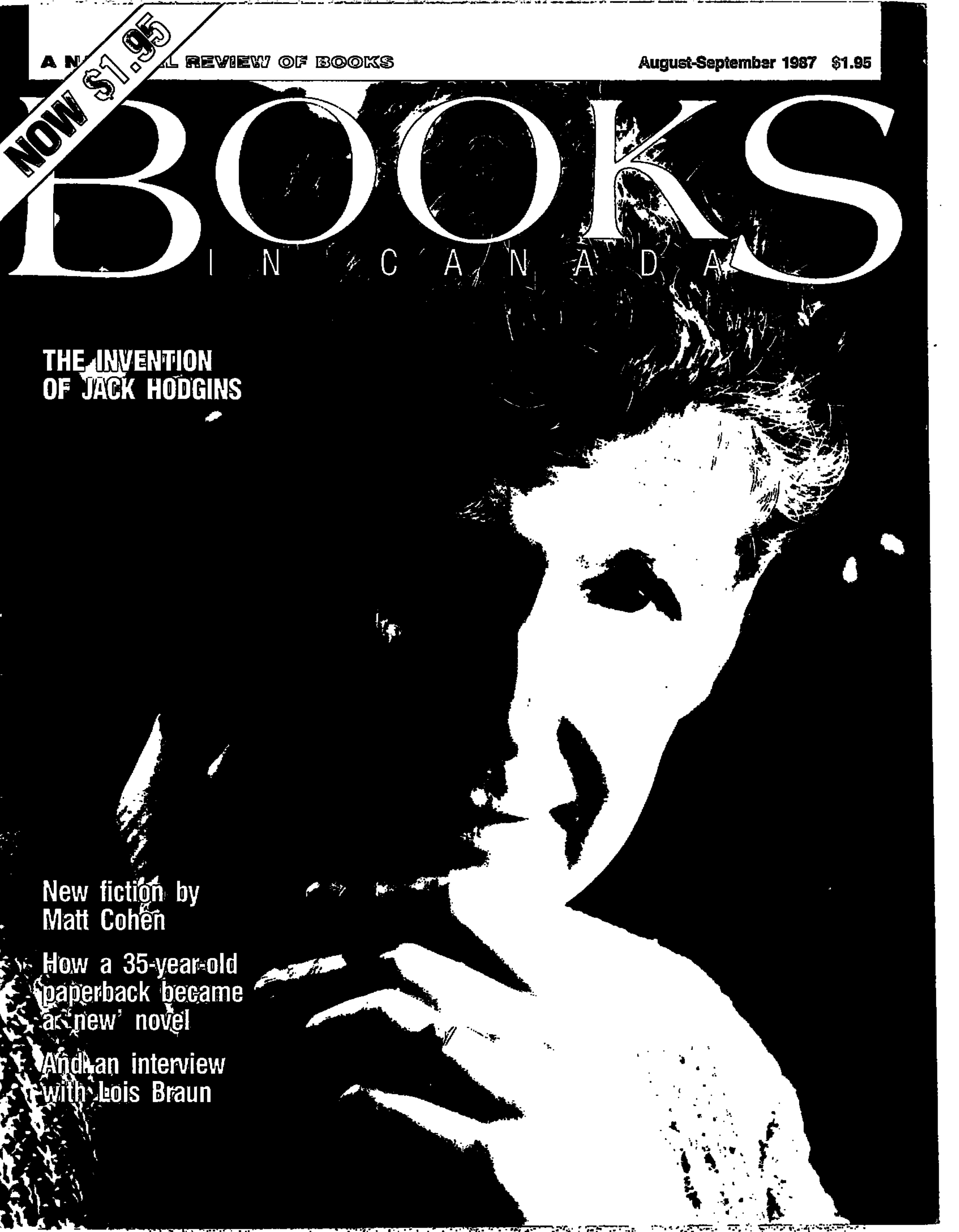
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How a 35-year-old
paperback became
a 'new' novel
And an interview
with Lois Braun

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

BOOKS IN CANADA

A South American education

It is one thing to read newspaper accounts of torture in Chile. It is quite another to hear the survivors' stories for yourself

LAST APRIL four Canadian poets — two from Saskatchewan, Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane, and two from Ontario, Gary Geddes and myself — climbed aboard a CP jet for Santiago, leaving behind a Canadian spring for Chilean winter. I wasn't expecting a conventional tour. I knew that the organizer of our tour, Lake Sagaris, a Canadian living in Santiago, editor of *Un Pajaro es un poema*, an anthology of Canadian poetry that she translated into Spanish, would do more than set up readings to promote a book. What she planned was *"El Abrazo Que Une Un Continente,"* an embrace that spanned a continent. I suspected that the trip would be more than a cultural exchange. It was a political education.

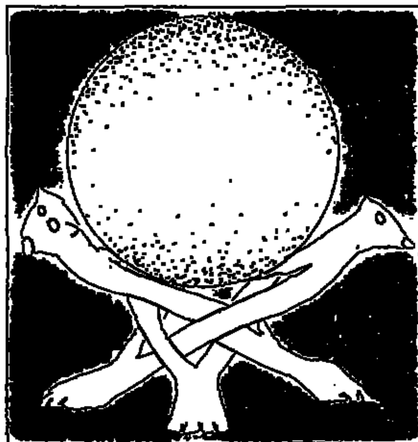
It is one thing to read newspaper accounts of torture, to read about murder and the disappeared; it is quite another to meet the victims who survive and to hear their stories, from their own lips, in quiet tones, unembellished by rhetoric. Personal stories that are part of public events. In a poem by Carolyn Forche, "The Colonel," she is given "something for her poetry," a bag of human ears, which looked to her like dried peach halves. A bag full of ears is no ear at all, no human ear. A mass grave without a marker. Imagine your father's ears among them. Imagine your own. How easily we transcend with words the world we fail to create. We wait instead for it to detonate. The relatives of the disappeared and the executed we met in Santiago wanted us to bring back their stories to Canada.

We were received very warmly and generously. The SECH, the Chilean writers' society, hosted readings and panels and banquets for us. We performed with Amauta, a jazz-rock group who musicalized several of the translations of Canadian poems from the anthology. Their song version of Margaret Atwood's "A Women's Issue" is riveting. We were welcomed and entertained and instructed by poets like Naim Nomez and Gonzales Millan, recently returned to Chile from their exile in Canada. We met Chilean women writers, dynamic women like Carmen Berenguer, who were in the process of organizing the first Latin-American Women's world poetry conference.

The Neruda foundation invited us for lunch at Neruda's Santiago residence. We were given a tour of the house, which he designed himself, eccentric and extravagant as the man described to us by Jorge Edwards — a house full of books and knick-knacks and secret passages, built like a ship by the irrepressible boy in that literary master. I touched his green velvet jacket (it was gigantic; I could have worn it as a dressing gown!), the jacket he had purchased in Paris and loved so much that he wanted to throw a dinner party for it, to celebrate with his friends.

Chile, the country that produced Neruda, more than a Nobel Prize-winning poet, a seminal writer for our century — Chile, formerly one of the most advanced countries politically and culturally in South America, has been reduced to a tragic condition by its military regime of 14 years. Education is being privatized. We went to soup kitchens formed by the thousands of teachers recently fired. Too many of its best minds have been driven into exile, including some who now live in Canada.

Chile is the country where I saved a fellow Canadian from arrest because I had given him an invitation to our poetry reading and concert at the Cafe del Cerro. After having dinner with us, Robert



Thompson, who had been working as a consultant on housing projects, walked back to his hotel. He was stopped by military police, who were not very pleased by the flyers and posters he had picked up as souvenirs from the May Day demonstrations that morning. His excellent Spanish and protests about being a Canadian did not impress the police. It was a small thing, the invitation — which declared the event's sponsorship by the Canadian Embassy — that persuaded them to release him.

I did not feel personally in danger during my stay in Chile, but it is a society whose government parades its violence and its power. Truckloads of military police with submachine guns in hand circle the city, casually questioning citizens. The reigning joke at *Analisis*, a politically critical magazine and publishing house whose foreign editor was murdered last fall, concerns the new liberalization: Books are no longer censored. Any book can be published and publicly displayed. It's the writer who disappears!

— MARY DI MICHELE

Home again

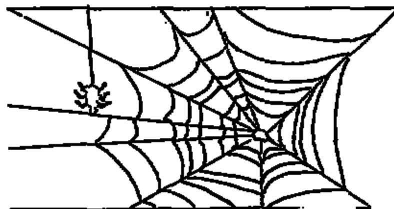
SAUL BELLOW comes home to Lachine, Que., population 36,500, on one of his periodic visits to that salt-smelling industrial town that stretches along the wide waters of the St. Lawrence southwest of Montreal. Bellow spent the first two years of his life on Lachine's Eighth Avenue, before moving first to Montreal, then to Chicago. The town, led by its four-term mayor Guy Descary, who nurtures the image of purveyor of cultural goods to the population, has squeezed the most out of the Nobel Prize-winner's short childhood there. And, graciously, Saul Bellow has accepted this attribution of roots. *"Je suis lachinois,"* he told a group of town notables and admirers at a dinner a few weeks ago at the Maison du Brasseur (the Brewer's House), one of the old buildings the town has restored to display the glories of its 19th-century industrial past. If roots make a writer stronger, then the more roots the better.

Natty and professorial in blue shirt and red bow tie, the 72-year-old Bellow told the crowd what he remembered of Lachine, 70 years past. "My nursemaid was an Indian from the Caughnawaga reservation," he recalled. "She used to chew the meat before she fed it to me. That's how I explain the secret of my success." Bellow's parents, however, looked at Lachine with different eyes when they

arrived there in 1913. "They came from St. Petersburg, a European capital, and I think they regarded coming to Lachine as a great fall." The audience laughed, while Mayor Descary looked a little uncomfortable in his seat. Lachine at the time was a great funnelling point for Eastern and Southern European immigrants, who hired on at companies like Dominion Bridge. (My paternal grandfather was reputed to have stopped there, before moving on to Chicago to settle in the neighbourhood evoked so frequently and successfully in much of Bellow's fiction.)

Bellow then trained his powerful memory on his years on Montreal's St. Dominique Street, during the great flu epidemic. "There were such splendid funerals back then! Hearses with magnificent black horses prancing down the street. Almost everyone had a wreath in front of his door." Bellow too almost found himself in one of those hearses, but not as a result of influenza. After an appendectomy, he developed pneumonia and peritonitis, and spent a spell on Ward H of the Royal Vic. "I read the funny papers and the Bible — even the New Testament," he recalled. "That's where I picked up the reading bug." (Perhaps a stay in the hospital should be mandatory for all aspiring young writers.)

In today's Montreal and Lachine, language is the centre of social conflict and the sense of belonging; positions have hardened since the international atmosphere of those immigrant days that Bellow conjured up with the glow of nostalgia. "My parents spoke Russian to each other; we kids spoke Yiddish to our parents; we spoke English to each other and French in the street. Then I went to Hebrew school . . . and you can add the Caughnawaga nursemaid to that too. I was never really aware of which language I was speaking." When the Bellow family



moved to Chicago in 1924, they found the same atmosphere. "I never had any conflict living with many different identities. *Perhaps that's the definition of contemporary man.*"

Bellow's internationalism soon had the crowd ill at ease, though it was hard to tell whether or not he was only playing devil's advocate with his fellow Lachiners. He was pessimistic about Canada's ability to resist multinational economies; at the same time he seemed to profess that typically American belief in the spontaneity of culture, a belief often professed by dominant nations. "If you have culture, you don't need a minister, and if there is a minister, he won't be able to make culture anyway," he quipped, and the audience laughed.

But the notables of Lachine, mostly French-speaking, listened almost in disbelief when Bellow began an elegiac evocation of the "melting pot" of his immigrant youth; if there are any fighting words in Quebec these days, "melting pot" are two of them. Sounding like a U.S. trade protectionist, Bellow conjured up the menace of Japanese, Taiwanese, and Korean industrial domination, then asked rhetorically, "Is speaking French equal to the development of Korean electronics?" But in a private moment after his talk, when he was informed that the phrase "melting pot" was a red rag to his audience, Bellow's eyes twinkled. "I know," he said.

Writers are increasingly given to *fabricating themselves*, Bellow commented during the course of his talk, and few people paid attention to what those words might have meant. But by so expertly playing the devil's advocate role, he gave us a lesson in creative self-fabrication that evening, since he left most of the audience thoroughly entertained, but wondering just where he stood. — DAVID HOMEL

'How delightful to put the book down crying, "More! More!" and to know that there *is* more (and perhaps even better) to come.' So wrote Robin Mathews in *Canadian Forum* about the first volume of David Pitt's biography of E.J. Pratt, *The Truant Years: 1882 – 1927*. Now the 'More!' that readers have been waiting for is here.

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Another brick in the wall

THERE ARE PEOPLE in Quebec who still take politics seriously, or tried to at the first-ever *Festival Multilingue d'art Engagé* (Multilingual Street Festival of Political Art) held in Montreal this summer. Driven by the prophet motive, in a vacant lot beside the Librairie Alternative book store, skeletons on dark murals bore deadly messages painted by Artifact, a women's art collective who initiated the project. Other signs warned: "*Insoumission Génerale*" (General Insubordination), "*Dégageons L'Art Engagé*" (Let Us Widen Political Art), "Please Save Our Homes," and "Wet Paint."

A Muslim association owns the property. A mosque will soon be built on it. Therefore permission for use of the land could only be granted on the strict condition that there be no drinking or dancing — the art of the impossible! So a 20-by-20-foot stage was constructed in the buffer zone between the street and the lot. The area ended up being disaster-free anyway. No police stayed to watch the fun. During peak afternoon hours, close to 500 spectators lined Blvd. St-Laurent, or sat on the sidewalk, gravel, or grass. The only shooting that took place was via videotape, and the only burning incident occurred when a small fire was lit by some cold participants to keep warm. The three-day anarchist spectacle unfolded with the orderliness of a church picnic.

In the middle of the grounds, a prostrate human figure lay wrapped in plaster. The body was not some rubby sleeping off a hangover, but a sculpture by Mehdi Naimi entitled *The Political Prisoner*. A candle-lighting ceremony honoured all martyrs who have died at the hands of oppressors everywhere.

More than the scheduled 150 artists flooded the stage to act out their revolutionary fantasies. Male minstrel Windi Earthworm kicked off the agitpop, flaunting his green skirt and Indian war whoops. Then Norman Nawrocki drummed on garbage pails and chanted: "Hey! Hey! John Doré! We refuse to pay!" Hysterical Women, a feminist theatre group, were as funny as their name suggests. The trio performed skits about bourgeois liberation, ("right wing means right"), tossed white bread at the multitudes, and came out with lesbian take-offs on Miss Liberty Feminine Protection — one of them wore a jumbo panty liner shield that covered her up to her neck with a "baby-fresh scent." Poet Céline Délisle accompanied herself on accordion howling *"La Chanson de Loup"* while the audience owoooooo-

ooo'd along with the chorus. Les Marionnettes Picardi, a Chilean puppet troupe, ritually executed an effigy of Augusto Pinochet. Dragana, a Balkan women's choir, followed with lovely costumes and harmonies. And Beverly Walker stirred up an encore for her solid fusion of gospel, folk, and Latin music.

Sunday the dancing began. Palomares, a Chilean song and folk dance ensemble, whirled for 30 minutes. Dancers of every political bent got in their toes' worth: Sara Bild and Jano Cook, "Wo(man) is me"; Nathalie Derome, "*Une féministe questionne le féminisme*"; Christian O'Leary *"La politique de l'aliénation"* and Guy Déom embodied the body politic with his arhythmic *"épreuve de résistance"* (test of resistance).

Guitarist René Lussier scared off the pigeons thumping his fuzzicato *"musique actuelle"* to a background recording of loon calls, galloping with foot pedals that sounded as if he were stepping on Yoko Ono's throat. Rock band B.S. Incorporé were tight and together. Jah Cutta & Determination Band filled the evening with air bursts of ranting reggae. And Ma t'chum, an "all womyn's" group, bashed on. Woe-man.

Squeezed into the action, holding onto their wind-whipped pages, were the poets. The crowd applauded philippics by English voices, as well as by Paul Chamberland and Louky Bersianik (French), Alfredo Lavergne and Manuel Betanzos-Santos (Spanish), and Antonio D'Alfonso and Fulvio Caccia (Italian).

Consciousnesses in need of further heightening could climb upstairs to the book store and gaze at videos dealing with bulimia, rape, sexual politics, war, peace marches, the ecology, automation, unemployment, poverty, violence in South America, speaking white in Quebec, immigration, discrimination, racism, hatred: the whole dirt catalogue.

The organizers gambled with the weather and won. Only the clouds were threatening, and the rain came down on Sunday night just as the closing band Fail-Safe was about to appear. Norman Nawrocki called the event an "urban Woodstock." Woodstick? Sixties idealism was still good to see in the '80s, even if the final product ended up being as cute and Canadian as Wayne Gretzky endorsing Solidarity. The biggest joke of all, of course, was that the entire subversive sideshow was bankrolled by the Canada Council to the tune of $14,600.

A distinct party in a distinct society!

— RAY FILIP

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Help wanted

It's bad enough that book publishers can't afford to hire good editors. Newspapers *could* afford them, but can't find many to hire

By Bob Blackburn

ONE OF MY frequent and fervent prayers is to be spared the attentions of the sort of editor who puts a comma in *Baja California*. This is not a paranoid fantasy. Such a person, in the employ of one of our largest and most respected publishing houses, edited a novel by a friend of mine years ago, and later, I suspect, moved up to become a teacher of editing.

A few weeks ago, the essayist B.W. Powe wrote a piece for the *Globe and Mail* about what he called *post-literacy*. He began by quoting a telephone call he had received from an editor who had been working on an article by Powe:

> "I've corrected the typos in the manuscript," he explained, "including the one in your name. You left the two Ls off Powell.'
>
> Indignant, I answered: "Do you think I'd misspell my own name?"
>
> "Well, how was I supposed to know?" he said. "You spelled Hemingway with only one m."

I don't know why Powe felt compelled to aver that this was a true story. I didn't doubt it for a moment. It turned my thoughts back 40 years, to my first newspaper job. The paper had hired a reporter whom the editors judged to be incompetent but for some reason did not wish to fire. The solution was an appointment as copy editor. I thought it bizarre at the time, but it is not that uncommon.

I have been told by acquaintances in the book-publishing business that it simply is economically impossible for them to hire good editors, so I should just forget about it. What's more depressing is that I am told by acquaintances in the newspaper business that they *could* afford to hire good editors but can't find many.

There are some around, and there are others who would like to improve, but all, I think, are dispirited by the realization that it doesn't seem to matter much any more. Once I was asked, by a newspaper executive, to comment on the performance of an editor he was pleased to have hired. I said I could never feel quite comfortable with an editor who could not spell. "Oh," he said, "can't he spell?"

The other day I had an exchange with an editor who said, "My wife con . . . oops . . . persuaded me I was wrong." Interesting. He knew, and cared, that there is a distinction between *persuade* and *convince*, but was not pleased to be told he had it backward. I once phoned an editor to tell him I had been rechecking a story I had sent him and noticed I had mistakenly used a *which* instead of a *that*. He said he had already fixed it. I thanked him and congratulated him on his sharp eye. Said he: "Oh, I always change *which*es to *that*s."

Persuade vs. *convince* is a bit tricky, but an editor who is persuaded to investigate the distinction might soon become convinced that the effort was worthwhile. The *that* vs. *which* distinction, violated by 10 times as many writers and editors as acknowledge it, is clearly explained on the lower half of page 59 in Strunk and White with two examples involving a lawn mower.

While I have S&W in hand, I would like to direct the attention of every writer and editor in the English-speaking world to the middle of page 13, where is printed in large, bold, italic type: "A participal phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject." There follows almost a full page of explanation and examples that should not be beyond the comprehension of at least some of the professional communicators who tirelessly flaunt their ineptitude by flouting this simple and sensible principle.

Having got all that off my chest, perhaps you will permit me to change the subject for a brief footnote:

I watched the recent TV coverage of Admiral John Poindexter's testimony in the Iran-Contra hearings with gnawing frustration at not being one of those in a position to question him. My question would have been, "Admiral, during these days, you have repeatedly spoken of decisions to *proceed ahead*. Remember, you are under oath, and you are on national television, and you owe it to the American people, and you are duty bound to tell us here and now: If you know of any other goddam way to proceed except ahead, what is it?" □

The invention of Jack Hodgins

'You work with the patch of world you're given,' says the self-effacing Vancouver Island novelist, whose seemingly ordinary life conceals a wealth of literary artistry

By Eleanor Wachtel

WHEN JACK HODGINS was seven, the great earthquake of 1946 shook Vancouver Island. Chimneys came crashing down, dishes were smashed, people shaken, the roof of the elementary school caved in, and yet somehow it still felt as if the world was the way it was supposed to be. It seemed normal that every once in a while the earth should have a little convulsion, like an old relative who goes on the occasional rampage, burning down a shack, causing a ruckus, adding to local legend.

"Everything became absorbed into the great comedy of life," Hodgins recalls. What he remembers vividly about the perhaps two-minute-long tumult was turning to the adults around him to see when it was going to be all right to laugh, when the process of incorporating the incident into local lore could begin. "Story-telling was inseparable from laughing at ourselves in that particular world. Almost immediately, once you knew that no one was hurt, then you saw how funny it is that buildings dance around and chimneys fall off this bucking earth."

The earth "could buck you off its back just any time it wanted to," says the title character of *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*, a hyperbolic, life-affirming book that ends with an entire town slipping into the sea. In Hodgins's latest novel, *The Honorary Patron*, a staid, aging professor discovers that the house in which he grew up was built over a mineshaft and may collapse at any moment. As Hodgins puts it, he likes to pull the rug from under his characters "every chance I get." Yet the disequilibrium of a rambunctious world is always set off against some underlying order, a solidness and continuity that also harks back to Hodgins's childhood. Maintaining a balance — between exuberance and control, energy and order, island and mainland, the artist as participant and as invisible observer — is Jack Hodgins's country. Perhaps not surprising for a writer whose early "literary" influences were L'il Abner crossed with William Faulkner.

JACK HODGINS burst upon the book world just over a decade ago with a collection of stories, *Spit Delaney's Island*, which was praised by Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro for its compassionate portrayal of often eccentric characters and was short-listed for the Governor General's Award. It was quickly followed by an ebullient, mythopoeic novel, *The Invention of the World*, which won a Gibson Literary Award and was praised by a New York editor, Gordon Lish, as joining "Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business* as the decade's most distinguished achievements in Canadian fiction." *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* won the Governor General's Award two years later, and was followed, in 1981, by another impressive short-story collection, *The Barclay Family Theatre*. Then, for six years, silence — to be broken this fall with the publication of *The Honorary Patron*.

Jack Hodgins

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

When I spoke to Hodgins this summer, it was his first interview in years. An essentially private man, he enjoys talking about some subjects: the environment of his childhood, doing interviews, the craft of writing, and his passion for books. Like a quirky, warm-hearted Pygmalion, he loves his characters and discusses them as if they were old friends. There's a distinct contrast between the extravagant figures who populate his fantasies and his determinedly ordinary domestic life. To do truly adventurous work, some say, one needs to live quietly. But as in Hodgins's fiction, beneath the artless surface, the self-effacing persona, lie complexity and sophistication.

A fifth-generation Canadian and a third-generation Vancouver Islander, Hodgins lives

in a tranquil residential section of Victoria, near the university where he teaches creative writing. The house that Jack built, on two and a half acres near Nanaimo, "in a grove of arbutus trees overlooking Georgia Strait" — a place so beloved of dust-jacket writers — was finally sold last year. His current house, a five-bedroom, cedar and stucco split-level with tall pampas grass and, yes, a couple of arbutus trees on the front lawn, is, he says, the one he would have built if he had the skill. The back garden is spacious and secluded, with a huge, beautiful arbutus tree and flowers around the edge. Bandit, a pound dog, part spaniel, part Sheltie, eagerly greets all comers.

Once described as an elongated Harpo Marx, Jack Hodgins is 6'3", slim, with curly hair, almond-shaped, down-turned eyes, and a friendly, impish smile. His ears are largish, like those of Jacob Weins, the hapless mayor of Port Annie, the town that washes away at the end of *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*. The curls are greying in front and there's a small, thinning spot high on the back of his head, but at 48 (he will be 49 next month), the impression he gives is boyish, despite the slight hunch to his walk.

In keeping with the contradictions he negotiates in his writing, Hodgins is a self-confessed ham who enjoys his privacy. An affable host, he explains almost apologetically that lunch is *en famille*. His sons, Gavin, 22, and Tyler, 19, happen to be home, although, he hastens to add, they both have summer jobs. (A daughter, Shannon, is 24 and lives on her own in town.) The boys are beanpoles, taller and thinner than their father, and equally amiable. At the head of the table Jack carves the quiche while confessing that credit for it goes to Dianne, his wife of 27 years, who passes the salad. From the next room, one can hear Sweeney Todd, the canary, chirping loudly.

Gavin is about to attend theatre school in Vancouver, and Jack and Dianne banter about their own days at the University of British Columbia, when Jack entertained his fiancée with inedibly buckshot pheasant. Dianne recalls trying to scrub out a spreading ink stain from the apartment floor when Jack was moving out. Typically sleazy student digs, it was the kind of place where you'd hear all sorts of things, says Jack, but not really know what was going on. "Oh yes you did," says Dianne, a teacher. Reflecting her grin, Jack concurs.

They're both enthusiastic about the four weeks they have just spent in Australia, thanks to the Canada-Australia Prize that Hodgins recently won. They travelled everywhere (Hodgins has also toured Japan, Ireland, and Switzerland, giving readings and meeting writers), and met fascinating people, both officially and unofficially. A tea drinker, Dianne interrupts the story to warn Jack not to keep the coffee on simmer all day or its aroma will permeate the house. He boils it over while reheating it.

In the living-room the furniture is brown and beige Danish modern. On the table is a photo of Dianne holding a bear from the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane. There's a Marimekko print over the fireplace, a Kandinsky poster from the Zurich Kunsthaus, and a pencil drawing of Tyler's. One son wants to be an artist, the other an actor. "Where did I go wrong?" Hodgins asks, obviously proud.

Hodgins wrote his first book on a kitchen table, his second in a basement, his third in his daughter's bedroom, which he rented from her for 25 cents a week. Today his office is upstairs, with one window overlooking the street and another that he punched out to face the trees. The earlier books were handwritten; now he has a computer. But he still uses the wooden desk he made out of a door while at UBC. There are a couple of Tyler's pencil drawings of characters from Hodgins's next book, a historical novel, and a copy of the Egon Shiele painting, *The Family*, which appears on the cover of *The Honorary Patron*. Some snaps of his kids when young, a black-and-white photo of Faulkner, and a Chaucer print lean against one bookshelf.

Most of his books are in Dianne's office next door or in the living-room, but some of his favourite children's titles are here: *Uncle Wiggly and His Friends* and *Elsie the Cow* — "one of the first books I ever read." Beside the door is a stack of unread, new hardbacks. Hodgins loves books, buys them and savours them. On his desk is a small, brown, looseleaf binder he calls his notebook. It's where he writes snatches of conversation, descriptions of people, observations, places that he wants to remember. Calling it a journal, he says, would imply an audience. Next to a bookshelf is a careful painting his mother made of his childhood home.

FIVE MINUTES from Hodgins's house is a small, rocky beach that looks out on what he describes as "a scallop of blue islands" separating us from the mainland. In the distance, on the U.S. side, is Mount Baker, afloat on the horizon like an ice cream sundae. We sit on two rocks, facing each other. He graciously insists I take the flatter rock while he perches on a pointier one. It's sunny, almost hot. The waves are gently lapping; the tide is coming in. It's one of those idyllic West Coast scenes.

> **Hodgins plays on the feeling that you are nowhere and it's a great humiliation to go anywhere else. When the boy from Merville goes to Toronto something awful will happen**

Hodgins has never been a great swimmer or fisherman, but he's drawn to the edge of the sea. When he lived in Ottawa he didn't feel quite right until the river ice started breaking up and he could see the water moving. It was as if something were held in suspension — like holding your breath for six months — and then became fluid again. When he saw the film of Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* while in Ottawa, he found it very affecting (even though he'd seen it three times before and knew it wasn't a great movie). It was seeing the Pacific, and recognizing that Steinbeck's characters were people he knew on Vancouver Island.

Before I pose a question, Hodgins starts talking about interviews past, such as the time he was interviewed by Peter Gzowski. "This was my first book and they got me on this radio show in Toronto. I guess Gzowski knew he had a green one. He began by saying, 'Why does every book that comes out of Vancouver Island have an Emily Carr painting on the cover?' And I sort of sputtered. It wasn't until I got home that I realized I couldn't think of a single other book from Vancouver Island with an Emily Carr painting, so I failed that test.

"But what he did half-way through — this was really cheeky — he said, 'Are all the horrible things I've heard about Nanaimo true?' I guess I looked like, 'You can't ask me that!' And he said, 'You don't have to worry, we're not heard there.' So help me, I half-believed him. I didn't say anything I was sorry about, but for a moment I believed that nobody in Nanaimo heard the CBC, even though I heard it there myself. They have you at such a disadvantage when you're new. The intimidation of that microphone and all the millions of people crammed inside that microphone ready to catch you out — that was a mean trick. But by the time we were through, we were both laughing."

That's the kind of gentle self-mockery Hodgins enjoys. Hart Hansen, a former student, refers to it as the islander's siege mentality. "It's the feeling that you are nowhere and it's a great humiliation to go anywhere else. Hodgins plays on that: he knows that when the boy from Merville goes to Toronto, something awful will happen to him and it does, and it's wonderful."

Merville, B.C., in the Comox Valley, seven miles from Courtenay, is a collection of small stump ranches and hobby farms clustered around a crossroads. It's more or less described (as Waterville) in *The Barclay Family Theatre*: "The place has never wanted to be part of anyone's map. This collection of

thirty hobby farms along a four-mile stretch of highway has never wanted to be anything at all but what it is: a General Store and Post Office, a community hall, and houses you pass on your way to somewhere else. They don't even ask you to reduce your speed as you're driving through."

A stump ranch? "That was local idiom for a farm," says Hodgins. "There was embarrassment about calling these places 'farms' because they didn't look like what we saw in books, which were Ontario and Nova Scotia farms, with rolling fields and little white fences. Stump ranches are a very important part of my growing up and it's an image that keeps coming back. We had 70 acres of semi-cleared land, and the cattle roamed in among the stumps that had been left by the early loggers. Those early stumps were about 10 feet high and 15 feet across and had been charred black and hollowed out by forest fires that had gone through at least twice while I was growing up. We played in them — made castles and houses and schools inside these stumps.

> There was a sense of belonging, to a family and to a place. 'The world was an extension of the family. It was an extension of the backyard. There was no area of the world as we knew it that we weren't connected to'

"There'd be hundreds of stumps, maybe thousands, on the land. The whole district was like this, not just our place. I never figured out why the loggers wasted the bottom 10 feet of the tree, but that was the standard way to log. So our playground was 70 acres — in fact, the whole district — of these blackened stumps. Fantasy every day. And there were great long logs, also blackened from forest fires, with their roots up in the air; they were pirate ships or whatever you wanted. You could sit up on the top of the roots. And it wasn't scary. I do remember vividly once waking up and looking out the bedroom window and seeing a great black animal coming towards me, which I thought must be a bear. I went back to bed to hide and then I looked again and it was back where it had started. Eventually I decided it was one of those black stumps, but in daylight, amongst them, they were just part of the furniture.

"All of the people of the district, including my father, were loggers who had hobby farms — a cow and chickens. My parents grew their own food; they cleared the land as they had the time. Gradually each field of stumps became a field of hay."

Hodgins talks in long answers, turning what he can into a story. His childhood reflects the contradictions he continues to straddle, of connection and being apart. On the one hand, there was a strong sense of belonging, to a family and to the place. ("We had this huge family, I belonged there and was inseparable from the trees and the land.") On the other hand, he felt he'd been put on the wrong planet. The things that were becoming important to him were not particularly valued in the society.

"But there was the sense that the world was there as an extension of the family. I could swing on the barn gate and see on the side of Mount Washington where my dad was actually working in the daytime. It was an extension of the backyard. One uncle had a sawmill and another was building houses. There was no area of the world as we knew it that we weren't connected to. There was no foreignness to any of it. When 'foreigners' moved in, they were quickly absorbed into the community, usually by marrying a relative." He laughs. "I was a hick from the sticks. The whole world has been a constant discovery of the wonders that are out there."

Every summer, when cousins and friends were visiting, they'd perform plays in the woodshed. One year it was a circus. "I remember my mother going around the district in the old red Ford, collecting kids to come to the circus. She gave them money so they could buy tickets." Among the performers were Jack, his younger brother and sister, and visiting relatives, who might include the younger members of the older generation, like his mother's youngest sister, who's only four years older than her nephew.

"I had a violin, and dressed up as a gypsy to tell fortunes. We had the dog in an overturned baby crib — that was the great lion. We'd also put on plays. In the summer, the woodshed got as empty as it was going to get, and we'd string up bedspreads across the middle of the room to distinguish the stage from the audience. The plays were nearly always melodramatic and full of bloodshed and violence, suicide. We had a wonderful time. Part of it was family tradition, but it was also a district response to a need for entertainment."

Still, Hodgins felt an outsider, because he wanted to be a writer. From the time he could read, he wanted to be "one of those people who put the magic in the boxes" that were books. When he was around eight, he wrote a story and asked the babysitter to type it for him. Then he sewed the pages together and made a cover on which he drew a picture of "a gorgeous redhead with a smoking pistol in her hand." It was only about six pages, but it had become a book. "Whatever it is that makes me want to write stories and not just tell them can be extended to that love for the object."

HODGINS WAS the first in his extended family to go to university. He funded studies toward his Bachelor of Education degree with a $2,000 scholarship from a logging firm. He thought a teaching certificate would help him eat if necessary, though he planned to become a best-selling author before he had to face a classroom. At UBC he took a writing course from Earle Birney, the first real writer he'd ever seen (in Hodgins's office is a colour snapshot of a special moment: Birney presenting him with the Governor General's Award in 1980), and in an English

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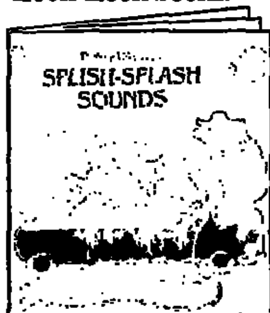

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class he met William New, now editor of *Canadian Literature* and a lifelong friend. He also met Dianne, and married her just prior to graduation.

While still in university, Hodgins was churning out novel after novel. "They were really short stories about 250 pages long, because I wanted to finish one so I could start the next and get on with being a famous writer." One was about growing up, falling in love, late adolescence. Another featured "a great mansion, not a plantation but it could have been, on the edge of Vancouver Island, burning down as a result of a melodramatic event — with a matriarch sitting at the centre, of course. The thing is that I was borrowing archetypes from literature, but I was using people I knew. I was reading Faulkner and recasting — like taking a local cast of actors to put on a play written by someone in another place." One story, about a garbageman, was perhaps good enough to publish. But Hodgins needed only one rejection from a publisher to relegate a manuscript to the closet.

When he graduated he returned immediately to Vancouver Island — to the outskirts of Nanaimo, about 60 miles south of Merville. Even moving that far away from home broke with local tradition. "The pattern was to get a job after high school, in a logging camp or in town, to build your own house at the back end of your old man's property if he gave you a corner, or close by, and get married and raise a family. It was a pretty contained world." Hodgins had something of both worlds — the unconventional university and "the strong need to fit some of the patterns."

He started building his own house and raising children. It took seven years of moonlighting at night school to finance what was quite an ordinary home, not a glamorous log cabin. But consider what Hodgins was doing at this time: teaching English and math at the local high school, teaching night school, building a house room-by-room as his family lived in it, and meanwhile trying to be a writer. Although he's been described as a "natural-born" teacher and clearly enjoyed his 18 years of teaching, at first he found it difficult. "You have to struggle very hard to learn the techniques to become a 'natural born' teacher."

Hodgins's primary impulse in writing is to tell a story. He's interested in people and what happens to them — or as in the old saw he quotes, "to walk around in their shoes for a while." He is so self-effacing that he says he sometimes finds it easier to understand other people's points of view than his own. He'll follow his characters anywhere, but at the same time he's a highly conscious writer, fascinated — one of his favourite words, along with "haunted" — by patterns, literary devices, and traditions that he can employ or subvert. "I love fiction and read it all the time. And there's an aspect of writing a novel or short story which is purely the creation of an object in which the pleasure comes from the discovery of the appropriate images and the sense of what might be symbol." An effortless surface and a richly complex undercurrent, elegant sophistication hidden behind a panorama of colour and plot — the books have what Hodgins has called "book-ends," a framework that contains the centrifugal forces.

Some of Hodgins's delight in patterns can be linked to his interest in mathematics. "I love the lines and shapes of geometry. I respond to that sense of completeness and structure that isn't always carried out in my work because I also believe in open-endedness. I don't want my stories to be little boxes, but I do like the sense of order, of principle at work here." In *The Honorary Patron* balance is fairly central, since it deals with a character who retires to the neatness of Zurich only to return to Vancouver Island and be confronted by its ebullience.

If geometry is pattern, algebra is mystery: what makes people tick? "When I think of algebra — *As*, *Bs*, and *Xs* — there's always somebody hiding behind them, and you've got to track them down, to find a solution. Who's *X*, anyway?" In his first years of teaching English and math, to teach a theorem was as exciting as teaching a poem because it had beauty, symmetry, mystery, even an end line.

Plot and subtext, algebra and geometry, Hodgins again consciously bridges some stylistic contradictions. An admirer of the late John Gardner and his views on "moral fiction," Hodgins takes responsibility for his characters and the "big questions that often confront them. Having the rug pulled out from under them means transcending boundaries, searching for new meaning to their lives. In *The Honorary Patron* that takes the form of questioning modern atheism, our "orphanage-planet of wearying molecules," and plumping for something more.

He takes responsibility for his characters and the 'big questions' that often confront them. Having the rug pulled out from under them means transcending boundaries and searching for new meaning to their lives

Vancouver writer Keith Maillard traces Hodgins's "religious feeling" to his love of the small, wonderful details of being alive. "There's that extraordinary moment [in *The Barclay Family Theatre*] when people are waiting to see if a girl will rise from the dead. And our attention is turned away from that to Carl Roote noticing that the trowel work on the cement is crooked. That image is really clear and intense for me — the solidity of the concrete, the line of the trowel, that kind of reality — and his wife looks up and sees the lights spilling out and down in front of the hotel. It's the pulling back into the real world. It's almost as though Jack creates this wonderfully filigreed and intense density — especially in the early books where there's this *horror vacui*, where there's no corner or bit of space left undecorated — but what it seems finally to pull back to is the beauty of ordinary life." The Dutch title for *The Barclay Family Theatre* translates as "Life is a Feast."

At the same time, the undercurrents of Hodgins's writing flirt dangerously with notions like metafiction and deconstruction, closer to critic William Gass than to John Gardner. For example, *The Invention of the World* is also a book about writing a book. But to Hodgins that just adds to the texture, depth, and integrity of the work; it's not arid artfulness.

DURING HODGINS'S LONG apprenticeship as a writer he gave up his derivative novels and turned his attention to short stories. The result, eventually, was the widespread success of *Spit Delaney's Island*. "I published *Spit* out of a great — I don't want to use the word ignorance or even innocence — perhaps unpreparedness. On the one hand, I had what seemed like a lifetime of ambition behind me, the drive to do something good. But I also was bringing to it many years of rejection slips so there was that lack of confidence. And all this gets complicated by the fact that I want to be taken seriously — this sounds so pretentious, please put it in quotations — as a 'literary artist.'

"I had a very strong sense that the stakes were high. I wasn't going to slip unnoticed into the writing world. Fortunately, I had been chosen by a major publisher [Macmillan], who had decided ahead of time to make a big deal of it. At the last minute, if I could have passed a law prohibiting Vancouver Island people from reading the book, I would have. I didn't want to meet the people who were reading my stuff. I didn't want my intentions to be misunderstood. The reviews very quickly acknowledged that I was writing about a part of the world they hadn't heard much about before, but that I was interested in something else — in capturing the human spirit, the things that the writers that I've always admired have aimed for.

You work with the little patch of world that you're given. I was very conscious that I had thrown in my lot with the heavyweights — or at least was trying to."

By the time *Spit Delaney's Island* came out Hodgins had already written *The Invention of the World*. In fact, his publisher asked if he wanted *The Invention* to appear first. "I said, 'No way. I want the stories first.' I guess I was so insecure I thought, if they don't like the first story, maybe they'll like the second. I imagined all these people out there with their thumbs up or down: and judgement was going to be passed. They had 10 chances of finding something they liked, and

'I remember holding that book and my entire life passed before me, recalling with pain and joy all I had been through up to this moment, and being absolutely overwhelmed'

reviewers would be able to say something nice about the book. It turned out the opposite. Most reviewers were very good about the book, but felt obliged to find one story they didn't like.

"If the stakes were high with the first, I knew I'd upped them by writing the kind of novel I did — with a kind of arrogance, I suppose, saying in effect 'I know what you think a novel is supposed to look like but I don't care. I'm writing the novel that I want to write, the way I want to write it, having failed with five traditional timid novels.' So by the time that one came out, the reviews were predictably mixed, but farther in either extreme — wilder praise and stronger criticism. It's a funny business — at the same time that I'm responding to those things, I'm already writing the next book, which I knew would be different from the first two.

"I remember when *The Invention* physically arrived in the house," he continues. "That is the moment at which the whole thing hit me. I remember holding that book and my entire past life passed before me, recalling with sharp pain and joy all that I had been through up to this moment, and being absolutely overwhelmed to look at this thing and think: perhaps this is the book I have wanted all my life to write. I guess it was the single moment in which I recognized the enormity of the whole business. And I was both elated and humbled. It was like a fist in the chest. Whooo. All of life was boiled down to this one second."

The acceptance of *Spit Delaney's Island* for publication buoyed Hodgins's confidence. He applied for a five-month Canada Council grant and took a semester off from teaching to write two drafts of *The Invention*. The success of those books brought invitations to be writer-in-residence at Simon Fraser University and the University of Ottawa. Hodgins took an extended leave from his high-school teaching and never went back.

The Barclay Family Theatre came out while he was living in Ottawa. The travel was starting to surface, with stories set in Japan, Ireland, and Ottawa. "I always come home with certain images or moments or buildings stuck to me — poetic burrs — that I can't shake until they gather some kind of life to them." Sometimes it works the other way; he takes his characters abroad. In perhaps the best story of the collection, "The Sumo Revisions," Jacob and Mabel Weins (*The Resurrection*'s mayor and his wife) reappear in Japan. When Hodgins was attending Kabuki theatre in Tokyo, he could "imagine how Mabel would love this and how Jacob would hate it. Once that notion had occurred to me, it was inescapable that I was seeing everything three times. I was haunted by Jacob Weins's need to be written about again."

The story also highlights Hodgins's attraction to costume, particularly men dressing up — whether it's the male Kabuki actor disguised as a woman or the mayor of Port Annie garbed as Captain Vancouver. The sober hero of *The Honorary Patron* dons feathers and metallic robes to lecture on the painter Gustav Klimt, and later is unceremoniously stripped on a nude beach. All this relates to Hodgins's preoccupation with the whole business of fiction, which is inherently artifice and ambiguity about what is real and what is mask. But it also has to do with "the fascination I have with people's ability to invent themselves, to reinvent themselves and be different people in different situations."

Costumes are just a part of the spectacles, dramas, parades, and celebrations that proliferate in his books. For a private man, Hodgins loves creating madcap crowd scenes. (There's a Brueghel print in the hallway of his house, he points out.) He depicts community rituals where everyone attends and it turns into a mammoth brawl or blow-out. Living on an island, he says, makes it easy to imagine the whole world coming out for a party.

Hodgins resists suggestions that his early novels were "magic realism," or even larger than life. Yes, he was influenced by the Latin American writers Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Vargas Llosa, but — here he sounds like Margaret Atwood defending the realism of *The Handmaid's Tale* — "there's absolutely nothing in *The Resurrection* that hasn't happened in some shape or form on this island. I didn't have to make anything up."

On the surface of it, his books are becoming more "realist" than "magic realist," but then the realism of his own life is changing — he left central Vancouver Island for Ottawa and, since 1983, Victoria. The "poetic burr" he acquired in Ottawa became an albatross (if we can switch from flora to fauna). For five years, Hodgins was tormented by an 800-page Ottawa novel he was trying to write about a West Coast character, Topolski. The gargantuan manuscript is stashed in his closet now, along with an unwieldy play on the same subject.

The Honorary Patron was started while he was still struggling with Topolski, but then picked up its own momentum, especially when his hero arrived on Vancouver Island. That's where the energy is unleashed and where people become *characters*, in the multiple senses of that word. As we walk back to the house, Hodgins describes the annual pumpkin-growing contest that his family and friends participate in to see who's the greatest pumpkin grower in the Comox Valley.

"They all haul in their 150-pound pumpkins that they've been secretly growing out behind the barn all year. They dress up — they wear the most outlandish things they can drag together, the men and the women — and part of the fun is having a wonderful time in these nonsensical, exaggerated costumes. It's all part of that sense of enjoying one another and creating your own spectacles. This is consistently true of the people amongst whom I grew up and who are still very much part of my life — the sense that they are their own best audience. To tell the stories to one another, to make a fool of yourself, to surprise one another is the important thing. At the latest pumpkin weigh-in, one of my uncles had what was obviously going to be the smallest pumpkin there so he secretly hollowed it out and filled it with molten lead. It actually weighed the most, although it was only the size of your fist.

"Self-mockery is part of the costume thing too. Another relative of mine made an impression at the weigh-in. Again, he realized he had a losing pumpkin — and you don't just go in and humbly accept your defeat. He got a logging truck and a semi-trailer, and put his tiny pumpkin right in the middle of the semi-trailer and chained it down with great chains extending out to each corner as if it were an absolute giant, and drove through the centre of town, blowing his horn and making a great deal of it, so that everybody saw his embarrassing failure as a pumpkin grower. He arrived as a hero. It's a part of the ability that I just admire in so many people I know, the ability to turn everyday life into excitement and drama and comedy, comedy and fun!" □

WORK IN PROGRESS

Emotional arithmetic

Benjamin had no idea what to make of his mother, nor had his father, nor had she herself. That didn't excuse the way his father had behaved — only helped to explain it

By Matt Cohen

HIS MOTHER'S HANDS. White. Long-fingered. Manicured pearl nails like the moons of a faraway planet arcing across space and time. It was July, perfect weather. Benjamin had been up with the sun. Coffee steaming into the hollow colours of the morning sky. Dew soaking through his shoes, coating the car. Silvery rolls of mist snaking through the valleys.

His mother's hands were in repose, spread out as if to be examined on the table that was between them. The table, the chairs, Benjamin, and his mother were all in the shade of a towering oak tree.

"I'll have a cigarette."

Benjamin offered the package and then, when his mother was ready, stood up and held the flaming lighter in place. As she sucked sharply on the filter her face contracted briefly and her unlined forehead furrowed into a familiar pattern of what Benjamin used to think was concentration and intelligence.

ILLUSTRATION BY MAUREEN PAXTON

"Help yourself," his mother said.

"I don't smoke."

"That's right. I always forget. You never smoked, did you?"

"No."

Benjamin placed the gold lighter back on the table.

"Your father used to smoke. He gave me the lighter and the wedding ring at the same time. Look at the initials — JLW — the same on both of them."

His mother took off her ring — the gold wedding band was the only ring she wore — and held it out for Benjamin to see. "JLW. Do you remember what they stand for?"

"Joanne Lansing Winters," Benjamin said.

"I used to have the Joanne Lansing School of Dance. Do you remember? That was before we moved to the farm. Of course I was better at singing. But no one wanted to send their children to singing school. They couldn't sit still for that. It was jump and twist and moan. It was dance, dance, dance. But I'll tell you the secret of the stage." She leaned forward. In the days of the dancing school her hair had been a rich chestnut colour that glowed in the summer. Now the dye that kept away the grey hair had made her hair a brittle and coppery red. But age had not destroyed her face. Only drawn the skin more tightly, squeezed out the softness, made her features sharper and more commanding than ever. Nor had the colour of her eyes changed. They were still blue — not the washed-out soapy blue of old people's eyes but the sharp throbbing blue of the sky at sunset. "The secret of the stage, dance or no dance, is being still. Let the others jerk around like monkeys. They're only making fools of themselves. You stay upfront, unmoving, the centre of the storm. Do that and all eyes are on you. The Joanne Lansing School of Dance. I should have had the Joanne Dancing School of Lance. Did you ever think of that?"

"No," Benjamin said.

"Your father would have helped me with that. Mrs. Dance and Mr. Lance. We could have been quite a pair, what do you think?"

"You were quite a pair," Benjamin said.

"Only one problem. Mr. Lance had to go a-poking. Joking and moping and poking until he poked his way into someone else. Now what kind of school is that?"

His mother's eyes had begun to fill. Benjamin wanted to lean over the table and take her hands in his, but he didn't. Instead he waited. The tears began to roll down his mother's cheeks but her eyes stayed open, fixed on his. Then her mouth twisted, lips gripping each other like despairing hands.

"Madness," she croaked theatrically, "that way lies madness." She laughed, a sharp knowing laugh that was new to her these past few years. It was the kind of laugh that didn't expect company. Then she took a Kleenex from her purse, wiped her eyes. Her mouth began to relax and Benjamin could see the tension literally draining from her face. "How is the old goat anyway?"

"Getting along."

"Goating along, you mean. Did you know he turned 75 in

May? Seventy-five! When we got married everyone said he was too old for me. Now he's an old man and I'm—" His mother's face again began to ripple, this time like an airplane bucking under the influence of a violent storm. Sudden changes in air pressure. Spinning out of control. Pilot unconscious while heroic co-pilot struggles against all odds. Just before the passengers have to parachute the sky clears again and the pilot regains control, debonairly smoking another cigarette while a thin trickle of blood dries on his chin. The point of perfect stillness. "But he has a woman and I'm alone."

"You're not entirely alone," Benjamin said.

"I know. I don't even want another man. And it was I who told your father to leave. You were away at college then. I waited for that. Then one morning at breakfast I read him the Riot Act. 'You're a pig and an idiot,' I told him, 'you should have declared moral bankruptcy 10 years ago.' I said more than that, too, but I don't think he was even listening. I had wanted to hurt him but he was glad for the excuse. Anyway I sent him a present but he never wrote back. I don't think he knows what to make of me, do you?"

"No," Benjamin said. In fact he had no idea what to make of Joanne Lansing Winters, nor had his father, nor had she herself. Of course that didn't excuse the way his father had behaved — only helped explain it.

"You still see him?"

"Yes."

"Your sister was smarter, she got away."

"She didn't get away," said Benjamin. "She was here last week."

"Once in six months. I suppose she would rather spend her time on her refugees."

"She finds it difficult to see you because she loves you so much."

"Am I that bad?"

"No, you're not bad at all."

"I don't know what she sees in those people."

"They need her. They need someone to help them."

"She was never that generous."

Benjamin felt his shoulders begin to sag. Emotional arithmetic: these visits were exercises in emotional arithmetic of love and hate, time passed and time remaining, injustices suffered and revenge meted out. It would be easier to have her at home, he had said to his wife. Who, to balance her own emotional books, was forced to agree. Now Benjamin's back was aching and a sharp flame was burning in the pit of his stomach.

"You're looking great today," he finally said.

"What's the best thing about me?"

"Today? I'll tell you the best thing about you today." Slowly and intently Benjamin scrutinized his mother, as though he were a judge torn between the triumphs of a hundred dazzling beauties.

"You're staring," his mother said. "No fair staring."

The flame in his stomach was beginning to sputter. If he could appease his mother it would go out. If, on the other hand, Benjamin could not manage her; if the bantering turned into accusations, the accusations into tears and rantings; if finally she went entirely out of control and he had to be rescued — then the flame would be with him until the next visit.

"Let me stare," Benjamin said. "I can't decide with my eyes closed."

His mother smiled. The flame went out. A woman was crossing the lawn and coming toward them. Benjamin carefully kept his eyes from shifting until she was finally standing beside them, ready to join the conversation.

"Mrs. Delfasco, what do you think is most attractive about my mother today?"

"Her hands," the nurse said right away. "Mrs. Winters, you have the most beautiful hands I've ever seen."

Benjamin stood up. "Not so fast," his mother said. "What about you?"

"Your tongue," Benjamin said. "I don't know what I'd do without your tongue." He winked at his mother and, while she was still smiling, he leaned over and kissed her quickly on the cheek. Then, as always when things had gone well, he nodded without saying goodbye and in the same motion started on his way toward the parking lot. □

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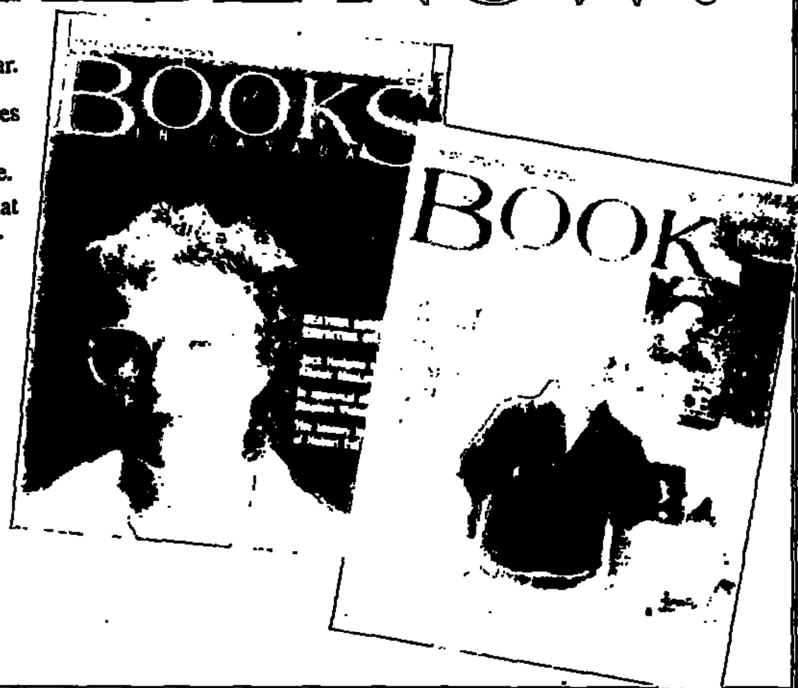

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REPORT

Rewriting the past

A recent novel by Ted Allan bears more than a slight resemblance to a 35-year-old paperback by 'Alice K. Doherty'

By Paul Stuewe

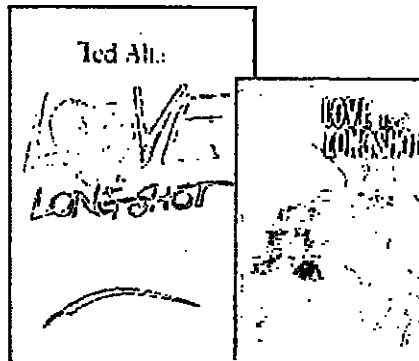
OUR STORY BEGINS in the spring of 1977, when I was doing some research into the history of paperbacks for a magazine article. Among the numerous obscure items of information that came to light, none was more interesting than the short but eventful career of Export Publishing Enterprises Ltd. This Toronto company, founded in 1949, had issued pseudonymous paperback originals by the likes of "John Holmes" (Raymond Souster) and "Jarvis Warwick" (Hugh Garner) before its offices and warehouse were destroyed by fire in 1950. It seemed a reasonable assumption that there might be other Canadian authors who had contributed to the more than 30 titles Export published during its brief but active career: could it be that a previously unknown Morley Callaghan or Mordecai Richler novel lurked beneath such innocent-sounding authorial monikers as "Tex Lane" or "Serge G. Wolsey"?

When I finally tracked down one of the businessmen who had operated the company, he proved to be something less than an informational gold mine. He was able to recall that Al Palmer and Danny Halperin, two Montreal newspapermen, had written novels for Export, but he was understandably a bit fuzzy about the details of a business that had ceased to exist more than 25 years ago. Finally, I asked him if he could remember any of the bizarre pseudonyms that sometimes concealed the identities of authors with literary reputations to protect. (Hugh Garner's "Jarvis Warwick," for example, memorialized a short stay at Toronto's Warwick Hotel on Jarvis Street, where Garner churned out *Waste No Tears* in less than a week.) "Yes," he replied, "there was one that struck me as particularly funny. When we published *Love Is a Long Shot* we gave the author the name Alice K. Doherty, but the book was really written by Ted Allan."

Well, this wasn't exactly stop-the-presses stuff, but it was an interesting piece of otherwise little-known information. R.E. Watters's *A Checklist of Canadian Literature 1628-1960*, the major reference work in the field, did list Export's Garner and Souster titles, but failed to mention *Love Is a Long Shot*. Feeling that I had made a small but nonetheless original discovery in the otherwise well-charted waters of modern Canadian literature, I wrote my article and enjoyed the appreciative comments that my work received when it eventually appeared in the May, 1977, issue of *Books in Canada*.

Cut to 1984, when McClelland & Stewart published the novel *Love Is a Long Shot*, by Ted Allan. Curious as to what relation it bore to the Alice K. Doherty version, I was puzzled to find that neither the copyright page nor the dustjacket contained any indication that Allan had previously published a book with the same title. It was possible, of course, that this was an entirely different novel that simply reflected the author's recycling of an effectively alliterative phrase, but the situation obviously demanded further investigation.

At this point, what had merely been an embarrassing circumstance suddenly became an irritatingly obstructive one. I did not possess a copy of the Alice K. Doherty version, and neither did any Canadian library I consulted. Although the Export executive had assured me that the book had in fact been published, I had never actually seen a copy; as I searched Southern Ontario's second-hand book stores I began to think that I never would. No one had ever seen it, no one had ever heard of it, and doubtless many of these bookshop proprietors suspected that I had fallen into that sort of obsessive search for the nonexistent that often entraps the aging bibliophile. But in book-hunting, at any rate, all things do eventually come to those who wait, and recently I was able to put my hands on a copy of Alice K. Doherty's elusive opus.



It was immediately apparent that although Allan had revised and rewritten his earlier work to the extent that it was quite a different novel, there were enough similarities remaining to establish a meaningful connection between the two versions. Both are set in the Mount Royal area of Montreal in the 1930s, and both feature a young protagonist who takes a job at the neighbourhood cigar store, which serves as a horse-betting parlour and social centre for a colourful cast of characters. But after that, their respective narratives diverge considerably: the 1949 version's protagonist, an 18-year-old girl, experiences her first love and her first murder in melodramatic prose drawn from the hard-boiled school of pulp fiction, whereas the 1984 version's hero, a not quite 18-year-old boy, gets involved in an essentially humorous romp with Damon Runyon-type gangsters and left-wing revolutionary politicos. Despite their very different plot lines, however, a close reading of the two books reveals a number of places where the 1949 version has served as the basis for its 1984 reincarnation, as the following examples demonstrate:

> "What has been the daily average take?" she asked in a business-like manner.
> "I beg your pardon?"
> "Don't beg my pardon, and don't act so damned dumb. Your vacation is over. What's the average daily take?"
> "About forty-five dollars." Her hostile tone disturbed me.
> "We're going to double that in a month." (1949)

> "What's been the average take since you started working here?"
> "I beg your pardon?"
> "Don't beg my pardon, and don't act dumb. It doesn't fool me. What's the average daily take?" Her lip curled.
> "Around forty dollars," I said, wondering how long it was going to take me to give notice.
> "We'll double that in a month, triple it in three months." (1984)

"John pays him for making the furnace, but he throws it away on booze.

And remember, I don't want him in the store. He'll smell up the place. He'll come sucking around you trying to mooch dough. He'll talk your ear off about how he was a captain in the war and that he gives all his pension money to his poor old mother. That bum never had a mother." (1949)

"Eddie pays that bum for attending to the furnace, but he spends it all on booze," she said. "Make sure you never let him into the store. He'll stink up the place and try to mooch money for booze and tell you sad stories about being a captain in the war and that he gives all his pension to his old mother. That bum never had a mother!" (1984)

"I got my little crooked niece good and proper," she gloated.

"It's about that dollar and eighteen cents," I explained. "Aunt Molly took it out to trap me, to see if I would adjust the meter."

He groaned and looked disgusted. "Katie told me about the shortage so I readjusted the meter."

She stared at me, disbelieving.

"That's right," he said. "She told me about it this morning. How was I to figure it was one of your dirty little tricks to catch her. You make me sick."

"You no-good-rat!" shrieked Aunt Molly at her husband. "You cheap no-good-slobbish-rat!" and walked out of the store. (1949)

"I got this little crook good and proper!" croaked his wife.

"It's about that five dollars," I said. "Mrs. Keller took it out of the till to trap me."

Mr. Keller looked at his wife and nodded his head as though this didn't surprise him. "He told me about the five bucks being short, so I adjusted the meter." He eyed her in disgust.

She peered at me and Keller, trying to figure out if she was being had.

"I should have known," said Mr. Keller, "that it was one of your dirty tricks. You make me sick. It's time for your trip to Florida."

"You no-good rat. You no-good slob!" she spat at him and stomped out of the store. (1984)

More detailed comparisons will be left to any aspiring academic in need of a minor but certifiably original topic for a thesis. Speaking as one who cherishes the hunt for the obscure but meaningful detail, who asks for nothing more than the chance to add a grain of knowledge to the bulging CanLit cornucopia, I'm more than satisfied with this small indication that a computer hasn't yet made me redundant. If love is a long shot, the odds against connecting an almost unknown 1949 novel with its 1984 recreation bring to mind George Herbert's words in *Jacula Prudentum*: " . . . things of this world depend on such a train of unseen chances that if it were in man's hands to set the tables, still he would not be certain to win the game." □

REVIEW

Too little too late

By Alberto Manguel

The Honorary Patron, by Jack Hodgins, McClelland & Stewart, 336 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4189 6).

THE FATHER- (or mother-) land is an invention of memory, the land we choose to rebuild in fits of nostalgia. Confrontation with its physical reality leads to disappointment. To avoid this, we can either refuse to go home, or turn the homecoming into a theatrical performance, re-enact our dreams, make them stand for what we see. In Jack Hodgins's new novel, *The Honorary Patron*, Canadian professor Jeffrey Crane, a voluntary exile in Europe, first tries the former, and then adopts the latter solution.

Tempting Crane back is his unfaithful sweetheart, the beautiful Elizabeth, who instead of marrying him (sometime in their youthful past) married a certain Argent. The forbidden apples Elizabeth offers Crane are those of common affection and future responsibility: Crane is to become the "honorary patron" of a small B.C. Shakespearean festival that (Hodgins warns the reader in the acknowledgements) "bears only a small resemblance" to the real-life one in Nanaimo.

Crane has been an actor before becoming a professor, but retains a certain performing naivety that tinges all his actions. "For all his early training for the stage and his many years of experience at the front of lecture halls, he found he could not be so certain of controlling his own face, which he'd been told was the long and narrow suspicious sort of face one expected to find on a country priest." It is this involuntary innocence that in the

end allows Crane to succeed in imposing his imagination upon the world around him.

Reality transformed through our imagination and history moulded by our dreams have become the signature of Hodgins's fiction. *The Invention of the World* is more than the title of Hodgins's first novel: it could also serve as the title of his collected works. In *The Honorary Patron* Crane invents first a Vienna and a Zurich of pursuers and pursued, then a B.C. of cranks and visionaries. Neither corresponds to the reality of newspapers, but neither contradicts it. Crane's inventions may not be real, but they are true.

The reality of Crane's geography is made believable by Hodgins's mastery of the language. The story is told in the third person, but a third person that barely disguises the voice of Crane, the hero. Outside Crane's story stands the author's voice, and yet we, the readers, know that it is Crane's version we are hearing. Crane's ebullient vision of the world must seep into the telling, and Hodgins wisely allows it to do so. Almost any line is a good example of the ease with which Hodgins echoes the tone of his character, describing an event, commenting on an occurrence. "The small waiter was found passing by in his stiff white jacket, and snatched out of his intended journey by the wrist." "He was ramming his feet into his shoes. Dramatic exits were almost impossible for people in the habit of kicking off their shoes wherever they settled." "The entire staircase had been constructed, he could swear, for the sole purpose of making him see himself as ancient and doddering." "He," of course, is Crane, and it is Crane's point of view that sheds light on the story.

It is, however, that same story that seems to be *The Honorary Patron*'s weak point. Half-way through the book it doesn't seem to have begun — nothing much seems actually to *happen* until well into chapter 14. The characters (as seen by Crane) are brilliantly introduced, the stages are set, dialogue crackles with wit, but for the longest time there is no plot to follow. Not every novel, of course, demands a plot, but *The Honorary Patron* not only demands it: it has one. It is just that it is impossibly slow in starting, so that by the time Crane's love-life begins to undermine his carefully constructed reality, this reader's impatience has spoiled (at least in part) the interest in the outcome.

Nevertheless, Hodgins's writing is full of felicities, of perfect turns of phrase and images that bring home unexpected new meanings. There may be at times an overdose of cultural name-dropping, of reference to Kandinsky, Henry Moore, Thomas Mann, Brueghel, etc. And yet, after a few pages, they all seem to belong quite naturally in Crane's dream-academic world. Crane's people and their language are distinct and coherent, in spite of the tale they have to tell. Like great actors in a simple-minded play, Crane and his cast lend *The Honorary Patron* the strength of their talents. What remains is the memory of a remarkable performance wasted on a lagging story of little consequence. □

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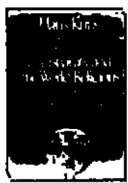
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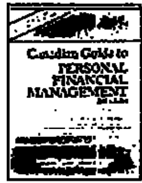

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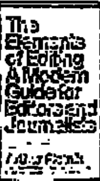
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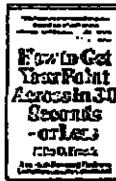
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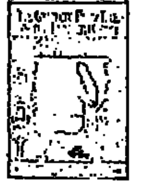
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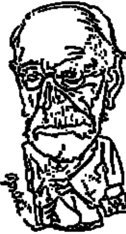

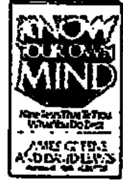

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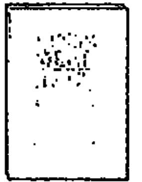
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FEATURE REVIEW

Dangling man

Saul Bellow's intellectual heroes are too dreamy to make conventional husbands, too fastidious to interest women who 'eat green salad and drink red blood'

By Norman Snider

More Die of Heartbreak, by Saul Bellow, Viking (Penguin), 335 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81899 2).

WELL BEFORE HE was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1976, Saul Bellow had cultivated a special place for himself on the contemporary scene. Since the publication of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* he has personified the genteel reaction to the thundering savage apocalypse of American life. As Diane Johnson observed, it is the mission of Bellow's narrators to be at the moral centre of their books. This prize-winning, exemplary hero is the thoughtful and worried person doing his level best against impossible odds to maintain old-fashioned humanist values and decent conduct in the face of urban violence, declining literacy, rampant greed, sexual anarchy, self-satisfied philistinism, debased media, crooked politicians, a trashy popular culture, degenerate ethics in the legal and medical professions, an academy that has failed to uphold genuine intellectual standards, artists who have turned their careers into sideshow carnivals, false philosophy, and death-saturated hedonism. In other words, it's been Saul Bellow vs. the Decline of the West. So far it's been a standoff: neither Bellow nor the Decline have shown any sign of weakening.

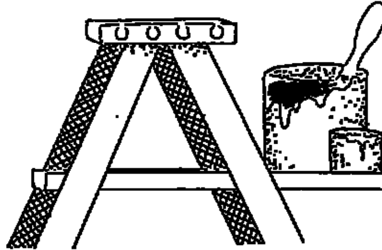
In *More Die of Heartbreak*, Bellow once again takes on the subject he defined once and for all in *Herzog*: the torments of middle-class love and marriage, American-style. That is to say, love and marriage and divorce, with all the half-states and ambiguous floating dilemmas found in between. Since *The Dean's December*, however, Bellow has contrived a unique novelistic approach with plots that offer little in the way of drama or suspense, limited action, compressed scope, and vestigial characterization. In compensation he offers a prolific flood of ideas and observations: the novel as essay.

This meditative style is anything but austere: Bellow is the master of a nervy colloquial style that puts one in mind of Henry Miller minus horny descriptions and underdog rant. Nonetheless, late Bellow, as the master's most assiduous overseas disciple, Martin Amis, has termed it, takes the longest of views. As in late Beethoven or Eliot's *Four Quartets*, all contemporary squabbling and writhing is seen under the eye of eternity.

Not that *More Die of Heartbreak* is a work of serene Olympian detachment or autumnal serenity. What Bellow observes of Dostoyevsky is equally true of himself: he is one novelist who works from his own troubled nature. Except for the odd peaceful interlude, the ladies are continually handing the Bellovian hero, this decent and humane man, the roughest of times. Women, observed one of these gents, in a memorable phrase, "eat green salad and drink red blood."

The story of *More Die of Heartbreak* is easily told: Benn Crader is a world-famous botanist living in a unnamed Midwestern city that nonetheless bears all the earmarks of Bellow's Chicago. He is a widower exhausted by 15 years of embattled bachelorhood. For him marriage represents surcease from the emotional disasters of courtship, flirtation, rejection: the dating game that now carries on mercilessly from puberty till the grave.

What he is looking for in marriage is a peaceful state wherein two human beings are "bound together in love and kindness" — which he reflects, poor sap, "shouldn't be too hard to accomplish." Brilliant with plants, inept with women, Crader precipitately marries an ambitious beauty named Matilda Layamon. Solely



interested in the social status Crader's academic prestige can confer upon her, she envisages a lushly furnished apartment where she can entertain visiting big shots like Henry Kissinger and Günter Grass. Her physician father, like Dr. Tamkin of *Seize the Day* a medical piranha, desires to exploit Crader financially for the wherewithal to make this dazzling life possible.

There is a subplot involving Crader's nephew Kenneth Trachtenberg's difficulties with an S-and-M-loving airhead named Treckie who is the mother of his child but who refuses to marry him. Matilda, another prize bitch in Bellow's endless gallery of same, is offstage much of the time; for the reader, she is little more than a brutally oversized pair of shoulders. Similarly, Treckie has run off to Seattle. The novel's most intense connection is that between the two men.

Accordingly, at the core of the book is the ongoing conversation between uncle and nephew about the larger implications of their woman troubles. This talk, however, is obsessively fascinating. "Knowledge divorced from life equals sickness," observes Bellow at one point. So, the dialogue between uncle and nephew is neither academic prattle nor men's-group moaning; it represents nothing less than a brilliant disquisition on modern love, which is defined finally as "two psychopaths under one quilt."

Thomas Pynchon once observed of one of his characters that "women happened to him like accidents." Bellow's men demonstrate an equal passivity; they are never pursuers, always the prey. In Bellow, it is relations between men that are spiritual and transcendent. Just as the most important connection in *Humboldt's Gift* is between the title character and the book's narrator, Charlie Citrine, Kenneth Trachtenberg wants only to safeguard his uncle's gifts, "to protect him in his valuable oddity."

Needless to say, Matilda Layamon has a different agenda. "The beauty and the charm were up front," writes Bellow of his heroine. "Nobody was invited behind them to get a different perspective." Behind the mask is a rapacity that is both 1980s up-to-the-minute and as old as Balzac. After he fails as an academic, Matilda wants Crader to pursue a lawsuit concerning a family inheritance so she can buy a partnership in a brokerage. (Direct reference is made by Bellow to Balzac's *Cousin Pons*, where another mild old gent is exploited by a ruthless family.)

Nor does Uncle Benn fare any better

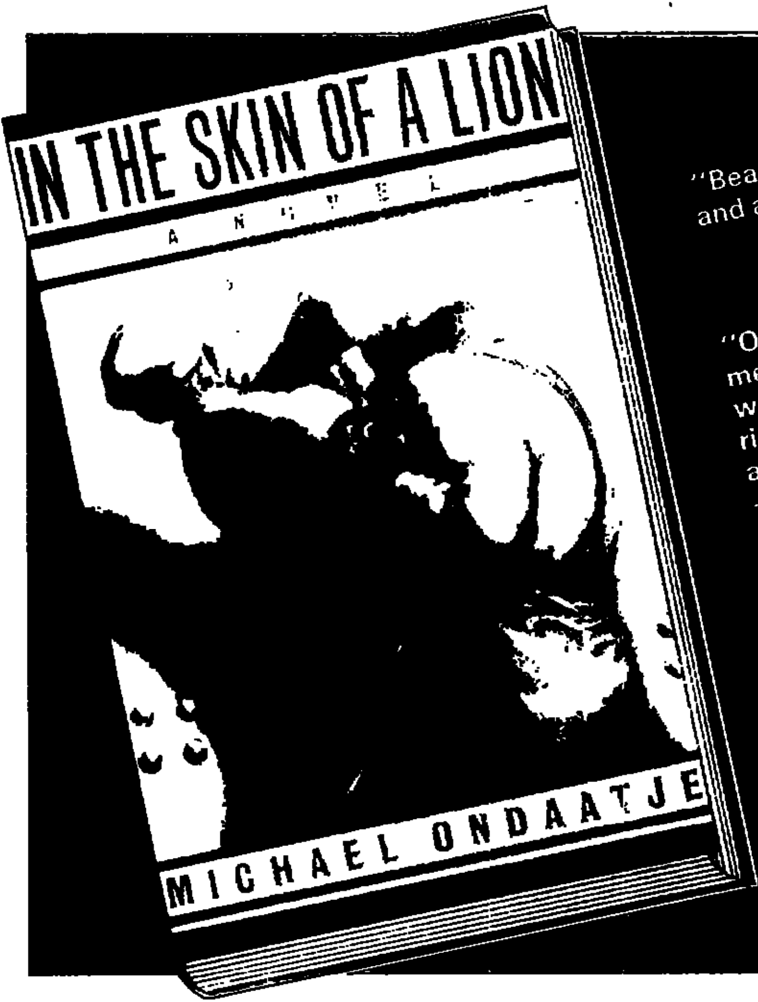
at the hands of the other women in the book. A drug-taking socialite from the Hamptons named Caroline Bunge makes a move on him and he almost marries her until he reflects that "during the act itself she would look and behave as if she was sitting in the Dress Circle at the opera and you were the starring tenor." A dumpy middle-aged neighbour appears at Benn's door and demands that he do something about her sexuality. And in a wonderful scene, Treckie's mother appears and presents an outrageous plan whereby Kenneth can get custody of his daughter by marrying Mama herself, senior citizen though she may be. Bellow, in a stunning turn of phrase describes Crader as "dredged in floury relationships with women who could fry him like a fish if they had a mind to." At the end of the novel, the botanist flees to Antarctica where he can be alone with the lichen.

At this stage in his career, Saul Bellow stands well outside any possible category. Although most of the novel's characters are Jewish, their experience is not especially particularized; it lies well within the American mainstream. The social world Bellow's fiction has inhabited in the last couple of decades is that of the distinguished senior academic, the globe-circling professor-emeritus, the "world-class intellectual." As with Albert Corde of *The Dean's December*, too much inexplicable fuss is made of Benn Crader. Kenneth Trachtenberg continually talks of his uncle's "magic" and charisma. Henry Kissinger and Günter Grass would certainly drop off to visit a Nobel prize-winner in literature in the Midwest, but never a botanist, no matter how distinguished. Like that of Albert Corde, Benn Crader's stature and appeal are only understandable in terms of those of his author.

Although Bellow himself would detest such *Ring Magazine*-style rankings, one question naturally arises in the circumstances: who is America's greatest living writer, Bellow or Mailer? Since the two novelists represent a monumental study in polarity, no doubt the Ph.D. mills are already grinding on the subject. Where Mailer went to war and wrote about men in combat, Bellow stayed home and wrote about the home front. Where Mailer consciously abandoned his Jewishness all the better to encompass American society, Bellow insisted on it. Where Mailer strove to become the egomaniacal King of New York, Bellow remained a decent, modest chap in provincial Chicago. Where Mailer ventured out to explore and embrace the psychopathy of American life, Bellow stayed behind to man the burgherly barricades. Where Mailer became a kind of Mosaic prophet of rebellion, Bellow remained an embattled apologist for the educated middle class.

And herein lies the crux of Bellow's romantic dilemma. One British critic has observed that all of Bellow's novels could well bear the title of his first book, *Dangling Man*. His intellectual protagonists are far too dreamy and mystically inclined to make good, prosperous, conventional husbands, far too gentle to duke it out in the back alleys of the so-called real world of business and politics, all in the name of family life. (Children, Bellow justly observes, are the great excuses for scumball behaviour in the arenas of money and power. "Why do I do it? I do it for my kids.") At the same time, men like Kenneth Trachtenberg and Benn Crader are too morally and intellectually fastidious to countenance any of the female inhabitants of the bohemias, high or low, currently available to them. These women take drugs, they like to get beaten up; the genteel Bellow hero is in their view a killjoy, one dull Charlie, just not their style of dude. So his protagonists dangle, essentially solitary, on the margins.

Still, James Joyce, who knew about these things, once made a remark that well applies to Bellow's quandary: the mistakes of a man of genius are merely the portals of discovery. □



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REVIEW

Heart of the city

By Kenneth McGoogan

Between Men, by Katherine Govier, Viking (Penguin), 312 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81499 7).

SEVERAL FINE writers have set novels in and around Calgary, among them W. O. Mitchell, L. R. Wright, and Aritha van Herk. But until now no novelist has dared to place Calgary at the heart of a full-length fiction, to make it the focus of attention in a work designed to put the city on Canada's literary map.

Katherine Govier, an expatriate Albertan based in Toronto, establishes her controlling metaphor early in *Between Men*. "This matter of getting on the map," one of her narrators writes: "first it was the railway that was going to do it, then the boom, then the fire of 1886. And still it hadn't happened. There was a sense of something owing." Later, he observes: "Calgary will be the first Western town to have streetlights. The power project will put us on the map."

Between Men is a complex, well-crafted novel that intertwines two story-lines. The first of these, the framing tale, is a contemporary love story that focuses on Suzanne Vail, a thirty-fivish history professor recently returned to Calgary after an absence of 10 years. She is torn between two men — her businessman husband Ace, whom she is divorcing, and a jaded, 53-year-old politician named Simon, with whom she has an intense affair.

This contemporary story is rich and detailed. It includes vignettes from Suzanne's past (most of them involving Ace) and an ongoing skirmish in the present, with Suzanne battling an attempt by her departmental chairman to cut the most significant course she teaches (Reinventing the West). It's populated with memorable minor characters, notably Suzanne's oilman father-in-law, Block, and her friend Gemma, a shameless gold-digger who founds a group called SWARM (Single Women After Rich Men), incidentally providing light relief.

Suzanne is researching a historical paper about the brutal and mysterious murder of an Indian woman named Rosalie New Grass. She is obsessed with this real-life event, which happened in 1889 at a down-and-dirty Calgary bar called the Turf Club. Her search for facts becomes a quest for truth, and her imaginings form the story within the story, and eventually reveal the death to have been "something that happened between men."

Suzanne's quest is linked carefully with Govier's larger purpose: "This murdered Indian woman, that dark club and the men who frequented it, the town's panic: it was one of those occasions where the layers of custom broke open, and one could see straight to the core of the place. But to see that core, Suzanne would need a way in."

To this end, Suzanne creates a newspaperman-narrator named Murphy, who is present at key historical scenes and himself comes vividly to life. Murphy's dark, brooding chapters are among the novel's chief attractions and clearly demonstrate the great power of Govier's imagination.

Dipping her brush now in the dark colours of the past, now in the bright ones of the present, the author creates a multi-hued portrait of the city in which she became a woman. Riding in hot air balloons, canoeing in Bowness Park, camping in the nearby Kananaskis mountains — all of the distinctive local tones are here.

When Suzanne pushes her bicycle up 11A Street towards Riley Park, those who know Calgary will exclaim: "Yes! I see it! I see it happening!" But the author doesn't forget those unfamiliar with the city, for she immediately rounds out the image: "She intended to go to sit by the playground and watch the mothers and children. . . ."

Govier combines an insider's intimate knowledge of Calgary with an outsider's cool detachment. Her depiction of the city is profound:

> Calgary was a club. Membership meant holding dear a few tenets: the mountains were beautiful, and business was good. These two tenets periodically came into conflict, such as over matters like putting hotels on fragile alpine meadows. When this happened, business won. Further tenets were a handshake meant a deal, and art without a horse in it was pretentious. . . .
>
> Anyone could do business in Calgary. But although making money was Calgary's credo, and a continuous influx of fortune-seeking strangers necessary to its functioning, the seekers after gold were disdained. . . . Club members were more than willing to do business with you but until you'd lived through a bust and lost your money and started again, you wouldn't belong. . . .
>
> This exclusivity was, like all exclusions, a defence. It was the Calgarians' answer to the national assumption that they were

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lesser because although they had made it big they had only done it in this out-of-the-way place. Nevertheless it was there.

If Govier is sometimes hard on her old home town, she is even more coolly scathing when it comes to conventional eastern Canadian attitudes about the West. When Simon learns that Suzanne has spent the past 10 years down East, he relaxes: "There were common assumptions then, she wasn't an untutored westerner after all but someone who had been in the centre, who had learned the proper order of things."

Between Men can't be considered an allegory. It's far too subtle. Yet, Simon is quintessentially an ugly easterner — older, experienced, smugly superior, he has come to teach the local yokels a thing or two. Ace, on the other hand, is 35 but looks 20. He's a great maker of mistakes — but also vital and alive. And he's identified with Calgary and the West.

Govier's novel is also notable, finally, for its insight into male-female relations. One example: "Fidelity was an invention of men to ensure an otherwise unprovable paternity, embraced by women because they needed a man's protection. Until [Suzanne] had agreed to that fidelity. . . she had had the power. But now she had given up her power. Without Ace, she could not make Simon jealous. Instead she made him fearful."

No ambitious novel is without flaws. In this one, Ace's possessiveness is hard to believe, given his years-long separation from Suzanne. There's also a curious, whimsical scene between Ace and his mother that might have been better omitted. Some will object to certain supernatural effects, others to Govier's habit of sometimes using commas to separate complete clauses.

Still, *Between Men* is a powerful, multifaceted assertion of identity by a gifted fiction writer. When all of the clever but placeless novels churned out this decade have been forgotten, *Between Men* will still be showing up on Canadian literature courses. It puts Calgary on the map. □

FEATURE REVIEW

To make a short story long

As a new collection shows, Canada's literary strength may not be its short stories but some superbly written novellas

By Cary Fagan

On Middle Ground, edited by Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman, Methuen, 437 pages, $19.95 paper (ISBN 0 458 80800 8).

AT WHAT POINT does a story become long enough to be called a novella, or a novella earn the title of novel? The editors of *On Middle Ground*, Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman, give vague boundaries of length for the novella (10,000 to 50,000 words) but decline wisely to be much more precise. Instead, they write in their intelligent introduction, of "indeterminate possibilities." But in the 20th century all literary forms have defied their definitions and perhaps the novella, being in the middle range, is merely more indeterminate than others.

In Europe the form was once quite accepted, but in North America, especially since the demise of serial publication in magazines, even well-known writers wishing to use the middle length have had to risk having their work largely ignored. Still, many have been drawn to the novella, perhaps for the same reasons as Vladimir Nabokov, whom the editors quote:

> There is, it would seem, in the dimensional scale of the world, a kind of delicate meeting place . . . a point, *arrived at by diminishing large things and* enlarging small ones, that is intrinsically artistic.

The superb work in *On Middle Ground* should cause us to consider revising the easy assumption that the short story is Canada's strongest form, or that the story is the most difficult form to write (an idea that, I've always suspected, has been sown by the story-writers themselves). The best work in this volume achieves wondrously that distillation of which Nabokov wrote, and the book as a whole is at least as impressive as the best of this country's story collections.

The seven works included here show that Daymond and Monkman have not looked to theme or any notion of what makes a work "Canadian," instead holding to the simple rule that no fiction is worth reading that is without an accomplished style. They also have some biases, which for the most part I can happily accept. Four of the novellas are set on the West Coast, three have writers as protagonists (four if you count music composition as writing), and in several illness is a recurring if not a central obsession.

For me the collection held two genuinely exciting surprises. Most of Malcolm Lowry's writing has been over-

shadowed by one novel, *Under the Volcano*, but "The Forest Path to the Spring" is a work of genuine beauty told in a refined, emotional voice that requires the length of a novella to seduce the reader with its long, non-narrative descriptions.

> Often all you could see in the whole world of the dawn was a huge sun with two pines silhouetted in it, like a great blaze behind a Gothic cathedral. And at night the same pines would write a Chinese poem on the moon.

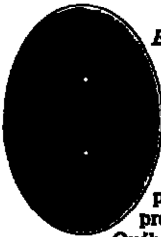
A squatter living on the B.C. coast, ex-seaman, ex-jazz musician, recalls several years of idyllic life. The novella is an elegant damning of civilization's uniformity and a hymn of praise and wonder to the love between a man and a woman.

The other surprise for me is Keath Fraser's "Foreign Affairs." Silas, a young and promising diplomat, is struck with multiple sclerosis and shipped back to Canada. Twenty-three years later we see him engaged in a power struggle with his disciplinarian nurse (a woman who "insists on wearing colors that testify to the presence of disease") and lusting after Nadine, the anorexic daughter of an old friend. Nadine aids Silas in his wish to re-enter the world by taking him for long wheelchair trips along the sea wall that leave him exhilarated, exhausted, and finally defeated.

Fraser's writing is so rich and lively that I have a hard time identifying what's missing. Perhaps it's his use of diplomacy and memories of India, reminiscent of V.S. Naipaul and Graham Greene, which in the end seems merely brilliant colouring rather than a means of creating any larger meaning. But as a portrait of a mind trapped by illness, "Foreign Affairs" is a *tour de force*.

If Mavis Gallant and Clark Blaise are less of a surprise, it's only because I knew their work before. The novella is

ellipse



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Gallant's natural form, and here the editors have chosen an earlier work, "Its Image on the Mirror." While almost as layered in social detail as her later writing, it is more gentle in tone, more compassionate and less bitterly amusing. The story of Jean's confused love for her anarchic sister Isobel is a revelation of the repressive family life of English Quebec and a fine depiction of Montreal during the war.

Perhaps only Clark Blaise can rival Gallant in vivid portraits of Montreal. In "Translation," a novelist named Porter, half English, half French, and suffering from epilepsy, returns to the city to promote his surprisingly successful autobiography and find the ends of the two strands of his past that have always haunted him — his father's desertion and his mother's suicide. If the novella's end is a touch too dramatically Freudian, in every other way it is a searing act of the imagination.

These four novellas all weave time and memory with extraordinary sophistication. The remaining three are worth reading, yet they pale next to such fine work.

Ethel Wilson's "Tuesday and Wednesday" shows us the life of Mort and Myrtle, he a gardener and she a woman whose "nose was thin and would some day be very thin." Unfortunately, Wilson can't quite sustain the amused ironic voice, a precursor of much Canadian fiction, to the end.

Audrey Thomas's "Prospero on the Island" recounts a writer's year-long island residency; although it is a warm, affirmative work the language and insights are often quite ordinary and the loose journal form is a less interesting use of the novella length.

John Metcalf's "Travelling Northward" has a writer flying up to Northern Ontario to give a reading. Metcalf's style is certainly dashing, if sometimes strained for effect. Some may like this persona of

a self-aggrandizing writer and his morose satire. I don't.

Nevertheless, *On Middle Ground* deserves to be read outside the artificial boundaries of Canadian literature courses. Writers have long known the promise of the novella's "indeterminate possibilities" and this collection should make readers equally excited. □

REVIEW

Trouble in Camelot

By Brian Fawcett

The Enigma of Arrival, by V.S. Naipaul, Viking (Penguin), 318 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81576 4).

TO PUT FIRST things first, *The Enigma of Arrival* is a book worth any reader's careful attention. It can be perused and enjoyed for its marvellous prose or for the remarkable sentence-by-sentence lucidity of V.S. Naipaul's mind. But it should also be read as a structural and technical *tour de force*, and finally (and most important) as an indispensable addition to intellectual history, an important deciphering of the current conditions of Western civilization and of the fate and direction of its literature.

Naipaul's historical position in literature has some similarities to that of Joseph Conrad at the turn of this century. Both are exiles from other cultures, both committed themselves early in their writing careers to securing a large audience for their work, and they share an obsession with explaining how and why their books have been written.

Conrad's exile was from a literate and politicized Eastern European culture and family. After a childhood as a virtual political refugee and a youth as an adventurer, he settled in England to write about the dark side of European civilization's then expanding and irresistible imperial energies. His mission was to investigate and make explicit to his reader the volatile interzone between imperial civilization and the planet's half-wild lands, oceans, and peoples as they fell within the control of the Imperium. In doing so, he held the mirror up to his civilization with accuracies that are *still* just being discovered.

Born in Trinidad in 1932 of East-Indian descent, Naipaul came to England at the age of 18 on a colonial scholarship to Oxford, intent on making himself into a cosmopolitan writer as a means of escaping the economic and cultural poverty of his Third-World heritage.

From those beginnings, the similarities between the two men increase. Like Conrad before him, Naipaul is an odd man, by turns pretentious and humble, liberal and cranky to the point of bigotry. Most of his books have been situated in the same interzone Conrad examined, and in several instances, he has deliberately followed Conrad's tracks.

The television persona that was created when he became, for several years in the

early 1980s, something of a media celebrity, like Conrad's public face, commanded respect but very little affection from the ideologically persuaded. The two books that made him a celebrity, *The Return of Eva Peron* (1980) and *Among the Believers* (1981), are brilliant assaults on the cultural naivety and violence of vulgar authoritarianism. If his judgements are predictable, which they rarely are, they usually derive from his hatred of vulgarity, another trait he shares with Conrad.

The Enigma of Arrival differs from the rest of his *oeuvre*. It is called a novel, but like *Finding the Centre* (1984), which documents Naipaul's early life in colonial Trinidad, it is more critical memoir than an application of what most people think of as the tools of a novel — dramatic plot development and fictive invention.

In *Finding the Centre* he produced an admirable record of the writerly methods he has used, and their generative sources in his background and personality. *The Enigma of Arrival* extends that database, but it is structurally much more ambitious. Naipaul orchestrates the full range of his formidable repertoire as the book charts his development as a mature man and writer, and as a citizen of the postwar modern world.

The book centres on an estate cottage just outside Winchester in southern England, a few miles from Stonehenge, where Naipaul moved in the early 1970s. He chose the quiet rural countryside, paradigmatic of all that is graciously English, filled with prehistoric burial middens and overlaid with centuries of history, because it seemed a refuge from the ugly passages of the modern world and a psychological refuge from his own background as a colonial. What he finds there — and reveals to the reader — is a paradigm of a wholly different dispensation.

Breaking with Conrad and his own early work, which sought their primary subject matter along the boundaries of the expanding Imperium, Naipaul reverses field and locates the Imperium's now crumbling inner core in the English countryside. Inner core it may be, but it is no timeless paradigm, no still, deep pool of historical accretion. As elsewhere in the modern world, he finds a mutable way of life, collapsing partly from indifference and ignorance, and partly beneath the onslaught of global homogenization. It is a world replete with migrant populations barely conscious of their surroundings and high-tech military installations practicing megadeath rituals.

The book develops elliptically, focusing loosely but faithfully on the rural enclave that surrounds the decaying country estate his rented cottage is part of. Beginning with a rambling depiction of his first years there, and of a nearby cottage garden and the man who keeps it, he begins to tell us a series of parallel tales. Central among them are the stories of his early years in England, the peeling away of his colonial cultural and artistic illusions as his skills as a writer develop and grow. Yet always his narrative touches back at the valley and cottage, taking us ever deeper into the strata and substrata of the present.

People come and go in the valley, and the result of their labours, for the most part, is failure and waste. Through the marvellous, elliptical textures of his narrative, Naipaul brings himself, and us, face to face with the existential constants of change and death, but also with the power of the human curiosity that allows us to learn and grow and transcend that dark fate.

The result of his own labour in this book is a curiously mixed and culturally rich message, one that betrays neither his East Indian heritage nor the cosmopolitan identity he has worked so painstakingly to achieve. It is also among the most informative tales of the single tribe we have become that our partisan era has yet produced. □

REVIEW

No need to explain

By Anne Denoon

Visitations, by Elizabeth Brewster, Oberon Press, 111 pages, $23.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 661 5) and $11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 662 3).

THE BACK COVER of this new collection of six stories by Elizabeth Brewster bears a quotation from a previous review of her work in *Books in Canada*. The passage quoted, which struck me as faint praise, mentions the necessity of the reader's accepting "the ordinariness of her world." The idea of ordinariness does seem to be central to the author's, as well as her publisher's, vision of her work. In this collection, Brewster refers more than once to her inability, or perhaps disinclination, to "tell a story" in a dramatically structured way. Thus the supposed ordinariness of her prose pieces seems to reside not so much in her choice of subjects, which are rarely ordinary, but rather in her reluctance to shape her material into an artificially heightened version of reality.

About "Collage," a "scrapbook of prose poems" in memory of her father — the last and least conventionally narrative piece in the group — Brewster states:

> This is not a story. A story has a beginning, a middle and an end. A story has a direction. A story has a theme. It has a conflict you can recognize. There is a climax, maybe a recognition scene, a reversal.

Then, referring to the tales her father liked to repeat and embellish, she says: "I can't tell stories in his way."

Although some of the other pieces in this collection more closely approximate the traditional short-story form, Brewster's preference for simplicity and restraint touches almost all of them. In "A Perfect Setting," which describes in the most straightforward and detailed manner possible the arrival of a naive university graduate at her first job in a slightly dubious private school, the author wryly alludes to the stylistic possibilities she has rejected. Her heroine speculates about the different genres — murder mystery, sentimental pot-boiler, Victorian romance, juvenile school story — to which the situation might lend itself, and even finds appropriate examples in the school library, which she stealthily, but uneventfully, visits in the dead of night.

However, "A Perfect Setting" has some of the recurring weaknesses of this collection: in her reluctance to dramatize reality, Brewster tends to pile up details, all with equal emphasis, so that the fact that Isabel's breakfast toast is cold seems almost as important as her ominous realization that most of the school's previous teachers have resigned. Yet, having conveyed the young woman's bewildered reaction to her position with such painstaking care, she tacks on a final paragraph that seems to "explain" what she has so carefully shown.

I found this latter tactic particularly disappointing in the otherwise good "The Old Woman," in which a university lecturer in early middle age is faced with a persistent *memento mori* in the person of a neighbour who is growing senile. This story would have been just as haunting, and its meaning perfectly clear, without its last two sentences.

One aspect of Brewster's prose style that surely reflects her work as a poet is her acute sensitivity to the multiple shades of meaning in a single word. In the title story, for example, a first-person reminiscence based on the 1944 diary of a young university student and would-be poet (the author herself?), she discusses the nuances of the word "visitation":

> It could be a mere visit, somebody dropping in Sunday afternoon for tea. It could be a state visit, a visitation by the Bishop or a royal personage. It could be a spectral appearance by ghosts. . . . It could be a disaster, an act of God or maybe of some malign power.

This passage also indicates the link that joins the various pieces in the collection, for each concerns a visitation of one kind

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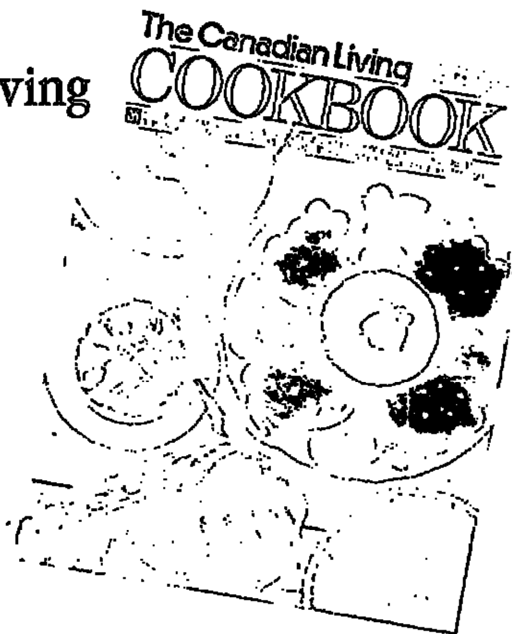

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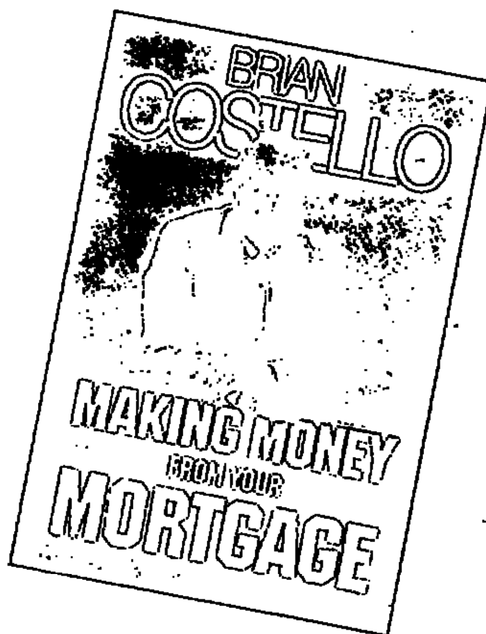

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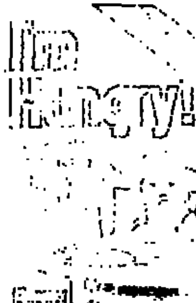

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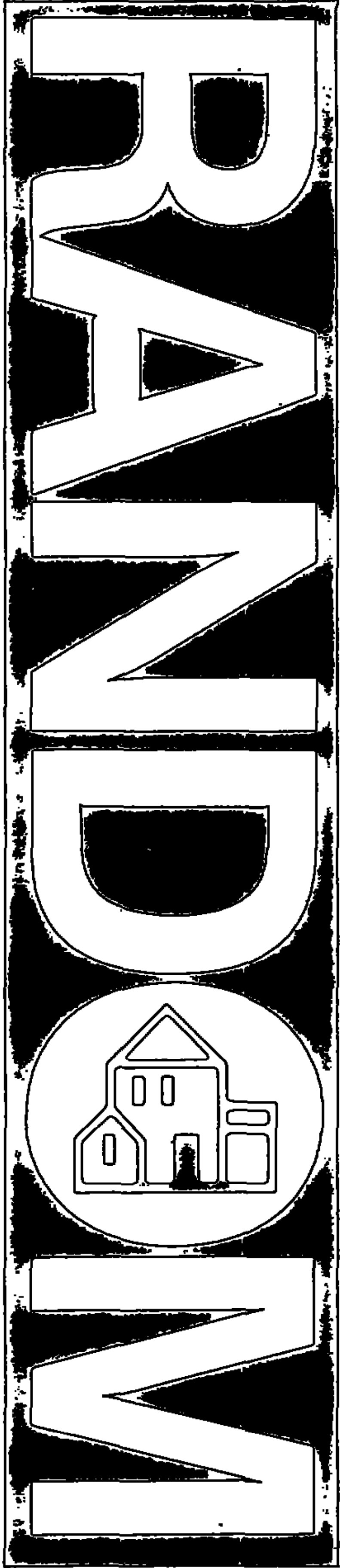

or another. In "Cold Lunch," an uneasy visit by an old friend to an embittered wife who has survived a broken marriage and a potentially fatal illness provides an opportunity for the author to explore the precariousness and ambiguity of memory in the face of time and change. "Well-Meant Advice" also includes a visit and a disturbing event, in this case a rape, and is the most conventionally narrative of the group. Unfortunately, it seems to confirm Brewster's own estimate of her limitations as a teller of stories, for I found it the least successful. Although presumably set in the present, it has an oddly dated air, and its two middle-aged sisters, one blowsy, one prim, somehow fail to convince. Perhaps this is because the author seems to condescend to them a little, much as does the young poet in "Visitations" when she observes two working-class women on the street:

> I don't know why I write of these things, except that these people are so comfortably solid. I like them because they have no doubts of their own existence.

One of the motifs that run through Brewster's "non-story," as she calls it, "Collage," is the presence of ghosts. At once a tribute and an exorcism, it combines memories of her childhood with interpretations of a series of her dreams, and explores the function and process of memory itself. This is the most experimental and ambitious piece in the collection, and as such is predictably uneven.

Brewster's sensitivity to symbol and allusion enriches certain passages, such as her account of a dream of writing a story called "My Father Goes Fishing," in which she leads from a legendary catch of childhood, through the religious and sexual symbolism of the fish, and back to the moment of her own conception. At other times, however, the process of free association ends instead in irrelevance:

> Some writing — Chaucer's maybe? — lasts 500 years. A house — a Canadian house, anyhow — is lucky to last a hundred. Some objects — Christmas tree ornaments, for example — may last only a few days.

Although "Collage" has moments of illumination, it is perhaps *too* personal: there are stretches where the accumulation of detail and the pursuit of meaning become wearisome for the reader, who is less intimately involved in the search.

Some of the ideas Brewster explores in "Collage" — for example her regret at sometimes having been ashamed of her father, and her reluctance to accept what she sees as his legacy, a tendency to melancholy — also appear in her fine poem "Inheritance," which is included in her *Selected Poems, 1944-1977*. A comparison of the two suggests that the discipline and austerity of her poetry is the key to the transformation of such material into art of universal significance. □

REVIEW

Minding their Poes and cues

By Paul Stuewe

Invisible Fictions: Contemporary Stories from Quebec, edited by Geoff Hancock, House of Anansi, 437 pages, $14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88784 153 8).

ONCE PAST A pretentious and often misleading introduction, *Invisible Fictions* offers a variety of delights from 25 of Quebec's brightest literary stars. In order to get to them, however, you'll have to wade through some fairly off-putting editorial drivel, wherein trendy buzzwords combine with hoary banalities to produce a textbook case of intellectual gridlock. Grabbing at a sociological generalization here and a literary platitude there, Geoff Hancock whips up a mind-numbing clutch of confusions that eventually totters to one ambiguous conclusion: *Invisible Fictions* is right on the edge of the new frontiers of Quebec writing, as wild and woolly a batch of far-out fantasies as anyone could desire.

Fortunately, this too proves to be a less than accurate indication of the book's contents. Its more experimental examples of literary frontier-bashing are generally unimpressive: Yolande Villemaire's tedious linguistic games and Claude Gauvreau's aggressively unperformable plays neither seek nor deserve a reader's attention. But the balance of *Invisible Fictions* pays explicit respect to the distinguished authorial line represented by Poe, Kafka, Borges, and Calvino, and even its title seems to have been generated by a — doubtless unconscious — interaction between Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and Borges's *Ficciones*.

Of these various influences, Edgar Allan Poe's is perhaps the most surprising to an anglophone reader. Most of our academic critics have long relegated Poe to the horror genre, but in France the advocacy of Baudelaire initiated a pervasive pattern of influence and imitation that has obviously carried over into Quebec. *Invisible Fictions* contains several noteworthy examples, among which Pierre Châtillon's bewitching "Ghost Island" and Thomas Pavel's multiple-personality shocker "The Persian Mirror" are effective homages to Poe's inspiration. A somewhat subtler use of his techniques is offered by André Charpentier, whose "Birdy's Flight" combines them with an exciting tale of the early days of aviation, and by four short pieces from Michel Tremblay that take a more magically realistic approach to the classic story of psychological terror.

The Kafka-Borges-Calvino connection is also much in evidence. Jacques Brossard's "The Metamorfalsis" is a delightfully witty and playful fantasia upon Kafka-esque procedures, Claude Boisvert's madcap parables of magic and religion display a deftly Borges-like touch, and Paul Paré's "Five Fables" resonate with Calvino's quirky slants upon modern fabulation. In drawing upon the work of these master builders of 20th-century literature, the book's contributors are engaged in a fruitful dialogue with a rich and by no means exhausted tradition; and if "fruitful dialogue" sounds much less adventurous than such typical Hancock phrases as "a self-created universe" and "a space where energy is expanded," rest assured that the collection's high points are with few exceptions attributable to the stimuli provided by an illustrious group of literary forerunners.

Invisible Fictions also contains a few stories that exhibit a sophisticated awareness of recent developments in science fiction and fantasy, and it was one of these that reduced my critical faculties to an awed acknowledgement of genius at work. Elisabeth Vonarburg's "Cold Bridge" takes a standard plot — flight from technological insanity into an apparently, but only apparently, pastoral paradise — and from it fashions an absolutely compelling tale of the discovery of self through contact with a mysterious other. Her imaginative inventiveness and sensitivity to the effects of culture upon character are nothing short of amazing, and her French-language collection *L'Oeil de la nuit* awaits an enterprising English-Canadian publisher. Michel de Celles's "Recurrence" and Jean Ferguson's "Ker, the God Killer" are also well-crafted examples of the literary assimilation of overtly fantastic elements, and François Hébert's "Prowling Around Little Red Riding Hood" does some amusing if mechanically predictable things with the familiar fairy tale.

Thus *Invisible Fictions* is, title and editorial inclinations to the contrary, a high-visibility collection of stories, tales, fabulations, and conceits that largely transcends the limitations of the anxiously experimental. Its contributors are for the most part skilled practitioners of one or more vital literary disciplines, and its prospective consumers can look forward to an anthology that blends expertise and imagination into a series of rewarding reading experiences. Those who lust after the sound of frontiers exploding and traditions toppling had best look elsewhere: *Invisible Fictions* is engaged in the further refining of some of the time-tested components of modern literature, and it does so with a degree of finesse and commitment that merits both our attention and our respect. □

BRIEF REVIEWS

BELLES LETTRES

Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand, by W.H. New, University of Toronto Press, 302 pages, $30.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5663 2).

W.H. NEW HAS chosen Canada and New Zealand for his inquiry into the history and practice of the short story because of the form's importance to both literary traditions. Both societies are committed to orderly development, New argues, yet their literatures are riddled with violence both as subject and verbal process: "Why the paradox, and what does it imply?"

New calls his study an attempt to give fluid shape to a subject that is continuously undergoing change. He takes it as axiomatic that these literatures are rooted in their people's experience, and looks for individual adaptations. He argues that these writers sought ways of structuring stories "so that they might break free from received conventions of speech and form, hence break formally free from the shaping social conventions that were lodged in their inherited language. This process is ongoing."

New explores the work of Canadian writers Duncan Campbell Scott, Margaret Laurence, and Alice Munro, and New Zealanders Katherine Mansfield, Frank Sargeson, Patricia Grace, and Maurice Duggan. These individual analyses are perhaps the most valuable portions of the text. *Dreams of Speech and Violence* will remain an important contribution to critical dialogue in Canada.

— PATRICIA MORLEY

FICTION

A Body Surrounded by Water, by Eric Wright, Collins, 168 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 223181 6).

RED SOIL, SEAFOOD, and *Anne of Green Gables* are usually what come to mind when one thinks of Prince Edward Island. But murder? Never. Yet that's just what happens in Eric Wright's *A Body Surrounded by Water*, the fifth and newest Inspector Charlie Salter mystery. And what could be more natural than for Salter, the vacationing Toronto cop, to lend the local Mounties a hand with their investigation?

The bludgeoning death of a local historian, Clive Elton, and the disappearance of the Great Silver Seal of Prince Edward Island are more than enough to distract Salter from his golf and fishing. Elton was acting as go-between for a dealer who represented the seal's unidentified owner and a group of prominent businessmen who wanted to present it to the provincial government. Charlie is consulted by his father-in-law, one of the potential buyers, and helps the RCMP solve the case with several days of holiday to spare.

Despite two murders and more foul language than in the previous books, *A Body Surrounded by Water* describes a world as safe and secure as, well, P.E.I. Wright's cast of family, door-to-door peddlers, and single women is engaging but not terribly distinctive or menacing. As usual he pads the novel with amusing anecdotes about the Salters, including this time a full-scale family wedding. The plotting is deft, but given the brief list of suspects it's soon obvious who the culprit is. To Wright's credit, the lack of suspense matters not a whit to one's enjoyment of the book.

— DOUGLAS MALCOLM

Big Plans, by Paul de Barros, Talonbooks, 191 pages, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 244 4).

AS ITS TITLE suggests, Paul de Barros's book is full of big, ambitious plans. The title is intended to be ironic — to reflect the time in the 1960s when everything seemed possible for a new, rebellious generation — but the irony backfires. The idea of blending non-fiction, a "South American Journal," and fiction, "North American Stories," in one volume is a worthy experiment, but one that isn't especially well thought out or executed.

Someone once said that nostalgia isn't what it used to be. Perhaps that explains why the documentary half of this book seems so dated. Episodic and fragmented, it recounts the 1969 adventures of long-haired hippie de Barros as he wanders aimlessly through South America. His "plan" is to get to Brazil where he dreams of turning an inherited family estate into a communal farm. Along the way, there's a lot of talk about Zen and revolution — and a lot of characters who fade in and out, leaving no lasting impression. Early on, de Barros inadvertently underlines the flaw in the story he is telling: "This journey was my own invention. I created it. . . . It's as if you put your life in quotes then breathlessly tried to keep pace with the script! How long before I run out of plot?"

The second half of *Big Plans* is much better. Picking up where the journal leaves off, it is a connected series of short stories about a young man who has just returned from Brazil. Travelling northward from California to British Columbia, the hero's "big plans" are gradually replaced by the more mundane and settled demands of community, home, and family. In the process stability is gained at the expense of freedom and spontaneity. Like the journal, the fiction is locked into a '60s point of view, but it is not nearly as self-conscious or haphazard. In short stories like "Black Wood Acacia" and "An Easement Into Paradise" de Barros shows that he can create memorable characters and keep the narrative moving.

— JOEL YANOFSKY

Tales from Firozsha Baag, by Rohinton Mistry, Penguin, 250 pages, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 009777 5).

THIS FIRST COLLECTION is, like its opening tale, an "Auspicious Occasion," though without its pathos of frustration and degrees of rude soiling. Mistry has an unforced narrative poise; his prose is relatively stately, but without self-conscious elegance. His style is eminently suited to Parsi lives in a Bombay apartment complex, which are governed by ceremony and civility. The impression is of three-dimensional life in a self-contained community, among these slightly driven and recurring characters. The narratives examine their lives with sympathy and irony.

These 11 tales do not always have the ostensible literary arrangement of the short story; when they do, the effect is remarkable. "Exercisers" sets Jehangir's romantic attachment against his parents' defensive martyrdom, while the park's exercisers, with their routines of development, reflect his unfulfilled desires — all coloured by a wise man's cryptic advice, "Life is a trap, full of webs." "Swimming Lessons," with its comic erotic subtext, says much about story, language, and reception, as its motif of the confusion of cause and effect bears on Kersi, the protagonist, now a writer in Toronto: the "tale" carries its own commentary on the sources and execution of this very collection.

"Condolence Visit" sets the heart's needs against social pressure and public observances; in "Of White Hairs and Cricket" a younger Kersi becomes sensitized to mortality. In "Squatter" Sarosh — in Canada "Sid" — cannot adapt to new toilet techniques, and remains a foreigner, in contrast to the arrogant

scorn of Jamshed for his homeland in "Lend Me Your Light." Altogether Mistry's attractive book has many delights; the auspices are excellent.
— LOUIS K. MacKENDRICK

The Day of Creation, by J.G. Ballard, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 256 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 181 5).

J.G. BALLARD'S latest novel, *The Day of Creation,* recounts a latter-day Conradian voyage in search of the source of a new river, one that takes on symbolic meaning not only for the reader but also for the characters.

Dr. Mallory is a physician with the World Health Organization, working in a mythical central African country, who launches what appears to be a vain search for water to forestall the desertification of the region. He accidentally releases the flow — and in fact thinks he is the creator — of a new river. So obsessed is he with his original plans that he embarks on a dangerous journey to find its source and destroy it.

Because of Mallory's self-conscious identification with the river, we have to wonder about Ballard's intention. Are we to accept this symbolism as fundamental to the novel's meaning, or should we consider it as merely something in Mallory's mind? Certainly Ballard provides enough of a "rational explanation" for the river's origins and fate to keep the novel from being read as pure allegory. Perhaps he is most interested in exploring his character's single-minded responses to what ought to be a boon to them and the land. However we are to interpret the novel, it remains an entertaining and intriguing quest narrative. — ALLAN WEISS

Unknown Soldier, by George Payerle, Macmillan, 288 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9490 0).

WHETHER JUSTLY or not, any Canadian novel dealing with the theme of war and published since Timothy Findley's *The Wars* provokes comparisons with that classic work. George Payerle's second novel, *Unknown Soldier*, is much less successful than Findley's in finding universal significance in one soldier's story.

The novel is narrated from the point of view of Sam Collister, a veteran of the Second World War now living in Victoria. One of the difficulties of employing the third-person, limited point of view is maintaining consistency of voice and character while exploring broader questions, especially if the protagonist's personality cannot support such philosophizing. Collister's speech and stream of consciousness remind one of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction: "He walks over the gritty rug and into the sticky kitchen to turn on the stove. Gotta clean this place up, he thinks." Colloquialisms like "gotta," "gonna," and "ya" (for "you") clash with the lyrical passages, which seem inappropriate for someone with Collister's background. (Payerle's attempt to account for the discrepancy, in chapter 15, is unconvincing.)

Another problem is Payerle's handling of his characters' emotions and motivations. Collister and others burst into tears so often that the novel teeters on the brink of melodrama. Also, characters are completely aware of their own feelings and concerns and verbalize them without restraint:

> "You get older and it seems like it's all behind you. . . Seems a man has to live for something. I gotta find a job and a decent place to live. But I don't feel like I *belong* anywhere. . ."

This sort of self-analysis and self-explication is unnecessary and unrealistic.

Payerle's novel has an excellent sense of place, and as long as the characters respond in believable ways it is enjoyable and occasionally quite moving. When it strives to be Meaningful, however, it shows how far it falls below works like *The Wars* and loses the particularity that is its greatest strength. — ALLAN WEISS

THE PAST

Benjamin Disraeli Letters, 1838-1841, edited by M.G. Wiebe, J.B. Conacher, John Matthews, and Mary S. Millar, University of Toronto Press, 458 pages, $60.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5736 5).

THIS THIRD VOLUME in the distinguished and superbly crafted series of Disraeli letters continues the scholarly tradition of its two predecessors. The thorough and thoughtful 70-page introduction emphasizes the importance of these pivotal years in the life of the emergent politician and husband. The years 1838-1841 were still uncertain for the ambitious Disraeli but he managed to strengthen his political philosophy and to improve his fiscal, social, and emotional status through marriage.

The extensive footnotes place each person, place, issue, and event in perspective. The book is carefully edited, well indexed, and contains a useful chronology. As in previous volumes, the letters continue to fascinate and provide a refreshingly frank, lively, and charmingly gossipy meld of British society and politics well sprinkled with references to his fiscal difficulties and bursting with his seemingly boundless ambition.

Politics were his first love, followed closely by other people's money, his own lack thereof, and a passionate desire to be socially successful. His letters spared none, including the dowager Queen. Perhaps this letter to his sister captures the essence of the man:

> My dearest Sa,
>
> I write because I suppose you would prefer even stupidity to silence. I have nothing to say of ourselves. W[alpole] is our guest at present — his wooing speeds well — indeed 'tis virtually settled. What a revolution in his prospects and position. By one coup, one of the richest peers in England . . . .
>
> Ever with 1000 loves / to all. D/Carlton Club [London] Saturday [3 October, 1840]

In all of his efforts, he was loyally aided and abetted by his dearest sister Sarah or "Sa," to whom he related all the depths and heights of his emotion and ambition. It is clear that Sarah's role in "Diz's" courtship of Mary Anne Lewis, widow of politician Wyndham Lewis, was an important one and that the courtship began rather soon after Lewis's death. What better for an ambitious and impecunious politician than to marry the childless, older, politically connected, socially astute, wealthy widow of a politician? The early letters reveal that he loved her for her affluence, her gifts to him, and herself in that order. By the time they were married he seems to have become genuinely fond of her and increasingly dependent on her as a nurturing mother figure — a role he seemed to prefer in his relationships with women.

These letters provide a fascinating portrait of the colourful Victorian period and will appeal to anyone interested in British politics and history.— CYNTHIA M. SMITH

Meeting of Generals, by Tony Foster, Methuen, 559 pages, $29.99 cloth (ISBN 0 458 80520 3).

VETERANS OF the Normandy campaign of 1944 will remember Kurt Meyer. Through the hot, bloody summer of 1944, he and the fanatical youngsters of the 12th SS Panzer Division fought Canadians to a standstill at almost every encounter. It was no chivalrous combat. At Authie and Buron and outside Meyer's headquarters, dozens of Canadian prisoners, all of them helpless, many of them wounded, were systematically shot. In some cases, their bodies were then crushed under the treads of Meyer's tanks.

That was why the SS general stood before a court of his victors on Dec. 27, 1945, to hear Major-General Harry Foster pronounce sentence of death. From that meeting, Foster's son has created a fascinating dual biography of two soldiers so different that their lives could only have intertwined on the

Normandy battlefield and in the artificial judicial combat at Aurich.

Foster makes no secret of his sympathies. His adolescent resentment at a father who deserted his family for a six-year war has matured into a critical sympathy for a professional soldier of limited talent and basic decency. It is Meyer, however, who is the hero of the book, as he rises from youthful poverty through the police, stormtroopers, and an astonishing aptitude for battle. On the Eastern Front, where Meyer learned his trade, neither side was scrupulous about taking prisoners. Nor, Foster insists with ample evidence, were Canadians.

That may be special pleading, but it was close enough to the truth that Harry Foster's superior, Major-General Chris Vokes, defied Canadian opinion to commute Meyer's sentence to life imprisonment. Instead of death, the German spent the postwar years at Dorchester Penitentiary from which, Foster reveals, he was released briefly in 1950 to advise Canadian generals how to fight Russians.

This is a big, fat book on a repellent subject but it is also compellingly written and insidiously persuasive. There may be better ways of understanding the men who fought each other in the villages and hedgerows of Normandy close to half a century ago, but this is one of the best so far. — DESMOND MORTON

POETRY

Anyone Can See I Love You, by Marilyn Bowering, Porcupine's Quill, 77 pages, $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88984 104 7).

AUDACIOUSLY SERIOUS, in this context, is not an oxymoron. On the cover, audaciously in yellow with red boots, Marilyn Bowering poses with a photo of her other Marilyn (Monroe). And this book boasts also audaciously great lipstick ruby end-pages. Then reading we must witness again the major bio-details of the sex-and-film goddess. The reading is full of harrowing reminders of the little we know. A furthering. Not gloss. Serious.

Bowering has had to be audacious to attempt a sequence of poems about Monroe, that much-worked vein of gold. Bowering has also had to apply, full-tilt, her considerable craft: restraint and an emphatic focus have pulled this audaciousness off. Beautifully.

The shared first name makes some of these pieces lyric with no context necessary. Others are point-blank:

Three husbands, not too many, just enough.
one to spin the thread of life
one to measure it,
one to cut:

Jim, Joe, Arthur.

New . . .

Catalogue of the National Gallery of Canada
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General Editors: Myron Laskin, Jr. / Michael Pantazzi

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comes back
to haunt.

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it has
come back
to kill.

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DiMaggio and Miller come off as they need to: indifferent jailers and the milkers of Monroe's doubt. Clark Gable, Yves Montand, the Kennedys are all here. But the presence that interests me is Bowering's own.

In this book, one Marilyn uses another Marilyn as anchor and binocular (bio-ocular) to create an almost anonymous intensity of woman's voice. In the best poems, Bowering transcends the details of Monroe to give us dilemmas that are disembodied. And yet the language is from flat to crisp; the style is minimal.

These poems don't excite me stylistically or thematically, but I do admire the poet's and the publisher's making of freshness from what had been (or so I thought) squeezed of all freshness.

— PHIL HALL

Mother I'm So Glad You Taught Me How to Dance, by Vancy Kasper, Williams-Wallace, 62 pages, $8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88795 054-X).

THIS FIRST BOOK of poems by Toronto author Vancy Kasper centres on the struggles of romantic love, bringing an attitude that's strongly ambiguous. On the one hand Kasper yearns emphatically for union, on the other she seeks a certain independence. In the end she refuses to sacrifice one for the other, striving instead to retain both. Desirous of men in the final poem, she is nevertheless self-assertive.

Pieces such as "When I Stand at the Door of the Cottage" and "Summersong" bespeak a poet of deep longing. In the former Kasper writes:

And the yearning for you
is so strong
it blots out the perfection of love
in the duet of Puccini's La Boheme.

Waiting for the lover — and disappointment at his failure to show — is a frequent theme. "Summersong" describes a solitary summer at the cottage, and is punctuated with the phrase "you said you'd come soon." Though certainly heartfelt, these charged passages occasionally turn melodramatic. "My Nights Were Endless" is an unconvincing expression of loneliness.

In response to her vulnerability and dependence, Kasper articulates a feminist sensibility. Stepping — if only briefly — from the romantic trance, she views her life through what Adrienne Rich calls the "powerful, womanly lens." In "Our Room Is Empty" Kasper confronts her former husband, seeing his manipulative techniques for what they are:

you called me Mousy all those years
offended my feminist therapist
it was a mistake i explained
in the beginning you thought i was gentle

"Towards the Source," "I Will Not Crawl for You," and "Birth of a Feminist" offer a similar vision of self-reliance and sharpened insight. As if responding directly to "Summersong," "Birth of a Feminist" begins, "I am tired of waiting"; it concludes, "I am ready to grow."

Often beautifully crafted, the collection leaves us with hope. In her finest poem — "Bawdywomansong" — Kasper affirms that her love and gutsiness will continue beyond death.

— GIDEON FORMAN

Letters from the Equator, by C.H. Gervais, Penumbra Press, 79 pages, $7.95 paper (*ISBN 0 920806 87 2*).

DEAR MARTY:

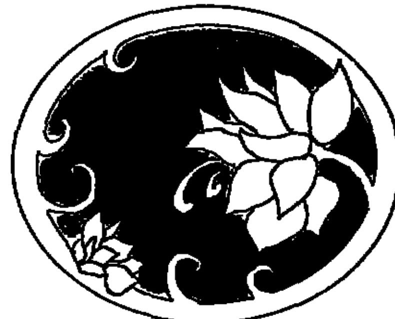
Long time no see. I like your new book of mostly letters and some poems. Or are they all prose-poems? I didn't know you'd been recently in Nicaragua and Italy and elsewhere. What surprises me is how religious as well as secular this book is. All your previous books (of poems) have given me glimpses of you in Spirit-Mall mirrors, but this is the first collection in which I see you outright.

The prose-poems read like journal entries. Are they?

"Letter to Jean Cocteau"
I saw your right hand at Musee Grevin, the wax museum on Blvd. Montmartre. . . Those pale, sad, effete, warm fingers. Your writing hand under the glass case. Lying there like a rubber glove in a white sink. . .

Prose-poems that develop from narrative seeds (daily events, here, or in the other hemisphere) so often ring loose, as if the poem were under the prose, undeveloped, un-dug-for. But I like the actual poems. Especially the Thomas Merton sequence. Did you stay at Gethsemani, Kentucky — the Merton monastery — a while?

These pieces don't have the stridency



or exhaustedness of the ones by Saul Bellow's Herzog: that random winging-off of letters to dead and living alike. Nor do they have the blunt precision of Richard Hugo's late missives from Midwest U.S. bars. But they do seem to

mean well and be generous to a reader.

I like this best of your many publications. It doesn't thrill or teach me, but the voice speaking is more tangible and concerned about the politics of passion. Thanks for that, C.H. — PHIL HALL

POLITICS & POLITICOS

Ottawa Unbuttoned: Who's Running This Country Anyway?, by Dave McIntosh, Stoddart, 247 pages, $21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2114 0).

"THE POWER OF accurate observation" said George Bernard Shaw, "is commonly called cynicism by those who have not got it." By any name, McIntosh has it, and he earned it the hard way. A 30-year veteran of the Canadian Press in Ottawa, now retired on an unindexed pension of $221 a month, he reported the facts without embellishment for long enough to have won his spurs, and now dispenses salty opinions with glee. He spits out the innumerable things stuck in his craw in an unbridled book of juicy anecdotes and crusty comments, and the result is refreshing.

Although the book is haphazard and disorganized and written with insistent jabs rather than grace, McIntosh employs a tough-minded wit to skewer personalities, ideas, and institutions. He tells with relish stories about Trudeau the tightwad, fobbing off unwanted Christmas gifts from foreign embassies to his staff, Monique Bégin the querulous backseat driver who was abandoned by her chauffeur on the road to Montreal, Dief reading Peter C. Newman's *Renegade* between his knees under the desk, and Paul Hellyer "the humourless and plodding autocrat." On individuals, he is aces, admitting a fondness for Dief the confused populist and Paul Martin who often did gentle favours for ordinary people in a quiet way.

McIntosh's best shots are aimed at the military, which he suggests will soon have more brigadier-generals than privates, at TV, which he correctly asserts is distorting and perverting Parliament, and particularly at the civil service, our real political masters, whose numbers grow like fleas on a fat pup. Ottawa mandarins, paid more than their Washington equivalents, are beyond the effective control of Parliament, he argues, and the hydra-headed monster of the bureaucracy has become the principal threat to freedom and good sense in this country.

McIntosh is a bright and amusing but angry man who flails and thrashes about, scoffing at the Emperor's transparent clothes, dismissing Mulroney in 50 lines as an Irish Duddy Kravitz, and prodding us to re-think the sonorous mush we are fed on the late-night tube news. He displays that most uncommon quality of common sense. McIntosh strikes me as a bit off the wall, sometimes over the wall, and yet at bottom exasperatingly sane.

The book reminded me to look up a statement at the 50th anniversary dinner of the Canadian Press, in 1967, by one J.R. Burnett, publisher of a P.E.I. newspaper: "That's the trouble with the Canadian Press. It's one of those faceless corporations with no soul to save and no ass to kick." Dear Gawd. Isn't that the story of the Canadian corporate media elite? There are no substitutes for guts or experience, and there are many reasons why a writer such as Dave McIntosh should be read, and cherished.

— JACK MacLEOD

RERUNS

The Tiger's Daughter, by Bharati Mukherjee, Penguin, 210 pages, $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 009301 X).

FIRST PUBLISHED by Houghton Mifflin in 1971, *The Tiger's Daughter* is the story of Tara, a young Indian woman who returns to Calcutta after seven years in the United States. A Vassar graduate married to David, a U.S. writer, Tara has grown away from her old life as the beloved daughter of a privileged Brahmin family. The idle, snobbish chatter of her old friends irritates her, but she remains drawn to them by the pull of the past. Not really at home in either India or the U.S., Tara tries to make sense of her life in both countries.

This was Bharati Mukherjee's first novel, and it's a brilliant piece of work. There is none of the awkwardness one associates with first novels; the style and the material are, for the most part, a perfect blend.

Although *The Tiger's Daughter* is the kind of book that leaves a reader like me with a strong sense of hopelessness, it holds many deft touches of humour, mostly black. On the train from Bombay to Calcutta Tara meets P. K. Tuntunwala, a "National Personage." When they reach Howrah Station, "A blind beggar who had begun to sing and rattle his cup was thrown out of the train by Tuntunwala." The National Personage reappears periodically throughout the novel, counterpointed with that strange old man Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, who drinks gin in which "the ice cubes were clear though bacteria ridden." Tuntunwala and Joyonto both contribute to the terrifying climax: "And Tara, still locked in a car across the street from the Catelli-Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta."

Mukherjee does not spare her heroine. This is made particularly clear when Tara and her friends visit Joyonto's compound in Tollygunge, which has been taken over by squatters. She reacts hysterically when a little girl in a faded party dress, her legs covered with sores, screams: "I want that! I want a sari just like that! I want that! I want that!!" — HELEN PORTER

SOCIETY

Our American Cousins, edited by Thomas S. Axworthy, James Lorimer, 226 pages, $25.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862 877 3) and $17.95 paper (ISBN 0 88862 878 1).

A PRIME PASTIME of the hundreds of Canadians who live in San Francisco and Silicon Valley — if they haven't transformed themselves into golden-tanned Canuckifornians and begun attending rolfing sessions — is to gather for dinner parties or the Stanley Cup playoffs and talk about Americans. All they do is shop, we say smugly, pointing to stacks of coloured newspaper advertisements for occasions as benign as Father's Day. And never get into an argument with an American over a parking space, we warn one another — he's likely to reach into the glove compartment and pull out the family revolver to reinforce his point. But despite our facetiousness, Americans *are* different, more than Canadians who remain in the Great White North generally believe. It is this premise former Trudeau aide and Harvard professor Thomas Axworthy would like to reinforce in *Our American Cousins,* a collection of essays and articles culled from famous Canadians' experiences south of the border.

But that's just the problem: we don't learn much about Americans here. We learn more about Farley Mowat wrestling with the U.S. department of immigration before a proposed book tour, or John Kenneth Galbraith as a student at Berkeley in the 1930s — a dated perspective if ever there was one, if it weren't outdated, so to speak, by the inclusion of Gordon Sinclair's rusty piece of radio propaganda "Americans," written to boost the then-fragile Yankee ego of 1973. I would rather have read insightful essays on the American people by unknown Canadian writers than such inclusions as George Jonas's poem for paranoids, "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant in Central Park."

There are one or two good pieces, such as Mordecai Richler's account of Jewish-American holidays in the Catskills and Ron Graham's story of Canadians who have conquered — or been conquered by — Hollywood/Babylon. But overall, there's little to learn here except more about ourselves. Canadian self-consciousness has cocooned us once again. — BARBARA WADE ROSE

The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada, by Gary Kinsman, Black Rose Books, 236 pages, $36.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920057 81 0) and $16.95 paper (ISBN 0 920057 79 9).

FOR THOSE WHO believe in the primacy of social and historical relations, sexuality in Canada has been defined by what the law implicitly or explicitly condemns. Gary Kinsman has no doubt that the Canadian state has always condemned anything that threatens heterosexual hegemony. This view follows logically from two premises. One is: "Sexuality is not biologically defined, it is socially created." The other is: "Heterosexual hegemony organizes and is organized by capitalist patriarchal relations." In contrast to the ideal pan-sexual state, then, a capitalist country like Canada restricts sexuality to relations that perpetuate the hegemony of patriarchy. Q.E.D.

The book reads like a thesis, which it was. There are two parts, theory and praxis. In the first, Kinsman details the difficulty of presenting an accurate history of sexuality that takes into account all sexual perspectives — lesbian, gay and heterosexual. In the second, "Towards a Queer View of Canadian History," he exhaustively documents the oppression of gays and lesbians and their efforts to achieve proper standing in the eyes of the law.

No attempt has been made to translate thesis into book. Swarms of footnotes effectively conceal engaging or persuasive argument. All incidents are of equal importance, equally undramatic in their lack of narrative interest. The book is valuable, nonetheless, for its research into important history that has invariably been overlooked or dismissed out of hand. There the service ends. A more careful selection of material and ideas would have made Kinsman's thesis more compelling to read and, for those who find its premises arguable, more challenging to debate. — MARK CZARNECKI

SPORTS & ADVENTURE

Freshwater Saga: Memoirs of a Lifetime of Wilderness Canoeing in Canada, by Eric W. Morse, University of Toronto Press, illustrated, 190 pages, $25.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2610 9) and $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 8020 6657 7).

IN THE 1950s, at the age of 48, Eric Morse decided to put his lifelong love of canoeing to the test by paddling the voyageurs' routes across the country. Within 10 years he had moved his summer expeditions north to the Barren Lands. In the days before canoes were made of Kevlar or ABS plastic, the days before packaged "adventure travel," Morse paddled northern river highways that in many cases had been almost unused since the turn of the century.

Morse was a pioneer of recreational canoeing, who often navigated with only aerial photographs and the journals of the early explorers. His rediscovery of the past led to the publication of the classic, *Fur Trade Routes of Canada: Then and Now*. *Freshwater Saga* complements the earlier work by telling the story of how Morse did his research. Morse joins Sigurd F. Olson and R.M. Patterson as one of a select group of North American authors who have written lyrically of the canoe in this century and made it a living part of our heritage. — S.R. GAGE

REVIEW

Food for thought

By Harriet Friedmann

The Politics of Hunger: The Global Food System, by John Warnock, Methuen, 334 pages, $16.95 paper (ISBN 0 458 80630 7).

The Hunger Machine: The Politics of Food, by Jon Bennett, Polity Press, 248 pages, $14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88794 326 8).

FAMINE ABROAD is a problem familiar to Canadians. We respond generously, both individually and through our government. Yet the causes of hunger abroad are mysterious, and so is the way that aid to poor countries is administered. They are at least as confusing as hunger in Canada, which also prompts our generosity. Most users of food banks — domestic emergency food aid — are receiving public assistance of a kind not available in Third-World states, yet still they need a form of charity not seen since the 1930s.

Food banks in Canada, like hunger in the Third World, proliferate in the midst of embarrassing agricultural abundance. This creates one sort of paradox in Canada: commercial farmers face bankruptcy despite high productivity, a variety of subsidies, and attempts to control supplies and marketing. It creates a different paradox in the Third World. There commercial agriculture, which drastically reduces the variety of crops and livestock (not to mention wild species used for grazing and food), is being established for the first time at the expense of self-provisioning communities.

Self-provisioning may not be fair or efficient, but it does guarantee something to eat to everyone most of the time. To a large extent, the disasters and chronic poverty portrayed in news have social causes. Making land and labour into commodities, and using both to produce what people with the most money want to buy, makes people live or die not by nature or culture but by prices set in world markets.

These are the themes of *The Politics of Hunger* by John Warnock and *The Hunger Machine* by Jon Bennett. Both emphasize the Third World, but make a lot of connections that go beyond previous studies. They link problems in the underdeveloped countries with those in the advanced countries (mostly capitalist, but Warnock also has a lot to say about the state socialist countries, both North and South). This is better than the old simplification that rich countries exploit poor countries. Both authors are at pains to emphasize that poverty and agricultural crisis exist in so-called rich countries; explanations must encompass all countries as well as account for the differences between them.

Although both Bennett and Warnock are coy about using the word, they emphasize that it is capitalism that originally separates people from the land. Small capitalists, large corporations, and almost all states (as opposed to the people they rule) benefit from such separation. Private owners, seeking the highest return from the land, evict people who were themselves (inefficient) producers. If they are lucky enough to be employed at all, these people then become buyers of food. This experience is far in the past for most Canadians, farmers and consumers alike. The dying towns of rural Canada, both effect and cause of large-scale crop specialization, show the best future to which Third-World peasants can aspire. Both books suggest the alternative — for people in rural communities to build on what they have where they are, with help offered and *not imposed* from outside.

Both authors link ecology and social organization. Degradation of the natural environment goes hand in hand with impoverishment of people. In the developed world competitive pressures force farmers to use techniques that maximize yield in the short run at the expense of sustainable agriculture. Ecologies are drastically simplified through intensified single-crop production, which makes pesticides and other chemicals increasingly necessary. Topsoil is lost, water polluted, and damage done to the health of farm workers and food consumers.

The export of these practices to the Third World is causing environmental destruction on an unprecedented scale, with potentially disastrous global effects. Tropical and subtropical ecologies are more fragile than the North American environment, and Third-World governments are more desperate for short-run economic growth. They allow the use of chemicals forbidden in advanced

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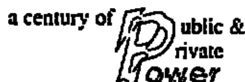

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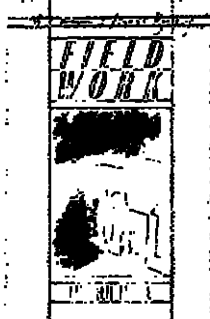

The Women's Press

WALTER PATER
a
life remembered

edited by
R.M. Seiler

ISBN 0-919813-28-3 $24.95* + P&H
* Price in US dollars outside of Canada

This collection of portraits of Walter Pater and his milieu contains fifty contributions by some of the foremost literary figures of the day, including A.C. Benson, Henry James, Lionel Johnson, J.R. McQueen, W.H. Mallock, George Moore, Vernon Lee, William Sharp, Arthur Symons, Oscar Wilde and Thomas Wright. The items have been arranged chronologically so that the story of Pater's life — especially the "dark" side — unfolds naturally.

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capitalist countries. Bennett quotes an Indian farmer who accepts lower yields by refusing to use the chemicals that give his children stomach pains. The Indian government, most aid agencies, and most experts would describe him as "backward."

More devastating still are the projects that create unpredictable ecological effects while uprooting — and impoverishing — people who previously used the land. Sudan, which has become familiar for the television images of famine and civil war, is an example. Having inherited from British colonial rule the largest irrigated farm in the world (a *cotton* farm), the Sudanese government, with financing from the World Bank, granted huge tracts of nomadic land to private companies to be transformed into mechanized agriculture. Many of these operations grow food crops not for the impoverished local nomads but for customers in Saudi Arabia. Fragile ecologies were disrupted, leading to expansion of the desert; displaced herdsmen worked for wages when and where they could; others overgrazed the areas left to them, further undermining the ecology and with it their livelihood.

Despite broadly similar interpretations, *The Hunger Machine* is the more readable of these books. Its strengths and weaknesses both derive from its roots in television: it occasionally gives the reader the disorienting feeling of quick cuts. However, Bennett effectively uses case studies (Sudan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Brazil, and the United States) to bring to life points about famine, aid, trade, technology, property, and poverty, including an unusual stress on positive examples. The book's greatest strength is the use of television-style documentary material in counterpoint to the analytical text. It is replete with boxed items, sometimes poems or quotations, more often individual stories by farmers from Bangladesh to Minnesota and slum-dwellers from Rio to Chicago. These are always interesting and frequently moving.

Warnock's more scholarly book is an excellent reference work. His chapters are comprehensive on matters ranging from the history of ideas and policies to the similarities between agriculture in advance capitalist and state socialist countries. He not only documents problems (and partial successes) of various capitalist strategies but also critically explores the alternative models of China, North Korea, Cuba, and Nicaragua. His global picture is more comprehensive and more systematically documented than Bennett's, and he presents alternative arguments in a thoroughly balanced way. The bibliographies after each chapter are excellent guides to further research.

Yet even the academic specialist sometimes bogs down in the many references that Warnock inserts in the text. His language can be evasive ("critics argue. . ." for something that turns out later to be his own position). I would have liked a more Canadian viewpoint from a Canadian author. Occasionally a personal note slips through, especially in the last chapter where I gratefully remembered that I was reading the words not only of a scholar, but of a former Canadian farmer. □

REVIEW

Beginner's luck

By I.M. Owen

First Stage: The Making of the Stratford Festival, by Tom Patterson and Allan Gould, McClelland & Stewart, 225 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 6949 9).

IT SEEMED AN absurd idea in the early 1950s: to start a major theatrical festival in a small town in the sleepy heart of rural Western Ontario — 100 miles from Toronto and even farther from Buffalo and Detroit — for no better reason than that the small town's name was Stratford. And this in a country that had had almost no indigenous professional theatre since the movies took over.

In fact the time was exactly right for such a venture. The very lack of a professional theatre meant that a lot of people with conspicuous talent had been acting and directing as amateurs and doing it very well. And then had come CBC Radio; from 1944 on, Andrew Allan's *Stage* series provided a partial living for many good actors who might otherwise have remained pure amateurs; this helped Dora Mavor Moore to turn her distinguished amateur group, the Village Players, into the professional New Play Society; in 1945 the U.S. director Robert Gill came to Hart House Theatre

at the University of Toronto and proceeded to train a new generation of actors; in 1950 the CBC, preparing to launch its television network, appointed Mrs. Moore's son Mavor chief producer. By hindsight, it's obvious now that a summer-long annual festival was exactly what was needed to complete the transition to fully professional theatre. But it took someone from outside this bubbling little theatrical community to do it — someone, in fact, from Stratford.

Tom Patterson knew nothing of theatre. He had hardly ever seen a stage production; even in London during the war the nearest he had come to it was a Vic Oliver revue. But he had grown up under the influence of Tom Orr, the creator of the beautiful system of riverside parks in Stratford, and since his school days he had been talking, off and on, of staging Shakespeare among them.

Now at last he has written the whole story down, starting with a brief history of the town itself (fascinating: I never knew that in the 1930s its council meetings opened with the singing of the *Internationale*), and finishing with the end of the first season in 1953 and the nervous breakdown he understandably suffered immediately afterwards.

The unlikely story is told fully, honestly, and with malice toward none. That last point is truly remarkable, considering the rough treatment he received. He constantly stresses the co-operativeness and hard work of the festival board; he mentions only in passing the hostility of many of its members to him, and finds it understandable. He was surprised to be replaced as general manager behind his back three weeks before the opening, but he expresses no resentment; he *was* getting too much personal publicity, he says, and he *wasn't* a good manager. Similarly, in writing of Alec Guinness, the start of that first season, he stresses his good nature, hard work, and approachability; he reports without emphasis his sulks and tantrums.

The festival couldn't have happened without Tom Patterson. But even Tom Patterson probably couldn't have made it happen without Tyrone Guthrie. It was Dora Mavor Moore who told Patterson that Guthrie was "the greatest Shakespearean director in the world." That's a judgement I'd dispute, but there's no disputing the fact that he was the ideal collaborator for Patterson in getting things started. For one thing, he didn't condescend to the Stratford board as ignorant provincials; he was genuinely impressed by them and treated them with the respect they deserved. For another, he was rightly determined to seize this as his opportunity to build a thrust stage, and he made the inspired choice of Tanya Moiseiwitsch to design it. And it was Guthrie who, after interviewing all the leading architects in Toronto and explaining what was wanted (one of them said, "You don't have to go through all that, because we just finished designing the Odeon Hyland cinema"), picked Bob Fairfield, the young son-in-law of an old friend,

because he said, "I don't know the first damned thing about building theatres."

But the main factor in the improbable achievement was one that Tom Patterson doesn't mention, either because of his genuine modesty or because he's unaware of it: his own compelling personality. It was not long after the events recounted here that I came to know him. An insignificant-looking man appeared in my office: almost as young as I was, short and thin like me, bald and bespectacled unlike me. (It turned out later that we'd overlapped at the smallest college in the University of Toronto, but I'd never noticed him — he simply wasn't noticeable.) He sat down in front of my desk, fixed me with eyes that glittered through his glasses, and in a booming voice told me what he wanted me to do for the festival — a tall order, by the way. Then I understood. When Patterson said what he wanted, no matter how tall the order, the only possible answer was "Yes."

Like many of the top achievers I've known, Patterson is a procrastinator, and I'm sure it was necessary to give him a co-author to push him to complete the manuscript. I'm rather sorry, though, that McClelland & Stewart picked Allan Gould. He's a relentlessly facetious writer, and his contributions are all too recognizable: "To go from a town that hollered hockey to one that shouted Shakespeare" is typically tiresome. And he's addicted to what Fowler calls Irrelevant Allusion; it's simply impossible for him to use the word "fortune" without adding "(and men's eyes)," or to say that someone was not amused without mentioning Queen Victoria. Still, anyone who succeeded in dragging this important memoir out of Tom Patterson deserves our gratitude, however grudging. Thanks, Gould. □

FIRST NOVELS

Urban scrawl

Why do manifestly bad writers feel compelled to toss off a book as if it were a sweater on a hot day? Worse, why do publishers print them?

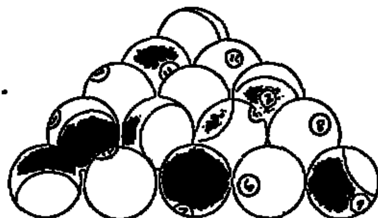
By Janice Kulyk Keefer

DON'T HOLD YOUR breath: Martin Waxman's **The Promised Land** (Black Moss Press, 100 pages, $12.95 paper), advertised as a "clever satire" on the neverland of suburban shopping malls, will not get you into any literary or even comic Canaan: it's as thin and flat as a Visa card and textually as interesting. What is surely meant as the lightest of possible reads — the struggle between a mall merchants' association and the mall manager ever so felicitously named Martin (you guessed it) Mall, as observed by the manager of a curtain outlet, Sally (get ready for this one) Rodd — thuds and clunks along so leadenly it would be an act of kindness to put the narrative out of its misery by tossing it in the nearest wastepaper basket by page 15, if one could stay awake long enough to do so.

Why is it that people who are manifestly not "born" or even "made" writers feel compelled to toss off a manuscript as if it were a sweater on a hot summer's day? More to the point, why do publishers print the results, when presumably there are many fine, genuinely interesting manuscripts gathering dust in editorial slush piles? Filthy lucre couldn't be the answer, at least in the case of *The Promised Land* which, despite its post-modernist cover, couldn't even be given away, not at the glitziest of shopping malls.

In the case of Simon Ritchie's **The Hollow Woman** (Collier Macmillan, 248 pages, $22.50 cloth), what begins as a slow-moving but intelligently written thriller picks up enough momentum to become a finely paced, richly textured mystery, only to collapse at the end in one of the most rushed, least convincing dénouements possible. *The Hollow Woman* deserves to be read, and it would be a disservice to Ritchie to reveal in a review what he works so assiduously to keep hidden for so much of the narrative, but a *caveat lector* is in order: one leaves this novel with the sense of having been given nothing for something.

The central character created by Ritchie — the wonderfully named John Kenneth Galbraith Jantarro — is as engaging and complex a hero as one could wish for: we want to learn much more about his ethical imperatives, his relationship with his father (a veteran of the Spanish Civil War), his intellectual and emotional moorings. The prime action of the novel, a dangerous and painful deconstructing of the official solutions found for a particularly hideous kidnapping and murder, is utterly engrossing. But the *raison d'être* Jantarro finally uncovers is simply ludicrous, unsatisfying in terms of



the knowledge it offers the reader and the techniques the writer employs. Nevertheless, *The Hollow Woman* is a promising début, and one hopes that Ritchie's next book in this series will deliver all of the goods.

Diana G. Collier's **The Invisible Women of Washington** (Clarity Press, 186 pages, $10.00 paper), an account from the perspective of a young, naive street-dumb country girl of being down and out in that Nation's Capital, is an earnest book, an honest book, one with much convincing dialogue and many finely-wrought descriptive passages. But it's not a particularly engrossing or illuminating novel: it suffers from facticity, an overload of details that fail to hook into the reader's consciousness, to make us care about the characters. Collier's narrative falls into the naturalistic mode — we get plenty of information about the shortage of decent, cheap housing in Washington, D.C., the ravages of a killer heat wave, and the habits of roaches, but we can't really be made to care very much about the people who have to put up with them. The stream of consciousness of a practically illiterate 20-year-old girl who does almost nothing but sit in her squalid room or go for walks with her equally passive friends is shallow and sluggish, to say the least.

Collier is obviously emphasizing the demoralization, the inertia that afflicts people who want to work for a decent living but who, for no fault of their own, aren't allowed any drops from trickle-down Reaganomics. And she deserves praise for refusing to romanticize her characters or dress them up with the accessories of radical chic. Yet for all that she creates a convincingly repellent stage for her characters to subsist in, she hasn't the narrative skills to make it a world that profoundly engages us.

With a few exceptions her women are not so much invisible as opaque, and this is particularly true of the heroine, Abby-Jean. But there are a few scenes in which

the reader is given a sudden entrée into a richer fictive world — the shopping expedition of the pustular Yolande and the vividly foul-mouthed Lynn; the account of the doomed Josephine trying to make her way *à la* Harlequin Romance into the fantasy world of Fripp Island, the literal ignition of the demented Linda Beddoes in the conflagration with which the novel draws to a close. They don't however, redeem a text that would have been more effective, perhaps, as a television docudrama than a novel.

Finally, we come to the most ambitious and rewarding novel of the bunch, D.F. Bailey's Fire Eyes (Douglas & McIntyre, 243 pages, $12.95 paper). It's the first-person narrative of Billy Dearborn, a young, army-trained demolitions expert who is not so much psychotic as mythological: Billy's mother vanishes after leaving him in a paper bag by the highway; he has extraordinary gifts (being able to count to dizzying numbers at an equally dizzying speed, having visions, hearing quasi-angelic voices); and he dies and is brought back to life in the penultimate part of the novel.

Young Billy is possessed by and besotted with Power, "the power to say *I count*, goddammit" by blowing things up; he is used by a sexy yet motherly, confused yet single-minded terrorist named Renee who gets blown up carrying the bomb Billy constructs in the first chapter of the novel. The rest of the narrative is a slow circling back through the hows and whys of that initial catastrophe. There are times when the narrative gets bogged down by the sheer weight of information it offers as to the mechanics of detonation, but the horrific scenes of army life and the sheer momentum of Bailey's prose keep the reader going.

Ultimately, the exposure of Billy's psyche, the hackneyed observations about Power, the analogies drawn between orgasm and explosions prove less rewarding than the flow of the narrative itself and the engrossing conflict that develops, reminiscent of the film *Platoon*, between the two leaders of the "grunts," the appealing Michaels and the demonic Jamison. One almost wishes that Bailey hadn't dragged in the terrorism counterplot with all its predictable dimensions (the terrorists are against nuclear power, and scheme to blow up the head office of the nefarious Power Corporation itself) and had concentrated instead on exploring the sadistic, macho world of demolition boot-camp. But for all its flaws, *Fire Eyes* remains an intriguing and compelling first novel; the reader can be satisfied, rather than sorry, that this book made it into print. □

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Roughing it in the bush

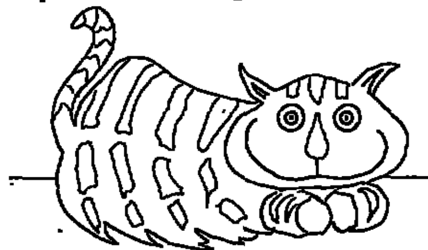
As Canadian children's writing struggles toward maturity, its characters confront the wilderness in search of themselves

By Mary Ainslie Smith

JUDITH SALTMAN'S Modern Canadian Children's Books (136 pages, $9.95 paper) is one of a new series, Perspectives on Canadian Culture, from Oxford University Press. Saltman, who teaches at the University of British Columbia's School of Librarianship, presents an overview of trends in the development of writing for children in Canada in the decade between 1975 and 1985. Using the publication of Sheila Egoff's *Republic of Childhood* (2nd edition, Oxford, 1975) as her starting point, Saltman shows how in the ensuing decade children's literature in Canada progressed to the point where it is much more abundant, more varied in the genres represented, more professionally produced, and better able to compete internationally. This progress has been made in spite of geographical difficulties in distribution, a limited readership, the economic problems of publishers, and inconsistent reviewing and evaluation.

After a brief historical survey of children's books in Canada before 1975, Saltman discusses, chapter by chapter, the major kinds of children's books produced from 1975 to 1985: picture books, fiction, the oral tradition, and poetry. Each category is subdivided — fiction, for instance, into such areas as child-and-family-life stories, social realism, and outdoor adventure and survival. Each chapter ends with a useful bibliography of all the Canadian books it has mentioned. "Useful" is, in fact, the word that best describes this book. It is a useful survey, focusing, in Saltman's words, "on books that have achieved literary excellence . . . major authors, illustrators, titles and trends . . . landmarks on the map of our cultural imagination."

Saltman's instincts for what makes an excellent book are pretty sound, but her survey too often becomes a mere listing of titles, accompanied by brief plot summaries and some rather perfunctory critical remarks. Her work lacks the illuminating flashes of insight that Egoff provides in her discussions of the roots and reasons for children's literature. Rarely would Saltman's readers get the impression that it might be fun to read



children's books — or exciting, or inspiring, or even sometimes disturbing — something that comes across very clearly in another recent survey of children's titles, Michele Landsberg's *Guide to Children's Books* (Penguin, 1985), where the author's personal response to all the books she discusses cannot help involving her readers. However, Saltman does convey a sense of an overall national context for our children's literature and presents some strong support for her conclusions that it is well on its way to a full maturity.

The adventure-survival story has a long tradition in Canadian children's writing, especially for young adults. Saltman devotes a whole section in her book to a discussion of stories where young people, alienated from society, pit themselves against the wilderness in an effort to find their own individuality. Two recent novels from Irwin fall nicely into this category: Log Jam, by Monica Hughes (169 pages, $10.95 paper), and Nobody Said It Would Be Easy, by Marilyn Halvorson (194 pages, $10.95 paper). Both depict teenagers whose problems cause them to see trips into the wilderness as a means of at least temporary escape, and in both they are thrust back on their own resources in order to survive.

In *Log Jam* the two main characters start out on their journeys separately and then come together, the fate of each depending on the other. Isaac Manyfeathers, a 17-year-old, convicted of aiding in a robbery, has escaped from his detention centre into the Alberta foothills.

Convinced that he should deprive himself of food and drink like his ancestors on a spirit quest, he plans to travel back to his grandmother's isolated home, where he spent his early childhood before his mother took him away to the city and the loneliness of the white man's world.

At the same time, 14-year-old Leonora is having the most miserable time of her life on a camping trip with her mother, her step-father of a few weeks, and her two new step-brothers. A yearly camping trip has been a tradition for the three males, and Leonora and her mother are along on sufferance and very clearly in the way. Leonora enlists the younger brother, Denis, as an ally and the two of them sneak away from the others and attempt a white-water canoe trip with disastrous results. When a hallucinating Isaac finds and rescues the injured, half-drowned Leonora, he believes that she is the Sun Child, the answer to his spirit quest. The transition back to their real, contemporary world is not easy for either of them.

Nobody Said It Would Be Easy takes up where *Let It Go*, an earlier novel by Halvorson, left off. The climax of *Let It Go* was the survival by the teenaged heroes, Lance and Red, of a hostage-taking and a vicious knife attack. At the opening of *Nobody Said It Would Be Easy*, Lance receives the bitter news that he may not regain use of his right hand, injured in the fight. Since Lance hopes to become a professional artist, this news is particularly devastating.

Lance's problems at school and Red's confrontation with his authoritarian father continue in this second book. The boys' lives are further complicated by the arrival of Lance's cousin Kat, a wildcat of a girl whom Lance thinks he hates but actually admires, and with whom Red becomes infatuated.

All this takes a while to set up, but eventually the survival part of the story gets going. Lance's Uncle Joe, a bush pilot, takes Lance, Red, and Kat with him in his ancient Cessna on a trip north to help him move some pack horses. When they encounter a severe early snowstorm, the plane crashes into the mountains and Uncle Joe is killed instantly. The three teenagers find that they must depend on each other and on their own inner resources to survive.

Log Jam and *Nobody Said it Would Be Easy* invite comparison. They were published at the same time by the same publisher, and because the cover illustrations are by the same artist, Wes Lowe, someone glancing at the two books might even think that they are about the same people. But although the settings and plots are similar, there are many differences. Hughes shows up clearly as the more experienced and polished writer. She is an expert at setting up tensions among her characters and creating in a few lines of dialogue all the complex levels of rivalry, frustration, love, and hate that can exist within a family. Her parallel plots develop surely until the two protagonists, Leonora and Isaac, come together in what we feel is an entirely believable and inevitable fashion.

Halvorson, however, seems to have a deeper commitment to her characters, sustaining quite acceptably Red and Lance's adventures through two books. The relationship between the boys is warm and supportive and seems very believable, as does the fact that their problems are never completely solved. They have breakthroughs in their relationships with their parents, for instance, but no totally happy resolutions. Rather, in both books, the boys acquire a greater understanding of the adults in their lives and a surer feeling for their own potential place in an adult world. Halvorson's sensitive portrayal of this maturing process and her descriptions of the beautiful Alberta ranch country that means so much to both boys make her books special.

Falling into what Judith Saltman would classify as "social realism" is **Salmonberry Wine** (Groundwood, 192 pages, $6.95 paper), Mary Razzell's sequel to *Snow Apples* (Groundwood, 1984). Sheila Brary, whose coming of age in an isolated coastal village in post-war British Columbia was harrowingly described in the first book, has begun nurse's training at a Vancouver hospital. She finds she must conform to the rigid rules of the Catholic nursing school, but nursing itself is something she enjoys and is good at. Then she watches as a favourite patient weakens and dies because of incorrect diagnosis and treatment by an arrogant senior surgeon. Sheila's discovery that the hospital world can also be dominated by narrow, male-oriented prejudice causes her to reconsider her plans to become a nurse.

There have been lots of books about student nurses, and *Salmonberry Wine* contains its share of clichés: the handsome young doctor, the jealous roommate, the exacting floor supervisor with the heart of gold, the first experience with a catheter. However, the heart of this story is how Sheila learns she must continue to exist and to do her best in an unfair world, and in dealing with these themes, Razzell rises above cliché.

Fans who for more than a decade have been enjoying Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* will be happy to know that Richler has produced a sequel, **Jacob Two-Two and the Dinosaur**, illustrated by Norman Eyolfson (McClelland & Stewart, 85 pages, $14.95 cloth). By now Jacob is

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eight years old (two times two times two) and has moved with his family from England to Montreal. He is still, however, teased and belittled by his two older brothers and two older sisters. His parents, returning from safari in East Africa, bring Jacob a tiny green lizard, found when it was dislodged from a 60-million-year-old block of ice by a slight earthquake in Kenya. With this lizard, Dippy, as his pet, Jacob's need for attention is soon filled. Dippy has an enormous appetite and immediately begins to grow. By the time the family moves to their cottage on the lake for the summer, Dippy is on his way to becoming a full-sized diplodocus. Obviously, this creates problems.

At last Dippy becomes the target of an attack by all levels of the Canadian armed forces under the feared Bulldog Burke, chief of army intelligence. The prime minister, Perry Pleaser, has become convinced that killing Dippy will give him a St. George the Dragonslayer image and supervises the attack personally. Jacob takes Dippy on a wild trip across the country, trying to get him, to the Rocky Mountains, where Dippy believes he can live safely.

This book is less cohesive than *The Hooded Fang*. The action is more rambling; the wimpy prime minister and the members of his think-tank do not provide the same evil focus that Slimers' Island and the Hooded Fang did. The underlying philosophical consideration — is there a place for a dinosaur in this age of computers? — is probably what will stick the longest in the minds of any adults reading the book aloud to their children. □

INTERVIEW

Lois Braun

'I love the combination of the bizarre and the warm. Things can be so ugly and so bizarre, *and yet there's so much love'*

By Nancy Wigston

AMONG THE FINALISTS for this spring's Governor General's Awards were Alice Munro, John Metcalf, Aritha van Herk, and prairie writer Lois Braun, whose first collection of short stories, *A Stone Watermelon* (Turnstone Press), had been praised for its "diamond-hard realism," "subtle detail," and "sharp emotions." Braun, who grew up on a farm near Altona, Man., now lives on a farm run by her husband and teaches grade five in Altona. On a recent visit to Toronto she was interviewed by Nancy Wigston:

Books in Canada: *Teaching school and living on a farm, had you been doing a lot of writing?*

Lois Braun: No, not at all. In grade seven and eight, my friend Virginia and I saw ourselves as writers. We lived on neighbouring farms, and we lurked around the thickets and ponds and railroad tracks and talked about books. We read a lot and started novels we never finished. In high school I had a fabulous English teacher, a wonderful man, who helped me develop an appreciation for good writing, and in university I wrote some poetry, the things everybody does. But after I went into teaching and got married, I never thought about writing. When I was 29, I received a book in the mail, an anthology called *Western Moods* and a story of mine that had been published in the high school year book was in it. The story was so awful, so obviously juvenile, that I thought, well, if they're going to publish something like this, I'm sure I can write something better. I sat down immediately and started to write, and I started to take creative writing courses at the University of Manitoba.

Lois Braun

BiC: *Did you benefit from these courses?*

Braun: Being in a creative writing course — and this is important — helped me find out where I was in relation to other people who were starting writing. A film-studies course influenced my writing a lot too; I start my stories with visual pictures. And cementing images throughout a story, making sure you have a thread, reminded me of the things I learned in high school about good writing.

BiC: *Many of us think of the prairies as a blank, a flat space, yet your stories are extraordinarily rich in people, feeling, and imagination. Is this really how life is on the prairie?*

Braun: You have to look awfully hard. The first person who taught me that was my father. Being a farmer doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to be aware of what's happening around you, but he was a nature lover as well as a farmer. He really taught me, pointing out what was happening in that furrow over there, that ditch or that pond. He had such a keen sense of belonging in that landscape. And my friend Virginia shared a love of nature with me. We would walk down the railroad track for hours. It was a path right through to the prairie, and we would look at the little things, the bugs and the changes of colours in the soil. We were really in tune with our surroundings. And then, around the time I was 28 or 29 I began to think, where am I going and where have I been? Why did I marry when I was 20 years old? And why haven't I tried different jobs? What am I doing in Altona? You want everything to be different, and during that time I spent an awful lot of time out walking on the fields around our house, tramping it all out. I became aware all over again of everything that was going on.

BiC: *You said you grew up near Altona. What is your background?*

Braun: My parents went to the United Church, since my father had been in reserve training during the war, and Mennonites do not allow this. But the food we ate, our friends and relatives were Mennonite — my parents both spoke low German. I consider myself to be of Mennonite background.

BiC: *When asked about character and imagination, you responded in terms of landscape — turning over the rocks and so on. Is this what you do in your stories?*

Braun: Yes, because in the Mennonite community people keep things very much to themselves. There isn't much openness when it comes to problems, and they come up in the oddest ways — they kind

of blister out unexpectedly. You have to look under the rocks for the bugs and so on.

BiC: *There is an eeriness in many of your stories — the floating watermelon, like a bald head, in the lake in "Hunting Clouds," for instance, and the Indian in the wheelchair in "A Stone Watermelon." Along with these haunting images is a pervasive lack of communication between human beings. Is this also part of the prairie experience?*

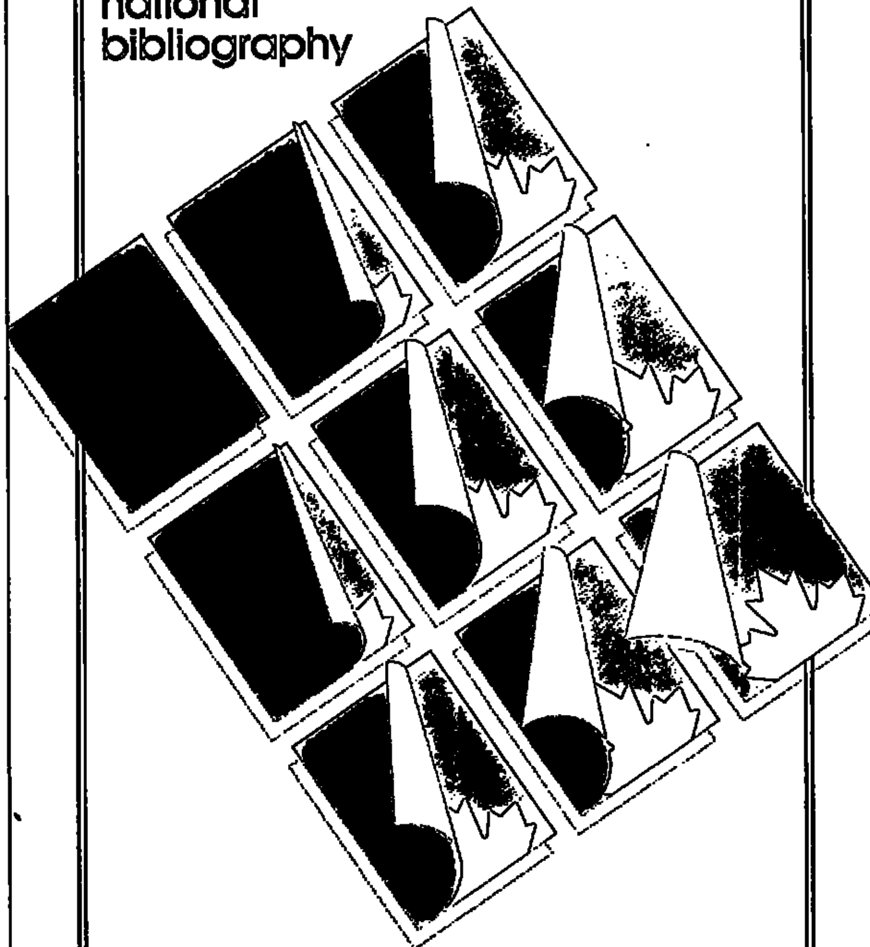
Braun: It's a third dimension. You've got the landscape, and then you've got these mental pictures. I was driving down a road out near our house, very flat, and there were squalls, rain storms, all around, and there was a native man pushing a woman in a wheelchair down this lonely, lonely road. The third dimension is the bizarre, the mysterious, whatever you want to call it. I don't know where that comes from. It's something I've had to add, a spice into the mixture of the pictures and the landscape. I'm influenced by John Irving; I love the combination of the bizarre and the warm. Things can be so ugly and so bizarre, and yet there's so much love, as in *The Cider House Rules*. The way I'm writing now I'm trying to build in a little more of the love and the warmth and the caring, whereas the stories in *A Stone Watermelon* are kind of detached.

BiC: *Robertson Davies once spoke of the "bizarre and passionate life in the Canadian people" that he was trying to reveal in* Fifth Business, *as if we're Chekhovian characters but unaware of it.*

Braun: Yes, people don't realize the richness of their own lives. You know, the Mennonites were never known to be much involved in the arts, and in the last two or three years there's been almost a renaissance. It can't be a renaissance since it was nêver there — but it's really great to see the writers, musicians, the poetry coming from the Mennonites now.

BiC: *What about the pervasive feelng of aloneness or lack of contact in your stories — even with one's own history? Is this because the individual is dwarfed by the landscape?*

Braun: Where I grew up, it's more like a rich river valley than a real prairie. We're not looking at the dry, grassy, treeless place that parts of Saskatchewan and southern Alberta are. So I don't think it's a landscape influence. I think it's still the old pioneer mentality. You're isolated, you've gone to start something new — the Mennonites did that, they came from Russia. The people that I hear talk really think about that a lot — that they were displaced, they had to leave their home country. There's a sense of being separated from where you naturally should be, and then being separate from other groups once you get here.



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BiC: *The life described in stories like "Three Crows Dancing" and "The No Place Bar and Grill" has this frontier quality — not nostalgic but rather grim, a constant test between a character and the new environment.*

Braun: Yes. I seldom hear these people talk about what a great thing it was that they did it — it is always recalled with suffering. And that feeling lasts with you forever. You die with that feeling, that you are a newcomer in a strange land.

BiC: *In "Three Crows Dancing," Alice, the housewife whose husband barks orders at her over the CB radio, tries to plant an apple tree for her kids but finds the soil too dry and hard. In the midst of this scene the dog comes around the corner holding a dead kitten in his mouth, and suddenly violence bursts out from all her frustrations. Are these domestic victims — the dead kitten, the dog too inert even to run, the trapped woman — somehow connected?*

Braun: You know, somebody else brought that up, the violence to animals. I wonder why I write about that. We have pets and we just love them. I don't know where that comes from — it's sort of a dark part of me.

BiC: *Is this the "erupting blister" that you referred to earlier?*

Braun: Yes. I think little bits of unexpected violence do happen in all families, and it's something that they'll never talk about. But suddenly it's there, suddenly you just can't stop this action, and it becomes more and more intense. I think deep down that people need to have an outlet for violence. There must be a way that people can physically work off their emotions. If they don't, something will give, something will break — the farmer working out in a field will snap something.

BiC: *So many of the women in your stories — Alberta, Alice, Sarah, Rita, Buzi — seem particularly isolated. Do you agree?*

Braun: I think I do know a lot of women like that; I do see women as being isolated, as being held back from what they could accomplish. Not necessarily always by someone else, not even by a situation, but by their not trying, holding themselves back. And because they know that they are holding themselves back, they tend to move further and further away from society.

BiC: *Is this because it's a man's world?*

Braun: Where I come from, it's certainly a man's world. The town council is run by men, the school board is run by men, but that isn't to say that there aren't some very strong, fine women. When teaching my class, that's the area where I really try to make my kids aware of what they can all do. I think the only place we can work from is the children growing up. ☐

LETTERS

Death by drowning

THE LETTER IN the April issue from Dorothy Livesay to Lorne Pierce about my father, Raymond Knister, has been in the Queen's University archives for years. Livesay wrote it in the late 1940s when she was writing a memoir to accompany a book of Knister's poetry. At the end of this letter Livesay implies that she initiated the project, but the letters at Queen's show that Dr. Pierce had planned to publish the poetry and write the memoir himself.

Leo Kennedy wrote a very indignant letter protesting Livesay's suggestion of suicide and Dr. Pierce was inclined to agree with him. So Livesay concocted this fiction, which was sure to shock Dr. Pierce, a former United Church minister.

No doubt Livesay and Knister did have a long argument about literature, sex, and politics. Probably Livesay did send him a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and insisted that he bring it back in the morning as it was banned at that time and difficult to obtain. However Livesay's claim that Knister fell so madly in love with her during this discussion that he committed suicide is absurd. She admits in this story that they scarcely knew one another. Her claim to have cared about him is refuted by her sale of this letter to your magazine.

In Livesay's book *Right Hand, Left Hand* we get a hint of what that argument was really about. Apparently she was trying to recruit Knister into the Marxist movement with talk about "the working classes," which she obviously considered him a part of (her writing about him is very condescending), and with talk about "free love." She says in *Right Hand, Left Hand*, "He wanted me to keep on writing lyrical poetry and I wanted him to write political novels! We could not come to terms."

Raymond Knister was not the type of man to fall in love with a woman who believed in "free love." My mother, who is 85 now, has always described him as extremely jealous and possessive. The Marxist philosophy would not have appealed to him either, as he was always in search of truth and Marxists are interested only in the advancement of their purposes. He probably tried to talk some sense into Livesay because her parents were friends of his and because he felt she had a genuine talent for poetry. She says in this letter that "he was obsessed with the idea that he was a great poet." At that time he had not written any poetry in years. His advice about the poet getting away from it all would have been for her, not himself.

Leo Kennedy said in his letter to Livesay that when the news of Knister's death came to the Montreal *Herald* people who did not even know Knister said, "a suicide of course." That was the mood in the 1930s. Livesay wasn't even being original in reacting in the same way. Probably the reason she immediately thought that he had committed suicide was simply a guilty conscience combined with an overactive imagination. But she was wrong. Knister had a good job waiting for him at Ryerson Press and a new novel planned. He was likely not even thinking of Dorothy Livesay while enjoying his holiday at Stoney Point. Having jumped to the wrong conclusion years ago, Livesay will not admit she could be wrong.

Livesay claims to care about this man she says took his own life because of love for her, yet she is holding him up to public ridicule. For that matter what man would commit suicide over a romance that consisted entirely of several hours of arguing, first while he was driving, later in the hallway of her home?

Livesay's misinformation has been perpetuated in many reference works. Knister was a full-time professional writer, one of the leading critics of the 1920s, and had produced an amazing amount of work before his death at the age of 33. Yet he is cited as someone who "failed to earn a living" and "took his own life." His stories are searched for "melancholia" and "morbidity." His ideas are dismissed as products of mental illness.

Dorothy Livesay once said she would have liked to have written a novel called *Sons of Earth* based on her ideas about Raymond Knister. What she has written about Knister is mostly fiction and should be labelled as such.

Imogen Knister Givens
Harley, Ont.

I MET Raymond Knister's daughter at camp when we were both very young girls. She told me her father had been a writer. She was very proud of him.

A few years ago she wrote to ask me if I thought there was any way she could defend herself and her mother against a story that was being told about her father, which showed her parents' marriage in a light that her mother believed to be quite untrue. She sent me pages of her mother's journal, written at the time of her father's death, which showed the strength of the marriage at that time, from the wife's point of view, and made a strong case for accidental death.

There's more than one truth about most lives and most marriages. The famous person's "truth" gets broadcast,

and believed, and the obscure person's "truth" doesn't. All I can do for my girlhood friend is to bring this fact to your readers' attention.

Alice Munro
Clinton, Ont.

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH

HAVING NEVER, despite my many faults, perceived myself as a person of great power or indeed great viciousness, it was interesting to read the letter in your June-July issue from Mary Ellen Csamer accusing me of being an enforcer of "Official Truth" — this in the context of the *Books in Canada* first novel award and some bizarre brand of sexual politics.

Her complaint seems to be that her choice didn't win, and one must certainly applaud literary passions however they occur. Nevertheless, I must protest Csamer's suggestion that her choice did not win because its author was male and I, for my sins, am female. I point out merely that I was but one of four judges, and the sole woman. We made our choices independently, so I had no opportunity to bully any weak-minded men, supposing there were any, into agreement. One judge, all by himself, agreed with my choice. Another, all by himself, seems to have come to a similar conclusion to mine about Csamer's choice, although he expressed it in different words. One judge agreed with Csamer. Those are, I think, the usual breaks when it comes to literary awards.

Csamer is correct, though, in saying that while contests come and go, great writing lasts. Meanwhile, it's always a fine thing to discover, as she has, a book to love, and surely that should be enough.

Joan Barfoot
London, Ont.

ONE FOR THE MONEY

MORTON SHULMAN'S dismissal of *Hot Money and the Politics of Debt*, by R.T. Naylor (April), which he sees as "fun reading," not to be taken too seriously, can too easily be seen as a refutation of some perspectives that deserve serious consideration. The fact that the governments of Third World debtor countries are now being asked to "assume obligations incurred by private companies or by corrupt public officials and that they pay off those debts by lowering their people's standard of living" is causing unspeakable suffering for millions of people.

Not enough food and water, schools and clinics remaining unbuilt, and all those boys in uniform to keep the natives from getting too restless. Not much fun, very serious — and common knowledge to experts like Noam Chomsky, Meyer

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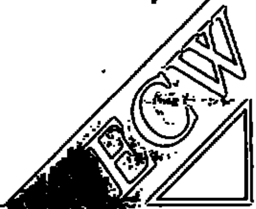

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Brownstone of the University of Toronto, and educated people throughout the Third World. Anyone who follows the news should know, by now, that the powerful are sometimes less than candid and that the truth may well lie behind what we are being served by the popular media. "The wicked amongst us" who put the fun in *Hot Money* may never see most of their migratory money and, with over a trillion dollars gone south, even the innocent may face some unwelcome changes.

Fun is nothing to sniff at, but it is worth noting that Naylor's book can also be seen as a remarkable prophecy of Irangate, and it provides a flawed but accessible view of the need for a north-south dialogue motivated by generosity. A quick look around will show who has something left to give.

Brian Turner
Victoria

WILD TIMES

I SUSPECT THAT the reviewer of Lyn Hancock's *Looking for the Wild* (April) wasn't interested enough to read the whole book. He didn't bother to put some significant aspects in perspective.

He superciliously refers to a 16-page bird list arranged by Latin names and to a series of abbreviated bird lists throughout the book. I must admit that, as a naturalist and not primarily a birder, I opened the book with a little trepidation, anticipating daily "checklists." But Hancock has solved this problem for the general reader rather well. The 16-page list with zoological names really had to be given for the record — and is in the appendix. The daily records are hardly lists. The birds are shown in their natural surroundings with trees, plants, animals, weather, and people all part of the picture.

Though the route was around the U.S. (except for its beginning in Newfoundland), perhaps one might note that the field party visited areas where birds were wintering or on migration paths, and that the naturalists know many of the species in their nesting areas in northern Canada. The sea mammals, too, have their international paths. The trip was an adventure and the record reads like an adventure story. What are they going to find at the end of the story? For one thing they are going to find Roger Tory Peterson far away on the Priboloff Islands.

Hancock has a very interesting conversation with him about the possibility of saving the natural world, both species and habitat. He remarks that today there are 30- to 40-million bird-watchers in North America, and it is through their perception — as they observe birds they become aware of what is happening to the environment and become active in taking steps to protect it — that progress is made.

I see *Looking for the Wild* remaining with us as an important book. For one thing it is a record of a 30,000-mile trip in the natural world in 1983. The geographical background is fascinating, with very impressive descriptions of great geographical landmarks, from the estuary of the Mississippi to the beaches of the Priboloffs. Of course, S.R. Gage is right; *Looking for the Wild* is a book of special interest to birders and it belongs in their libraries, but it is also full of information of a wider significance.

Mary Fallis
Prince George, B.C.

WIN SOME, LOSE SOME

FOR THE RECORD, someone should give credit where credit is due. In her profile of L.R. Wright (June-July) Eleanor Wachtel calls Wright "the first Canadian to win. . .the Edgar [Award]. . . presented annually by the Mystery Writers of America for the best novel of the year."

L.A. Morse won the Edgar a few years before Wright for his novel *The Old Dick* (Avon, 1981). I'm not positive what constitutes a Canadian writer (residence? citizenship?), nor do I know anything about Morse's personal claims to such. Nevertheless, he is a Toronto resident, to the best of my knowledge, and the Toronto *Star* reported in May, 1982 that Morse had been resident in Toronto for 16 years at that time.

Somewhere, Morse is sitting, shaking his head, reflecting on How Soon They Forget. . . .

Terence M. Green
Toronto

Letters may be edited for length or to delete potentially libellous statements. Except in extraordinary circumstances, letters of more than 500 words will not be accepted for publication.

RECOMMENDED

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

FICTION

Caprice, by George Bowering, Viking (Penguin). Replete with good guys and bad guys, cowboys and Indians, what we have here is not an old-fashioned western but a post-modern one, in which the hombres have ethnic identities and the Indians debate metaphysical questions.

NON-FICTION

Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business, by Michael Bliss, McClelland & Stewart. For all its bulk and price ($39.95), business people will be urging this book on the unconverted with apostolic zeal. Never before have they had a more literate, informed, or persuasive account of how business — not public enterprise — made Canada.

POETRY

Sanding Down This Rocking Chair on a Windy Night, by Don McKay, McClelland & Stewart. There is an unquestioning, unforced Canadianness to McKay's poems, which speak of industrial softball leagues, hockey games, winter driving, white-water canoeing, and the migration of geese. He takes such mundane elements and electrifies them with perception.

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:

A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing, edited by Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli, Longspoon/Newest.
The Academic Corporation: Justice, Freedom, and the University, by Allen Fenichel and David Mandel, Black Rose Books.
Against All Odds, by Stephen L. Hubbard, Dundurn.
Albert's Bed, by Hervé Baudry, Black Moss.
The Amazing Apple Book, by Paulette Bourgeois, Kids Can Press.
The Annie Poems, by Anne Cameron, Harbour Publishing.
As It Came Upon Me, by Edward L. House, Harry Cuff Publishing.
Ballpark Figures: The Blue Jays and the Business of Baseball, by Larry Millson, M & S.
Beneath the Western Slopes, by Patrick Roscoe, Stoddart.
Beyond Patriarchy, by Michael Kaufman, Oxford.
Borrowed Beauty, by Maxime Tynes, Pottersfield Press.
Buon Gusto!, by Val Clery, Macmillan.
Canada Among Nations, edited by Brian W. Tomlin and Maureen Apel Molot, Lorimer.
Canada 1900-1945, Robert Bothwell *et al.* U of Toronto.
Canada: The State of the Federation 1986, edited by Peter M. Leslie, Queen's University Press.
The Canadian Woman's Legal Guide, by M. J. Dymond, Doubleday.
Caught Soul, by Marnie Duff, Sono Nis Press.
Chinked with Oakum, by Eve Hobson, Admont Corporation.
A Collection of Short Stories, by Percy Janes, Harry Cuff Publications.
A Collection of Stories, by Otto Tucker, Harry Cuff Publications.
Communications, by Dan Mackie *et al.*, CHP Books.
La Conference Inachevee: Le pas de Gamelin et autres recits, by Jacques Ferron, VLB Editeur.
Contours of Canadian Thought, by A.B. McKillop, U of T Press.
The Cowboy Kid, by David A. Poulson, Plains Publishing Inc.
Craigdarroch: The Story of Dunsmuir Castle, by Terry Reksten, Orca.
Crocodiles in the Bathtub and Other Perils, by George Jonas, Totem.
Culture, Governments and Markets: Public Policy and the Culture Industries, by Steven Globerman, Fraser Institute.
Dan McGrew, Sam McGee and Other Great Service, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
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World of Vocabulary Canada, by Ken Weber, Globe/Modern Curriculum.
The Writing Programme For Grades 3 Through 9, nos. 3, 7, 8, and 9, by David Booth *et al.*, Globe/Modern Curriculum Press
A Yen for Profit: Canadian Financial Institutions in Japan, by Richard W. Wright with Susan Huggett, Institute for Research on Public Policy.

CANWIT NO. 122

WE CAN THANK the advertising industry for the handy categorizing of some consumer households as DINKS (Double Income, No Kids), and a new novel by Katherine Govier, *Between Men* (Penguin), reports on a phenomenon known as SWARM (Single Women After Rich Men) — all of which set us wondering what other demographic formations might be expressed in acronyms. One we thought of was SWANK (Separated, With Apartment and No Kids), but we're sure our readers can do better. We'll pay $25 for the best set of sociological acronyms and their definitions received before October 1. Address: CanWit No. 122, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 120

OUR REQUEST for lipogrammatical verse — in which the letter e does not appear — produced a wealth of entries, but few lived up to the letter or the spirit of the limerick form. The winner is Alec McEwen of Ottawa whose limericks included:

Said a monk, a lascivious rabbit
Who would look for a lay and just grab it,
"It is fun with a nun,
And you'll pardon my pun,
But I cannot stay out of that habit."

Said a tart of a john's copulation,
You pay sixty for slow consummation;
What a pity it's limp,
But I'm bound by my pimp
To build in any costs of inflation."

Honourable mention:

"No porno!" says Ramon Hnatyshyn,
"I'll kill it all off by attrition;
For Canadian art
I don't mind a fart,
It's back to that missionary position."
— Barry Baldwin, Calgary

SOLUTION TO CANLIT ACROSTIC NO. 7

I knew my parents loved me even though I was ungifted, plump, and talked back. After I made my bed in the morning, my mother always remade it when I was at school because I left lumps under the spread. Mother was my comforter and protector, not to be found anywhere else but at home.
— Sondra Gotlieb, *True Confections* (Stoddart)

CLASSIFIED

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

FAST by David Fujino. Mail order poetry from Vocabulary. 500 copies hand-signed and numbered. Each $6.00 plus 50¢ for postage and handling. Vocabulary, P.O. Box 1347, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2V9.

FOR A BIOGRAPHY of Margaret Laurence I seek copies of letters etc. from her. L.H. Powers, Dept. of English, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA 48109.

HELLO TO BARB & KEES in Amsterdam.

HMS PRESS is going out of business and will no longer be publishing as of July 1. The only remaining title in print is *Whiskey Jack* by Milton Acorn. P.O. Box 7, Station D, Scarborough, Ont. M1R 4Y7.

SEPTEMBER 15: Happy Birthday Blanche DuBois and Pooh; many and best years lie ahead.

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CanLit acrostic no. 8

By Mary D. Trainer

		1 E	2 O	3 H	4 L	5 P	6 R		7 W	8 G		9 F	10 BB	11 M	12 D		13 F	14 AA				
15 S	16 B	17 D	18 A	19 Z	20 S		21 C	22 V	23 X	24 G	25 P	26 E		27 D	28 B	29 S		30 BB		31 Y		
32 I	33 L		34 AA	35 F	36 V	37 K	38 J		39 O	40 R	41 H	42 W	43 S		44 K	45 C	46 T	47 J	48 BB			
49 O	50 G	51 I	52 U	53 X	54 K	55 B		56 AA	57 Q	58 D	59 S		60 F	61 O	62 U	63 AA		64 J	65 V	66 O		
	67 BB	68 C	69 L		70 L	71 O		72 BB	73 H	74 F	75 S	76 D	77 Z	78 I	79 Q	80 N	81 C		82 K	83 Y		
	84 G	85 K	86 F	87 X	88 AA	89 H		90 D	91 Z	92 E	93 I		94 BB	95 K	96 S	97 C		98 G	99 H			
100 J	101 M	102 D		103 U	104 J	105 N	106 Y	107 BB	108 N	109 P	110 D		111 A	112 S		113 F	114 AA	115 I	116 Y	117 BB		
118 P	119 O	120 L	121 BB		122 D	123 R	124 F		125 Z	126 E	127 O	128 Q		129 K	130 A	131 D	132 J		133 BB	134 W		
	135 B	136 O	137 G	138 K	139 Z	140 E	141 C		142 J	143 R	144 H	145 U		146 A	147 X		148 Z	149 D	150 W	151 K		
	152 BB	153 C	154 S		155 N	156 F	157 I	158 D		159 H		160 C	161 J	162 D	163 AA	164 M	165 F		166 T	167 V		
168 X		169 P	170 B		171 O	172 K	173 C	174 D	175 F		176 I	177 BB	178 U	179 S		180 V	181 H	182 D		183 O		
184 T	185 M		186 Q	187 BB	188 O	189 F	190 G		191 K	192 BB	193 F	194 M		195 V	196 H	197 Y	198 L		199 C	200 I		
		201 AA	202 T	203 B	204 E	205 Y		206 S	207 F	208 G	209 X	210 J	211 R	212 D		213 Q	214 O	215 BB				

When properly filled in, the letters in the box form a quotation from a Canadian book. The first letters of each answered clue form the name of the author and the title of the book. (Solution next month.)

The solution to Acrostic No. 7 appears on page 41.

A. *White Figure, White Ground* author — 146 111 130 18

B. Final result — 16 135 55 203 28 170

C. Snowmobile manufacturer — 160 153 199 21 173 45 141 68 97 81

D. CP ship involved in major 1914 accident: 3 wds. — 58 90 158 12 102 212 174 149 27 76 131 162 17 122 110 182

E. Discuss again — 92 140 126 204 26 1

F. Book awarded 1959 Governor General's poetry prize: 3 wds. — 175 86 35 13 165 189 124 207 9 60 113 193 156 74

G. Internationally acclaimed architect — 50 208 98 24 190 84 8 137

H. "Mon Pays" composer — 3 181 41 99 144 159 196 89 73

I. Appreciator of the beautiful — 200 157 51 115 78 32 176 93

J. ___Company, major fur trade operation: 2 wds. — 47 104 161 132 64 142 210 38 100

K. Freshwater fish — 129 54 95 85 151 191 172 44 82 133 37

L. Get the better of by superior cleverness — 120 70 198 33 4 69

M. Eighth letter of Greek alphabet — 185 101 194 164 11

N. Fifteenth day of March — 108 155 80 105

O. Toronto newspaper, 1895-1936: 3 wds. — 39 2 119 171 61 188 213 183 66 71 136 49 127

P. Canadian merchant family — 25 169 118 109 5

Q. Like an irritating skin sensation — 214 79 186 57 128

R. "___ and Day," Cole Porter song — 123 40 6 143 211

S. Oldest permanent settlement in Manitoba: 2 wds. — 179 154 29 96 112 75 206 43 15 20 59

T. Death notice (abbr.) — 184 166 46 202

U. Beat, defeat — 52 103 178 145 62

V. ___Canal, well-known skating rink — 22 65 180 36 195 167

W. This "doctor" dispenses political advice — 134 150 7 42

X. Bird artist — 53 87 23 168 147 209

Y. Swarm — 106 197 31 116 205 83

Z. City section — 77 139 19 148 125 91

AA. Distressing predicament: 2 wds. — 14 88 114 34 163 56 63 201

BB. 1972 election slogan: 4 wds. — 107 177 10 94 30 117 215 192 72 67 152 187 133 121 48

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