesn't exist?) At any rate, the winner is Alec McEwen of (fittingly) Ottawa, for a list that includes:

- Duplessity: government by padlock
- Favreautism: preferential jail treatment
- Permafrost: Ontario's post-war ruling dynasty
- Renegade: A renouncer of provincial separatism

is correct. But that is the price of the hardbound edition. For those readers, like myself, who travel economy, the paperback price — \$19.95 — should also be given.

So eager is Galt to prove himself up to the task of preparing his own guide to literary sites that he neglects to mention two of the most important components of my book. Nowhere does he mention that the book has 650 black-and-white illustrations, or that it has an index of 4,800 entries.

He does the reader, the user, and the author a disservice by dwelling on what he calls at one point the "personal touches" and at another the "eccentricities." I have no objection to stressing these — after all, I knowingly and cunningly included some eye-catchers — but they should not be stressed without stating that the mainstream writers and their sites dominate the book. He does not mention the treatment given to L.M. Montgomery, Stephen Leacock, Irving Layton, Earle Birney, Hugh MacLennan, Margaret Laurence . . . to name but six major writers given major treatment. The accent is not on eccentricity but on the range and wonder of Canadian literature.

John Robert Colombo
Toronto

George Galt replies: Colombo's letter wins a little more attention for *Literary Landmarks*, but I must point out that it answers none of the very specific criticisms — which went far beyond his quirkiness — made in my review. One can only assume the author thinks these criticisms are valid.

THE NEW LOOK

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CONGRATULATIONS to Rick Jacobson and Laura Fernandez for their excellent cover design on the January-February issue. It couldn't be better or more appropriate for your publication. If they can top this initial illustration, they are due for further congratulations. I certainly have no wish for them to become redundant, but in my opinion, this could be a permanent cover illustration for *Books in Canada*.

J.R. Cowan
Milton, Ont.

OUR MISTAKE

LIKE THE new format.

In the January-February issue, under Books Received you list me as the author of *The Last Domino*. The correct title is: *America, the Last Domino: U.S. Foreign Policy in Central America Under Reagan*.

Stan Persky
Vancouver

RECOMMENDED

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

FICTION

Stories by Canadian Women, edited by Rosemary Sullivan, Oxford. Though Sullivan might have been more venturesome in her choice of writers, this historical overview — from Isabella Valancy Crawford to Dionne Brand — is a worthy introduction to Canadian women's fiction, if not a surprise.

NON-FICTION

The Canadian Prairies: A History, by Gerald Friesen, University of Toronto Press. Without indulging in mystification, through his personal love for the subject Friesen demonstrates that the Prairies have experienced a much more complicated history than we are normally led to believe.

POETRY

Words for Elephant Man, by Kenneth Sherman, Mosaic Press. Sherman is capable of graceful shifts of tone and style, mixing historical quotations with epigram and his own protean verse to create a kaleidoscopic and engrossing metaphor from the tragedy that was the Elephant Man.

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:

Acrobatics, by Victor Tolgsey, Edahl Productions.
Adventure in Living: Inspirational Messages from People Who Dared to Risk, by Brian M. Gazzard, Lancelot Press.
The Adventures of Amos Elliot, Loyalist, by Audrey Marsh, Lancelot.
Aglag: Retirement, Leisure and Work in Canada, by Alan Roadburg, Methuen.
Amy's Wish, by Paul Kropp, Collier Macmillan.
Arrows in the Mind, by J.R.C. Perkin, Lancelot Press.
The Beast, by Marilyn Godfrey, Collier Macmillan.
Beginners' Book, by Peter Lear, Hayes Publishing.
Café Le Dog, by Matt Cohen, Penguin.
Capital Tales, by Brian Fawcett, Talonbooks.
Charles de Salaberry, by J. Patrick Wohlner, Dundura Press.
A City Out of Sight, by Ivan Southall, Irwin.
Come and See: An Insight into the Religious Thought of Teilhard de Chardin, by Frances MacLellan, Lancelot Press.
The Coming Cataclysm, by Reuben P. Bulka, Mosaic Press.
The Completely Collapsible Portable Man, by J. Michael Yates, Mosaic.
Computerized Library and Information Network Contracts, by Rajesh Ahluwalia and Roddy Duchesne, National Library.
Cracked Wheat and Other Stories, by Hugh Cook, Mosaic Press.
The Day Is Dark, and Three Travellers, by Marie-Claire Blais, Penguin.
Expecting Rain, by Stephen Scobie, Oolichan Books.
416 Squadron History, Hanger Bookshelf.
Frame-Up in Belize, by Rob Wilson, Simon & Pierre.
Friendly Fascism, by Bortram Gross, Black Moss Press.
Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala, by Jim Handy, Between the Lines.
Gumpers into New Brunswick History, by Carol McLeod, Lancelot Press.
The Headlines, by J.E. Belliveau, Lancelot Press.
A Horse Called Farmer, by Peter Cumming, illustrated by P. John Burden, Ragweed Press.
In Bed With Sherlock Holmes, by Christopher Redmond, Simon & Pierre.
In Search of Your British & Irish Roots, by Angus Baxter, Macmillan.
Index to Canadian Poetry in English, compiled and edited by Jane McQuarrie et al., Reference Press.
Industrial Innovation, by Kristian S. Pajda, The Fraser Institute.
Journal of the Margaret Roll 1840-1844, by Captain James Doane Coffin, Lancelot Press.
Kevin's Story, by Dvora Levinson, IPI Publishing.
Korea: Canada's Forgotten War, by John Melady, Macmillan.
Labrador By Choice, by Ben W. Powell, Jespersion Press.
The Last Season, by Roy MacGregor, Penguin.
Lawyers, by Jack Batten, Penguin.
A Literary Friendship, edited by Bruce Whiteman, ECW Press.
The Magnificent Gael, by Reginald B. Hale, Bayne House.
The Making of Genesis 2, by Dick Charlton, Lancelot Press.
The Man Who Broke Out of the Letter X, by Robert Priest, Coach House.
Martha's Clinic: Letter Five & Six & Seven, by A. Collignon, Nongilloc Books.
Micro Man, by Paul Kropp, Collier Macmillan.
Military Doctrine and the American Character, by Herbert I. London, Transaction Books.
Miss Emily et la Mort, by Michael Harris, traduit par Jacques Marchand, VLB Editeur.
Murderer, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Marchenko, Annick Press.
Newfoundland Disasters, by Jack Fitzgerald, Jespersion Press.
The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan, edited by Eilspeth Cameron, Macmillan.
Our Musical Heritage, by Lester Sellick, Lancelot Press.
The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, Oxford.
A Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community, by Anastasia Shkilyok, Yale University Press.
The Real Terror Network, by Edward S. Herman, Black Moss Press.
Remember Me, by Michel Tremblay, Talonbooks.
The Riel Rebellion: A Biographical Approach, by Charles and Cynthia Hou, Tantalus Research.
The Riel Rebellion: Teacher's Guide, by Charles and Cynthia Hou, Tantalus Research.
Russian Poetry: A Personal Anthology, selected and translated by R.A.D. Ford, Mosaic Press.
The Salt Line, by Elizabeth Spencer, Penguin.
Season of Blood, by Henry Beissel, Mosaic Press.
Space Adventures for the Commodore 64, compiled and edited by Peter Lear, Hayes Publishing.
Spin Out, by Marilyn Godfrey, Collier Macmillan.
Step-Families: Making Them Work, by Erna Paris, Avon.
Stubbora People, by Magda Zalun, Canadian Stage and Art Publications.
Three Bluenose Plays, by Arthur L. Murphy, Lancelot Press.
Variorum, by Doug Fetherling, Hounslow Press.
The Victorian Design Book, by Lee Valley Tools (Firefly).
Wedding Styles, by Jules Schwerin, Prentice-Hall Canada.

COMING UP IN THE MAY ISSUE OF

BOOKS IN CANADA

COASTAL DRIVE

In search of British Columbia's elusive 'literary community'

By Eleanor Wachtel

TORONTO ANNEXATION

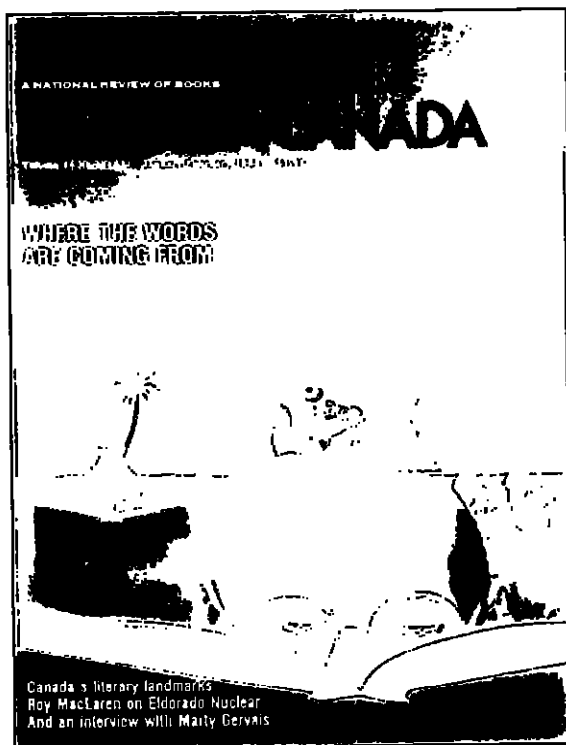
An inner-city neighbourhood in fiction and fact

By Sherie Posesorski

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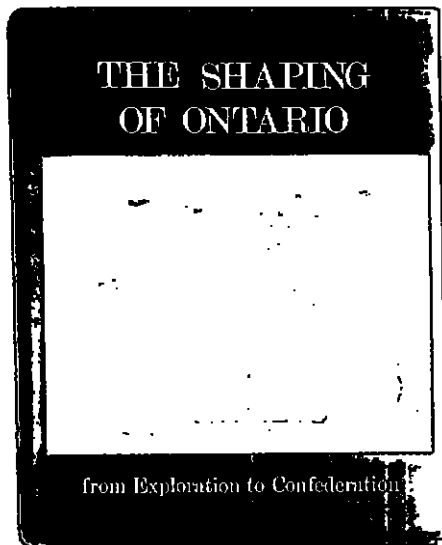
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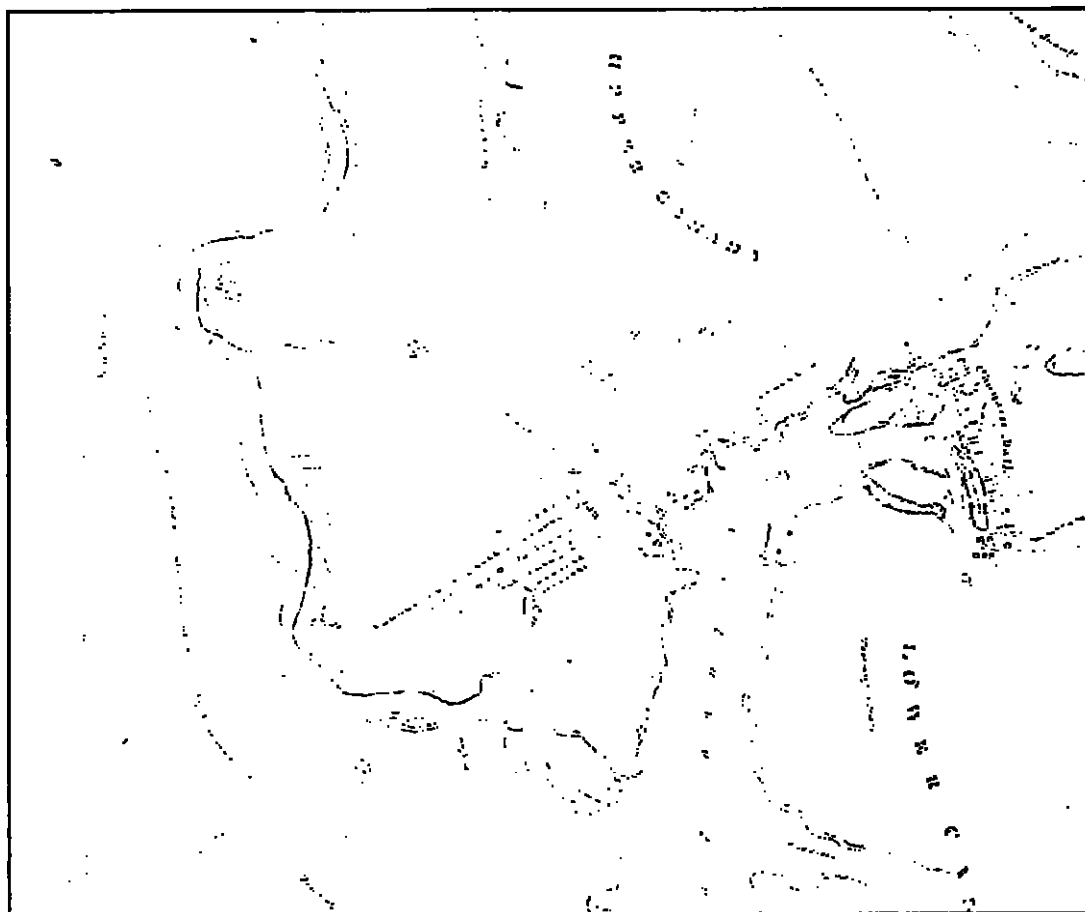
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Bytown (Ottawa) in 1828 Under the direction of Lt. Colonel John By preliminary work began on the Rideau Canal in 1826. Map shows the Upper and Lower Bytown. On the right side the Chaudiere Falls. PAC