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L.R. WRIGHT: WOMAN OF MYSTERY

New fiction by Douglas Glover

Timothy Findley on Jane Urquhart

Tom Marshall on Michael Ondaatje

And an interview with Rohinton Mistry

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CONTRIBUTORS

Tony Aspler's *International Guide to Wine* and *The Wine Lover Dines* were recently published by Prentice.Hall. **Matthew Behrens** also writes for *Now* magazine. Bob **Blackburn** writes frequently about English usage in these pages. New Brunswick editor and critic **Laurel Boone** is book-review editor of the *Fiddlehead.* Toronto poet Barbara **Carey** is a frequent contributor to *Books* in Canada. **Frederick I. Case** is chairman of the French department at University College. University of Toronto. Saskatchewan writer and critic Paul **Denham** was formerly the editor cl the *NeWest Review.* Mary dl **Michele's** most recent book is *Immune to Gravity* (McClelland & Stewart). Mark **Everard** is a Toronto freelance writer. **Cary Fagan** is a freelance writer in London, Ont. **Timothy Findley's** most recent novel is *The Telling of Lies* (Penguin). Gideon **Forman** coordinates a weekly radio show, *Peacetide*, cc CIUT-FM (Toronto). Poet **Susan Glickman's** *The Power to Move* (Véhicule) was reviewed in cur previous issue. **Douglas Glover** is a novelist currently living in Saratoga Springs. N.Y. Montreal writer John Goddard's profile of Roger Caron appeared in our May issue. **Wayne** Grady is managing editor of *Harrowsmith magazine.* Poet **Phil** Hall will be writer-in-residence al the Ganaraska writers' colony this summer. Toronto artist Dawn Hood's drawings appear throughout the issue. Karl **Jirgens** is the editor ot *Rampike* magazine. Nova Scotia writer **Janice Kulyk Keefer's** latest back is *The Paris-Napoli Express* (Oberon). Bract **Ledger's** profile of John Metcalf appeared in our April issue. Critii and anthologist **Alberto Manguel's** latest book is *Evening Games: Chronicles of Parents and Children* (Penguin). Kingston, Oct., novelist Tom **Marshall's** new book, *Adele at the End cl the Day* (Macmillan) was recently reviewed in these pages. **Ken McGoogan** is book-review editor of the Calgary *Herald.* **Patricia Morley's** latest book is *Kurelek: A Biography* (Macmillan). **Desmond Morton** *is the* principal of Erindale College. University of Tcmntc. Paul **Orenstein's** photographs cl literary personalities frequently appear on our covers. John **Oughton** is preparing a book an how writers can make the best use of word processors. **I.M.** Owen is a freelance reviewer. **Maureen Paxton** is an artist and children's book illustrator. **Sherie Posesorski** and **Alison Reid** are Toronto freelance writers. Barbara **Wade Rose**, formerly of Toronto, now lives lo Menlo Park, California. **Rupert Schieder** reviews Commonwealth literature for this magazine. Mary **Ainslie Smith** is our regular children's bock reviewer. Norman **Snider** is the author of *The Changing cl the Guard* (Laster A Orpen Decoys). **Joanne Tompkins** has made a special study of tbe works of Thomas Raddall. **Mary D. Trainer** is a freelance writer and puzzle-maker In Port Coquitlam. B.C. Vancouver journalist and broadcaster **Eleanor Wachtel** Is a contributing editor cl this magazine. **Nancy Wigston** is a Toronto freelance writer. **Joel Yanofsky** writes for the Montreal *Gazette.*

EDITOR ∘ Michael Smith MANAGING EDITOR ∘ Doris Cowan
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS ∘ Eleanor Wachtel (West Coast) ∘ K.G. Prober (Prairies) ∘ Shirley Knight Morris ∘ Paul Wilson ∘ Ray Filip (Quebec) ∘ Terry Goldie (East Coast)

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BOOKS IN CANADA

Home from the sea

In half a century of story-telling, Thomas H. Raddall's constant goal has been to provide 'intelligent entertainment'

SUMMER IS COMING, and Thomas Head Raddall is eager to get out on the golf course at White Point, near his Liverpool, N.S., home. Prevented from taking much exercise by heart trouble and arthritis, he doesn't play any more, but likes to walk across two fairways to his favourite spot, a bench overlooking Port Mouton Bay, where he visits with friends. Also, he notes, "White Point and Sable Island happen to be on the same parallel of latitude, so when I look true east I know my island is down there over the horizon."

He may speak fondly of Sable Island today, but when Raddall was 17 he "got down and kissed the deck of the *Lady Laurier*" after spending a year "sentenced to Siberia" as a wireless operator there. A few years later he took a bookkeeping job with a down-at-heel pulp company in the backwoods village of Milton, five miles up the Mersey River from Liverpool, planning to gain a year's experience so that he could look for work in Halifax. He never quite got that far. When he became a full-time writer in 1939, after 10 years at that job and another like it at the Bowater-Mersey Paper Co., he remained in his comfortable Dutch-colonial house in Liverpool. His brief stay has lasted 64 years.

When he first launched out on his own, half a century ago, Raddall vowed never to join the host of writers, good in their day, who continued to write even though their work had degenerated into mediocrity and trash. In 1968, convinced that he had written all the things that excited him and about which he could excite others, he retired. And he has not changed his mind — *The Dreamers*, published recently by Pottersfield Press, consisted of 10 reprinted stories that, for one reason or another, never seemed to fit into his other collections.

Thomas H. Raddall

PHOTOGRAPH BY LAUREL BOONE

Regardless of when they were written, the stories in *The Dreamers* reflect Raddall's constant goal, in books such as *His Majesty's Yankees* (1942), *Pride's Fancy* (1946), and *The Nymph and the Lamp* (1950), to provide "intelligent entertainment." Listening to the old sailors' tales, when he went to sea at 15, Raddall realized that "you couldn't fake anything. You had to tell a legitimate story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. If it droned on and was obviously padded, you lost your audience right away."

Raddall sold his first story in 1928, to *Maclean's* for $60. "Three Wise Men" (reprinted in *The Dreamers*) is a comic yarn about how some Sable Island wireless operators get even with their stingy bosses. "I thought I had the world by the tail," he says. "My very first story, accepted by *Maclean's*. But it wasn't the kind of thing I wanted to write." Though it drew on his own experience, "Three Wise Men" was wishful thinking. He wanted his stories to be grounded in fact.

So Raddall modelled his next story, "Tit for Tat," on a real character and a real practical joke he had witnessed at the Milton pulp mill. To his dismay, the editor of *Maclean's*, Napier Moore, wrote him two pages detailing its worthlessness. "I threw it in a drawer," says Raddall, "and it lay there for five years." In the meantime he began to read *Blackwood's*, and one day he submitted "Tit for Tat," thinking it might suit the magazine's style. "That started a whole career," he says — not only in *Blackwood's* but in *Maclean's*, for once the stories had the English seal of approval *Maclean's* bought the Canadian rights.

Raddall likes to echo the opinion that fiction should be like a mirror carried along a road: "You can't stop by the wayside shrine any longer than you stop by the wayside pigsty. You merely reflect what is there and move on." Never one to shrink from writing about sex (his female characters seek and enjoy sexual relations with a complexity that is true to life but rarely found in fiction), he gleefully tells about a teacher in Ohio "who had taken *The Nymph and the Lamp* out of the school library because there was so much sex in it. And she was surprised to read on the jacket that I was a married man with children."

His curiosity piqued, Raddall added up all the paragraphs in the novel relating to sex and found that they "amounted to about three pages if all were put together." He wrote to the teacher advising her "to go back and read the other 330 pages, which obviously she must have missed."

Now 83, Raddall still speaks with a resonant voice, and his thick glasses do not obscure the lively depth of his brown eyes. These days he spends much of his time listening to music and reading. Hugh MacLennan remains his favourite Canadian author, and he disdains those who criticize Robert Louis Stevenson "for writing adventure stories, as if that were some foul disease." Now that he's "old and decrepit," he says, "I find myself reading more and more the old favourites just for the savour of them again."

He calls himself "an instinctive writer," one who worked by fixing in his mind the general plan of a story or novel and then "groping my way through the fog toward the distant shore. For me that's more like life." And he draws a simple analogy: "I know with whom I'll be spending next Christmas, but what's going to happen to me and them in the meantime I don't know — I just have to live it."

— LAUREL BOONE

Stage fright

WHEN JAMES POLK'S play, *Vanity Press* — about a domineering mother who has confused her identity with that of her publishing house — opened a few weeks ago, Tarragon Theatre held a special performance for members of Toronto's publishing community. In fact, so many publishers responded to the invitation that a second performance had to be scheduled. I went to the first, hoping to see the looks on the faces of Jack McClelland, Anna Porter, *et al.* when

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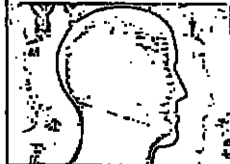

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they or their houses were turned into clever one-liners ("If I'd wanted shifting structure I'd have gone to work for M&S"), but few if any of those named in the play appeared in the audience.

The play is very funny, but the reaction to it was reserved at best. Some reviewers complained that its subject was too limited in appeal, of no interest to the public. Or perhaps no one in Canadian publishing — or in the arts in general — feds quite secure enough for self-critical laughter. Aside from poking fun here and there, Polk, editorial director at House of Anansi, has something important to say about the publishing trade. But the idea of the play seems to have caused more stir than the play itself.

Vanity Press revolves around Sonja, who runs the small publishing house Wolverine, and her son and daughter Andrew and Billie, who are her sole employees. Her former husband is also a major shareholder. Sonja is so intensely involved in Wolverine that she has confused herself and the press until in her mind she and the press are synonymous. in the same way that she dominates Wolverine, she has also become unable to stop interfering in her children's lives.

Enter Neil. a young man with a first novel about "the Shield," who believes the only way to get published is to get into bed with the publisher, who happens to he ripe for an affair. Then Andrew and his father try unsuccessfully to engineer a takeover of the press by gently nudging Sonja out of thc way. But Sonja's victory is hollow: she rejects her lover's novel; he rejects her and starts an affair with her daughter. who resigns from Wolverine.

As one might predict. the night 1 saw it what got talked about was not Polk's characterization of Sonja but the question of whom she was modelled after. But the play is too good to be reduced to such a trivial guessing game. if it is to be produced in other parts of the country, some of the humour may be lost on audiences not familiar with the publishing scene, but how many of the inside jokes in Shakespeare or Albee does the entire audience understand? The same crises and tensions at Wolverine might arise in any family-operated enterprise. whether publishing or auto parts.

All the same, the following exchange between Sonja and ha daughter was probably the most telling of the evening:

SONJA: God, I hate Canadian literature.
BILLIE: We all do.

The audience giggled at the first line. Roared at the second. Perhaps Freud was right: the troth we fear is what we laugh at the most.

— MARC CÔTÉ

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Pregnant prose

A woman who expects to have a baby probably will become a parent. One who anticipates an ap arent birth can expect trouble from the fight-to-life crow8

By Bob Blackburn

I RECENTLY overheard a veteran editor chiding a somewhat younger one. "It constantly astonishes me," said the greybeard, "how many otherwise literate people persist in misuse of the word *scan* when what they mean is *skim. He* went on to explain that to scan something is to read it very carefully, and ended: "Look it up in a dictionary."

That is asking for trouble. Although he was correct, in essence.. he would have been on thin ice even if he had said, "Look it up in a good dictionary." 1 looked it up in six or seven, of various ages and weights, ranging from the *OED* to the fairly hefty paperback 1934 *Webster's II New Riverside Dirtionary. Since* 1 must confess to some times using *scan* in the sense of giving something the once-over-lightly treatment, 1 was putting myself in the shoes of the chidee and looking for vindication. 1 found it on the first try, in one of my favourites, the 1952 college edition of *Webster's New World Dictionary,* which, without reservation, says, "4. To glance at quickly; consider hastily."

The *OW, not surprisingly,* has no truck at all with this sense of *scan,* and my favourite authority on American English, the second edition of *Webster's* unabridged, brands it as colloquial. The 1980 *Oxford American Dictionary gives an* unqualified second place to the sense in question, while the *New Riverside* and a mid-sized *Funk & Wagnalls* fall to recognize it at all. A collegiate *Webster's* puts the *colloq.* tag on it. (if you really want to get confused, ask yourself how it got here from the root meaning of *climb.)*

1 suggest, while in no way feeling pleased about it, that in 1987 this colloquial sense is the one in which a great majority of North Americans would take the sight or sound of the word, even though it is practically the opposite of the traditional and useful meaning. So it goes.

Of course., *skim* also merits *a* close look. it remains an ideal alternative to the misuse of *scan,* as suggested above, but it, too, is endangered. its mot meaning has to do with the removal of scum from the surface of a liquid. This is a somewhat distasteful notion, but the word acquired a more agreeable aura when it was applied, quite appropriately, to the removal of the cream from the surface of whole milk. Thus it acquired a connotation of eclecticism. One might now wonder whether to skim a book is to skip over it superficially or to retrieve its most valuable content. There's some help in the intransitive use. To skim over a book is to read it superficially. To skip *through* it is something else. Both terms have clearer meanings than do the intransitive forms.

1 have noticed lately that people are doing less expecting and more anticipaling. That is alarming. There is no justification at all for the use of *anticipate as a synonym* for *expect.* To anticipate something is to foresee it, and, usually, to forestall it. or at least attempt to fore stall it. it is that sense that makes the word valuable. *Expect* is a good word. Most people know what it means. That, 1 suppose, is why some writers shun it. A woman who expects to have a baby probably will. but a woman who anticipates hating a baby can expect to arouse the wrath of the right-to-life crowd an eventualitv she could anticiaate bv not anticipating childbirth.

I HAVE MENTIONED this before, but notice that more and more journals are ascribing deaths to *apparent* heart attacks; and i am driven to repeat that this might be the most idiotic bit of journalese ever invented. Sorely it is not an atrocious waste of time or space to say that someone died, apparently of a heart attack. rather than that he died of an apparent heart attack. The former is one letter and two commas longer, and 1 don't think our forest reserves would become any more seriously depleted were the press to revert to using it.

Perhaps we can anticipate reading about persons dying in apparent airplane crashes. □

Mystery woman

A novelist for nearly a decade, L.R. Wright began writing crime fiction almost by accident. Now she's one of the most celebrated authors in the trade

By Eleanor Wachtel

IT'S A QUIET, sun-drenched morning when **80-year-old George** Wilcox murders **his 85-year-old brother-in-law, Carlyle** Burke. He bashes in Burke's bead with a blunt **instrument** on page one of l-he ***Suspect,*** by L.R. Wright, the **first** Canadian to win the time trade's most important award-the ghostly **white** bust called the **Edgar** (as in Poe) **—** presented **annually** by the Mystery **Writers** of America **for the** best **novel of the year. The** *novelty* of **having** octogenarians es both murderer and **victim,** the twist of revealing the murderer's identity from the start **— changing** the story from **a** whodunit to **a whydunit — and** the craft in rendering old**George** the most Likable and complex character in **the** book made ***The Suspect "a*** spell-binder" (San Diego ***Union***), ***"one*** of the best books **. . .** this year" (Boston ***Globe***), and **"top** notch **. . . every** bit **as** good **as . . .** Ruth **Rendell** and P.D. James" ***(People Magazine). In*** fact, ***The Suspect*** beat not one but ***two of*** **Rendell's** books for the award.

Wright, of **Burnaby,** B.C., has been **writing** fiction for **almost a** decade. and her **books** have won **prizes,** respectful **reviews** in the New York ***Times,*** **and** selections by the **Literary** Guild. But it was the **Edgar —** won previously by **such** well-known **novelists as** Raymond Chandler **and** John Le **Carré —** that catapulted ha to fame. More remarkable, ***The Suspect*** **was** her first foray into writing about crime. Even before winning **the** Edgar she had knocked off **a sequel,** Sleep ***While I Sing, and this summer*** she is working on a tbitd mystery, but she also continues to **write** "mainstream fiction" -somewhere **between** Anne Tyler and **Charlotte** Vale **Allen.** Her next novel, to be published **early in** 1988, **is** ***Low in the Temperate Zone.***

Tall, composed, at **first** slow to smile (though her **hazel** eyes look friendly), **Laurali Ruth** Wright, **now** 47, has always been **known as** Bunny. Her parents gave her the nickname before she was born. But her **publishers** complained that Bunny **Wright** sounded too much **like** the **author** of sports books **or** perky romances. They preferred **Laurali;** Bunny Wright, who **finds Laurali** "excessive," opted for L.R. **Her** current publishers **(Viking** in the U.S., Doubleday in Canada) wanted L.R. on the mysteries and **Laurali** on the novels, but Wright, who **enunciates clearly** but says only es much es she wants to, **said:** "No, I'm **the** same person."

When she **finishes** a sentence, Wright stops -staring comfortably into space until you, uncomfortable, rush to **fill** the **silence.** The relative absence of **contractions in her speech** adds *stiffness, a formality uncommon in **a** native speaker. We met in restaurants because she wouldn't allow **me** into the **suburban** house **where** she does her writing. It **has** become important **to her** to separate the personal fmm the professional, and **her reserve colours** her **conversation.** She sandwiches her **life into** a paragraph; **when** drawn out, she still **absorbs 10** years in a **single** clause. After a couple **of meals (and even these are** spartan: soup, or soup **and** salad with **coffee),** her story is pieced together something **like** this:

L.R. Wright

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

WRIGHT WAS BORN in Saskatoon, the elder of two children of a **high-school** principal **and** a **teacher.** After **the** Second World War her **father** remained in the **army,** so the family moved around, **living in** five provinces in **five** years before **settling** *in* Abbotsford, B.C., when Bunny was 10. **Abbotsford,** about **an** hour's drive east of Vancouver; **provided** a **rural setting and an** early **connection** with nature **that** surfaces in **Wright's** prose. **Her childhood was "ordinary" —** playing in the woods **with friends** and her dog. **attending** school in **a** Quonset hut on the airport grounds. Some days skunks

under the floorboards would drive the children home early. So would a ripening strawberry crop, since everyone was expected to help with the picking.

By the time she was 12, she knew she wanted to be a writer. The catalyst was L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon, a* semi-autobiographical novel described in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature as* centring *on* "family traditions, the adolescent Emily's journals, and her Wordsworthian 'flashes' of creative insights." Bunny asked her father for something with hard covers to write in and he. gave ha a book with the words DAILY JOURNAL on tbe cover. She used it as a diary and for what she called "descriptions." "If I saw a fire, I would trv to re-create the wav it looked. And I wrote the most awful, vile poetry, trying to describe daffodils and things."

With Emily as her model, she knew *that she* wanted *to* write books. but by age 14 she bad realized that a novelist couldn't necessarily earn a living. "It was pointed out to me that newspapers were written by real people, so I decided to be a journalist." She continued to write in her journal every night and planned to attend journalism school at Carleton University in Ottawa. Her only concern was that she might have to cover gory scenes such as car crashes. so she wrote to the chairman of tbe department for advice. He replied, very gently, that reporters could not dwell in ivory towers. It was a fear that Leona, a reporter in one of *Wright's novels, Among Friends, also* expresses. Like Wright, the worst thing she ever has to cover is a fii.

When Wright was 16 her family moved to West Germany, where her father worked for tbe defence department. Two years later, he died of a heart attack. "I decided not to go to university when my father died. There seemed to be no reason to do anything the way it had been planned, because tbis was such a totally unplanned event." Instead, she took secretarial courses to learn to type and enrolled in night classes in creative and non-fiction writing. At 19. she sold her first article to tbe *Globe and Mail* — about what it was like to be a teenager in Germany. "The only thing I can remember is that they put sugar on their popcorn instead of salt."

A job at the Fraser *Valley* Record, a small-town weekly, brought her back to B.C. in 1959. It was right across the river from Abbotsford (where her mother still lives). Wright "loved" newspaper work, but after visiting a girl-friend in Monterey she decided tbat California was a much more sensible place to live. She found a job in an advertising agency on Cannery Row and became involved in amateur productions at the Golden Bough Circle Theatre in Carmel. Back in Vancouver tbe following year. she joined a summer theatre troupe at the University of British Colombia, where she played the role of Barbara Allen, who falls in love with a warlock in a play called *Dark oft& Moon.* In the audience was the man she later married. John Wright thought Bonny was "beautiful and serene" when he first saw her — a serenity that bespoke "great privacy and reserve." John Wright was also an actor, and they both joined the Holiday Children's Theatre.

Though she enjoyed the camaraderie. Bunny Wright was often uncomfortable on stage. She never seriously considered acting as a career. For the next few years she worked at odd jobs, putting her husband through graduate studies in drama at Stanford and giving birth to two daughters, Katey and Johnna, 16 months apart. She didn't return to journalism for almost 10 years, until 1968, when the family moved to Saskatoon, where John found a teaching job and Bunny worked as a reporter for the *Star-Phoenix.* She enjoyed "finding out what happened and telling people. And I don't mean dredging out the underneath part of things, though there was some of that, I suppose. But just translating what was happening ... into words people could understand." The following year the Wrights moved to Calgary, where Bunny wrote for the now defunct *Albertan* and then the *Herald.* where she worked her way up fmm city hall reporter to senior assistant city editor.

Throughout tbis time Wright never stopped writing her journals and diaries — the journals for thoughts and feelings, the diaries more factual, more succinct, chronicling the weather and geography. Both were a way of processing reality. "It was necessary. Things weren't complete or real until I bad pot them into words. That was relaxation and rejuvenation. I really wanted to do it. I needed to do it." She maintained her journals for 25 years. As soon as she started to write novels, she stopped keeping them. It wasn't deliberate — the impulse simply "dribbled away."

WRIGHT BEGAN writing fiction in the summer of 1976, when she won a Calgary *Herald* scholarship to a Banff writing workshop with W.O. Mitchell. Her only previous attempts bad been a couple of children's stories and, two years earlier, "an intense, dense, beautifully written piece." says John Wright, "concerning the death of her father." That was "before I knew how to write fiction." Bunny Wright says. "I was trying to write, and sometimes the writing was not bad. But it was all true, it was all *me.* It was very depressing, because I couldn't get out of that. I was afraid I was going to be stock in reality."

> 'I was trying to write, and sometimes the writing was not bad. But it was all true, it was all *me.* It was very depressing, because I couldn't get out of that. I was afraid I was going to be stuck in reality'

Two things helped pry her loose. Feeling frustrated at Banff ("I just couldn't figure out how the hell to do this, to write fiction"), she called John, who advised her to pretend. just as she had when she was acting, to be another person. That kind of acting — without an audience — suited her tine. A second tip was what Mitchell calls "sense memory," where one tries to recall an incident, second by second, drawing on all one's senses to evoke it.

The most powerful memory for Wright had occurred when she was eight, when she was attacked by a large German shepherd, which bit her ear severely, knocked out a tootb, and cut open the back of her head. "It's amazing what you can remember," she says "— the dust in your mouth, rolling on the dirt with the dog on top. The silence -he wasn't making any sound. but I could hear his panting. It may not be an accurate memory, but it is so strong that when you write it, it's absolutely convincing." In her second novel. *The Favourite* (in part the story of a teenage girl's coming *to terms* with her father's sudden death), the central character, eight-year-old Sarah, is attacked not by a dog but by a classmate: "She aimed herself toward the sidewalk, and started to move her feet, one after the other. She knew that ha body must be broken into hundreds of pieces. It wasn't falling apart because of her skin."

Despite the attack, Wright has never stopped liking dogs. She now has two poodles. ("It wasn't bis fault," she says. "He was a watchdog and I disturbed him when he was eating, which was really stupid.") In her latest mystery, *Sleep While I Sing, which opens* with the grisly slashing of a young woman in a dark woods, the unknown assailant later slits a dog's throat. wright says it was harder to write about the death of the dog than the woman. "Both bothered me to write. but tbe dog bothered me more because at that point the murderer was very uncertain as to why he was doing it. The first time, he thought he had a reason. The second time, he was feeling, 'My God. maybe this is an awful thing I'm doing.' And I felt that *too."*

While she was at Banff, Wright started her first novel,

Room of One's **Own, a quarterly journal devoted to creative and critical writings** by **women, invites submissions** *for* **a special issue:** "Working for **a** Living." **to** be **published** Summer 1988. **Poetry, short fiction,** graphics **and reviews** (query fiat for **reviews)** should be **sent with** SASE **to "Working** *for* **a** Living," ***Room of One's Own, P.O. Box* 46160, Station G,** Vancouver, B.C. **V6R 4G5.** Deadline: **30** November 1987.

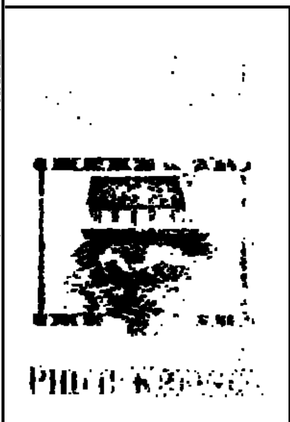
Neighbours, which deals with the helplessness two **neighbours** experience as the women next door gradually **goes** mad. **"At** that time," says **John Wright,** "Bunny was very concerned with **the difficulty** one human **being** has communicating with **another — that we are each** of us, despite our best **attempts,** truly alone and isolated in the world. **Also around** that **time** she had **written** a series of **articles** on mental health for the *Herald.* And," he adds, "there was a nutty **neighbour** who **really existed."**

Under the **terms** of **her** scholarship Wright was obliged to **spend** another year at the ***Herald,* during which** she found it impossible to continue the novel. But in **the fall** of **1977** John, who had been doing some freelance **directing,** took a job in educational **television in Edmonton, which freed Bunny finan-** dally. During the last four months of the year **— including** a couple of weeks **when she** locked herself **in** a hotel room, away **from** family **responsibilities — Bunny** finished ***Neighbours* in time** *to enter the* **Search-for-a-New-Alberta-Novelist Competi-**

> 'I always rewrite. **I** don't think I've written any book fewer than four times. **I work** long hours. **I** don't mind reworking and I don't mind **cutting.** Nothing is sacred after you've worked for newspapers'

prizepublication, $1,500
from the province. It took **until** Thanksgiving of the *following* **year to hear** from Doug **Gibson** at Macmillan that she had **won.**
I n t h e **meantime**
Favourite.* *Her novels* begin with** a visual image **—** a flash "of somebody **doing** something. That's **all** there is **—** just **that** image. Thea you write to **find** out what's happening **and** who these people **are** and all that." With ***The Favourite, it was a woman (it **ended** up as a young girl) trying to get away from
in a k i t c h e n , s **this** k n o w
hit i t w i t h a f **ay** i n g p a n
Originally she called the novel *The Haunting* — the young girl, father, with
relationship. **The** m o **difficult**
Macmillan and McClelland &
beinge
Turnbull, her e d i t o r a t D o u b **Wright** a y , s e a t
22-page,single-spaced letter suggesting revisions.
"Ieased. **rewrite.** I d o n ' t t h **written** I ' v e
times. I ' m f a s t o n c e I **and** t **write** t a r t e d ,
getg hours once I **mind reworking**
mindcutting. Nothing **after** y o u ' v e w o r k e d '
newspapers."

CRITICAL REACTION *to The* ***Favourite* was** *mixed.* **The** New **York *Times* described it as "a most agreeable book" and Wright stylist** graceful **has** a**contagious**
ordinary,"Adachi a t t h e T o ***Star*** n t o
WilliamFrench at the Globe *and Mail* not **only** savaged The ***Favourite*** but took the **opportunity** to question **the earlier novel**
— "which isn't exactly up **there** with **the Prix Goncourt," wrote** French, **"but** it has a certain cachet **incattle country." *Neighbours,* said Adachi, was "a choice that raised questions about the kind of standards**
art body, Alberta culture, demeaned
literarycompetitions i **general** **suspicion** t h a t
Western **separation, after all,** isn't such a bad idea." Never- theless, U.S. **paperback rights** to ***Favourite*** *w e n t*
$25,000,Literary G u i l d p a i d a n o **(in** h e r $ 1 8 , 0
received half). Wright was a l s o **paid** **$25,000**
advancefor her next **novel, *Among Friends,* compared** to **$2,000** for ***The Favourite.***



CONTACT PRINTS:

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Praise for CONTACT PRINTS:

"... a marvelous black comedy ..."
(ROBERT WEAVER)

"... gritty enough to act as an **abrasive** on our conscience and funny enough to be **entertaining."**
(WILLIAM FRENCH, ***The Globe and Mail)***

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By 1980 Wright had moved to Vancouver and was well into *Among Friends*. An exploration of urban loneliness, it revolves around three Calgary women, all of whom work in some form of journalism. who know each other hot are separate. "Even though they are friends," Wright says, "I wanted them to live parallel lives without really touching." Wright has never lived alone., but that private part of her understands a solitariness that almost all of ha characters experience.

When she was having trouble with *Among Friends* she decided to write it three times fmm three different points of view. The effect was so pleasing that when she rewrote it for the last time. she retained that *Rashomon*-like structure. It's a" intelligent; low-key book that lacks tension perhaps because, despite the individual perspectives, there's still a strong sense of detachment. To a lesser extent than *The Favourite, however,* it is marred by the occasional bit of overwriting: "Christmas didn't beckon her with silvery seductive fingers this year."

Her best-plotted and best-written novel, *The* Suspect, is something completely different. Wright had always been a" avid reader of mysteries (a character in *Among Friends carries* around a Ruth Rendell novel, one of Wright's favourites), but her publishers had discouraged her from writing crime fiction. In f&t, when she began *The Suspect*, she didn't&tend to write a mystery.

Her starting visual image was the opening paragraph -two old guys. SMACK on the head — although she wasn't yet sure it would be the first scene. The idea emerged from a conversation with friends about the adventures of elderly people they knew. "My mother had just decided to bicycle around Australia. Someone else we knew, at the ripe age of 76, had soddenly rushed off with somebody else's husband and they were holed up in a suburban motel. We were marvelling about this and thinking how if you're capable of something when you're younger, you're capable of exactly the same sort of stupidity when you're older, including murder. I didn't remember ever having heard of a" old person killing off another, hot I figured it would he interesting and quite possible."

When Staff Sergeant Karl Alberg arrived on the scene to investigate, Wright suddenly realized she had a mystery on her hands. Who would fmd the body? What would happen to George? How would he deal with the police? As the cliché would have it, the hook acquired a momentum of its own.

Alberg, Wright's sleuth, is a bii blond fellow, 44, thickening at the waist, recently separated from his wife and two almost grownnewSechelt, a picturesque rural peninsula just north of Vancouver, accessible only by ferry. Wright decided to set her mysteries there because it was a place she knew well from visiting her in-laws over the years, and because of the ferry link it was a self-contained, somewhat isolated community. The third character in *The Suspect* is the CassandraAlberg throughthepersonal(adss trategy employedbycouple of Wright's friends). Cassandra is torn between her budding romantic interest in Alberg and her deep affection for the pater-"al George Wilcox, them& who wielded the blunt instrument.

When *The Suspect arrived,* Doubleday New York, accustomed to her novels about troubled women, were horrified (though Wright's editor loved it). They wanted to hold off publishing it until her next "serious" novel could appear in tandem. Wright promptly switched to Viking (stay& with Doubleday Canada). *The Suspect* won the Edgar., was optioned for movie rights, and foreign rights were sold in Japan, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, England, and West Germany.

Wright started a new book about a broken marriage, Love in *the Temperate Zone. but* found she wasn't yet ready to write a mainstream novel. She wanted to write "another Alberg book." The result, *Sleep While I Sing, is less* successful than *The Suspect* for two reasons. As a more conventional suspense story, there aren't enough suspects (even though Wright rewrote it to add complications) to keep the reader fmm solving the mystery well before Alberg does. More important, the central focus now is o" Alberg, who is a far less interesting character than George..

For her third mystery Wright again plans to reveal at the outset the identity of the murderer. "I don't Like to think that part of my objective is to keep people fooled. I deliberately tried to do a traditional whodunit and it was not as satisfying as *The Suspect*." Her daughters, 21 and 22. identify with Alberg's and want to "lake a" appearance in the next book. "They have many suggestions as to what I can do with them." She smiler. "I'd like, to encounter his ex-wife too, but I don't know if I will or not."

Another clue is that the villain will be a sociopath, "someone devoid of all conscience and all guilt. That interests me a lot, to see what a person like that would be capable of — not having to worry about the things that constrain most of us." Mentally deranged people figure not only in Wright's mysteries but also in two or three mainstream novels. She offers no explanation, other than her early journalism on mental illness, and she's disconcertingly unconscious of making the two "had guys" in her mysteries both latent homosexuals.

> Writing, says Wright's former husband, is her natural form of expression. 'When she wants to say something, she can best say it in writing. When she wants to learn something, she heads for the library'

WRIGHT IS A disciplined, at times regimented person. When we're trying to schedule our next meal together, her time is hooked with such chores as food shopping, buying a present for a relative, editing a manuscript through the weekend. When she started writing full-time, she forced herself to the typewriter at 10 each morning and worked until noon,returning for two hours in the afternoon until the girls came home fmm school. Now she doesn't have to do that "because I know it's going to get done. and just as quickly overall. Some days I work very short periods and some days, very long hours. Some days I don't work at all, and then I fed guilty." To overcome the isolation of writing at home, for a few months this spring she has been working in community relations at UBC, writing press releases. When she and John separated a couple of years ago, she also started taking philosophy courses — because she's interested in the "big questions" — toward a bachelor's degree.

By our third meal she is both warmer and more exasperated than before. I remember a line from *The Favourite* — something about *feeling lightly* jostled by a porcupine. We talk about what people get out of books. John had said that writing was her natural form of expression: "When she wants to say something, she can best say it in writing; whenever she wants to learn something, she heads for the library." Her intention, however, is not to teach anybody anything. She wants her readers to enjoy themselves. "The bit you can do is cause people to recognize themselves or hits of things that happen to them, because we can't tell each other anything new. Just to be reminded that we're all in it together."

She finds the *work* of writing much easier now ("There's a certain amount of acquired professionalism after writing six books, which is comforting"), and the mysteries are easier work than ha other novels. "I don't quite understand it," she says, "because I become just as involved with the characters, but I write with a lighter heart when I write mysteries. After you get to a certain point, it's not like writing with your own blood any more." ❑

WORK IN PROGRESS

The lady of the boathouse

'She knew the rules. Hell, she **made** the rules. Men **like to fantasize about** meeting **women** of character, but the real thing is **scary'**

***By Douglas** Glower*

I WOKE **EIGHT neighbourhood** dogs breaking into the boathouse for which **I** had lost tbc **key.** Inside it was black as a licorice stick. I **yanked the** light **cord,** and the **bulb** blew out with a pop. I had placed boards over the boat slip to make a floor and piled lamp cartons around the walls up to the rafters. A little mountain of Styrofoam packing chips had leaked out onto the boards. I **unrolled** a" old sleeping bag for a bed and **composed** myself for rest. I could **hear the** Gulf of **Mexico** lapping at the boathouse **struts** inches beneath **my** ears.

I **closed** my **eyes** and thought **about** the day: it had **been** averagely disastrous. I **was** empty and discredited, my fragile philosophy **in** tatters, my unreasoned code as full of holes as a sponge. Yet **it could** have been worse. When you touch bottom, you **get** a scrape, but it wakes.

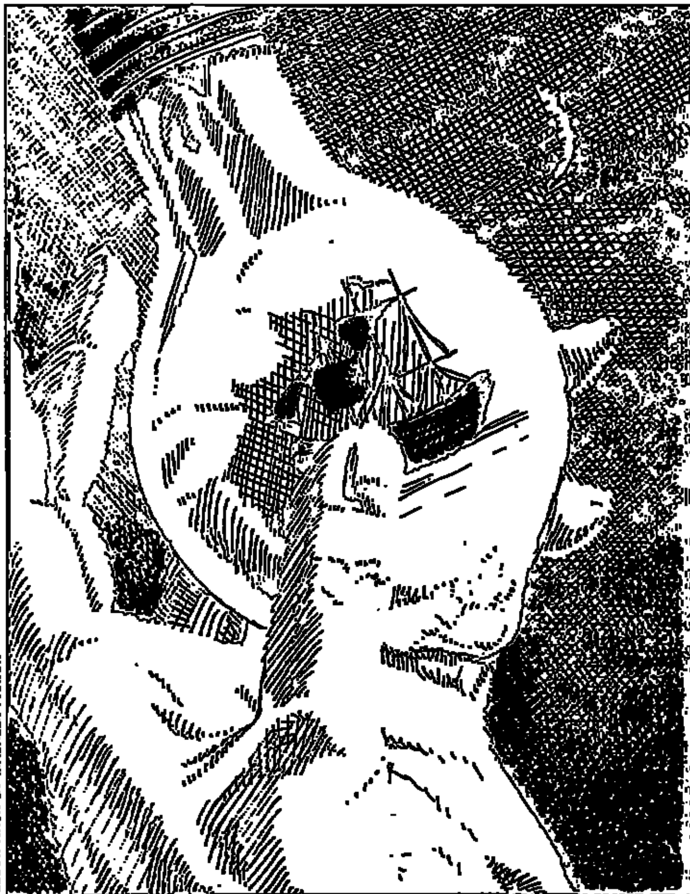


ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREEN PAXTON

you up. At least **you** know **where you** arc. **To** tell the truth I was getting excited. We ought to pray to **be,resisted,** I thought. **Resisted to the bitter cnd.**

My body and brains had **taken** so much **abuse** in the past **24** hours :hat it wasn't long before I fell **asleep.** I don't know how long I **stayed like** that. But when I awoke, the darkness **was exactly** the same shade of black it had bee" **when** I shut my eyes. My mouth was **full** of Styrofoam: I **felt like** a ma" in a box. There was **someone** beside me.

I **threw** up a hand **instinctively** to protect myself. It **came into contact** with **something** soft and spongy. I **felt** around-a little knob at the end. There was no doubt about it. I was **touching** a breast.

My heart **leaped** like a **trout.**

"Lydia," I **said.**

An alien hand came **out** of nowhere. Wham! It caught me **right across** the nose. I thought I was bleeding again. I was **stunned.**

My fingers **scouted** tentatively in **ever-increasing circles** around **the** breast. No one tried to stop me. I **quickly** located the **other** breast. The **two** of them were **suspended** above me like fruit. **There** was a bit of clavicle and neck **about where** you would **expect them.** And down below I was able **to** stick my **pinky** up to the second **knuckle** in someone's navel.

I was a **little disoriented, waking** up like that. the slap and all. But finding these anatomical landmarks in the right places somehow gave me confidence.

"Dang —?" I **said,** without being able to finish.

Thls time the hand had become **a** fist. It **came** in under my **left ear.** My **ear** was **ringing.** My head ached. **Tiny** red flashbulbs exploded inside **my** eyes. I had **been** dead wrong **twice.** It made a **man** lose heart. I decided **to** keep **my** mouth shut and **await** developments.

There **were knees** on **either side** of my hips. The hand, or maybe it was the **hand's partner,** reached down and began **rooting around in** my draw-strings.

I was prompted to speak again. But tbc hand **came** down over my mouth, gently but **firmly.** The" I felt someone's **warm** breath against my check. A kiss. The hmd had **finished** fumbling **with** my pants. Her body pressed down. **cool** and **anxious** and dry. I didn't mind.

All **around us** were the cardboard **cartons containing** the Stamper **lamps, fruit** of **my labour,** hope of **my** future. On each of the **boxes** there was a logo I had designed **myself:** a generalized hand **pulling** a generalized lamp chain and the words

AND **STAMPER SAID UNTO THE WORLD,**
LET THERE BE **LIGHT!**

But **we** couldn't **see** than. The **Styrofoam chips squeaked under** my back.

I had met **Colonel Parkhurst** at Abe's Bar **& Grill** on **Linn** Street in Iowa City one hot Saturday afternoon while I waited for Lydia to get **through visiting** her obstetrician **in** the **medical** arts building **next** door. He had bought me a **drink** and **showed** me a smudged **business** card. No address. No phone "umber. Just **PARKHURST/INVENTIONS.** He looked exactly **like Sidney Greenstreet** in ***The Maltese Falcon,*** smelled of mothballs **and**

infrequent bathing. He asked me how I'd like to get in on the ground floor of a million-dollar electronics deal.

I wasn't a lampstand mogul by nature. let me tell you. But my wife was big with child. Not big, titanic. She went in and out of moms like a yacht in full sail. Across the parking lot was my only source of steady income, a blood-transfusion clinic where I made 972.50 a month donating the maximum allowable number of quarts as often as medic&y possible.

Parkhurst had a patent on a process by which liquid plastic could be made to resemble marble.. I suspected this was mostly bartalk, repeated a hundred times in a hundred deaf ears. But he used words like "minimal downside risk," "on-line capacity," "consumer research," and "aesthetic component." The words thrilled me. He was offering 50 per cent in return for a small infusion of "venture capital."

To tell the truth, before I could see the drawbacks. I was hooked. It was a compromise, business with art. Aesthetics would play a key role, I told myself. I would shed light in dark corners while making money to finance Lydia's astonishing fecundity. I shook the colonel's hand on the spot.

You may well ask where a penniless art student with a pregnant wife, already maxed-out on student loans and with no prospects, could find the necessary investment capital. I did it the American way — I sold drugs. Walter Hebel was my best customer. With Parkhurst at my elbow and a wad of cash in my back pocket, I bought a suit, leased a BMW, looked at building. purchased machinery. drills, vats, saws. lathes, polishers, Found suppliers, retail outlets. We threw away the first dozen batches of congealed plastic marble because it was either too brittle and crumbled or it was too soft and melted when a lightbulb was inserted in the socket and turned on. Parkhurst called this "tooling up." I was impressed with the words.

From the start I knew we had a hot item on our hands — art lamps in abstract shapes, moulded in plastic, veined to look like marble. Green, blue, wine. and cherry. Granted the early orders were small — a craft store in Jersey City, a gift shop in San Diego that catered to off-duty naval personnel. Lipnick, the czar of parking-lot art — but I knew the whole thing would gain momentum.

I rarely saw Lydia those days. She had failed to sympathize with the lamp project from the start. "Anal retentive" was her only comment as I gloated over balance sheets and sales projections. "Feces fixation" was what she said as 1 ran my fingers over the oily coldness of a brand new second-hand industrial jig saw. She would lie in the backyard in her underpants, letting the baby feel the sun, looking like a lizard that had just eaten a small dog. She would say, "Listen, capitalist pig, you can hear our baby." But every time I put my ear down there it sounded like triplets.

I had made my first delivery to Lipnick, shipped lamps UPS to San Diego and New Jersey: when Parkhurst hit me with the small print. I was stunned. He had included a buy-back clause in our partnership agreement — he could purchase my 50 per cent of the company any time during the first year of operation with payment in kind (with lamps!). He hired a Ryder truck and delivered 3.000 Stamper lamps to the Governor Street duplex. They were in the yard. They were piled on the stairs. They filled the living-room. I had to get Rev. Penney to open up the church basement to take some of the overflow.

I tried to hide the whole thing fmm Lydia while I thought of a way out. But this was impossible. I mean them were a lot of Stamper-designed lamp crates. She opened one on the way upstairs — she was at the stage where she had to stop for a rest every few steps. It contained a wine-coloured sailboat in plastic marble. I was pretty proud of it. When she opened the box, I had a feeling the day wasn't going to he a complete loss. Which just shows how wrong you can be.

I tried to stifle such negative memories while I dealt with the lady of the boathouse. But, inevitably, I would catch myself thinking of the lamps at the strangest times. The actual mechanics of sex are simple, as you probably know. By and large even the most inattentive lover can perform passably if his partner is eager enough. Peter-George, as always, was avid as a ferret after a rabbit to get into her hole. Meanwhile I tried to measure distances with my palms in an effort to arrive at an estimate of the overall length of the woman. But even at the height of passion she was conscious enough to slap my hands away. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what colour her hair was from the smell. Pointless.

It was a mystery all right. She was all darkness and heat, this woman. Her breath was like melted honey. And her pussy sucked up Peter-George so strongly that I feared For his return from that humid passage, that human labyrinth — my Perseus. But in all that drunkenness of arms and legs and heaving loins there remained also some essence of the act that was not just a proof for the inevitability of lust. I was there; she was there. Whoever she was. We cleaved to each other. Her hair was the colour of night and I could see sparks fly off it. She was all Female, all kindness and accommodation. Our lips Flew like batwings, finding each other by sound and feel. And we said not a word after my first wayward greetings.

When we were done, she lay beside me, her chest rising and falling like breath. I pressed my hand against her ribs and felt them rise and Fall. She left it there. I stayed awake, resolved to await the moon and by its rays solve the mystery of her identity. But I was too much satisfied and too fatigued by my exertions, and before long I slept.

An hour, two hours. passed. Perhaps she was asleep as well. She woke me with her hand.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Sssshhhh," she said. It was the first sound she had made.

"I- have we met somewhere before?" I asked. "Because if we haven't my name is Tully—"

"Sssshhhh," she repeated. This time I felt the hiss of her lips as they trailed down my chest, across my belly, and tickled my pubic hair.

"Will 1 see you again?" I asked. "Can we make a date7 How about a cup of coffee? I'll meet you. I'll he wearing ... ouch!"

It was a-playful nip. The lady was firm. She knew the rules. Hell, she made the rules. It was irritating. Men like to fantasize about meeting women of character, but the real thing is scary. 1 lay back, thought about lamps, resolved not to be an easy lay. But Peter-George was after it again. He was out of control. The dark lady took him by the neck and rammed him home like a professional bull breeder, settled in the saddle with a sigh. eased herself, rolled her hips. We were away.

It was better than the first time. I don't know why. Maybe it was because we knew each other now. I really wanted to talk. I'm usually the one to be mum, but the situation intrigued me. She was sitting on my belly, her hands on my shoulders — the watching position. What could she see in that darkness? What did I look like? It wasn't flattering. To be taken blind. I could have ban a bald, one-eyed harelip and she would have loved me just as well. I opened my mouth to speak. She put her fingers them. I liked them; I worshipped them. She placed her hand over my eyes, closing them gently. The hand was cool. It seemed to vibrate. I wanted to close my eyes. I wanted to sleep again. I was dreaming the hand. I was dreaming the woman.

Later, I woke and she was gone. □

Douglas Glover's short-story collection, Dog Attempts to Drown Man in Saskatoon, *published by Talonbooks, recently won a Literary Press Group Writer's Choice Award. His new novel,* The South Will Rise at Noon, *is to be published next year by Penguin Canada.*

Lord of the wings

Far from making him a one-note performer, Don McKay's obsession with birds leads his poetry in peculiarly Canadian directions

By John Oughton

Sanding Down This Rocking Chair on a Windy Night, by Do" McKay, McClelland & Stewart, 112 pages, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 5542 0).

MANY OF CANADA'S most notable male poets have been celebrators of themselves. Layton. Acorn, and Purdy made their own personalities the touchstone of their art, and things antithetical to their own experience are either ignored or attacked. By contra% Don McKav explores the world, especially the natural one. I" doing so, he reveals himself obliquely; through the images his perceptions catch and the music hi emotions make with them, we see something of the ma".

McKay's fifth and previous collection, *Birding, or Desire,* won him enthusiastic reviews, a nomination for the Governor General's Award, and the attention of many other poets. Yet despite these plaudits McKay, a professor of English at the University of Western Ontario, remains resolutely unchanged as a writer: idiosyncratic, learned. elusive, wry, and unassuming. (He declined to be interviewed by *Books in Canada,* apparently feeling that bis work, not his life, is what should be scrutinized.)

If there seems a peculiarly Canadian quality to that kind of modesty, it's no accident. One of the wonderful qualities of McKay's new poetry is its unquestioning, unforced Southern Ontario Canadianness. Fragments of French leave" his lines, the subliminal effect of all our years of reading the other side of cereal boxes and government forms. His poems speak of industrial softball leagues. hockey games, winter driving, white-water canoe ing, and the migration of geese. He can also whip an inspiring poem out of a" encounter with a chainsaw or Via Bail.

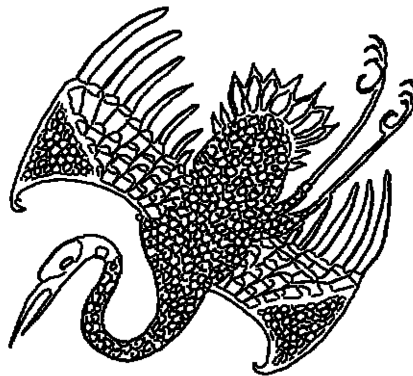
The typical McKay poem takes such mundane elements and electrifies them with perception, precisely as suggested in these lines fmm the serio-comic "Le Style":

Le style
of Mrs. Henry Zavitz when she told the meeting how she
wrapped ordinary tinfoil round a chicken, sent it
scurrying through last week's thunder-storm
and wound up with Celestial Fried
glowing in the drive shed like a holy grail.

Although flightless and lowly, the chicken is still a bird, and birds remain one of McKay's chief inspirations. Far from making him a one-note performer, McKay% ornithological fixation takes his poetry in many directions. Birds achieve moments of pure grace in his poetry, resembling angels (who also recur in McKay's imagery). Complete in themselves. free of apparent ambitions beyond flying, eating, reproducing, and singing, the perfection of what McKav calls their "moves" makes a commentary on the complexity and confusion of human patterns.

"Birding" in the title of his previous book. although literally the term for bird-watching, also suggests the state of *being* a bird. Despite all the birds he fixes in his binoculars, McKay is convinced there are birds of pure metaphor, who will always remain unseen. Birds, who have so often given poets images of flight and transcendence, also donate their feathers as pens, which McKay recalls in "Talk's End": "My tongue would feather a/curve into the air, so:/ I would leave you with the soft/end of the quill."

Too much time in the aerie can lead to a light-headed preciousness. Fortunately,



McKay grounds his lyric flights with a comic sense, as in "Sturnis Vulgaris," a jokey and free-associating monologue in three parts for a representative of "the starlings [who] swept across the landscape like free enterprise." Equal parts mockingbird, stand-up comedian, and salesman, Sturnis lets his tongue fly in a funny and rhythmic rap.

McKay both celebrates nature and marks how we consume and pollute it. A remarkable piece in this collection is "For Laurel Creek," a mini-epic about a waterway that flows through the city of Waterloo. McKay transmits the mystic forces of flowing water and the destructive force of the chemicals and garbage that cloud it.

Another quality that recalls his previous collection is the great care and craft he applies to the sound of his lines, their subtle assonance and alliteration as well as their resonant images and surprising leaps. As a bird marks out its territory with a series of trills and whistles, McKay structures his poems with near-rhymes and echoes, phrases sounded and the" turned around.

It is encouraging to see a poet in mid-career who still experiments with form. The title piece of the new book is a long sequence that shifts smoothly from prose to poetry. On the surface, it concerns sanding down a rocking chair that once was painted with a moose and lake scene by Angus, the wily proprietor of a Northern store. Although much of it is about the character of Angus, the sequence also makes a key metaphor out of the process of sanding down the finish to weal the essence underneath, the grain. Is that what memory does, asks McKay, or does it *add more obscuring* layers? Both short story and long poem, this demanding piece illuminates and resonates with rereading.

The risk in continuing to experiment is that one will occasionally fall on one's literary face. McKay's ear and intelligence generally catch him before the fatal plunge, but the strengths of the best pieces in this book make the reader wonder why a lesser effort like the scattered "Notes Toward a Major Study of the Nose" was included at all.

Sometimes recondite, often free-flying, McKay's poetry is not for everyone. But those who savour the music of words and admire a poet who honours his roots. yet whose writing moves out into the world rather than into himself, will prize this book. Those who argue that free trade will make no difference to our culture (since we're already an appendage of the

land that gave the world Jim and Tammy Bakker) should be required by a private member's bill to read this book. No American could have written it. It is distinctively aud unapologetically poetry arising out of the condition of living among the varied and migratory birds of Canada, not the arrow-clenching eagle of America. ❑

REVIEW

Lost in translation

By Alberto Manguel

The Mournful Demeanor of Lieutenant Boruvka, by Josef Skvorecky, translated fmm the Czech by Rosemary Kavan, George Theiner, and Kaca Polackova-Henley, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 288 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 128 3).

WITH FIVE SHORT stories written in the first half of the 19th century, Edgar Allan Poe invented the detective genre. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "Thou Art the Man," "The Gold Bug," and "The Purloined Letter" established the rules that would be followed by whole libraries of disciples. It also created a new kind of reader: a reader who knows from the very first page that he is engaged in a game, the purpose of which is to be deceived by the author. If the detective story is to be judged "good," it must present a puzzle, give clues that lead to its solution, and make that solution inaccessible until it is revealed at the very end. The puzzle may be bloody or psychological; the solution must be both obvious and unexpected.

While keeping the reader in its grasp, the detective story offers to the writer himself a solid structure within which to work, a structure that allows him to explore the nature of his characters in exacerbated circumstances — in this sense not unlike the narrative framework of the Greek dramatists. With the excuse of presenting a puzzle, the writer can write a novel.

For this reason, in spite of being regarded as Literature's poor cousin (as most popular genres are) and of being accused of "puerile triviality" by puerile and trivial critics such as the angry Edmund Wilson, the detective story continues to attract not only scribblers of the genre but also writers whose preoccupation with style and content has produced some of the milestones of modern literature. Ellery Queen once collected an anthology of detective stories by master writers such as H.G. Wells, Mark Twin. Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway. Rudyard Kipling. A similar anthology edited today would include the names of Marguerite Duras, Italo Calvin", and Joseph Skvorecky.

In must cases, these literary whodunits arc less successful than their lower-class brothers-less successful as whodunits, that is. There are honourable exceptions — Cecil Day Lewis writing as Nicholas Blake, Faulkner writing, as Faulkner, Borges as Borges and as Bustos Domecq — but by and large the writer of fiction, as opposed to the writer of detective fiction, tends to forget the importance of the puzzle itself.

I realize that I am describing the traditional Anglo-Saxon whodunit. In Czechoslovakia, 1 am told, curiously reminiscent of the development of the genre in Japan, readers allow the detective a more leisurely pace and the intervention of chance to a much greater degree. These allowances, unfortunately, mar the telling of Joseph Skvorecky's Lieutenant Boruvka stories.

Skvorecky wrote the first batch of these stories while still in Czechoslovakia, and the last page of *The Mournful Demeanor* gives *the* dates 19621965. Once in exile., in Canada, he wrote a second series, *The End of Lieutenant Boruvka*, of which only two stories have appeared in English, translated by Paul Wilson: "Strange Archeology," in *Fingerprints* (Irwin, 1984), and "Pirates," in *Descant* (No. 51, Winter, 1985-86). A third volume, which has not been published in English. finds Boruvka himself in exile, working as a parking-lot attendant in Toronto. Sic *transit*.

Skvorecky's undeniable qualities as a fiction writer shine throughout the stories collected in *The Mournful Demeanor of Lieutenant Boruvka*, but as detective stories they fail. Its mysteries are not mysterious. its puzzles are not puzzling. TM thrill of the hunt is not there because the quarry won't run. There is a blandness to the problems presented that does not do justice to the detective's character, nor to the elegance and humour which. as always in Skvorecky, are such an essential part of his style.

Of all unfair things a reviewer can do. perhaps the-unfairest is to reveal the ending of a detective story. Let me be unfair with only one story, the first one in this collection. An old woman has apparently hanged herself. Boruvka solves the mystery by deciding that her death could not have been a suicide because there was nothing in the vicinity of the corpse that would have allowed the woman to climb up and fix the noose around ha neck. For a reader of crime fiction this just won't do: it's too elementary, sad the reader knows that the solution must not be obvious. The remaining plots all lack the

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startling that the *crème* of crime requires, and this is too bad because Skvorecky's detective himself is such a superb creation.

Boruvka is the archetypical *homo melancholicus,* a creature *for* whom expressions of joy are like stains on a clean cloth. His forehead is smooth and round, but wrinkles when he's troubled, he has the habit of brushing it gently with his hand. His eyes are always sad; he blushes easily and -a drawback for a detective — he is easily shaken. He apologizes for his intelligence. moved by an overwhelming desire *to make* people happy. He seldom does. He is also unforgettable.

Around Bomvka mill. as usual in Skvorecky, a host of extraordinary characters: nervous women, apprentice policemen, ceremonious innkeepers, soulful sax players. apologetic *crooks.* Together they provide a moving background for Boruvka's disconcerting melancholia.

If the characterization saves the plot, the translation into English does its best to destroy both. Rosemary Kavan, George Theiner, and Kaca Polackova-Henley have tried to turn the very Czech Boruvka into an English squire. According to them, things in Czechoslovakia are "just dandy," someone is "a ninny," and Boruvka must deal with "lads from the local club." MY ignorance of Czech is word-perfect, so I cannot compare their version to the original, but read next to Paul Wilson's rendering of the two stories from *The End of Lieutenant Boruvka,* this tripartite translation leaves much to be desired.

Translators usually have a choice: they can either decide to be faithful to tbe sense of the original, while preserving its foreign (to the translator) flavour, or they can translate the sense in such a way that the reader of the new version will not be startled by that which flows unnoticed in the original. This latter option seems to me by far the preferable, but as the English version of *The Mournful Demeanor* shows us, it can degenerate into a masquerade. a Czech text dressed-up so as to look English. That a lucid balance is possible is demonstrated by Wilson's teats. One can only hope that the next two Boruvka collections will appear over his signature. 0

FEATURE REVIEW

Through the looking glass

Jane Urquhart's exhilarating 'escape' stories move beyond reality to explore the disturbing Imagery and tantalizing magic of dreams

By *Timothy Findley*

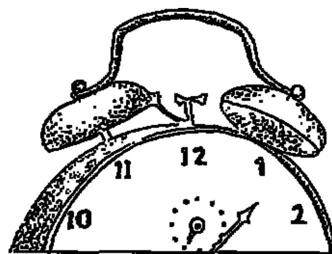
Storm Glass, by Jane Urquhart, The Porcupine's Quill, 127 pages, $8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88984 106 3).

IN 1986, Jane Urquhart published her tirst novel, *The Whirlpool, to almost universal critical* acclaim. When it met with a negative response, it tended to offend or bemuse because of its imaginative content. In *The Whirlpool,* Urquhart treated reality with contempt. She was' clearly a courageous stylist with a unique vision — and such writers rarely escape without raising a few hackles. Now, with *Storm* Gloss, the courage of the stylist is confirmed and the uniqueness of the vision is expanded.

Though most of the stories here predate the writing of *The Whirlpool, the reader* is given *the* chance, once *again, to explore* the territory of dreams and memory so vividly established in that book. Clearly, this is a milieu in which Urquhart excels.

The author herself describes her work as "escape writing" and certainly there is an air of creative freedom in the stories that make up *Storm Glass.* People walk in and out of one another's dreams and cross with alarming ease fmm the present into the past. In one story — "The Drawing Master" — an artist encounters a pile of Victorian wheelchairs dumped unceremoniously out of someone else's dream in a previous story. Discarded on the one hand by their owners and on the other by the woman in whose dream they first appeared, the wheelchairs represent for the artist the perfect image of an abiding sadness he could not, till then, articulate.

In the title story. a dying woman who has lost — over time — her sense of bonding with her husband comes to terms with what divided them. And she does this by exploring the view from her window through his eyes. At first, she holds fast to the view — which presents the shores of a lake — by means of her own determined understanding of what is there. Slowly, she veers as far away from that interpretation of reality as she dares. by trying to understand what she sees through her children's eyes. In her mind. she walks with her children around the shores of the lake, picking up the bits of broken coloured glass that lie in



amongst the stones thrown up by storms. She has always called these shards either *water glass* or *beach glass.* but her husband insists it is *storm glass,* smoothed and worn by the violence of wind and waves. This imagery of broken glass — and the characters' harsh insistence on what it most be called — provides the ground on which the woman and her husband come to' terms with their lives together. Its simplicity is worth noting. Few writers would get away with achieving this sort of profound reconciliation over a piece of glass, but Urquhart does it wonderfully well.

One of the stories in *Storm Glass* has already served as prologue and epilogue for *The Whirlpool. This is "The* Death of Robert Browning," but it bears rereading because of its evocation of another time and place — and equally because of its extraordinary evocation of what might be called creative regret. Browning, dying, cannot rid himself of the image of Shelley drowning and he wishes he were worthy of dying more splendidly himself; as if his death were all he had to leave posterity.

Other times and other places lend their colour to most of the stories in this collection. Windows and glass are also prominent. Some of the characters have no names and all of them are dreamers, though what they dream is hardly the stuff of which good sleep is made. Storm *Glass* is exhilarating precisely because the dreams of which it tells are so disturbing: disturbingly real and disturbingly familiar. Most readers will recognize the impulse here to wake up and escape the dream, but most will also recognize the tantalizing magic of dreams that keeps us going back for more. Certainly, most who read this book will hope Jane Urquhart goes back for more again and again. □

REVIEW

As for me and my horse

By Kenneth McGoogan

Caprice, by George Bowering, Viking (Penguin), 266 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81207 2).

SET IN THE Canadian West in the 1890% *Caprice* is replete with good guys and bad guys. cowboys and Indians, and a central figure who is obsessed with tracking down a killer and bringing him to justice. It's an old-fashioned western, then-except that the hombres have ethnic identities, the Indians debate metaphysical questions, and the eponymous, would-be avenger is a gorgeous, red-headed, French-Canadian woman who is six feet tall, carries a European bullwhip, makes poetry when she isn't suffering fmm writer's block, and has a schoolteacher boy-friend who plays baseball, can't understand her quest, and wants her to settle down. What we have here is an entertainment with a polemical subtext — not a" old-fashioned western but a post-modern one. In drawing attention to the conventions of genre, George Bowering is reasserting the aesthetic that informed his controversial 1980 novel, *Burning Water: "You're* reading a story, amigo, and don't you ever forget it."

The plot of *Caprice* is simple enough. A ruthless American gunslinger named Frank Spencer kills a French-Canadian wangler who calls himself Pete Foster — shoots him in the back over a couple of bottles of whisky. Foster, otherwise known as Pierre. dies with his sister's name on his lips: Caprice. Thii we learn in an early flashback, the narrative having opened with Caprice's arrival in the West to embark on her quest. She rides a beautiful Arabian horse named Cabayo, and pursues Spencer fmm Canada to the Mexican border and back again. But most of the novel takes place in British Columbia, in Kamloops and the, nearby Okanagan valley.

Here we meet Strange Loop Groulx, Spencer's French-Canadian sidekick and necessary foil; Everyday Luigi, a" Austro-Italian linguist who works as a handyman for the local Chinese community and gets his jaw shot off after performing an act of gallantry; and Roy Smith, Caprice's boy-friend, whose confidence in his own grace and power is such that "in front of one of his classes he was not afraid to flip a pencil end over end and catch it pointed the right way." Other characters include a" overweight Mountie named Constable Burr; Gert the Whore, who has — you guessed it — a heart of gold; a" obsessive photographer named Archie Minjus; and Arpad Kesselring, a visiting Austm-Hungarian journalist who romanticizes the West to further his own career.

The" them are the first Indian and the second Indian, whose counterparts we encountered in Burning *Wafer,* and who provide a commentary on the action. They play a larger role hem than in the earlier book, where they frequently yielded to a first-person narrator. They're like the soldiers in Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words* or the angels in Robertson Davies's *What's* Bred *in the Bone* (though Bowering would shudder at *that* idea).

Their conversations are absurd, wildly unrealistic, deliberately fantastic. One Indian asks the other if he has ever considered where they come from. "If you mea" in a metaphysical sense," comes the reply. "I suppose the Great Spirit sent us here to suffer inferior hunting and landscape, so that we would be tilled with a hankering for the Happy Hunting Ground." Later, the first Indian notes: "The western ma" of action believes that his actions are saving his country, as he calls it, fmm the decay of its early promise that set in when life became easy enough back east for people to make their living without getting dirty."

This motif, West in relation to East, runs through the novel — and not only in the Indians' dialogue.. The omniscient, third-person narrator contributes epigrams and some brilliant extended passages, most notably a lament that begins, "By the 1890s the west had started to shrink." It ends this way:

> In the absence of a complete silence we hear a voice saying come back. Shane. And hoofbeats. The bell with us. We are all Europeans now. Now we can write the books and plays and operas. We just have to look around in the past and find subjects. There we will find a cowboy rather than a businessman. The west has shrunk so much that we can get it inside us.
>
> It is awfully dry in there.
>
> We *walk around* in our European clothes, carrying our eastern newspapers, and we have a little dry something inside us.
>
> It feels something like a soul. only too dry.
>
> Some of us wouldnt mind seeing the last of it.

In *Caprice,* Bowering distinguishes fancy from imagination, rejects motivated characters in the name of fate, and invites his readers to collusion: "We can look back to what they [the characters] looked forward to." Old familiar ploys. Yet the novel differs fmm *Burning Water* in another significant particular. Though Caprice the woman is larger than life — a mythical figure — she

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never does anything magical. Bowering has resisted the temptation (one can only imagine the agonized writhings) to thumb his nose at realism by introducing, say. horses that suddenly soar into the air. some readers will miss the hyperbole, the unruly excessiveness of the earlier approach, but the strategy is wise. *Caprice* insists on its own reality, but more subtly then *Burning* Water. It will alarm end alienate fewer readers.

Once in a while Bowering indulges in corny jokes ("The two riders approached fast, their horses wild-eyed. One of the horses was brown-and-white. The other was white-and-brown"), end his oft-repeated insistence on "now, or rather the"," together with its variations, is an annoying affectation ("He hoped that be could forget [his anger] for two hours on the field this afternoon, or rather that one"). But these are peccadilloes. If the world of Canadian letters were a classroom, Bowering would be the kid who sits at the back of the room with his feet up on the desk, making wisecracks. That's his chore" pose. Behind the banter and bravado is one of Canada's most interesting novelists. □

REVIEW

Missed connections

By *Tom Marshall*

In the Skin of a Lion, by **Michael Ondaatje,** McClelland & Stewart, 244 pages, $22.50 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 6887 5).

THERE ARE AT least two different ways of regarding this book: as a commendable and ambitious attempt at a social novel (one that might bear comparison in some respects to a Matt Cohen or a Timothy Findley work) or as another somewhat disjointed compilation of those disparate magical moments. spectacular or bizarre "special effects," and vividly compelling sex 'n' blood 'n' rock'n'roll (correction: jazz) rhythms that have made Michael Ondaatje something of a cult writer. I suspect that his "lost ardent fans will savour the latter book and find the former one rather less interesting.

The novel introduces a number of potentially interesting characters but is slow to develop them or to trace cotions between and among them. Ondaatje's me" are, as always, "legendary" in their habits, appetites, and capacities; his two principal women are strong and sexy and (es fictional presences) more or less interchangeable. These people eventually undergo numerous physical adventures in various combinations and this often makes for good reading. But one reads (at least, I had to read) for a good hundred and more pages before discovering what connects these remarkable people whose lives are much more vivid the" most lives. It is a little like watching a long end intermittently lively experimental film.

The connecting link that emerges is the growth of revolutionary consciousness in Patrick, Ondaatje's chief hero. From childhood on he identifies more and more with the exploited immigrant workers, especially after he lives with Alice, an actress who has become involved with Toronto's Macedonian community. The book takes on a new coherence end purpose at this point. and the author even attempts quite explicitly, if belatedly, to justify his meandering narrative method. Patrick's life, he writes, "was no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices. Patrick saw a wondrous night web — all of these fragments of a human order. something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day. A mm on a bridge, a daredevil who was unable to sleep without drink, a boy watching a fire from his bed at night. a" actress who ran away with a millionaire -the detritus and chaos of the age was realigned."

Well, yes. And much of this "detritus" is very interesting (even the apparent walk-on of Al Purdy es a boy in Trenton). But the emotional and imaginative energies of the book have. finally, no necessary connection with class warfare or the march of history. For there is more of fairy tale and heroic romance then of serious social comment in the best sections of thls dreamlike book. The social message seems, finally, somewhat willed and perfunctory.

I suspect this is because the author is far more drawn, imaginatively and dramatically, to the emotional complex of fathers and sons and to Leonard Cohen-esque variations on the Oedipal romantic triangle the" he is to the struggle of workers and bosses. Or shall I say that he can see the latter only in terms of the former. (I write this a little hesitantly since I am all too well aware that anything I say about an old friend's work is perhaps itself suspect on the grounds of a possible sibling rivalry. Still, I think I'm right.)

But probably Ondaatje knows all this. His Patrick is a curiously passive character, as he himself observes, who ultimately fells es a revolutionary. He fells for the best of reasons: he is a decent human being who does not really believe in violence. He is dominated by hls two women. one of whom tells him, "You were born to bee younger brother." He is by temperament one of life's observers, end thus a potential artist like Ondaatje's earlier protagonists.

The author's new expansiveness is an interesting development. He is attempting some sort of social-historical panorama — one thinks of B.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime, which was, however,* much more tightly constructed, es was *Coming Through Slaughter.* Ondaatje's previous novel. I think this one will be reed for its best passages, some of which are es marvellous es anything he has written: a nun felting off a bridge but caught by a daredevil construction worker; a gang of Finnish labourers skating one river et night with torches; a fabulous puppet show in a waterworks, and many more such scenes. Indeed, reading this novel *is* rather *like* watching some over-ambitious and over-long Stanley Kubrick film that has, however, absolutely wonderful moments. □

REVIEW

Flying blind

By *John Goddard*

The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of *the* Air India Tragedy, by Clark **Blaise** and **Bharati Mukherjee,** Viking (Penguin), 256 pages, $24.95 cloth QSBN 0 670 81204 8).

IN THIS ANALYSIS of the Air India crash two years ago off Ireland, the authors conclude that Prime Minister Brie" Mulroney is insensitive, "white Canedians" are cold-hearted. end working-class Sikhs are undeserving *of* Canadian citizenship. Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee accept the deductions of others that terrorists blew up the plane to settle a political score *in India,* but they contend that Canadian immigration practices of the early 1970s made such a tragedy inevitable by admitting working-class Sikhs over professional-class Hindus. The Air India crash is "fundamentally a" immigration tragedy with terrorist overtones," the authors say. "It is important to see that Canada, for all its high-mindedness and self-exemption fmm blame, brought the tragedy on itself."

Blaise and Mukherjee say they were drive" to write the book as a tribute to the 329 crash victims — almost all of them Canadians of India" background. travelling from Toronto and Montreal to Bombay on June 23, 1985. But the harsh allegations make a sorry epitaph, particularly es the authors produce little evidence to support them.

The authors judge Mulroney "insensitive" for having sent "misplaced" con-

dolences to Indian Prime Mister Rajiv Gandhi, but for all the reader knows, Mulroney also sent condolences to the family of every victim. The authors repeatedly accuse Canadian embassy officials in Ireland and New Delhi of being unhelpful, but whenever the officials appear directly in the book, they seem to be going out of their way to accommodate difficult demands. The Irish police and other local helpers are said to be caring and sensitive — "not like white Canadians."

The book contains no evidence connecting former immigration pmctic.e-3 with the crash. The authors interviewed a man they suspect was a key conspirator in sabotaging tbe plane (nobody has been charged with the crime) but they say he is fmm a family of lawyers and property owners, not labourers, and offer no evidence that he came to Canada in tbe early 1970s.

While Blaise and Mukherjee denigrate others, they maintain a lofty view of themselves. They say news reporters rushed to the scene because they "smelled violent, newsworthy Death in the June greenness of County Cork," whereas tbe dignified authors were "bearing witness" to the tragedy. They were hot so noble, however, as to pass up a chance to describe some of the ghastly injuries the passengers suffered when the plane' exploded and fell 30,000 feet to the sea. The words "body" and "bodies" appear 74 times in 11 pages as the authors review the post-mortems in almost perverse detail, a distasteful and heartless reckoning given that local officials had done everything to spare families tbe gruesome particulars.

The chief failing of the book is its amateur level of research and reporting. Blaise and Mukherjee are accomplished fiction writers but journalism mystifies them. They add nothing of substance to the Air India dossier because they don't know what questions to pose or whom to call for answers. When Seymour Hersh began researching his book on Korean Air Lines flight 007, shot down by the Soviets in 1983. he began by flying to Moscow for long interviews with tbe head of the Soviet general staff and the Soviet deputy foreign minister. Blaise and Mukherjee never get as far as calling the prims minister's office for the wording of tbe condolence telegram to Gandhi. To them, politicians are baffling creatures moving in a world of shadowy intrigue. "We know there are larger stories, wheels within wheels [the main one turning on CIA involvement in the Afghan conflict, the role of Pakistan, and the ups and downs of Indo-U.S. relations] that only an investigator with off-the-record contacts can track down." Much of the book outlines. the history of unrest *in the* Punjab province of India, pointing to a conclusion the authors refuse to accept — that the crash had more to do with the racial problems in India than in Canada.

Somewhere within the flab of The *Sorrow and the Terror* is a good book trying to get out. Every once in a while the reader glimpses a victim's family and is struck by what extraordinary people they are, how imaginatively they have adapted to this country, and how much they have contributed. The authors could have explored the lives of the Air India passengers, using their common fate to unify a book about tbe Indian immigrant experience in Canada. Such a book would have revealed what a tragic loss tbe crash was for all Canadians, which is really the point Blaise and Mukherjee would like to make. ☐

REVIEW

Shadows of a dream

By Brent Ledger

A Forest for Zoe, by Louise Maheux-Forcier, translated from the French by David Lobdell, Oberon Press, 141 pages, SW.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 642 9) and $12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 643 7).

PUBLISHED IN FRENCH in 1969, A Forest *for Zoe* has the feel of the late 1960s. The award-winning novel attacks marriage, enforced child-hearing, and religion, while elaborating a new ideology of pleasure and imagination. Thérèse, the heroine and narrator, is perhaps a bit mad *(it's not really* clear just how mad) but true to the era of R.D. Laing, she's also perceptive, loving, and sensitive.

Not that she's a perfect exemplar of the '60s. She has no social conscience *per se*, being content to work through social issues on the individual level. There is exactly one oblique reference to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: "Mixed schools, trial marriages, priests absolved of their vows: a lot of good these things are to us, who were long ago crushed beneath the weight of their puritanical follies." For the rest, Thérèse dwells in a very private, inner world, drifting in clouds of reverie, spinning a lament for a lost childhood of intense love.

The object of her once and future affections is Zoe, a red-haired, green-eyed little demon, born exactly nine months after Thérèse. Long before they've reached school age, Thérèse and Zoe have become lovers. Zoe is Thérèse's ideal: she's a pantheistic, anarchistic devotes of the senses. She eats wild flowers and consumes handfuls of live ants. She draws

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ANANSI

explicit pictures of adult **genitalia** and traces "the antonyms of the words, ***duty, obedience,*** and ***purity" in*** blood-red letters o" a white kitchen wall.

Long after she has **disappeared from Thérèse's life Zoe** continues to **enthral her childhood paramour, haunting the pages** of the **novel,** lurking in **corners while Thérèse** makes love to the **women** who follow: Mia the alcoholic piano teacher, **Marie** the **convent** school friend, **and** Isis, **a photographer with eyes and hair the colour of Zoe's. Au of Thérèse's lovers are.** in fact, **dim** reflections of **Zoe. "Everything** that comes **after Zoe,"** says **Thérèse.** "is like the rough **sketch after the finished** work." **Zoe, in** turn, like all the lovers. is but a **narcissistic** emblem of the woman **Thérèse** would like to be — **"the** incarnation of all that I **was not,** all that I dreamed of being."

I" this solipsistic world **none** of the characters, aside fmm **Thérèse,** has **room** to **manoeuvre** or grow. They **are** erotic **icons,** static figures in a **frieze on** a" Egyptian temple. Indeed the book as a **whole** is as much **ritual** as novel. Nothing much happens. Potentially **dramatic incidents** — a teenage pregnancy, a husband's infidelity — are briefly and obliquely described. There is little **dialogue** and **less drama.** Most of the story **is** told in **summary.**

For readers **inclined** to skip description **and** race for the action, the book **will** be a disappointment. **Maheux-Forcier** attempts to capture the texture of the past in **dense thickets** of metaphor. And while much of the **time** she succeeds, her style is often obscure and needlessly abstract. ("Zoe's untutored instincts and stubborn **will** came **crashing against the** frail, **docile** fortress of **my** SOUL")

The novel's **form,** however — **non-linear,** almost tidal in its ebbs **and** flows — runs true to the rebellious spirits of **Thérèse** and **Zoe.** "Anarchy: the tight to be authentic at any **price.** This," says **Thérèse, "was** all that mattered to me." Her ***cri de coeur* informs *the novel.* There *is no*** plot. Characters float back **and forth** in time, and the past finds its echo in the present. Long-lost Zoe stands by the bed **while Thérèse** makes love to Isis. A past ***menage à trois* finds** its twin in the **stifling** suburban **arrangement** of **Thérèse,** her husband **Renaud.** and his mistress **Catherine.**

In search of **an unchanging "ancient** dream," **Thérèse disdains** the ides of **growing** up. **Her** story reaches a **climax through chronological regression and** formal **experimentation. When** Isis **abandons Thérèse, Thérèse** relives her childhood loss of Zoe and the "owl, in **a sense. explodes. The betrayal scene contains** the **first and only** bit **of** dialogue in the book and **when** the lovers speak, their **words** fall **like** stones. **shattering** the novel's **formal calm; Thérèse's** claustrophobic **dream** is broken and the world walks **in** as Zoe walks away.

Thérèse has lost her myth of childhood and gained who knows what — a bit of **peace** perhaps? It's a" odd, ambiguous ending for a" odd, poetic book, the like of which has not bee" see" in **English** Canada since By ***Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept.*** ❑

REVIEW

The price of progress

By Joel ***Yanofsky***

The **Woman** Who Is **the** Midnight Wind, by **Terence** M. Green, **Pottersfield** Press. 137 pages, $9.95 paper **(ISBN** 0 919001 33 **5).**

LIKE ANY POPULAR genre, science fiction has its own built-in boundaries. Unlike other **genres, though,** they are **almost impossible** to define. Even if the **description** is narrowed down to include all writing that "contains a" element of the fantastic," the Line between science fiction. fantasy, and **magic** realism **remains** blurred. **Labelling Terence** M. Green a science-fiction writer is similarly **misleading — mainly** because his **new collection** of short **stories** is simply good fiction.

The opening story plays on this confusion **and** it also prepares the reader **to** expect the unexpected **from** Green. "Ashland Kentucky" begins **conventionally** enough, with its narrator trying to grant his mother's **dying wish. Her desire** to see her brother **again** has the narrator searching diligently and futilely for an uncle who has not been heard from for **50** years. However, what **begins** as **a laconic,** moving account of a son's coming to **terms** with his *mother's* death turns into a curious **tale** of **time** travel.

While this unexpected **shift** in **direction** is puzzling, it **is** "ever jarring. Green gradually and **successfully eases** us out of our **logical, cause-and-effect** world into his own odd vision of a **universe governed** by mysterious **symmetries** and **unfathomable** possibility. **Recalling** the **strange** way things have developed, the **narrator** writes: "I should be upset, but I'm **not.** I think I **figured** it out. **...** Things have to be **settled, or** they **never** go away."

Throughout the book, Green jokes and exaggerates at the expense of popular culture. **A glimpse into the** future **reveals** that **25 years from now** Phil Donahue **will still** be a revered pseudo-psychoanalyst **and** that **Henry Winkler's** portrayal of "the **Fonz"** will be immortal. I" "Japanese **Tea,"** Green has eve" **more fun describing an educational system not very** far **removed** from today% **reality. Following** a" incident **in** which 50 teachers are executed. the school of the future is **designed specifically** to protect the faculty from rioting students.

But, more than anything **else,** it's Green's restrained and **understated** prose style that **makes** his fiction work. No **matter how weird events get, Green maintains his** balance, **never explaining** too much. He **uses** the special effects of the **genre** matter-of-factly — **throwing** away lines about **"psychocomputers," "calm-down pills,"** and "the **Time Research** Act of **2017." His characters take time travel** for granted the way we take television for granted. They don't exactly know how it **works. but they accept it as part of their everyday life.**

I" **"Legacy,"** a **man** chats **with** his father — a **conversation** made **possible** by **scientific** advances:

> The attendant. **. sees me, acknowledges me, and places** the earphones **on my father's head. moving the electrodes into place. . . Leaning** forward, I switch **on the** microphone, preparing to **speak. This** is. by **law,** my **final visit, for this is the fourth week since my father was** murdered.

But the technology, here, **is** just a **gimmick, a means to an end: a way for Green** to explore family **betrayal and loyalty. Aliens are** treated the same way. They **figure in** the title story **and in "Of** Children in Foliage," but they are **minor players —** part of the **landscape of** the future rather **than** au integral part of the fiction.

Meditations on mortality pervade ***The*** Woman Who Is the ***Midnight Wind.*** Writing **science** fiction **allows** Green the ***Opportunity to extend the discussion*** beyond its logical conclusion. I" **"Till** Death Do Us Part," for **example,** a woman puts it **into** her will **that** she **wants** to talk to **her ex-husband** one **more** time ***after*** her **demise.** He obliges and, in the process, learns something that he would

have **been** better off not knowing-that **marital** bitterness is **eternal.** "Susie Q^2" tells the story of a" astronaut intent **on suicide.** Before he takes his **life,** he calls **up** the **image** of his dead brother on the computer. But rather than **providing** the

two men with a iii.4 chance to say goodbye, this computer trick just raises new questions about the debt the living owe the dead.

Ultimately, it's human beings that Green is concerned with. The fact that he sets hi stories in the 21st century or on a planet called Pantella is almost incidental. People — their emotions, their dreams -don't change. In the futuristic "Barking Dogs" a policeman is nagged by familiar problems: the bad guys get away with murder, his captain is insufferable, hi wife is bored with their marriage. Depleting his savings, he purchases a portable lie detector — "a barking dog" -that he believes will solve all his problems. Instead it only adds to his personal and professional confusion. As in all the stories, Green's vision of the future, here, is of a world, not unlike our own, that has progressed too much and gotten too smart for the people who inhabit it. □

REVIEW

Land of the profits

By Desmond Morton

Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian **Business,** by Michael **Bliss, McClelland & Stewart, 631 pages,** $39.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 1577 1).

CANADIANS. SO OUR self-image dictates, are not very enterprising. We insure ourselves to the hilt, lock our money in pension funds, and hand over our resources for foreigners to develop while we look for a safe job in government or a large corporation. We place a remarkable faith in public enterprise and expect our politicians to invest our wealth more wisely than free-enterprisers. Why else would the Mulroney government' pour billions of tax dollars into General Motors or a host of tiny oil companies if not to win re-election?

In Northern *Enterprise*, Michael Bliss tells Canadians a very different story about themselves.. Canadians have benefited fmm an extraordinary range of enterprise, much of it home-grown. Far from succumbing to corporate concentration, this country has been fatal for monopolies, from the Company of New France to Air Canada. In 1821 the Hudson's Bay Company had destroyed every rival and held absolute sway over the vast Northwest; 40 years later ik directors had surrendered their charter in despair. Who now trembles at the power of the CPR? Who has even heard of E.P. Taylor or the Argus Corporation7

Far from being a predictable bore, *Northern Enterprise* is probably the most important Canadian book of the season. and easily among the most readable.. The author of two lively books on business history and two more on Frederick Banting and the discovery of insulin, Bliss was brought to this monumental project by the inspired patronage of Syd Jackson and Manufacturers' Life. He has certainlv given his backers what they wanted. For all its bulk and price. business people will be urging thii book on the unconverted with apostolic zeal. Never before have they had a more Literate. informed, or persuasive account of how business made Canada.

Bliss is a true believer. Capitalism works best when Adam Smith's "hidden hand" is free to grope. Government interference in the market may be well-meaning or malevolent; it is almost invariably wrong. It cannot out-think the market nor, Bliss insists, can it transform the fact that Canada's riches are scarce and jealously guarded. If there is a pattern for the government-corporate partnership in Bliss's mind, it was set 400 years ago when Martin Frobisher persuaded Queen Elizabeth to lend him a ship to bring back the gold and diamonds that littered the shores of the Northwest Passage. At least Good Queen Bess got ha ship back; no one has seen the millions spent on Clairtone, Churchill Forest Industries, Dome Petroleum, or the National Energy Policy.

Given the market as his guide, Bliss has no patience with more romantic visions of Canadian enterprise. Donald Creighton's claim that Montreal merchants, with their "Laurentian vision," were the first true Canadians Bliss dismisses as "a literary and nationalist fantasy." Nationalism, ancient or modem, is a special bogey to Bliss. When Arthur Lower lamented the rape of the Canadian forest, he was "parroting some of the industry's least-informed critics." War in 1939 was not necessary to pull Canada out of the Depression — business would have done the job anyway, though more slowly. Far from investing our postwar prosperity, Bliss insists, the great C.D. Howe was little more than the wilful, ambitious apprentice of the businessmen he invited to wartime Ottawa. Their "dollar-a-year," incidentally, was fictitious; all were paid at the going rate.

Bliss is a man of controversial views and *Northern Enterprise* is full of them, from Seminism to free trade. Armoured by a generation of controversy with skeptical colleagues and sustained by an impressive familiarity with Canadian history, Michael Bliss will be prepared to defend his ground. The fun is about to begin. □

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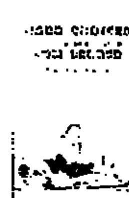

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BOOKS THAT MATTER FROM DOUGLAS & McINTYRE

REVIEW

To be continued

By Wayne Grady

Steven **le Hérault,** *by* **Victor-Lévy Beaulieu,** translated from the **French** by Ray Chamberlain, **Exile** Editions. **201 pages, $14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428** 33 9).

WHEN A WRITER publishes more than 35 books in fewer **than 20 years, as Victor-**L&y **Beaulieu (VLB)** has. it is **difficult** to think of **him** as **having laboured over a** single novel for **nearly** a decade and a half. But the characters in ***Steven*** k ***Hérault*** **— which is volume six in a projected 12-volume** saga of the **Beauchemin** family of **Trois-Pistoles — first** appeared in **a *récit*** published in 1973. **Called *"N'évoque plus que le désenchantement*** *de* ***ta ténebre, mon si pauvre Abel,"*** *the* six-page **flood** of words introduced a young **writer** named Abel, who **sees** his **brother** Steven off **at Dorval airport** then spends the next several months **with** Steven's lover, Judith, and writing **furiously at a novel.**

Steven has gone to Paris for **some** unexplained reason **—** it has to do **with the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, James** Joyce's glaucoma, and Steven's "incontestable **leaning** toward sainthood" **—** and during their lovemaking **Abel soon becomes confused** in Judith's (and hence our) mind with Steven. Soon even **Abel** begins to think **he *is* Steven, if not James** Joyce, and as Judith slips inexorably away from him. **Abel/Steven** is free to spend more and more time on his novel, which he finally describes as "hundreds of **unreadable** pages."

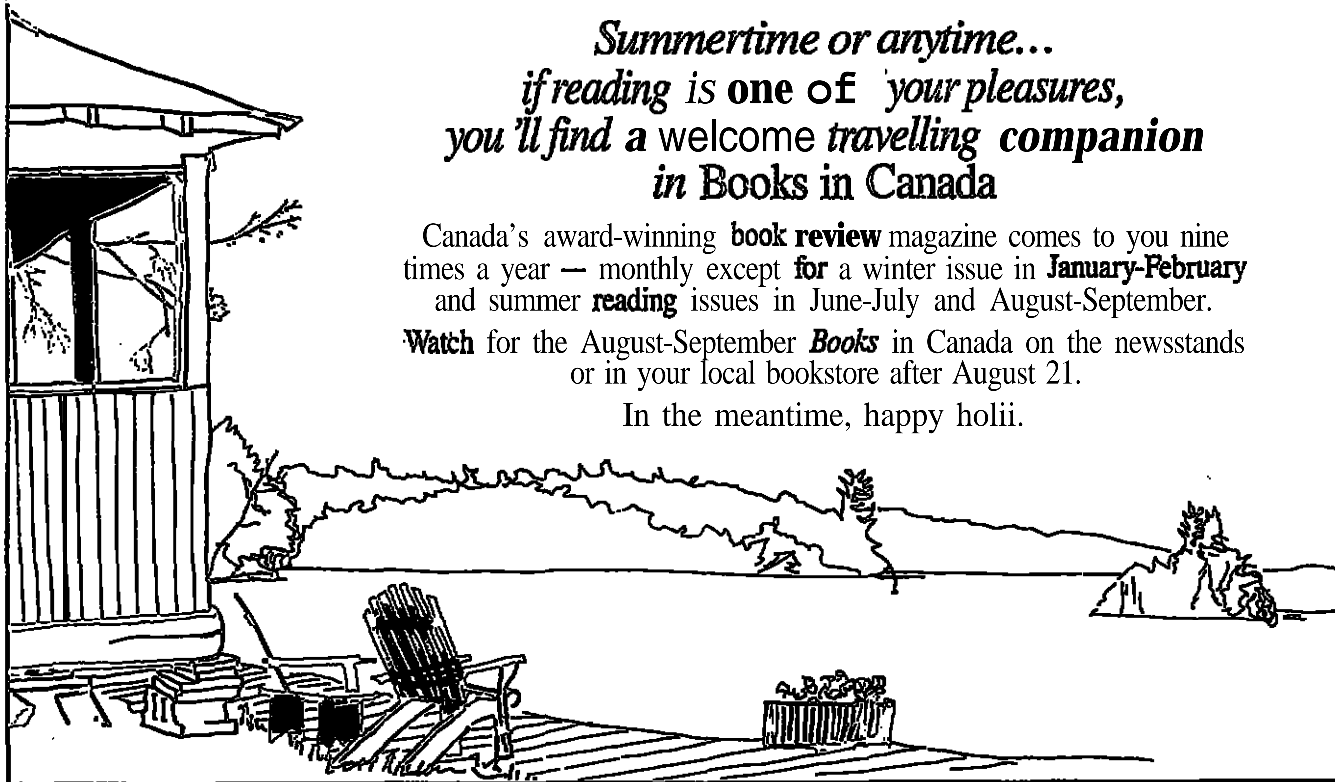
The trio **reappear** in **VLB's 1982** novel ***Don*** *Quichotte de* ***la démanche*** *(volume five* of **the** saga), in which they **are joined** by the rest of the **Beauchemin family:** father, mother, **brother** Jos, Uncle Phil, and sister **Gabriella.** Abel now is a reader **in** a **large** publishing house, married to **Judith** (who **dies** or does not die in **childbirth),** and is still **attempting** to **write** "the novel." **In *Steven*** k ***Hérault,*** "the novel" has become "the failed Book." As **a** younger man, Abel had **written** a novel

called Steven ***le Hérault*** **that turned out to** be a verbatim retyping of **James** Joyce's *Stephen Hero* (the original **title** of A *Portrait* **of *the Artist as a Young Man)*** **—** *although* ***hérault*** is **literally** translated **as ·.:herald".not** "hem." **Abel's current masterpiece,** "the failed Book," is in **fact** a **verbatim** retyping of **Rejean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés*** *(The* ***Swallower Swallowed,* 1967).**

Steven, **returning** from **a 15-year** sojourn **in** Paris, finds that his father has gone insane, **his brother** Abel has become a kind of **fin-de-siècle debauchée, and** his Uncle **Phil** is a mindless alcoholic. If Joyce's Stephen **Dedalus** wanted **to** "forge in **the** smithy of my **soul** the **un**created conscience of my **race," VLB's** saintly Steven **Beauchemin** may be said to be pursuing similar ends. *Abel considers* his **own** attempt to **have** failed:

> **Through his writing** he had **wanted** to **make appear the Québécois hero, that** bizarre **creature who, with one foot** ever in **the** Old World **and the other** in new **America, never** choosing. **has** always wound up **flat** on **his ass** in **the water.**

Quebec **society in *Don*** *Quichotte de la* ***démanche*** *was chaotic* but essentially human; in Steven ***le Hérault*** **it** is **almost completely** degraded and debauched. **The** novel, seen in **part** through **Steven's** eyes after 15 years of **exile,** is a desperate, **pessimistic** study of **human** corruption. There is, however. **hope. Abel** is **all** but snuffed at the end, but we are **reminded** that **Steven** may **yet herald** something worth waiting for. **Volume** seven of **the** saga. still ***en préparation,*** *is tentatively* **called *Histoire*** *de* ***Steven;*** *volume* **eight will** be called ***Le Livre*** *de Joyce.* □



BRIEF REVIEWS

BEAUX ARTS

Art and **Reality:** A **Casebook** of Concern. edited by Robin **Blaser** and Robert Dunham, **Talonbooks,** 240 pages, **$12.95** paper **(ISBN** 0 **88922 235** 5).

THESE ESSAYS were first presented at a" international conference held at Simon **Fraser University in** the **summer** of 1982. Most of **the** authors are North **American** critics, academics, or **administrators, although several — such** as Jean-Claude **Germain,** artistic director of **Theatre d'Aujourd'hui** in Montreal; John Hirsch, former **artistic director** at Stratford; and **Gottfried** Koenig from the **Institute** of **Sonology,** University of **Utrecht —** have **strong** artistic backgrounds. Robert **Irwin,** the only artist in the group, **raises** important points concerning art as inquiry, and the editors wisely chose to include the question-and-answer period that followed. **Koenig** provides an **eloquent** discussion of the history **and potential** of electronic music.

Many papers, **including** John **Bentley Mays's,** Carl **Oglesby's,** D. Paul Schafer's, Jorge **Alberto Lozoya's,** and **Prem Kirpal's,** discuss the limits **of art** as a **vehicle** that may somehow redeem the world from the shadow of **self**-destruction. **Lozoya's** provocative theories on **culture** as **conflict** may be of great interest to those who are **concerned with** the cultural impact of **current** free-trade talks **with** the U.S.

Them are some problems. Many of the essays are too brief. too **general,** or confirm **what** is already **known** by those aware of **problems facing** the arts. Some **are** already **dated:** they **were included** in the **Applebaum-Hébert** report, released after the conference. Perhaps the most **interesting were** those delivered by **hard**-nosed administrators and financial experts, which display an **applicable** and pragmatic concern for art and reality.

— KARL JIRGENS

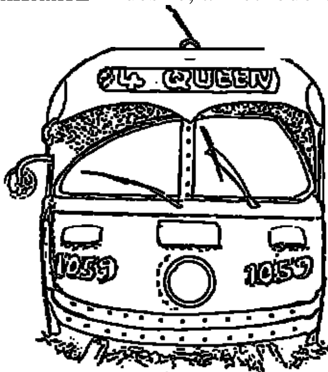
Total **Refusal:** The Complete **1948 Manifesto** of the Montreal **Automatists, translatedFrench** by R **Ellen**-mood. **Exile** Editions, 116 pages, $11.95 paper **(ISBN** 0 **920428** 91 **6).**

IN 1948 CANADA was recovering from the Second World War, **Mackenzie** King was prime minister, and **we were entering** the United Nations. Television **and** the baby boom were in their infancy, and in Quebec the **Duplessis government** was **battling organized labour.** Meanwhile, on a hot afternoon in August, a group of **Montreal** artists, **including** pioneers **in** the **fields** of **writing, painting, dance, theatre,** design, and architecture, released 400 **mimeographed** copies of the **Automatist** Manifesto, ***Refus Global.***

The manifesto created a **furor. Group** leader **Paul-Emile Borduas** was tired fmm the **École du Meuble.** Jean-Paul **Riopelle** and Pierre **Gauvreau objected** to **Borduas's** comments on **surrealism.** Other members argued **over** tactics and the purpose of the manifesto. By 1955, the dust had settled and both the group **and** the manifesto **fell from sight.**

It was not until the 1970s that it.5 full importance was recognized. Members of the **group** have gone on to achieve considerable success. **Riopelle** appeared in **Breton's *Surrealism and Painting*** and signed a **surrealist** manifesto. Now a **museum** devoted to his work is being planned for Quebec City. Art historian Dennis Reid has called ***Refus Global*** the **most** important aesthetic statement that has ever been ***made in Canada.***

Influenced by **their Futurist,** Dadaist, and Surrealist precursors, the **Automatists** confronted religion. politics, and aesthetic theories. They found **justification** in desire, a methodology in



love, and a state of mind in **vertigo.** This is **the first time** the entire manifesto is available **in** English, though a few of the works in this collection have been **translated and** published before. **Borduas's** lead manifesto appeared in 1950, **and** Claude **Gauvreau's** plays have appeared **in *Exile magazine*** and **in** the collection ***Entrails* (Coach *House*** Press. **1981).**

Ray **Ellenwood** is a **prize-winning** translator **whose knowledge** of the **period** makes him a leading authority **on** the **Automatists. Ellenwood's** style is lucid and fluent; he is **equally skilled** at **translating** the drama, poetry, and **critical theory** that appear here. **This** edition is beautifully crafted and **includes** historical and biographical **notes as well** as many period photographs. **— KARL JIRGENS**

FICTION

Bad **Money,** by A.M. **Kabal, Irwin, 224 pages,** 519.95 cloth **(ISBN 0 7725** 1659 **6).**

SOMEWHERE IN ***Bad Money*** is ,a good story that a **skilful** editor **could unlock** by **cutting** 50 pages. The plot **revolves around three** journalists **tracking** down **an** international money scandal involving **arms** and the **Vatican,** the Russians and **the** Poles. the Contras **and** the **CIA,** and a shadowy Mafia group **— all orches**-hated by the fiendish arch-villain. David **Medina** in Switzerland.

Everything about this book is excessive: too much violence (beads explode from gunshots: **blood** sprays "like confetti"; someone has a" eye torn out of his head and **thrown on** the fire); too much gratuitous sex **(everybody ruts like** rabbits) and too many tour guides of well-known cities like New York and **Washington.**

Excess is not necessarily a **fault** in this genre but A.M. **Kabal doesn't** seem to be certain about his Literary intentions. The novel **starts off in** a Len **Deighton** mode (international **intrigue** in high places), shifts up briefly to John **Le Carré** (the slow **unravelling** of the **covert** movement of **money** through **the** world's banking systems -good stuff), and the" settles for James **Bond (murderous** women bodyguards **and** getaway boats fmm secret **tunnels.)**

The hem is a tiresome drunk named John Standing, the black sheep of an **aristocratic Virginian** family, who spends most of his waking hours wondering if **he's sober enough to operate as a research assistant** for **ace investigative** reporter Cam **Kilkenny** of the London ***Examiner.***

The trouble with this book is that the **CIA-Iran-Contra** revelations **have** proved once **again** that no **novelist can** dream **up** a better plot than those men in **brogues** and **Brooks** Brothers suits at Foggy Bottom. **— TONY ASPLER**

Sometimes They Sang. by **Helen Potrebenko,** 86.95 paper **(ISBN** 0 88974 007 0).

HELEN **POTREBENKO** writes better about **working-class** and sexual-ghetto-class dilemmas than **any** other woman in Canada. **The** poor women in **her** novels. and the **disillusioned** sdf-persona of **her poems** and stories, **are all struggling along** the **desperation-edge** of **slum** housing, single **motherhood,** unemployment, job **discrimination,** and rape threats, **but** they

still manage to be at times disloyal or mistrustful of the. various dogmas and slogans that clutter the air around them. And they at times are convulsed with laughter.

Sometimes They Sang, Potrebenko's second novel, tells the story of Odessa Greeneway who. during the West Coast recession years of 1979-1982, is unemployed, uninvolved, wanting a child, walking a" eternal picket line, avoiding the various bare-traps set by former and potential male partners, and coming to terms with the economic/social history of her prairie Ukrainian background. Despite all this, Odessa maintains your basic small-a anarchist position: prove it, I thought so, what the hell, sure sure, and la-de-da.

Potrebenko has a cutting humour similar to Margaret Atwood's — or. more accurately. she has the double-edged wit that Atwood would have had if she hadn't polished the edges of it with Harvard subtleties. There is a" endearing desperation of saying in Potrebenko that is not diluted by language games. She wants a life; her characters want money and food, not the Booker Prize. I love this writing. It has no stake in superiority or shock, and no essential is exploited for effect.

At a time when competence rules but brilliance is rare and risky, Potrebenko has discovered a nay to write from outside Literature. I" this novel, as in her previous novel, *Taxi,* and in her fantastic poems, she has found a way to speak for all those women rarely depicted in Art, or depicted only as caricatures. I am thinking of lesbians and renegades: women outside the academy, outside the party, and outside the media.

I know women who treasure certain Potrebenko poems, or who pass on copies of her books to friends by way of giving them comfort, strength, and a chance to laugh through their tears. Can there be higher praise for a" author than this?

— PHIL HALL

The Dream Auditor, by Lesley Choyce, Indivisible Books, 87 pages, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920304 63 X).

THE PROBLEM FOR a book of science fictio" stories published by a literary press is that it will likely disappear into deep space (or a black hole, or whatever). Diehard SF fans won't ever find it and those with literary tastes are likely to turn up their noses. Too bad, because Lesley Choyce's likable, amusing, and big-hearted stories would probably provide some pleasure for those who browse the aisles at separate ends of the bookshop.

What's most impressive about these stories is their interesting conceits. I" the title story a tax collector comes to collect for the dreams he has bee" supplying a client; "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Writer" envisions a future in which writing has been forgotten and people communicate by "holoversions"; in "Privileged Information" an extraordinary vision appears in Malcolm MacDougal's outhouse seat. instigating the usual government-scientist clash:

> "Look here." Markson lambasted the civil servant. "You tear down that crapper, we lose what we figure to be the fun view of the solar system from the *far* rim of the galaxy. *Now I can't* let *you* do that. You ain't gonna have your way this time, buddy."

Choyce's direct and accessible style is show" off best in "Buddha at the Laundromat," the kind of fable that brings a spiritual figure into the mess of modern times. Too often, however, his style falls flat, sagging beneath clichés that don't seem to be meant ironically. Like most literary writers who try science fiction (Orwell usually being their model, as he is here) Choyce has a moral purpose, but these stories can't quite carry the weight of his warning about a modern society carelessly disposing of individuality and love.

Some of these conceits, intriguing in the stories, hold unused potential. One that could eve" be expanded into a novel is "Renaissance Man," in which memories are regularly reassembled and heads crammed with factual knowledge to create a society of vacant happiness. Choyce's ideas make me wish for stories that are longer end deeper.

— CARY FAGAN

Overlooking the Red Jail, by M.L. Knight, Childe Thursday (29 Sussex Ave., Toronto M5S 1S6), 160 pages, $13.50 paper (ISBN 0 920459 02 1).

THESE WISTFUL, unsophisticated short fictions, set for the most part in the late 1930s, centre on the Malcolmson family, a likable unit consisting of Edward, a minister in the Descending Presbyterian Church, his wife May, and their children, Sis and Bud. The adventures that the Malcolmsons undergo are mostly pleasant. I" "Cautionary Drowning," for instance, Sis experiences the heady pleasure of swimming unassisted for the first time, while "Spill" recounts a family visit to a Christian summer camp, the high point of which is the spilling of a box of tapioca by their sanctimonious hostess, and "Keeping the Newspaper away from Sis" describes the elaborate measures take" one Christmas season to prevent Sis and Bud fmm discovering in advance what their presents are. Events sometimes take a disagreeable turn, but bad experiences are quickly overcome.

Although there is the occasional infelicitous wording and awkward passage, in the main these stories are competently told, and succeed in evoking a world in which good works abound and a sense of community is possible. A" admirable feeling of particularity is instilled into this world through the words to hymns and the details of food preparation. There are also some genuinely comic moments, my favourite coming when the nasty suitor to a friend of Sis's proves incapable of handling May's toasted cheese roll-up sandwiches, endangering thereby both his standing in the Malcolmsons' eyes and his suit and de.

M.L. Knight does not give us as much of the internal workings of her characters as we might wish (for instance, Thomas J. Menish, the choirmaster, an important figure in the title piece, is observed entirely from the outside, and Sis's emotional development is only sparingly described), but perhaps because this material is missing, her fictions have a child-like sense of wonder and charm.

— MARK EVERARD

FOLKWAYS

Dzelarhons: Mythology of the Northwest Coast, by Anne Cameron, Harbour Publishing, 120 pages, $8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920080 89 8).

AS A CHILD growing up in Nanaimo, B.C., Anne Cameron was captivated by the Northwest India" creation myths and animal fables told to her by en Indian woman named Klopinum. As a teenager, she asked Klopinum to write them down; instead, Klopinum gave her stories to Cameron, insisting that *she* write them.

Like the best fables and myths, each of these eight tales entertainingly tells a" individualistic narrative that also reflects the intrinsic beliefs and values of the Northwest Indians. They range from gently humorous animal fables involving birds and whales through feminist legends to matriarchal creation myths.

Several stories are variations on the theme of maternal love. In "Ta-Naz Finds Happiness," a young English orphan named John Richardson is shipwrecked off the coast of B.C. He is rescued by Osprey Woman. who believes him to be her long-lost son, and she raises him with care and love. When the sailors come to retrieve him, he refuses to leave his new mother. In the feminist legend "Bearded Woman," a young woman grows a beard in order to stake her claim on land that her father wishes to leave to his wastrel sons. The title story is a sombre yet celebratory matriarchal creation myth that relates the many incarnations of the mythical mother of the world, Dzelarhons.

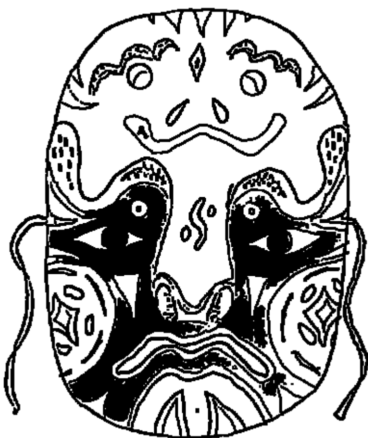
— SHERIE POSESORSKI

ON STAGE

Making It: The Business of Film and Television Production In Canada, edited by Barbara **Hehner,** Academy of Canadian Cinema and **Television/Doubleday,** 328 pages, **$15.95** paper **(ISBN** 0 385 25118 1).

THIS COMPREHENSIVE collection of **essays** by Iii professionals **contains essential** information for would-be producers, **film** students, and buffs avid to know the **arcana of** movie-making. AU the contributors arc **well-known experts** with **exemplary** track records, the most **knowledgeable** of **Canadian** practitioners. The tone ranges **from straightforward** to delectably gossipy to slightly **self**-important, but **always** with exhaustive **detail** to **demystify all aspects** of **the film**-makii process. We **learn** about screen**writing,** budgeting, financing, stages of production, completion guarantors, distribution, exhibition, publicity, and **entertainment** law. But principally **we learn** about the **daunting** job of the producer. who, **as** Louis **Applebaum** writes, must "inspire, push, **cajole,** implore, threaten and guide." He must be a **combination** of manager, **financier,** visionary and psychologist, and bis job is the most **financially insecure** in the film business.

The **guide's** subtitle, **however,** may not **attract** its intended **audience. Only** by **progressing through** the teat **does** the reader learn that it is meant to **instruct** the **novice** producer of feature-length theatrical films, made-for-TV movies, TV series or short **independent** fiction material **for** TV. It is **not aimed at** makers of



documentary features or shorts or industrial films or at **fledgling network television** producers, bat at private **commercial ventures.**

Making It* needs** a **less selective glossary** and one that **contains definitions** consistent with those interspersed **throughout** the essays. **Because** this is a **manual** for the **uninitiated,** many elementary terms arc included in the glossary, but many **equally** important ones are missing; **where,** for example. arc **explanations** of ***Stedicam, printing ratios, *blue cyclorama,* ***electronic insert, opticals, performance*** *bonds., television* ***Q rating***, *director's cut.* ***optical*** *and* ***magnetic sound track,*** *and street date? Also* notably absent is a **reference** section listing **guilds,** associations, unions, and services. **Though** some of this information **can** be divined from the bibliography, a more explicit list or a **full** description of the **contents** of **source books** such as *The Toronto* ***Film*** *and Video Guide, Who's Who in* ***Canadian Film*** *and* ***Television, Frame*** *by* ***Frame,*** **and** Film ***Canada*** *Yearbook* would have been welcome. **— ALISON REID**

POETRY

China Shockwaves, by **Nancy-Gay Rotstein, McClelland &** Stewart, 96 pages, $14.95 **cloth (ISBN** 07710 7749 **1).**

A TRAVELLER'S JOURNAL is always studded with a profusion of impressions. a fragmented **catalogue** of **sights,** sounds; **and smells,** because on a trip **everything seems** new, worth noting. Most of ***China*** *Shockwaves was* inspired by Nancy-Gay **Rotstein's** journey through the People's Republic of China, and tends to be faithful **to** that frenetic rhythm of **experience. There's a shutter-clicking quality to these poems,** whether the poet is **engaged in** formal sightseeing at the **Ming·Tombs** or **the** Great **Wall** or pecking **behind the** propaganda **façade** of a model **farm** hut or **classroom** lesson. This **effectively** conveys the sensory bombardment, but it **also** makes for poems that are **cluttered** and choppy. In "Ming Tombs," for **example, Rotstein** writes:

> *they* ***display canvas*** *sham*
> ***didactic*** *mist mockery*
> ***pseudo master craft***
> *with* ***mind-fermenting*** *script*

To her **credit, Rotstein does** want to offer us cultural insight, not just snapshots. She is sensitive to the **tension** between old and new in **China, and** the paradoxes it engenders. She's not **uncritical — stifling** regimentation **and petty bureaucratic** tyrannies are noted **—** but her harshest words arc **reserved** for the decadent West. In a foreword she asserts that the "North American syndrome" is the greatest threat to China. In her poems, the West is **seen as** wasteful, shallow. and **materialistic. Maybe** the **Chinese** no longer consider Westerners to be **"foreign** devils," but it's cleat that **Rotstein** does.

I **share** her concerns about the **juggernaut** of North American **culture,** as **well** as her distaste for capitalist **excess,** and I **find** it understandable that exposure to **Chinese** society would **create** "shockwaves" **in** her perception of **our own culture.** But too often **the** poems **in** ***China*** *Shockwaves* **are** pat and **judgemental,** giving us a **wealth** of detail but no complexity. **— BARBARA CAREY**

Delayed Mercy and Other Poems, by **George Bowering,** Coach House Press, 126 pages. **$12.50** paper (ISBN 0 88910 281 3).

THIS COLLECTION is very unlike ***Kerrisdale Elegies,*** **Bowering's** previous book, in tone. The **Kerrisdale Elegies,** which played with **the** texts of the ***Duino*** Elegies, **succeeded** in a **kind** of mind-meld **between Rilke** and **Bowering that** produced poetry of startling freshness **and** depth. **Bowering** became a lyric poet again to do **this** -and did it **brilliantly.** The work is truly **haunting.** ***Delayed Mercy*** **claims that** effect **and** fails.

If these are late-night poems, **the** writer and reader arc **never allowed to** drift **into** hypnotic states. The flow of images is rendered staccato by frequent **authorial** intrusions: "Pardon me, is that/the editorial **we?"** and "Oh **stop/saying 'poem' in a poem."** If **the** book concludes with a section called "Irritable **Reaching,"** it may be because the **fictive** dream is constantly **interrupted, leaving** the **reader** with "just **language & a vague** melody" **—** a **poetry** of **purely** linguistic impulse. That's a poetry that is primarily cerebral and **contrived,** not mysterious.

The **poems** in Delayed ***Mercy*** arc **all** dedicated, **as** far **as** I can **tell (recognizing** most, bat not all of the names), to **writers.** The poems **themselves** arc mostly about **writing: late-night self-consciousness, "a smart-alec** scribbler." The poems move by **intellectual,** not psychic, **leaps through** word-play, riddles, and jokes. **The** poetic voice questions the poem, the language, what life it **can contain: "I** saw Cadillacs **&** cattle, they did **not/herd them. All** I heard **was** the **radio,/dumb** pick-up **truck** music." And: **"I** didn't know anything but I **was/filled** with **intelligence.** I **didn't know/dying** but "ow I'm **dying** to **know."**

The poems are **clever** and playful, but not organic. The apparent **randomness** of **association** of **images** and the **use** of non ***sequiturs*** does not **release** the **unconscious because** the **poems** arc so **self-referential: "all** death writing is self-referential. **/Writing** is death **to** tbe **fingers,/death all** the way up to the shoulders." This is a **dull** death, **in** no way **threatening —** death without a **sense** of the **unknown.**

Substituting the word "boy" for **poem doesn't** bring the work to life **either.** But **Bowering knows** that without **this** self-consciousness reality is seamless: "Separate fmm **the** earth no **more,** the **blue** hero" I saw a **few/minutes** later assumed a" **alternate** shape of beauty, a

kind of/folded sky; **who** knew what **he** **was** looking **for?" However,** there is **no** **way** that this truth **can** be *known* — the **very** perception alters it. **"Truth?"**

-MARY **DI MICHELE**

Ashbourn, by John **Reibetanz,** Signal Editions, 91 pages, **$9.95** paper **(ISBN** 0 919890 76 8).

ENGLISH PROFESSOR John **Reibetanz** sets his **first** volume of poetry in **Ashbourn,** Suffolk, and **chronicles the** lives of village inhabitants. "Chronicle" may not be the correct term. though, for his book features not dispassionate historical record, but residents' ***monologues.*** ***Ashbourn*** is largely a series of poetic speeches, delivered by such folk as the district nurse. the preacher, the blacksmith.

As one would expect, the villagers often reflect upon **their love and** w&k. The teacher. May **Threadgold, discusses** the importance of **schooling;** the nurse, **Iris Holden,** describer the **delivery** of **an** infant. **Not** infrequently **these musings produce** valuable **insights.** The **characters step** back from **daily** life and consider their jobs' meaning. Lionel **Nottage, a** coal **miner,** comes to realize that he "might **as** well be dead." The blacksmith **sees** that, because they create the people's tools, the **smith's** hands "fed the whole **village."**

Death, too, is **a** subject of **villagers' thoughts. and** here **Reibetanz offers** some of **his** most **poignant** verse. "Walter Foster. **Lifeboatman,"** introduces a citizen whose whole work is **a confrontation** with mortality. Foster. better than the others, **understands human** frailty, **understands** how little **it** takes to **drown us:**

> ***Fifty years past***
>
> ***a few spoonfuls***
> *pooled in my mother's lungs*
> *and **lapped over her life.***

The attempt to save someone must be among the most passionate of acts. We sense tbis **when** Foster stretches out **his arms:**

> *. . . **your** hands*
> ***catching theirs** hold*
>
> *white wax madding*
> ***into stumps of snow.** Some*
> ***keep their** grip **till the boat comes***

Bob **Copping,** a village **veteran,** recalls **a** weapons **demonstration:**

> **Our *Cockney instructor patted***
> *The **muzzle** of **a Hales** rule-grenade:*
> ***"We've never** 'ad **a haccident."** Blood*
> ***spat***
> ***From where his '"ead" had sat, and steel***
> ***teeth chewed***
> ***The eager ones crowding up close to***
> ***learn.***

Reibetanz vividly conveys death's suddenness.

The veteran's monologue — like **many** others here — draws **strength** fmm **the** sophisticated **use** of rhyme. End-rhyme. internal **rhyme, end assonance make** reading the poems a frequent pleasure. There's a beautiful intelligence **in** one villager's **contemplation** of her dwindling marriage:

> ***Blind, I catch** the cough **of something***
> ***stalled:***
> ***And the red I feel as heat, I taste as salt.***

Reibetanz's attention to sound points to a **general** concern for prosody. ***Ashbourn*** is formally ambitious, offering among other things the complex **sestina,** the hymn, and **free** verse.

Despite a few poems that feel too long — in particular, "Judith Bolt's Dream **Story"** — the collation is engaging. Marked by craftsmanship and often perspicacity, these **village autobiographies improve with reading.— GIDEON FORMAN**

Flicker and Hawk, by Patrick **Friesen, Turnstone Press,** 73 pages. sg.95 paper (ISBN 0 88801 113 X).

PATRICK FRIESEN'S *Flicker and Hawk, his fifth* book, will **consolidate his** growing reputation. It begins **with** poems of **recollection** of a **small-town** youth and the contradictory responses it evokes — it is at the same time **a** place of **security** and affection, and one of narrow **religiosity,** "and I got out I'm getting out I'm getting out." In **one** of the early poems the **youthful persona** observes, "It took **my** breath **away** how **ferocious** love **could** be," and it is love **that** dominates **the** *two* **central sections** of the book — **love that is** ferocious, sexy, gentle, passionate, and contemplative by turns. **Friesen** often reminds me of **John Donne:** he has the **same sense** of the **conjunction** of sex and spirituality, and the belief that love **contains all contraries: "fire** and water **flicker** and hawk tbis is what we know of love." **The erotic intensity and questing** spirituality **are** suggested in "breaking for light":

> *I'm asking **can** you **take** me **straight***
> *on? **I'm a** lion **some days a rabbit***
> ***I'm not anyone** else*
> ***can** you take my **kisses** and my **juice?***
> ***I want** you all the **way*** sometimes ***at***
> ***close quarters** and **at** length **I want***
> ***to** be everyone **I am with** you*
> *when I'm lewd **or unruly** can **you***
> ***laugh? when** I'm render what then?*
>
> ***you want to** know **where I am this is***
> *my hand this is how **we touch is***
> *there anything **else** we **could want?***
> *I'm **breaking for** light **I don't know***
> ***what's next but** I keep **finding** out.*

The **final** section. **"an** audience with the **dalai lama," focuses** on the quest **adumbrated** in "breaking for light":

having rejected the small town's **fundamentalism,** he **struggles** toward **a new affirmation:**

> ***I want something other than rhetoric***
> ***or ritual maybe a gesture***
> ***my devotion to the lord is imperfect***
> ***there's** some **fight left** in me **I may***
> *be hooked **I am not landed***

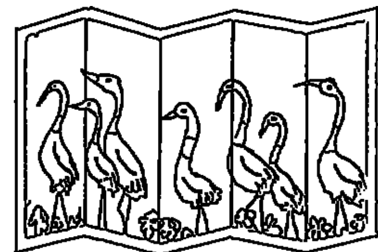
***Flicker and Hawk* is an intensely personal** book, **and** a rewarding one. **Friesen's** long, unpunctuated lines **move fluently,** and he "ever puts **a** foot wrong. He's one of our major poetic voices.

— PAUL DENHAM

A **Time** for **Loving,** by **Rienzi Crusz,** TSAR Publications, **(P.O.** Box **6996,** Station A, Toronto, **Ont. M5W 1X7),** 90 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 **92066 01 7).**

RIENZI CRUSZ'S *A lime for Loving* is a **selection** from **his** three previous volumes and also **contains** several new poems. It **makes** possible **an overview** of hi poetic career, **which** is not one marked by much **development; Crusz** found **his** characteristic subjects and idiom early. One of the central **structural** principles of his poetry, as **Réshard Gool** points out **in** the introduction, is the **contrast** between **Eastern** and Western civilization, as imaged by Sri Lanka, his place of birth, **and** Canada. The **East** is **an intensely sensuous** place for **Crusz,** dominated by strong clear **colours** -red **of** blood and sun, black. saffron. **brown** of skin, blue of sea and peacock, green of forest-and the smell of **frangipani.** Indeed, there's so much red **in** these poems **that** after **a** while it **begins** to feel like a stock **image** of **vitality.**

The **only colour consistently** linked **with the West** is **white, which evokes both** the snowy Canadian landscape **and an** anti-vital force, "the white silence **/** of civilization." Graffiti over **urinals is** evidence of sexual energy misdirected, and Ann Landers "walks out of her column **/** with a bucket of **quenching**



words: **/ Cool** it, baby. **. . ." Frangipani** is replaced with the smell of Dettol. **Crusz** speaks as **an immigrant,** alienated from his new **land** and nostalgic for his lost home, yet he also attempts to **understand** the myths **that** have **shaped** the **analytical** Western **consciousness —** the story of Eden, which **Crusz** reads as anti-erotic, and of Samson, **who** rejects love for

power. Yet occasionally the Canadian scene can yield images of harmony and wholeness:

And I. an old poet
sit on this pier, a witness
to the red rabbi of sun
finally chanting the wedding psalm
for Simcoe Lake and Simcoe sky
as a lone gull locks its wings
and glides in the amen of an arc.
("At *the* Wedding of the Lake")

Life goes on in Canada too, and there's comedy and pathos as well as white silence.

— PAUL DENHAM

How to Read Faces, by Heather spears, Wolsak & Wynn, 64 pages, $7.00 paper (ISBN 0 919897 06 1).

THIS IS A collection of exceedingly beautiful poetry — beautiful but very lonely. too. The beauty comes from Heather Spears's background as a visual artist; her painter's eye for detail is cootplemented by an acuity of language that often makes these poems almost painful in their spareness and intensity. The loneliness comes from the poet's overwhelming sense of psychic isolation.

How to Read Faces seems an ironic *title,* because it implies an understanding that penetrates the superficial — in effect, reading a face means reading a mind. But repeatedly the poet/artist's faithfulness to physical detail only lays bare her awareness of an inability to go beyond it. "The effort to reach you/has exhausted me/and I have not even moved/I have said nothing," she writes in "Studies-traede." Attempts at connection are met by a lover's punishing silence or the profound indifference of her surroundings: "I am/an accident, my being here/a chance that changes nothing." Even her instrument of sharpest perception — drawing — offers only "the terrified awareness of absence."

The detachment that sometimes chills How lo *Read Faces is* offset by the tension between Spears's sense of isolation and her desire to break out of it. In "How to live in this world" survival is associated with emotional withdrawal. Yet in the following poem, "To my body at birth," the poet suggests that the challenge of opening to life is something that can be met, though only when stronger:

YOU *allow*
the *world its light,* its *wilderness.*
Not yet, you are too tired. In your own
lime.

How to Read Faces is very much a private book. But it's written with a clarity and submerged emotional power that allow its inwardness to touch others. giving at least a recognition of *shared aloneness.* In that way, it connects.

— BARBARA CAREY

POLITICS & POLITICOS

Exporting Danger: A History of the Canadian Nuclear Export Program, by Ron Pinch, Black Rose, 235 pages. $14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920057 72 I).

WHAT COULD HAVE been a taut, bard-bitting exposé of Canada's less than moral nuclear dealings is instead a sad case of unrealized potential. To his credit, Ron Pinch has done a good deal of research, but what could have been a definitive reader's guide to Canadian contributions to nuclear proliferation is instead an incomplete book loaded with typographical errors and some of the unappetizing aspects inherent in academic writing.

This is a pity, for the book begins with good intentions and on sound footing. Finch explores the early days of Canada's role in the nuclear industry and the ugly political moves that forced the public to believe in the necessity and profitability of the miracle energy source, uranium. However, the promising introduction runs into a major roadblock: namely, chapter two. From here on the book reads like a college thesis, complete with those uncomfortable stylistic mechanisms that can make even the most interesting of subjects seem repetitious and boring.

The structure of the book is also questionable: 30 pages of footnotes are placed before the appendices and there is no index, a virtual necessity for so technical and factual a study. More disappointing, the main body of the book does not come to a definite conclusion:.it drifts to an uncertain finishing point and fails to place things into perspective.

The case Finch wishes to make is undermined when even untrained eyes begin to suspect the veracity of certain figures, which are called into question by the large number of typos. Had more care and time been given, the final version could have served as a valuable sourcebook for those involved in the fight against the nuclear menace.

MATTHEW BEHRENS

SPORTS & ADVENTURE

On Boxing, by Joyce Carol Oates, Doubleday, illustrated, 116 pages, $21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 23890 8).

"IT'S ON *boxing*?" a friend said incredulously, when I mentioned that 1 was reviewing Joyce Carol Oates's newest book. OK, I confess that I've never seen a prizefight in my life. But you don't have to be a fan of "the sweet science of bruising" to enjoy this slim, elegant treatise by one of North America's foremost writers.

The book could just as easily be called On *the Metaphysics of Boxing. Sure., there's a survey* of the sport's history, from its gladiatorial origins in ancient Greece to bare-knuckle contests in 18th-century Britain to contemporary multi-million-dollar title matches. There are photos, pithy quotas, and lots of boxing lore.. But the heart of On *Boxing is* what Oates's free-wheeling, speculative imagination makes of the sport. Did I say sport? "At its moments of greatest intensity it seems to contain so complete and so powerful an image of life — life's beauty, vulnerability, despair, incalculable and often self-destructive courage — that boxing *is* life," Oates writes. She presents boxing as art, as tragedy, as the crucible of racial/class anger, as a severe and all-consuming religion.

Of course, after all these ideas we are still left with the physical reality of the sport, something that Oates, a lifetime fan of the ring, doesn't evade. Boxing is about pain, about getting bit, about force prevailing. According to Oates. "it's the very image. the more terrifying for being so stylized, of mankind's collective aggression." Her convictions about human nature and masculinity are troubling, to say the least. But On *Boxing* is still an illuminating, thought-provoking essay. In one chapter, Oates describes

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Forthcoming: also watch for the Collected Poems of Ralph Gustafson, Volumes 1 & 2, Fall 1987

images of the sport's most dramatic moments as "powerful, haunting, unsettling." The same could be said of this book. — BARBARA CAREY

REVIEW

Anarchy and afterthoughts

By **Susan Glickman**

Afterworlds, by Gwendolyn MacEwen, McClelland & Stewart, 125 pages, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710-542s 9).

A moment in a small hotel with an old man who was a sheriff in the Wild East. talking of Lawrence and Palestine, and the radio tells us a new satellite has been launched at Cape Canaveral. He is almost deaf, so I point to the dark skies above Galilee and make circles with my hand. All the wars he has fought

Retreat into the silence of space.

— "Letters to Joseph in Jerusalem"

READERS FAMILIAR with Gwendolyn MacEwen's work will remember this old man. his stories and photographs of Lawrence of Arabia. We met him in a" earlier avatar of "Letters to Joseph," the suite of Middle-Eastern poems called "One Arab Flute" published in *The Shadowmaker* (1969), and he was also recalled in the foreword to *Lawrence poems* (1982). But in his first incarnation he was simply local colour; in his second, a guide to the private imagination. Here, in keeping with the cosmology of MacEwen's new book, he is a frail survivor of a time when war, however volved courage and afforded dignity — implied some dimension of humanity. MacEwen followed him into that past in her last volume; this one points "to the dark skies" silence of space.

But it does so without vaporizing social history; and political comparison of "One Letters to Joseph" with a Flute" reveals how much more thoughtfully MacEwen has explored her 1962 trip to Israel as the years have passed; how much more meaningful — globally and personally — the besieged and divided holy city has become over those years. For *Afterworlds*, MacEwen's polemical since *The Armies of the Moon* (1972). insists on the collective nature of the human experiment. What- ardours or miseries experiences — and a whole section of love to MacEwen's them — no one acts alone., no couple acts alone, against history.

Comparison with *The Armies of the Moon* is suggested most strongly by the organization *Afterworlds:* earlier this one pair which provides contextual definitions for the titles of the book's internal divisions. Here they are "Ancient Slang." "Anarchy," "Apocalypse," "Afterimages." "After-Thoughts." and "Avatars." The first section sets up the cosmology of the book: "Being means breaking the symmetry life is not a fearful broken symmetry" Genesis"). The second section defines the relationship of poetry to the world and and amoral Section is "t(h)ue"e consists of two long "Letters to the Joseph" and "Terror and Erebus," her verse drama about the expedition to discover the Northwest passage. dialogic; remains sen searches for the discern anklin expedition to meaning, tries to reconstruct the meaning of Jerusalem for Joseph. Thematically and aesthetically we centre the section, fifth fourth and "After-images" form "Afterthoughts" kind of pair also; first elegiac lyrics and then prose poems about the author's childhood. The prose poems carefully crafted than those in The *Fire-Eaters*, but except for the wonder- Three -Vi MacEwen hasn't yet mastered the stylistic possibilities of the form, although it's clear what she *wants* fmm it: a play of narrative against epiphany. Another exception: "Me and the Runner," which, careering through 18 commas with bravado-&d grace, provides a link to section five, "Avatars." the love poems. Here cosmology is redefined in terms of the body:

The sound we made when we came, love,
Will sound the same and is the same
As the cry we will make when we go.
("Daynights")

And yes, it is a female cosmology. Interesting to read this book after last year's Di Cicco and Dewdney — put it on the same shelf. This is serious poetry; it "never forgets the holiness of the heart's affections" in its terror of and respect for "the silence of space." But to understand this book, don't start with tbe deliberately "thematic" poems that frame it. Start with "Polaris," the meditation of a prisoner of the Gulag, which concludes:

If you consult the polestar for the truth
of your present position. you will learn that
you have no
position, position is illusion (consider
this
endlessly still self, endlessly turning);
this prison is actually your freedom, and
it k you, it k you, you
are the only thing in this frozen night
which is really moving □

REVIEW

The home of the braves

By **Douglas Glover**

The Nootka: **Scenes and Studies** of Savage Life, by Gilbert Sproat, edited by Charles Lillard, Sono Nis, 180 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919203 63 9).

IN THE SUMMER of 1860, Gilbert Sproat, a 26-year-old Scottish businessman, sailed the armed ship *Woodpecker to the* tip of Alberni Inlet, evicted a band of Indians he found already living there, and built a sawmill. For the next five years, he managed the mill, acted as a local magistrate, and watched (often, he says, with pencil and notebook in hand) the "Savages."

He called them the Aht for the suffix appended to their tribal names (Ahousaht, Sheshaht, etc.), but today we know them as the Nootka. a linguistic grouping of several tribes and tribelets living on the west coast of Vancouver Island and on Cape Flattery in the State of Washington. In their pristine state, they practised head-hunting and a biie inversion of capitalism, accumulating wealth in order to give it away in a ritual called the potlatch. They kept slaves (often prostituting the females), fought bloody wars (on a vendetta principle), and lived in semi-permanent pre-fabricated wood houses. They fished mostly, or hunted whales, moving their dwellings seasonally between the coast and up-river salmon runs. They used sea shells as currency, and carved themselves beautiful lightweight dugout canoes. They worshipped the sun and the moon, the god-hero Quawteaht and Tootooch, the thunderbird, and believed in a country-club-like afterworld for their nobility and a second-class afterworld for commoners and slaves.

By the time Sproat came on the scene, as he himself realized, the Nootka culture and social structure were already in decline. The first whites had arrived less than 90 years before. In 1785 the great trade in sea otter pelts with China began. first boosting the Indian economy (causing a brief efflorescence of art and the potlatch), the" undermining it by diverting the Nootka fmm traditional subsistence patterns. Trade goods (blankets, metalware, traps, guns) had replaced the old wood, bone. antler, and bark-fibre

technology. Syphilis, smallpox, and alcohol had devastated the population. By 1865, when Sproat left Alberni, the fierce tribesmen who had once swarmed over the trade ship *Boston* in Nootka Sound, taking 25 heads and two slaves, had been reduced to a depressed remnant living on the margin of a furiously advancing industrial age.

Out of print for more than a century, Sproat's book about the Aht, *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* (retitled *The Nootka* for the new Sono Nis edition, which includes a helpful introduction by Charles Lillard), is a product of that Victorian era when British men of affairs — educated, moralizing, acquisitive, superior. and curious — spread British capital and the British Imperium over much of the newly known world. It is at once a memoir, an anthropological study, and a period piece. Its author was a confident, cheerful. and intelligent man who balked at little — fmm linguistic theorizing (Nootka had no real grammar, he thought. but made interesting use of compound words) to spending the night with nothing but a cedar tree for shelter (his joy in the woods is contagious).

Hi ethnography is fascinating; given that it is first-hand and just about all we have from the period. One cannot fault him for his ignorance of 20th-century anthropology. He makes an effort to puzzle out the still puzzling (to non-Indians) Nootka rank and caste system. He describes a potlatch (without using the word), only partly realizing its crucial role in the social dynamic. He witnesses what may have been a human sacrifice connected with Nootka winter ceremonials. He is authoritative on fii and fishing technology, includes a short anthology of oral traditions, and talks about Nootka cooking, property rights, house-building, and the role of women.

Sproat's style is plain but serviceable, and he displays a distinct narrative flair, couching many observations in the form of stories: a mass deer hunt, one of the last great inter-tribal wars. his unsuccessful pursuit of an Indian murderer. He is at his best telling these stories, at his worst when he is moralizing or explaining how the poor Aht fall short of your average Englishman. Occasionally, he produces images of startling beauty, as when he describes a Nootka salmon-fishing ritual:

> . . . at the commencement of the season, men and women go into the water on a moonlight night. and lie quietly on the surface, floating here and there, without speaking a word, now and then crossing one another's arms and spreading the backs of their hands towards the moon.

All in all there is something touching and real about this book. Sproat's Victorian racial prejudice and his rigid belief in what anthropologists call the "civ/sav continuum" were his armour against the truth. (Lillard's historical and biographical introduction, though adequate in terms of fact, is not, I think, sufficiently deconstructive in regard to Sproat's attitudes.) Now they only demonstrate how wrong-headed well-intentioned mm and women can he. and how ill-understood and poorly served the Nootka were, even by those who tried to help. ☐

REVIEW

Fighting the good fight

By Norman Snider

Four Days of Courage, by Bryan Johnson. McClelland & Stewart, 285 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4448 8).

OF RECENT COUPS and revolutions everybody's current favourite was the one that saw the downfall of the Filipino tyrant Ferdinand Marcos and his footwear-loving wife, Imelda. Here at last was a political conflict where the forces of good and the forces of evil were blissful& clear-cur; the rebels were not, for once. Marxist dogmatists or Islamic fundamentalists; best of all, almost nobody was killed.

The Globe and Mail's former Asia correspondent, Bryan Johnson, has in *Four Days of Courage* written a fine straightforward account of the Philippines' 75-hour revolution that is marked by a warm affection for that country and its people. Johnson is well aware of some of the more comic-opera aspects of the revolution that brought Cory Aquino to power. He follows all the many twists and turns, bizarre stand-offs, and surreal confrontations between tanks and nuns: he understands the oddly *festive nature* of the coup.

Then there is a cast of characters so colourful that it seems a novelist like Thomas Pynchon with a taste for comic names has invented it wholesale. How about the rebel commander "Gringo" Honasan? Or his buddy "Red" Kapunan? Or the key engagement of the entire episode, the Battle for Channel 4?

This last is perhaps the most important of all the aspects of the coup that Johnson deals with. As the rebel General Ramos was well aware, the coup that deposed Marcos was at bottom a media war that was mostly fought in such places as the David Brinkley show and on *Nightline*. With a huge U.S. audience watching the whole thing live by satellite, with hundreds of foreign newsmen in the insurgent

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crowds that came out to challenge his troops, Marcos would have had to risk becoming one of the most hated of butchers on an international scale if he had even attempted to put down People Power by means of bloodshed.

Johnson has done a remarkably thorough job of research in this book, interviewing just about all of the major figures involved, military and otherwise, and they are remarkably open and candid in their comments about their part in the events. The best chapter comes toward the end. Johnson's eyewitness account of the storming of Malacanang Palace by Aquino's supporters has a raw authenticity hard to surpass. This chapter culminates in one extraordinarily cinematic image: the U.S. helicopters taking Marcos and his family to safety seen against the backdrop of a tropical night, palm trees, and a full moon.

Occasionally, however, one would welcome an interruption in Johnson's onrushing account of events, a pause for a fuller political analysis. He concentrates so exclusively on tbe events of the few days of revolution that a non-expert in Philippine affairs has only a sketchy notion of the indigenous political forces. that kept Marcos's "kleptocracy" in power for so long. Similarly, Johnson often assumes a familiarity on the reader's part with many of the figures involved in the events. Too frequently they are introduced without his having taken the trouble to explain just who they am.

Theo, unfortunately, them is the matter of style. *Four Days of Courage* is written in wall-to-wall journalese. Clichés abound. Terror is inevitably "stark." Silence is, just as inevitably, "stunned." Notbing is ever just wrong, it has to be "terribly wrong." Nor is Johnson immune from the foreign correspondent's voice, an attitude best described as "li'l ol' me in no-man's-land." Them is a gee-whiz quality to *Four Days of* Courage that occasionally detracts from its many virtues; a naïve Canadian boy's astonished delight in finding himself in a land where folks actually shoot at each other. "When an M-16 or Galil goes off," Johnson reports. "them is a neat series of 'thunk-thunk-thunk' sounds and a lot of people fall over dead."

Neat. all right.

Nonetheless, Johnson displays a charming willingness to submerge himself in the exotic south-seas culture of the Philippines, to suspend so-called objectivity and immerse himself in the concerns of a people he has come to care about profoundly. Despite the chaos, corruption, and religious hysteria of Filipino society, Johnson never once takes a stance of cultural superiority. His Filipinos come across as immensely warm and sympathetic: hugely attractive. The book. despite its accounts of confrontation and violence, has an odd effca: one feels like setting out for Manila immediately. Like the revolution it describes, *Four Days of Courage is one* of those rare books that leaves a reader with a sense of hope. □

REVIEW

Passages from India

By *Patricia Morley*

Below the Peacock **Fan: First Ladies** of the Raj, by **Marian Fowler, Viking (Penguin),** *337* pages, 525.00 cloth **(ISBN 0** 670 80748 **6).**

MARIAN FOWLER'S wickedly witty portrait of four of India's vicereines during the three-quarters of a century when the Raj was at its peak is in many ways a sequel to *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada.* Both books are group biographies centred on a theme: the conflict between the behaviour and attitudes of the model female in Victorian England and the characteristics needed by the same women for survival in very different conditions abroad. These group biographies, along with *Redney: A Life of Sara Jeanette Duncan,* establish Fowler as a major biographer whose scholarly training is nicely masked in a velvet glove of irony and female intuition.

The women — Emily Eden, Charlotte Canning, Edith Lytton, and Mary Curzon — h&been chosen -to represent four generations of British rule in India, from 1835 to 1904. Fowler calls their periods Early, Middle, High, and Late Raj, those four major phases being "by turns *fanciful* and greedy. sanctimonious and fearful, hypocritical and hidebound, arrogant and despondent — and doomed." The women were remarkable individuals, each embarked on what Fowler calls the greatest adventure of her life.:

> There they were, settled snugly into the plush upholstery of their English days, when suddenly the call came: brother or husband had been appointed by the British Sovereign as Governor General of India, and sister or wife was expected to accompany him to that distant, disturbing land.

India is disturbing to sensibilities bred anywhere, in any culture. Theo as now, beneath the glitter and the beauty them stood an India of mud and muddle. an India of violent and irreconcilable contrasts, "cancelling each other out. leaving a void without values." The women had good reason to fear disease, disaster, and what Fowler calls "the nastiest fear of all: fear of falling into the darkest crevices of one's psyche, below the propriety of peacock fans."

The women's lives had been made infinitely mom difficult by their social eonditioning. Hem. as in *The Embroidered Tent,* Fowler makes effective use of the so-called conduct books. which had programmed women to be passive, receptive, timid, prudish, and physically frail.

Emily Eden accompanied her brother George (Lord Auckland) to India in 1835. The sea voyage took five months. Settled into Government House in Calcutta, Emily faced the formality and flatness of routines. the appalling heat, and an army of servants. social activities provided one of the few available diversions.

Letters were another, a fact to which we owe the abundant evidence of these lives that survives today. Fowler has made good use of her very rich sources in public and private archives in Britain: letters, journals. photographs, sketches, and watercolours enable her, and the reader, to envisage these lives in vivid detail.

For two and a half years the Edens travelled through northern India to maintain the power-of the Crown throughout this vast territory. Their party, some 10 miles long, consisted of 12,000 people, complete with homes. elephants, and long barges. Emily, whose chief defence against India was her acerbic wit, wrote of the "extraordinary folly" of the march. She chose to be part of what she condemned and to accompany her brother throughout the adventure, which sapped her strength and ruined her nerves.

Charlotte Stuart went to India in 1856 with her husband, the Hon. Charles Canning. Their perils included the great mutiny of that year. Charlotte, as she wrote to her sister, had no part in the decision to go but was "ready to follow like a dog." Fowler pictures her as supremely good and chaste, "perhaps a little too coldly chaste within the matrimonial bed." Charles soon found livelier ladies.

Charlotte died in India at the age of 44 after travelling "up country" with her husband. Fowler, with a snideness that is frequent in her writing, observes that Charlotte had finally managed to do the one thing, the only thing, that would secure Charles's love and devotion forever: she had died.

The tart tone is usually amusing, and seems inseparable from the feminist eye. In her acknowledgements Fowler notes that male authors almost invariably end by thanking the wife who did the chores of typing, proofreading, and index-making. "I therefore wish to state with modest pride that I did these tasks all by myself."

Fowler's other trademark is ha love of

alliteration. Tbls can be overdone, as in a description of India's underbelly, "sordid and sinister and snaking from those stinking alleys." It is usually effective: Hindu gods "leered lasciviously."

The book affords some Startling glimpses of Victorian England and the Indian sub-continent. It is also a significant contribution to the history of women's lives and female experience: in short, thoroughly enjoyable. □

REVIEW

Red, white, and black

By *Frederick I.* Case

The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume 2: Canada, 1830-1865, edited by C. Peter Ripley, University of North Carolina Press, 560 pages, $35.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8078 1698 1).

SINCE 1976 the Black Abolitionist Papers Project has collected some 14,000 documents that are to be published in five volumes, the last three devoted entirely to the abolitionist papers of the United States. The first volume, The *British Isles, 1830-1865* (published in 1985), brought to light a great number of forgotten abolitionist voices in Great Britain who were neither members of parliament, peers of the realm, ministers of religion, nor wealthy *merchants.* and provided documentary evidence that the abolitionist movement gained its dynamic character in Britain from a succession of Afro-Americans who denounced slavery in speeches, letters, and articles.

The second volume is equally thorough. It presents 96 selected documents, produced by Canadian abolitionists of African origin who travelled throughout the country to carry their message of freedom. Some of the documents come from very well-known, and others from very Little-known personalities of the black Canadian community of the period. Unfortunately, the concentration on Ontario and British Columbia leaves the feeling of reading a work that is incomplete.

The introduction to the volume, a masterpiece of historical writing, provides a succinct account of blacks in Canada from about 1830 to tbe Civil War. detailing their anti-slavery struggles and underlining their attempts to build a community through action. The various emigration schemes for settlement in Africa, Haiti, other parts of the Caribbean, and South America reveal a people in search of a home and an identity. Eventually, even Mary AM Shadd — who defiantly defended the integration of blacks into Canadian society -Would return to the United States. along with tens of thousands of others, to participate in the Reconstruction. The dynamic leadership that Canadian blacks enjoyed during this period shifted to the States, where many former inhabitants of Canada achieved prominent social and political positions.

Item 5 of the volume gives the proceedings of a meeting held in Toronto on January 13, 1838. The minutes are approximately two pages long, preceded by a brief introduction and followed by a little more than five pages of annotations. This is the general format followed throughout the book. The annotations have been very meticulously documental with brief biographical notes on those named in the document, explanations of incidents referred to, and notes on newspapers or other publications mentioned. In this way one document provides us with a very broad view of North American history and illustrates the degree to which blacks of Canada were involved in various aspects of the anti-slavery struggle.

Other items indicate the extent to which the community was tom between the attraction of emigration schemes and the intense feeling that those blacks already in Canada should remain and build their future here. Though we have traditionally see" Henry Bibb and Mary A"" Shadd as the major antagonists in the conflict between self-help or dependence on the fund-raising of sympathetic whites, these documents make us realize that the issues were much deeper, much more complex and urgent than has hitherto been revealed.

In a letter dated March 13, 1855, the True Band Society of Amherstburg told Shadd, editor of the *Provincial Freeman,* that although they were fugitives who bad benefited from the fund-raising efforts of others they preferred not to depend on such humiliating aid. They announce that they have founded their organization in an attempt to strengthen their own community ties and to-help future fugitives from slavery in the United States.

But the time soon came when the movement was reversed, and the former fugitives began to return home to fight in the Civil-War. In a letter dated April 21, 1863, by Sarah Lester of Vancouver Island, we learn that the community was far from unanimous on the subject of recruitment of blacks in Canada for the Union army. The letter touches on several themes, including the collaboration of the North in the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Act, the indifference of the churches in the North, and rapes by conquering soldiers. Once the reader overcomes the complexities of the style (she assumes a male narrative voice, punctuated by verse) it becomes clear that Lester is an intelligent person of great sensitivity.

Of the many personal letters in the volume none are more worthy of serious study than the two written by Henry Biib to his former slave-master Albert Sibley. It is in such letters that we see the depth of the social and psychological scars borne by those who had been slaves. They help us to understand why Bibb advocated separate settlements of blacks in Canada and why, through his *Voice of the Fugitive,* he opposed the integrationist sentiments of Mary Ann Shadd.

There is no doubt of this volume's importance to Canadian blacks. It provides an in-depth view of our history during a relatively short but significant period and provides a more precise understanding of our current situation. One can only hope that the time will come very soon when Canadian scholars will undertake a task of similar magnitude and present us with documentation of an equallv high standard on the history of &I-- Canadians. □

REVIEW

Lady of the house

By* Barbara Wade *Rose

Brazilian Journal, by P.K. Page, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 224 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 166 I).

MORE THAN 30 years have passed since P.K. Page followed the newly appointed Canadian ambassador — her husband William Arthur Irwin — to Brazil, but men continue to dominate politics and the diaspora of diplomatic wives continues even in the enlightened 1980s. They serve in one of the most maligned, least understood professions. Outsiders see travel to exotic destinations, a free-of-charge household of servants, and the occasional cocktail party — none of which could justify a Gotlieb-given slap to the social secretary. The diplomatic wife sees endless social visits with strangers, demanding dinners for 50, and what Page calls the "international two-step" of protocol, punctuating a" isolation in a foreign country that can lead to loneliness and desperation.

Canadian women accompanying their husbands to remote destinations have produced some fine writing, though. *Brazilian Journal* recalls the 1950s sojourn in Somaliland that Margaret Laurence recorded as the wife of a civil engineer in *New Wind in a Dry Land.* Page is a woman *far* removed from the

colonial wife Laurence once described and despised. It was while she and Irwin were in Australia that she learned she had won the 1954 Governor General's Award for poetry for The *Metal and the Flower*, the highlight of a distinguished career: Page has written seven collections of poetry and co-founded tbc Montreal literary magazine, *Preview.*

As diplomats, both Page and Irwin were pioneers of political sensitivity. In addition to fighting off the Brazilian heat and peeling tbe mildew off embassy chairs they set about learning Portuguese as fast as possible, rather than relying upon interpreters as most of their colleagues dii. In *Brazilian Journal* Page recalls the pratfalls on the mad to fluency: when she was concerned about an oversupply of apples one day she solemnly told the cook not to buy any more young girls.

The pink-and-white tiered house the Irwins were assigned in Rio sat overshadowed by dark, forest-covered mountains. *The* contrast between them serves as an apt motif for the contrast between Page's "job" as a diplomatic wife and the exotic, erotic land she fell in love with. A total of 60 diplomatic missions required calls — Irwin visiting the diplomats, Page the wives. Over tea and cookies some of them cautioned her to beware of servants' stealing; others told her "not to bother" to get to know Brazilians. The most practical advice came from a 17-year expatriate resident, Princess Mechtilde Czartoryska, who advised her not to pull up any plants in the jungle "because your fingers will be painful, filled with pus, and next day you will find a beast under each fingernail."

Page spent her spare time not pulling plants but watching them and the rest of tbe populace, and her poet's eye produces some delightful observations. A museum curator she and Irwin meet has "a face just like a dog's. Most extraordinary. As I looked at his eyes, they were dog's eyes — pale eyes, honey-coloured — and I thought 'Nonsense, look at his nose,' and bis nose too was a dog's. And so I switched to bis teeth — pointed, white, dog's teeth. Uncanny. But such a polite dog. Wouldn't cock his leg Just anywhere."

They see lovers climbing flights of steps at the 0 Corcovado to be photographed under the 50-metre-high figure of Christ. Of the scenery below her. Page writes, "Mountain spurs reaching for the sky, their valleys seemingly filled with an avalanche of buildings — red-roofed and white colonial buildings, modern skyscrapers — spilling onto the coastal plain to be brought to a sudden stop by the ocean's sandy shore. If there is a more beautiful setting for a city, I can't imagine it." Scattered among these observations are enough descriptions of blond frogs, exotic birds, and colourful flowers to transport any armchair traveller.

It also transported Page. During her years in Brazil the poet P.K. Page remained mostly mute (one entry reads. "What *to* do about writing? Is it all dead?") in favour of the artist P.K. Irwin. She found she could express her feelings about the country best on canvas, and much of *Brazilian Journal* is taken up with her ventures into pencil sketching, pen-and-inks. oils, and art lessons. As a way of understanding Brazil, it worked better than words. After months of painting that Page considered neither progressive nor beautiful, she wrote, "A strange experience a few weeks ago while I sat at the Pioneiras. Suddenly saw one of the very beautiful Brazilian girls with quite new eyes. Saw her as a work of an. From that moment on my whole point of view has changed — become Brazilian."

The chief fault of *Brazilian Journal* lies in its definition: it hangs somewhat unsatisfactorily between journal and journalism. Page notes at one point that she never seems to write anything distressing about herself in her journal; to the reader, she writes almost nothing about herself at all. That would be fine if a more polished, journalistic view of Brazil were being presented, but the book is very much a journal when Page doesn't feel like finishing an idea. In describing a kind of bird that builds a clay nest, she notes, "This same bird has also been known to seal his wife inside with clay." Theo she adds several questions and exclamation marks as if she can't believe it — but she doesn't bother to investigate the bird's

habits further. A lion-monkey Page acquired is later referred to briefly:

> I realize I have never reported the flight of Benjamina, or, in detail, her charming and tiny life with us. Or the small but real tears I shed over her loss. How to describe her delicious smell or record her habits? Another day, perhaps, when my head is sufficiently clear to think in miniature terms..

She "ever follows up.

In her foreword to *Brazilian Journal* Page says she fleshed out her notes here and there, but occasional bare bones may have been left for authenticity's sake. If they are unsatisfying. it is merely in contrast to the main course. ❑

REVIEW

Standing up for himself

By Paul Denham

The Uncollected Acorn: Poems, 1950-1986, by Milton Acorn, edited by James Deahl, Deneau, 149 pages, $12.95 papa (ISBN 0 88879 150 X).

Whiskey Jack, by Milton Acorn. HMS Press (P.O. Box 7, Station D, Scarborough. Ont. M1R 4Y7), 49 pages (ISBN 0 919957 21 8).

THE UNCOLLECTED ACORN brings together poems fmm Milton Acorn's whole career, some previously published in magazines but most selected fmm Acorn's manuscripts in the public archives. Editor James Deahl has organized them topically in five groups — love poems. elegies, political poems, poems of nature, and religious meditations. He also provides dates, so that we can see how the poems are related to Acorn's poetic development.

A couple of poems in an uncharacteristic 19th-century-style turn out to be from 1950. the beginning of Acorn's career: this one, for example, sounds like Lampman or Roberts:

> *The autumn edgens and the geese go*
> *s o u t h .*
> *From towns and trudgey fields their*
> *echelons*
> *are glimmered, and recall a long-time*
> *drought;*
> *the voice-cracked air of camps in*
> *nomad dawns...*

There are a *lot* of experiments with the sonnet form, an interest that found fuller expression in *Jackpine Sonnets* (1977). "Never Say It's all for the Best," a poem dated 1958, contains lines later used in "Knowing I Live in a Dark Age."

Yet few of these poems are likely to endure with Acorn's best work. Some of the political poems read more like letters to the editor than like real poems, and in the love poems he is often as interested in his own erections as in the object of his desire. If they haven't appeared in print before this, that may he because Acorn, an exacting craftsman, knew they weren't ready. *The Uncollected Acorn* is *not a brilliant* final *testament,* but rather a window onto Acorn's career, and a tribute to the importance of that career for English-Canadian poetry.

It's not at all clear why we have two posthumous collections of Acorn. *Whiskey Jack, a* much smaller book than *The Uncollected Acorn,* is offered without explanation. Is it composed of

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poems that didn't make it, for whatever reasons, into the *Uncollected*? Or was it in press at the time of Acorn's death7 There's no editor; Deahl is listed es the proofreader, and there's an introduction by Al Purdy and a" afterword by Gwendolyn MacEwen, but nobody takes responsibility for *Whiskey Jack* or explains what it represents.

Purdy quotes a passage from "The Hummingbird" that, es other reviewers have already noticed, is different fmm the one on page 14; it turns out that Purdy's version is the one that appeared in Acorn's 1969 collection *I've Tasted My Blood*. Future scholars will have fun sorting out the textual problems. But who's complaining? It all makes work for the working man (or woman).

Many of the poems in *Whiskey Jack* are about owls, ravens, crows, swallows, and herons. "Mister Owl" indicates the reason for Acorn's interest in birds:

> To *be what you are with no intention*
> *Or concept of being otherwise....*

These are self-sufficient, unpretentious Canadian birds, utterly determined to be themselves — rather like Acorn himself.

Them are some non-avian poems too, such as the comic "Sonnet X" — another erection poem — in which the poet makes love to a foghorn:

> *Waking with a heavy-duty thruster*
> *Rude as a rocket nuzzling orbit*
> *From my fork; I heard a soft contralto*
> *Hoot appealing like a love-sick dinosaur*
> *Through fog lingering from the lakeshore.*

We're so used to thinking of Acorn as a raging leftie that it's surprising how conservative he could be o" some issues; them are two anti-abortion poems in *Whiskey Jack*. Acorn's politics, like everything else about him, was his own creation entirely. He followed no party line. And a good thing too. ☐

REVIEW

Yesterday's heroes

By Joanne Tompkins

The *Dreamers*, by Thomas H. Raddall, Pottersfield Press, 141 pages. **$9.95 paper (ISBN** 0 919001 32 **7).**

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to Thomas Raddall's novel, *Pride's Fancy*, Fred Cogswell explains that Raddall "writes so very much about our past because he wants us to know where we lost our way and how precious was the way which we lost." Throughout *The Dreamers* — a collection of 10 short stories written between 1928 and 1955 but 'never published in book form — Raddall pits the pest against either the present or the future, and the age-old ways usually triumph.

In "The Lower Learning," for example, a seasoned lumberman must cope with three cocky forestry students end their scientific book-laming. While the old-timer accepts their education, his experience (comprising mostly "local colour an' usin' my eyes") wins out. In "The Pay-Off at Duncan's." a more obvious tribute to the past, a fiddler, whose traditional music soothes tbe angry lumbermen. mourns Nova Scotia's transformation from a thriving "nation o' sailors" to a province with considerably less power: "Now. we're cuttin' down our fine tall spruce an' makin' it into paper. ... Aye, good ship-wood blowin' about on windy corners in dirty city streets. That's what we've come to, mister."

Raddall's stories revere those days when life was simpler and Nova Scotia more prosperous. Reading them is like perusing a lively history book that teaches the art of making brooms for ships (quite different from the kitchen variety) and how to search for a youngster lost in the woods. They provide a wealth of heritage in a conversational, often humorous style.

Added to the detailed historical settings are strong characters, almost all of whom share the ability to survive anything that their harsh province throws in their way. Their determination to surmount their difficulties is presented in almost heroic terms. Yet these heroes are ordinary folk with little sophistication or formal education. They are real people who are all the stronger for having succeeded on their own.

The Dreamers is vintage Raddall, but it will not interest many readers who are unfamiliar with his work. Raddall's "safe." short stories — crafted in an almost Victorian manner — will seem outdated to those who enjoy experimental literature. His stories resolve happily-ever-after for the characters, though the historical backdrop often clouds ominously over the future. Several "my be too sentimental eve" for die-hard fans. In "Swan Dance," the most serious offender, a country schoolteacher pursues her dream of being a dancer; although her one attempt at stardom fails miserably, the widowed theatre manager admires her pluck end asks her to marry him. There is no credible build-up to such a" implausible proposal.

Caroline Fesant, the dancer in "Swan Dance," also demonstrates the trouble Raddall sometimes has in creating female characters. As long as they are as strong as their male counterparts the characterization is fine. Once they have moments of weakness, though. they become utterly wishy-washy. But as Rad-

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dall usually sticks to men or extremely hardy women, such weak women are rare.

The Dreamers is by no means experimental, but if one reads the book in the spirit in which it was written — adventurous historical anecdotes to carry the reader away fmm his 20th-century worries-it is very enjoyable. It also provides an excellent cross-section of the ordinary people who built Nova Scotia and hence, Canada. ☐

REVIEW

Other worlds

By I.M. Owen

A Sport of *Nature,* by Nadine Gordimer, Viking (Penguin), 341 pages, 522.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81826 7).

IT'S HARD FOR US to imagine what it has been like, over the past half-century, to be a white person with civilized views on race who was born and has continued to live in South Africa. That may sound like characteristic Canadian smugness, and certainly Canada isn't Utopia in that or any other respect. But — with the greatest respect for the contrary opinion of Chief Stevenson of the Peguis Reserve — it's nothing like South Africa.

In her early stories. collected in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1950) and *Friday's Footprint* (1960), Nadine Gordimer showed us the appalling social structure of South Africa as it was; her opposition was implicit, but never came as close to the surface as Elizabeth Spencer's attitudes to Mississippi society came in her early work, especially in her powerful 1950 novel *A Voice at the Back Door (recently* reissued, by the way, and highly recommended). In Gordimer's novella of 1966, *The Lute Bourgeois World,* the heroine's son expresses the feelings of a white liberal in describing his discomfort with a school friend:

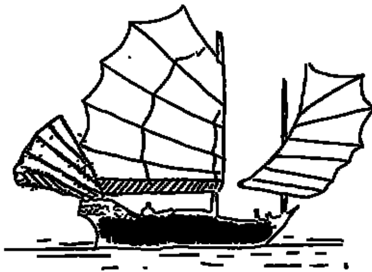
> "No. well, he's always talking about 'munts' and things — and when we get hot after soccer he rays we smell like kaffirs. Then when I get fed up he thinks it's because I'm offended at him saying I'm like a kaffir — he just doesn't understand that it's not that at all, what I can't stand is him calling them kaffirs and talking as if they were the only ones who ever smell. He just laughs and is as nice as anything. . . . He doesn't understand. There's nothing wrong in it, to him. Nearly all the boys are like that. You get to like them a hell of a lot, and then they say things. You just have to keep quiet." He was looking at me frowningly, his face stoical, dismayed, looking for an answer but knowing, already, there wasn't one. He said, "Sometimes I wish we were like other people."

The Late Bourgeois World shows the transitional stage: at the end the woman passes, inevitably and dangerously, into militant activism. In A *Sport of Nature* we *are* shown a woman in fully fledged activism; hot this is a woman whose girlhood made her future militancy seem far from inevitable. Her course, rather like Tabitha Baskett's in Joyce Cary's *Herself Surprised,* is determined by the identity of the me" she lives with. And. like Tabitha. once she enters into their worlds she becomes a major power in them.

Hillela is an outsider in manifold ways. A member of the white minority, and within it a member of the English-speaking minority, she is also nominally Jewish — nominally in two senses, being named after her Zionist great-grandfather Hillel. Her father is a travelling salesman who is usually far away; when she was an infant her mother ran off to live with a *fado* singer in Mozambique (Hillela's face is suspiciously Portuguese-looking) and lost all touch with her family.

In Hillela's childhood and early adolescence she lived, between terms at an Anglican boarding school in Rhodesia, with her mother's sister Olga and her well-to-do husband Arthur, both comfortably acceptant of things as they were in South Africa (but occasionally making "contingency plans not to go on living there"). After being expelled fmm school for dating a boy she didn't know was "coloured," she went to live with her earnestly liberal aunt, Pauline, and her husband Joe, a banister specializing in defending people accused of political crimes. In this Household she was loved hut considered almost as feckless and incapable of earnestness in the cause as her mother. Once she had been found in bed with Pauline's and Joe's son -virtually her foster-brother — there was nothing she could do but leave and strike out on her own.

Thus begins her immensely varied,



almost picaresque career. After going into exile with her first serious lover — an ambiguous figure who disappears and leaves her destitute — she marries an important black revolutionary and bears him a daughter (who grows up to be a famous fashion model in Paris). He is assassinated, and she spends some time in Eastern Europe negotiating arms purchases. Later she is taken up by a wonderfully characterized American woman:

> She and ha child came to the United States under the auspices (that's the vocabulary) of a political scientist who mved Africa as a new kind of white hunter. Dr. Leonie Adlestrop's trophies were causes, exiles, aid programmes and black political intrigues. In ha sixties, in sacks and sandals, floral dresses scoop necked for the climate showing the weathered hide of her bosom as two worn leather cushions crumpled together, she bore her trophies from Nigeria. Ghana, Angola, Mozambique. from Tanzania and Kenya, fmm little Swaziland and Lesotho, back to America. The university where she bad tenure as a Distinguished Professor was merely a base.

Through Leonie, Hillela meets a pleasant and wealthy young American liberal, lives with him, and nearly marries him. But she also meets through Leonie an African general, the once and future president of an emerging nation, and it is from her marriage to him that her eventual apotheosis comes.

It's a splendid novel, full of penetrating observation. witty comment, and vigorous adventure. I have reservations about it, but they're minor. One is that it's rather hard work to read. A reviewer of her first collection said: "Her attitude towards language is tbat of a woman towards the man she loves and as a result she winds it round her little finger." Today, she plays cat's cradle with it more than I like. What she says is beautifully expressed. It's also perfectly clear-on the second reading. "Pauline's smile quizzed gestural asides; she was the one who had to complete these for their initiators." Suppressing an impulse to send a sentence like tbis to the *New Yorker* for its How's That Again? Department, I take a second look and say "Oh, yes, I see what you mean." This exercise, repeated page after page, becomes a little wearisome.

My second reservation is about the oarrative method, which is to present the story as a biography of a world-famous person parts of whose past are still obscure. Every now and then she says that it isn't known what Hillela was doing at such-and-such a period. This doesn't sort well with the many scenes in which an omniscient narrator tells us not only what she was doing but what she said, what was said to her, and what her innermost thoughts were..

My final reservation is that I wish the author had omitted the last chapter, wbicb is set in the future and pictures a final resolution of the South African question tbt I gloomily regard as madly optimistic. ☐

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REVIEW

Crimes of the heart

By Rupert Schleder

The Heart of the **Country. by Fay Weldon, Hutchinson (Methuen), 199 pages,** $24.95 cloth **(ISBN 009 167090 X).**

WHAT A COMFORTING title *The Heart of the Country* — with its suggestions of "hearts of oak," home **virtues, and solid, positive values. Comforting, perhaps, for those** who approach **the work of Fay** Wddon for the first time. Those who are seasoned Wddon readers. including **a** block of feminists and those who were converted by her readings at Toronto's **Harbourfront, will** take **up this** new **fic**tion **with far less assurance** of any kind of comfort.

The British **public** has had a **better** opportunity **to get** to know **Weldon's** work. **Her** output there for the stage, for radio, and **especially** for television — some 35 TV **scripts** between 1966 and **1980,** including adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice* and an episode for *Upstairs, Downstairs* — continues to be prominent. There are also two quite provocative, unorthodox books, *Rebecca West* in the "Lives of Modern Women" series and *Letters to Alice* on the novels of Jane **Austen.**

The breadth of **her** interests and concerns can be attributed in part to her **English birth,** in 1933, her **early** years **in** New Zealand, her education **in** a London secondary school, **her** M.A. fmm St. Andrew University in **economics** and psychology, and **her** subsequent **series** of what she **calls** "odd jobs and hard **times." Since** 1967 she has had **fiction** published regularly — 13 books, with no **fewer** than three **appearing** in *Toronto within the last* two **years. Two** of her novels can be examined as representative: *Female Friends* **(1975),** her **third, and** *Puffball* **(1980), her** seventh.

Both, highly **dramatic** — *Female Friends* includes sections of dialogue set off as if parts of **a script — tightly, intricately constructed, portray geographically** small, **self-contained fictional** worlds, one in London and **Essex** and one **in** London and Somerset, in the shadow of **Glastonbury Tor.** Dominating **both** is **a** female narrator, **a** "voice," omnipresent, omniscient, treating us not as readers but as listeners, now making sweeping, devastating **generalizations** about life, now jumping in to address her character **directly** as "you."

In *Female Friends,* Wddon **concentrates on** Marjorie, **Grace,** and Chloe, their tangled relations with their friends, their parents. their children, **and their men, sometimes** husbands. The **pages are** swamped **with abortions, hysterectomies, and births — far more births than deaths.** The Wddon world is peopled with **victims,** frequently willing, and **victimizers,** usually men. beasts and **superbeasts,** pampered by the system. As **Chloe** says: "We women, we beggars, we scrubbers and dusters. we do the best we can for **us** and ours." She adds, however: "We are divided amongst ourselves. We have to be for survival's sake." So the *au pair* girl warns: "Female friends are not to be trusted." Altogether, the view of *life* in Female *Friends* is just as devastating as Fay **Weldon's** embodiment of it is **fascinating.** It's **a shocking,** entertaining. admirable novel.

Puffball, **written five** years later. is **just** as relentless in its view of the chances of **women** in **Fay Weldon's** world. Here, *however,* **two** additional elements play central parts. Concentrating **on** Liffey, the silly, deserted. beleaguered wife., **Weldon,** packing details of female chemistry and menstruation into a **series** of chapters labeled "Inside Liffey," traces in **clinical terms** the procreation **process from** the moment of conception through the nine months to a Caesarean birth. To the **pressure** of the outside **circumstances** presented in *Female Friends* is added the conditioning to which the **foetus** is subjected within the womb.

In addition to the male exploiters, including her husband. Liffey **is victimized** by the **curses** and potions of the **Glastonbury** witch. **Despite all** this, **the infant survives — which** might seem to offer some glimmer of **optimism** if it **weren't** for Wddon's **view** of the world into **which** the child is projected. The bitterness of these **two** novels **is made** palatable by the sharp observation, the deft **construction,** and the stylistic pyrotechnics.

These **are** such brilliant novels that her **newest fiction,** *The Heart of the Country,* read immediately afterwards. seems to suffer **in** comparison. **Here are,** once **more, Glastonbury Tor,** the curse, the deserted **wife — waking** from her dream in the **"nice** little bungalow. complete with dream kitchen, picture windows, and parquet **floors"** -the abysmal state of women. with repeated **statistics** to prove the sexual economic imbalance, the Wddon world-view summed up **in** the phrase, "the **fearful** nexus of chaos."

There are, however, two chief differ**ences.** First, the ignorant wife learns the **cruel** and **cunning** ways of the world and **"leaves** the **wives** and joins the women!' **Remembering** the title of Wddon's **second novel,** *Down Among the Women,* readers **will** know the **significance** of that **move.** Second, the novelist has abandoned ha

personal/impersonal narrative "voice." It is Sonia, in her cubicle in a psychiatric institution, who tells the "tale" as "creative writing therapy," split when referring to herself between "I" and "she!"

The result, expressed in Sonia's frequently hysterical and often foul language, is embodied in the variations on the novel's title. Far from being the warmest, safest, solidest place., "the heart of the country" is "the pocket of the country, ... mean, spiteful, and frightened. . . . The heart of the country is rotten. . . At Glastonbury Tor they live in the heart of the country in the shadow of cruise missiles" and a nuclear plant. The bleakness of Weldon's view is summed up by Sonia: "What sort of future did they have in this worn-out, sold-up, clapped-out country."

Margaret Drabble, Weldon's contemporary, would seem to imply some hope in the midst of the Thatcher wasteland, possibly by a political change, but here: "Not even a change of government could save it now. Too late.." One wonders whether, in the savage jungle of the Weldon world. there ever was time. Perhaps one shouldn't read three of Fay Weldon's novels in rapid succession. □

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Living in the past

For a young girl in a troubled family escape fmm the present doesn't guarantee that there won't be problems in the future

By Mary Ainslie Smith

TIME, SO INEXORABLE in actual life, is something that fiction writers — particularly fiction writers for young people — like to play around with, bending and adapting it to suit their purposes for plot and character development. A Handful of Time, by Kit Pearson (Viking Kestrel, 186 pages, $11.95 cloth), is another in a long line of children's time-travel stories.

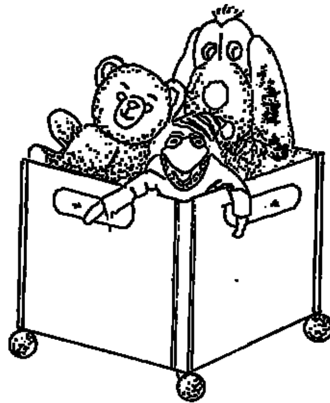
Patricia is an only child whose parents have just decided to separate. Her mother, Ruth, the beautiful but cold and detached anchorwoman for a television news program, sends her to a cottage 0" a lake in Alberta to stay with an aunt and uncle and a family of cousins she has never see" before. Patricia is not used to cottage life-she cannot paddle a canoe, her feet hurt when she goes barefoot, and she doesn't like swimming in the cold, weedy lake. Her cousins despise her weakness and exclude her fmm their activities. Desperately lonely and unhappy, Patricia hides in a small guest cabin near the main cottage and discovers a" old watch hidden under the floor boards. When she winds it she travels back 35 years to the time of her mother's childhood in the same cottage.

Invisible and unobserved, Patricia learns to her surprise that the summer ha mother was 12 she also felt excluded and misunderstood. Slowly Patricia begins to understand some of the factors that made her mother what she has become — ambitious and successful, but apparently unfeeling. This knowledge helps her to cope with her own problems at the cottage and eventually leads to her first real communication with her mother.

This sounds as if it should be a heartwarming story, but it isn't. The characters all share a certain sour selfishness that prevents the reader from enjoying and liking them. Patricia's parents are so absorbed in their own problems that they seem unbelievably indifferent to their daughter; ha aunt and uncle, although kind, are so determined that everyone at the lake be happy that they are maddeningly oblivious to what is really going on in their family.

There are also undercurrents of intolerance and prejudice throughout the book, exemplified by some of the cottagers' attitudes toward the Indians on a n e a r b y - . Patricia herself is not free of these imperfections. Her cousins are mea" to her at first, but when they make overtures of friendship as the summer progresses she refuses to allow them to accept her. Instead she come.5 to prefer by far her trips to the past when she can observe the rebellious young Ruth.

Patricia's grandmother, Ruth's mother, is the unpleasant link between the two times. She is unhappy with her own life and Patricia sees her nag the 12-year-old Ruth relentlessly, trying to form her



into her idea of a conventionally correct young lady. She applies a terrible double standard in her treatment of Ruth and of Ruth's two older brothers. I" Patricia's own time, her grandmother comes to visit the family at the lake, arriving like a malevolent spirit. She tries to pry from Patricia details of her parents' marital problems, taking a thinly disguised spiteful pleasure in it all.

Although by the end of the story Patricia and her mother have determined to forgive all past grievances and start afresh, the reader is left with the uneasy feeling that the problems of this family are so deep that they will have no easy solutions.

Using the past as a means to illuminate the present is also the worthy goal of many writers of historical flctio". Bill Freeman has produced an excellent series of novels for young people, following the adventures of the Bains family as they struggle to make their way in 19th-century Canada. Each novel has at its centre an important aspect of Canada's development.

I" previous books the older Bains children, struggling to make enough money to keep their family together, have helped in a lumber camp, joined a fishing expedition on the Grand Banks, and worked in a Montreal shirt factory. In the sixth book in the series, Danger on the Tracks (Lorimer, 129 pages, $12.95 cloth, $6.95 paper), it is 1875. Meg and Jamie Bains leave Toronto, the scene of their previous adventure, and ride the rails to London in southwestern Ontario. There they manage to sign on as cook's helpers with the company that is building the London, Huron & Bruce Railway north toward Wingham. Running as a theme throughout Freeman's books is his conviction that this country was built by the back-breaking labour of many ordinary people whose names are not remembered. In this story, he highlights the efforts of the railway navvies.

Most people welcomed the extension of rail services, but in *Danger on the Tracks* the Ryan family of Lucan, who run a stagecoach service between London and Exeter, see it as a threat to their

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livelihood. The Ryan brothers, led by the eldest, Will, are a wild bunch of young men who like to live it up on Saturday nights, drive their horses hard, and take great pride in the efficiency of their stage line. As an Exeter shopkeeper tells Meg Bains:

> Some say that the Ryan boys are heroes. Others think they're outlaws. There's those that blame everything on them: barn burnings, animals mutilated, shootings. But I've seen Will Ryan playing his fiddle at a barn bee, and you would have thought he was a friend to every man in the township. . . . One thing for sure. You don't mess with them lightly.

Perhaps, to those who have heard of Lucan's notorious Donnelly family, some of this will sound familiar.

As the story develops the rivalry between the railway and the Ryan brothers grows, with the railway builders becoming convinced that the Ryans are committing acts of sabotage against them. The climax is an exciting race between the Ryans' stage and the railway's new steam locomotive, north from London, through a driving rain storm, to the railway camp. By this time, Jamie Bains has become friends with the dashing Will Ryan and wants him to win the race, while Meg is on the side of the railway.

Freeman's series is a great way to absorb history. His writing is fast-paced and, while he doesn't worry too much about depth and shades of character, his people are believable and their adventures have a soundly researched basis in fact. Archival photographs help to create a sense of time and place, as do the many references to landmarks that can still be seen. Will Ryan, for example, changes horses during the race at several small villages that now have gas pumps to serve travellers along Highway 4 north of London.

In Freeman's series the Bains family has five children. When one gets too old for these sorts of adventures, another is ready to take over. So far, John, Meg, and Jamie Bains have been the protagonists and there are still two younger ones at home. If the followers of this series are lucky, future volumes may see the Bains children homesteading on the prairies, panning for gold, helping behind the lines at Batoche, or driving in the last spike.

Jeremy Gates and the Magic Key, by Janet Craig James (Penumbra, 101 pages, $7.95 paper), is another historical novel, set in the colony of Nova Scotia in 1750. Young Jeremy, a recent arrival in the colony, wants more than anything to be able to read and write, to hold those magic keys to success.

A series of violent adventures diverts his plans. His parents are killed in an explosion and he finds himself an orphan

on the streets of Halifax. He is kidnapped and pressed aboard a ship bound for the slave trade in the Caribbean. In a terrible storm the cruel captain is killed and the damaged ship puts into Boston instead. Jeremy end his friend Pug find work there with a printer and his daughter, who teaches Jeremy to read and write. At lest be is ready to return to Nova Scotia and help set up its first newspaper, which will provide a magic key for *the* whole colony.

James's writing is less polished than Freeman's but she too manages to recreate an interesting time and place in Canadian history. Her descriptions of Halifax's rough waterfront area are particularly good.

Janet Lunn's Shadow in Hawthorn Bay (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 216 pages, $9.95 paper), set in Scotland end Upper Canada in 1815-1816, ls a story about the mystery end tremendous strength and determination of the human s&it. The heroine. 15-year-old Mary Urquhart, is special in many ways. Courageous, proud, and resourceful, she has a deep love for her native Highlands and a gentle and understanding way of dealing with young children and animals. But above all, she is blessed — or cursed — with second sight. It is because of her special gifts that she can hear in ha home in Scotland an urgent summons from Duncan, her cousin and best friend, who emigrated four years earlier to Upper Canada with his family. Alone. she sets out across the ocean to find and help him.

Her quest brings adventures. bitter disappointments, and dangers, not the least from the dark forces that battle for control of her mind and that threaten to destroy her. But at last she finds peace in the New World and the home, love, and protection she needs.

This is a moving and engrossing story and Mary is a strange and attractive heroine. Lunn's mature writing allows her readers to feel every detail of her narrative: the harsh beauty of the Highlands, the misery of the ocean crossing, the suffocating loneliness of the forest and the warmth of friendships forged in the common struggle for survival. □

FIRST NOVELS

Cheap thrills

While claiming to probe the psychology of voyeurism, a new novel takes too much delight In spying on a bedroom strip-tease

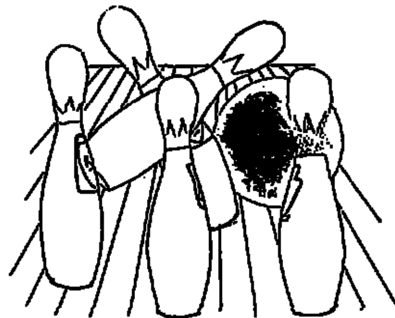
By Janice Kulyk Keefer

FRED CEDERBERG'S The Last Hunter (Stoddart, 241 pages, $23.95 cloth) might be described as a book that calls forth superlatives: it is without a doubt the dullest, dumbest thriller one could ever hope to avoid. It is not just the novel's questionable ideological *données -Nazism was* the work of a mere "criminal strain" in 1930s Germany; unregenerate Nab war criminals are far less to be abhorred then KGB agents; to have been associated with the "chic radical left" in the '60s was to have been recruited by the KGB — that do this story in, but the sheer boredom induced by a narrative devoid of any style, wit, dash. Cederberg's attempts at reproducing German, French, and British accents are particularly awful: "You mus' llmp . . . an theese way guarantees you shall. You will 'ave pains in your buttocks for a while ... but eet ees necessary." Pains in the buttocks, indeed.

The novel's hem, a 40ish newsman v/hose pot belly and chronic heartburn have irresistible aphrodisiac effects on ravishing young women, is as believable as the narrative's *pièce de résistance: that* Adolf Hitler is alive and well and living near Gananoque. Perhaps the only quasi-redeeming feature of *The Last Hunter* is that it must have been es much of a slog to write as it is to read: any reader interested in *plaisir du texte* will be hard put to discover it in this one.

By contrast, Peter Robinson's Gallows View (Viking, 225 pages, 517.95 cloth) ls an intriguing venture into the territory of detective fiction. Yet it's a troublesome text, one that tries to have its cake (probing the psychology of voyeurism and its destructive effects on women) and eat it too (providing the reader with a voyeur's-eye-view of attractive women undressing). The book's opening section is a provocative case in point: we are compelled to watch, with the voyeur, a woman who doesn't so much take off her clothes for the night as perform a strip-tease, however unwitting.

The sense of complicity this induces is as dubious as it is uncomfortable. especially at the very end of the section, as the narrator pulls back from the voyeur and his object/victim to report "objectively" the actions of each once tbe voyeur has signalled his presence. It's as though Robinson means to absolve both



narrator and reader by switching point of view for this reader, at least, the tactic doesn't work. Instead of giving us some valid insight into the voyeur's psyche, or affording an essential clue to the solution of the mystery, it functions as a cheap come-on to lure us into the text.

Gallows View is. however, immensely readable, and gives promise of better books to come. One hopes in future for less unintegrated discourse 0" the beauties of the Yorkshire dales or the failures of Britain's comprehensive schools, fewer stereotypes — dumpy feminists, superlatively sexy "other women" — and a diminution of narrative tidiness: the manner in which the various acts and agents of violence are made to tie into a sufficiently tight bow at the end of *Gallows View strains* credibility and diffuses interest. Yet Robinson's hem, unlike Cederberg's, is a living end breathing protagonist, though he is somewhat woodenly portrayed. His passion for opera, for example, seems like icing on his psychic cake, but no doubt Robinson will get a better handle on his character as he goes along.

Two aspects of this text deserve Particular comment. First, Robinson seems to bend ova backwards to rethink the concept and role of women in the genre of detective fiction. One may protest that he overcompensates for previous stereotypes by introducing two attractive female characters-Inspector Banks's sensible, reserved, but congenial wife Sandra, and the gorgeous, brainy Jenny Poller, Brinks's colleague — who do not fight each other like cats over possession of Banks's affections, but rather discover in their mutual roles, as victims of criminal acts, a transcendent and impenetrable form of female solidarity. But Robinson's refusal to reproduce clichés a Fred

Cederberg takes for granted — women as cheap-and-dumb sexual conveniences or else tainted, duplicitous, but still dependent love-interests — is commendable.

The other remarkable aspect of *Gallows* view, thrown out toward tbe end of the novel, Is a comment by Banks on the social necessity of a concept of evil to distinguish between good men led astray in crime, and criminals who are born irredeemablv vicious. Much of the strength of Robinson's text ties in its ability to reproduce the dreary look and heartless fed of contemporary England: in Gallows View he seems undecided whether Thatcherland is the source or innocent stage of adolescent forms of criminal violence. Should he decide that metaphysical and not political evil is the only heart of this matter, his narrative might lose the peculiar tension and comnlexitv that distinguish his first novel.

A word on the subject of recent Canadian detective fiction: for this reader, the apogee of the genre is still Douglas Glow's *Precious, a* work as elegant as it Is intelligent, and which succeeds superbly in the creation of convincing character, setting and moral atmosphere. Beside a text like Glover's, Robinson's becomes one whose stylistic and conceptual socks need pulling up, and Cederberg's simply vanishes. 0

INTERVIEW

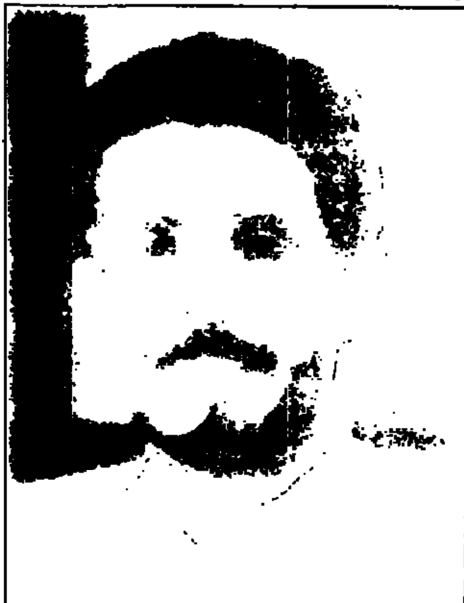
Rohinton Mistry

'Camus said something to the effect that "you can redeem your life by writing." I don't know what it means, but I like the sound of it'

By *Nancy Wigston*

ROHINTON MISTRY studied mathematics and economics at the University of Bombay before emigrating in 1975 to Toronto, where he took a job in a bank. At night he studied English and philosophy at the University of Toronto. where his first short story won the Hart House fiction competition. His first collection, *Tales f-om Firozsha Baag* (Penguin) is a series of stories about the lives of the tenants of a somewhat down-at-heel apartment complex, all members of Bombay's Parsi community, of which he was once a part. Now a Canadian citizen. he was interviewed in Toronto by Nancy Wigston:

Rooks in Canada: *Your book is a microcosm of a particular community in Bombay. The liver you describe ore earmarked by their intensity. Do you think that this is an Indian rather than a North American characteristic?*



Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry: Yes, 1 think so. Life in India is more intense, perhaps because living space is at a premium, so people may have to wait to marry, or live with their relatives. The extended family means people are involved In each other's lives.

BiC: *As a member of the Parsi minority, do you feel like an outsider in the larger Indian community?*

Mistry: The Parsis are definitely a minority in India. They number 90,000 in Bombay, about 320,000 in the whole country. Although In general the Parsis are esteemed, even envied, as a merchant class — they've been called the "Jews of India" — they can also become a convenient scapegoat, like any minority. Yet they are highly adaptable. Since landing in Gujarat [the Parsis are Zoroastrians who fled Islamic persecution in Persia in 700 A.D.] they've been constantly adapting, adjusting. compromising.

BiC: *The Parsis in your book seem generally to have seen better days; is that true of the community in general?*

Mistry: Yes, they've been in decline since the British left India, in 1947. Parsis did very well under British rule.

BiC: *Genteel poverty is a recurring motif in your stories. and toward the end of your book many stories focus on the young people who have emigrated to Canada or who are about to. Is thb typical today?*

Mistry: The motive for emigration is in the minds of a certain class of people, educated in a certain way. who grow up with thii idea — "to go abroad" for higher studies, usually. And then to stay, to have a car, a yacht, and so on. If you come hack to India you're considered a fool. a weak person.

BiC: *One of the recurring characters in your book is Sarosh, the Parsi boy who "Canadianizes" his name to Sid. We are told about him by Nariman, a garrulous old fellow. who entertains the boys of Firozsha Baag with the painfully ludicrous tale of Sid's failure to adapt to Canadian ways. The message of "Squatter" seems to be that life in Toronto is literally and symbolically constipating. Is this what you believe?*

Mistry: No, actually I heard about that experience from someone else. In fact, I don't think I'd even be writing if I were living in India. I wouldn't have been bored enough. the way I was here. I wouldn't have been working in a bank, for one thing. I took math and economics at the University of Bombay, and — I don't know If 1 should tell this; I mean to use it in a story — I was a singer in those days. Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel — that kind of music. "Bombay's Bob Dylan," they called me. I don't know if 1 could have made a living at it — I also taught classical guitar to beginners-but 1 wouldn't have been in a bank, for sore.

BIC: *You were working in a bank in Toronto?*

Mistry: Yes. You see, my fiancée was already here — she had relatives hem. And when I came my math and economics degree was evaluated at grade 12 level only.

BiC: *How did you react to that?*

Mistry: I laughed. Then I applied for a job in a bank and became a customer service rep — you know, the person on the phone when you call up to bitch about this charge or that 0" your statement. I'm sorry if that sounds offensive. In fact it's the wrong word to use, since it's mainly men who complain. It's a macho thing for them to do.

BiC: *Why did you begin writing?*

Mistry: I started evening courses at the University of Toronto, in English and philosophy. I saw an ad in the campus

newspaper for the Hart House short-story competition. I wrote my first story for that, and I won. I think I was lonely. and writing helped to make my origins clearer.

BiC: *A writer who comes to mind in your work is James Joyce. Jehangir, the "bookworm" of Firozsha Baag, is faced with what seems like a choice between his girl-friend and his mother in your story, "Exercisers." At his parents' insistence, he goes with them to see a holy man, Lo settle the question. The cryptic response is something about life being a "trap, full of webs." At the story's end the boy deserts his girl-friend for his mother, and it seems as if he is caught in the web of "mother India," like the nets that Stephen Dedalus flees when he leaves Ireland.*

Mistry: India might have been a trap, in spite of my singing success. I was thinking about Joyce recently, i" fact. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen recounts how a" English boy at his college intimidates him. "The language was his before it was mine," he says. The only time I felt uncomfortable here was in conversation in, say, a seminar situation, when I would feel insecure about the language, shy about making a mistake, or mispronouncing a word. At home we spoke Gujarati, and I didn't start English until I was in grade one.

BiC: *I" the story about Sid/Sarosh, who returns, a lost soul, to Bombay after 10 years in Toronto, the old Parsi story-teller maliciously explains our government's policy of multiculturalism, concluding that "ethnic is just another way of saying 'bloody foreigner.'" Is this a common view?*

Mistry: Yes. "Ethnic" has the same sound as "alien" to newcomers to the States, where you're a resident alien, a dependent alien, or the like. It's a word that points out differences.

BiC: *What Indian writers do you mad?*

Mistry: R.K. Narayan and VS. Naipaul. Naipaul showed me that it's possible to make your own unique little world the substance of your stories, as, for instance, in "A House for Mr Biswas"

BiC: *Naipaul is an expatriate writer, too. He grew up in Trinidad.*

Mistry: Yes, but he moved to England quite early on. For the former colonies England is still an ideal, I suppose. I might want to go there one day.

BiC: *Were any other writers important to you?*

Mistry: Albert Camus. He said something to the effect that "you can redeem your life by writing." I don't know what it means, but I like the sound of it. I admire Americans too, like Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud.

BiC: *Do you consider yourself a Canadian writer?*

Mistry: I'm not sure what makes a Canadian writer. One's citizenship? One's subject matter7

BiC: *Whom do you consider Canadian writers?*

Mistry: I like John Metcalf, Leon Rooke. I like what Metcalf says about government and the arts, even though I currently have a Canada Council grant myself.

BiC: *In your final story, Kersi is making a difficult adjustment to his new and rather alienating suburban Toronto apartment building. His parents rarely hear from him, and feel abandoned. Suddenly a book of his stories about Bombay arrives in the mail, delighting his parents. even though he has omitted the glorious history of the Parsis, and presents present-day Parsis as somewhat cranky and bigoted. Is this the key to Rohinton Mistry?*

Mistry: It's the key to the book, but not to me, not to the author. ☐

LETTERS

Sticks and stones

YET AGAIN unworthy readers have been treated to a feature article on that neglected writer John Metcalf (April). And again, the focus on his opinions is so strong there is hardly space for a mention of his fiction. Perhaps it is the exquisite contrariness of Metcalf that fascinates. On one hand, he raises the "expansiveness" and generosity of Canadian society; on the other, he decries its literary parochialism. On one hand, he despises Britain's stifling class-consciousness; on the other, he dismisses Robertson Davies (such a parochial writer) as "middle-brow."

It seems that what annoys Metcalf most is not that he has so few readers but that we few are so stupid. I admit tbat my own tastes are so degenerate that after 15 years of reading his books I am already tiring of stories that, however stylishly written, have only one character — and always the same mean-spirited, egotistical louse.

Colin Morton
Ottawa

I LOVED YOUR spoof on the writer as pedant. sycophant, and bully i" the April issue of *Books in Canada*. Some of your readers might think that Brent Ledger's burlesque of John Metcalf went too far, that such bombast and invective as the refuge of a muddled mind was overdone, but nothing was said that Metcalf; carping presence in tbe world could not sustain. Milan Kundera is quoted, in the same issue, as stating that "great novels are always a little more intelligent than

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their authors." Metcalf, a fine writer, seems determined to prove Kundera's claim a" understatement — it is only fitting, the", that he should be the centre of such splendid ridicule. I enjoyed the "profile" immensely: Ledger's Metcalf rivals as a whining graceless ass the pathetic hero of Metcalf's own fiction, *General Ludd.* Well done.

John Moss
Verona, Ont.

OFF THE RAILS

IN HIS REVIEW of *Whistlestop: A Journey Across Canada* (May) Greg Gormick *has slammed* a *book that* George Galt did not write and did not ever intend to write. *Whistlestop is not* a *history* of or reference work on the Canadian rail passenger system. If Gormick had take" eve" a cursory glance at the flap copy, he wouldn't have had to make assumptions about what kind of book *Whistlestop is.* And if his glasses weren't tinted a bright shade of sour grape, he might have bee" able to write a more relevant review.

Whistlestop might not please the Tourism Industry Association. It is not an attempt to paint yet another pretty pictore *of this country.* and that is a" essential part of the book's appeal. George Galt travelled off the beaten path and experienced aspects of our culture not see" by the ordinary traveller. Often humorous and sometimes eccentric, *Whistlestop* will appeal to the literate, intelligent reader who appreciates a well-executed sentence and a" unusual perspective.

Tanya Long
Senior Editor
Methuen Publications
Toronto

LOVE AND ART

ELIZABETH SMART was beautiful and she was from a wealthy family. Yes. It is to her credit that she tried the whole of her adult life to overcome these obstacles to understanding the world around her. She may have been selfish, she may have been narcissistic — certainly she was a survivor, and certainly she was loyal to her friends. She was generous. in particular with the encouragement and the plugs she gave to other writers. 1 think she was also the little girl who "ever learned how to say no. When she cane back to Canada for those few years before she died, I can remember no time when she ever turned down a" invitation for dinner, for a drink, for a reading, for anything — she always said yes, and, I think, felt guilty about this weakness. If she said she wanted to shut herself up for three days to write. everyone — her students, her friends — thought they were excluded from the plea for solitude.

Audrey Thomas, in her April feature review of *Necessary Secrets,* contends that "the two most powerful weapons against despair" are drink and art. It seems to me that drink is more a" acknowledgement of despair than a weapon against it. I think that Elizabeth Smart's own responses to despair were love and art. Perhaps because of her obsessiveness (she threw herself heart and soul into whatever she did, eve" into her drinking), she found it almost impossible to write and love at the same time, and spent her life trying to reconcile what she saw as two opposing forces within her. "To be in a very unfeminine, very unloving state is the desperate need of anyone trying to write" — as Audrey Thomas so aptly quotes in ha review. When Elizabeth Smart loved, it was for keeps. She harboured no resentments, and forgave absolutely everybody absolutely everything. Perhaps this type of love is conventional — certainly it fulfils a Christian ideal. I" any case, the fierceness with which she loved was not conventional — at least not in a Waspish world.

It is possible that she shirked in fulfilling her talents as a titer. If so. this lack may have had to do with despair, with a lack of personal self-worth, perhaps with an urge to self-punishment and even to self-destruction — or to a combination of all of these elements. But Elizabeth Smart was not a lazy person, artistically or otherwise.

She had great artistic integrity. She wrote, rewrote, rewrote, and rewrote again, and again. In *The* Assumption of *the Rogues and* Rascals there is not one careless word, not one word she did not mea" to be there. We have had to put up with so many myths surrounding Elizabeth Smart — the Myth of the One Burning Love. the Myth of the Unforgiving Mother — now are we going to have to deal with the Mytb of the Writer's Laziness as well?

Jacqueline Dumas
Edmonton

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH

AS USUAL, I'm miffed with the selection of Best First Novel (April). Joan Barfoot's comments made me want to break glass — could any mere male get a book by this woman? I suspect, were Shakespeare under her go", she would describe Hamlet as a typical male teen with overactive hormones and a persecution complex.

Barfoot reinforces what I've come to believe lately, that writing one's own troth will not do in this country. One must write Official Troth. As a writer (female) I despair for freedom of speech and the survival of literature.

I'm with Timothy Findley. *Back on Tuesday gets* better every time it's read; a book you lend to friends who the" go out and boy their own copies. A hell of a book. But men's woes are no longer valid, no matter how well written. My only consolation (Gilmour's too. I imagine.) is that contests come and go. Great writing lasts.

Mary Ellen Csamer
Toronto

NORTHERN MAGUS

WE IN SCANDINAVIA got a chuckle out of Robertson Davies's comments on the popularity of his own books in the North ("Writer's Writers," January-February).

We thoroughly enjoyed making the acquaintance of that brilliant writer and unique personality when he toured Scandinavia last autumn. The interview with Davies that I did for the Danish daily in which I write book reviews received praise: Davies's comments on Canadians, CanLit, etc. evoked an affinity with us. The Deptford trilogy is doing beautifully in Denmark, as are books by Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Aritha van Herk, and Margaret Laurence, whom the Danes will miss too.

Danish TV has just produced a special program on CanLit — with interviews with Roch Carrier and myself. May your government continue to send Canadian writers and their books abroad: their presence has made an explosive difference in awareness of CanLit and Canada.

Ellen Bick Meier
Copenhagen, Denmark

RECOMMENDED

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

FICTION

Squatters' Island, by W.D. Barcus, Oberon Press. Because of the strange beauty and intensity of its language, *Squatters' Island is not* easy reading, yet it remains a remarkable achievement: a first novel that does not merely promise but also delivers a great deal.

NON-FICTION

The Solitary Outlaw, by B.W. Powe, Lester & Orpen Dennys. A wild and haunting book about five men who stand *outside the* laws of mass culture — Wyndham Lewis, Marshall McLuhan, Pierre Trudeau, Glenn Gould, and Elias Canetti — raises the question not only of the survival of our national culture but the survival of culture at all.

POETRY

The Power to Move, by Susan Glickman, Véhicule Press. Meant to disillusion — not in the melancholy, negative sense of the word but in the spirit of its literal meaning, "to set free from pleasant but mistaken beliefs" — Glickman's second collection finds some fine poetry in familiar landscapes.

CANWIT NO. 121

ON OUR TRAVELS recently **we've noticed** a couple of slogans **on** passing vehicles that caught **our fancy:** in **farm** country. on **a veterinary-supplies** truck, **"We** *take care* of each udder" and **(we're** not making this up) **on a** moving van, "Fluke Transport. If it's on time, it's **a** Fluke." Readers are invited to compose appropriate slogans for such well-known real institutions as Canada Post, the Conservative Party, the Toronto Maple Leafs, **and** the like. The prize is **$25.** Deadline: September 1. Address: **CanWit** No. 121, *Books* in ***Canada,*** 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto **M5A 3X9.**

Results of CanWit No. 119

OUR REQUEST for neologisms based on the names of politicians and other well-known Canadians produced **only a** smattering of invective. The winner is **Odymar Vingo** of **Toronto** for **a list** of definitions that includes:

Bouey: To sustain at a desired **level, as** for example, **a** currency.

Dief: Selectively **hard** of **hearing; by extension,** unable **to** read **the writing** on the wall.

Mirvish (or **Remirvish):** To restore **to original splendour,** as for **example, a theatre.**

Amielrate: Castigate or criticize fiercely with **the aim of putting on the right** (i.e. far **right) path.**

Chuvalory: Great restraint in **self-defence. Unwillingness to** hurt **seriously one's attacker, while stoically** absorbing **his** blows.

Honourable mentions:

Carney: A smooth talker.
Jelinek: To gawk at sporting events.

— Alec **McEwen,** Ottawa

To **Lougheed:** To **save** people's money and **run.**
To go for **a Berton:** To **rewrite** the same book **for higher** gain.

— Barry Baldwin, Calgary

SOLUTION TO CANLIT ACROSTIC NO. 6

Another result of my **... flitting ... is that Air** Canada usually shows a profit. **...** Take Dr. **Foth** from its **accounts** and it is reduced to the revenues of Air Liberia. I will be crushed if my suitcase is not eventually bronzed and mounted in the People's Republic Airline **boardroom..**

— Allan Fotheringham, *Malice In* ***Blunderland*** (Key **Porter)**

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:

Alligator Man, by Meryl Duprey, Devil-May-Care.
At Water's Edge, by G. Brender à Brandis, Porcupine's Quill.
Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj, by Marian Fowler, Penguin.
Body Defenses, by Marilyn Dunlop, Irwin.
Building with Glass Blocks, by Bob Pennycook, Doubleday.
Cage, by George McWhirter, Oberon.
The Canadian Bed and Breakfast Guide, by Gerda Pantel, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
The Canadian Guide to Personal Financial Management (2nd Edition), by Mary Turner *et al.*, Prentice-Hall.
The Christian Archetype: A Jungian Commentary on the Life of Christ, by Edward F. Edinger, Inner City Books.
The Complete Guide to Bicycling in Canada, by Elliott Katz, Doubleday.
Devour Me Too, by Dacia Maraini, translated by Genni Donati Gunn, Guernica.
Dictionary of Imaginary Places, by Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Directory of Selected National Testing Programs, Oryx Press.
The Enchanted Tapestry, by Robert D. San Souci, illustrated by László Gál, Groundwood.
Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta, edited by David Leadbeater, New Hogtown Press.
Fire Eyes, by D.F. Bailey, Douglas & McIntyre.
Going Wild, by Linda Braun & Barbara Cox-Lloyd, Prairie Books.
Grand Illusions: The Politics of the Keynesian Experience in Canada, 1945-1975, by Robert M. Campbell, Broadview Press.
Henry Kelsey and the People of the Plains, by Daniel C.G. Conner, Prentice-Hall.
Homecoming, by Veronica Ross, Oberon.
Hong Kong Poems, by Gary Geddes, Oberon.
Images in Action, by Ferne Cristall & Barbara Emanuel, Between-the-Lines.
Insight Guides: Canada, APA Productions, Prentice-Hall.
The Iowa Baseball Confederacy, by W.P. Kinsella, Totem.
Jacques Cartier and the People of the Eastern Woodlands, by Daniel C.G. Conner, Prentice-Hall.
James Cook and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, by Daniel C.G. Conner, Prentice-Hall.
The Long March, by Darko R. Suvin, Hounslow Press.
The Magic of Unknowing: An East-West Soliloquy, Broadview Press.
The Making of a Peacemonger: The Memoirs of George Ignatieff, Penguin.
Merchants of Fear, by James Fleming, Penguin.
Murder Sees the Light, by Howard Engel, Penguin.
Nature Diary of a Quiet Pedestrian, by Philip Croft, Harbour.
The New Start With $1,000, by J.J. Brown and Jerry Ackerman, Macmillan.
No Other Way, by John W. Holmes, University of Toronto.
Not Another Diet Book, by Bobbe Sommer, NC Press.
Nothing to Repent: The Life of Hesketh Pearson, by Ian Hunter, Penguin.
Other Selves, by C.D. Minni, Guernica.
Our Arctic Way of Life — The Copper Inuit, by Doreen Bethune-Johnson, Prentice-Hall.
Our Coast Salish Way of Life — The Squamish, by Daniel C.G. Conner and Doreen Bethune-Johnson, Prentice-Hall.
The Politics of Hunger, by John W. Warnock, Methuen.
Pop Bottles, by Ken Roberts, Groundwood.
The Port Dalhousie Stories, by Dennis Tourbin, Coach House.
Priests in Working-Class Blue, by Oscar L. Arnal, Paulist Press.
Problem Bilong Yu, by Reginald Kendall, Queenston House.
Quiet Complicity, by Victor Levant, Between-the-Lines.
A Rattle of Pebbles, edited by Brereton Greenhous, Directorate of History.
Roots of Peace, edited by Eric Shragge *et al.*, Between-the-Lines.
Salmonberry Wine, by Mary Razzell, Groundwood.
Sculpture of the Eskimo, by George Swinton, M & S.
South Africa: A Modern History (3rd Edition), by T.R.H. Davenport, U of T.
Straw Cupid, by Karen MacCormack, Nightwood.
Taking the Veil, by Marta Danylewycz, M & S.
Tales from Firozsha Baag, by Rohinton Mistry, Penguin.
Toes in My Nose, by Sheree Fitch, illustrated by Molly Bobak, Doubleday.
Uneasy Lies the Head: The Truth About Canada's Crown Corporations, by Walter Stewart, Collins.
Unemployed: International Perspectives, by Morley Gunderson *et al.*, U of T.
West of the Great Divide, by Robert D. Turner, Sono Nis.
Wildflowers of Canada, by Tom Fitzharris, Oxford.

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CanLit acrostic no. 7

By Mary D. Trainer

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37 A	38 D	39 T	40 N	41 M	42 H	43 O		44 G	45 D	46 J	47 I	48 P		49 B	50 L	51 R		52 F	53 V	54 H	55 M	56 A
57 P		58 H	59 M	60 L	61 Q		62 C	63 E	64 M	65 T	66 S		67 V		68 J	69 G	70 S	71 T		72 L	73 K	
74 N	75 A	76 P		77 S	78 M		79 H	80 B	81 O		82 S	83 L	84 J	85 N	86 F	87 P	88 A		89 R	90 Q		91 L
92 B	93 T	94 I	95 S	96 F		97 K	98 N	99 H	100 O	101 P	102 J		103 D	104 N	105 K	106 M	107 B	108 G		109 J	110 H	
111 R	112 I	113 A	114 S		115 J		116 U	117 R	118 H		119 O	120 L		121 J	122 A	123 O	124 U	125 H	126 B		127 D	128 K
129 E	130 G	131 S	132 H	133 U		134 N		135 B	136 P	137 E	138 I		139 L	140 H	141 S	142 A	143 V		144 N	145 T	146 F	147 C
148 Q		149 I	150 L	151 H		152 K	153 G	154 T	155 N	156 L	157 I		158 H	159 B	160 J	161 I	162 E	163 M		164 U	165 F	166 S
	167 J	168 U		169 Q	170 M	171 P	172 O	173 K	174 J	175 N	176 A	177 Q		178 P	179 D	180 V		181 R	182 I	183 M	184 T	185 E
186 Q	187 M	188 B	189 U		190 S	191 Q	192 T		193 C	194 M		195 G	196 Q		197 O	198 L	199 D	200 R	201 H		202 E	203 H
204 K	205 L	206 Q	207 I	208 O	209 B		210 V	211 G	212 J	213 M		214 T	215 J	216 P		217 A	218 U		219 H	220 R	221 F	222 K

When properly filled in, the letters in the box form a quotation from a Canadian book. Find the letters by solving the clues below and writing the answers in the numbered spaces provided. Then transfer the letters from the spaces to the appropriate squares in the box. 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. 6 appears on page 41.

A. Environmental activist organization — 88 10 176 113 37 142 56 217 122 / 75

B. Toronto law school: 2 wds. — 159 14 30 188 92 107 209 80 49 / 135 126

C. Domesticated — 193 62 6 147

D. Centre of Nova Scotia fishing industry — 45 199 179 18 25 127 29 103 38

E. Erase — 162 137 63 202 129 185

F. Communicated — 86 221 8 165 96 52 24 146

G. Labrador festival — 195 69 2 108 130 153 44 211 22

H. Spend time idly: 3 wds. — 110 99 32 19 201 54 42 125 203 / 151 132 79 219 140 158 58 118

I. Birth control plan: 2 wds. — 182 94 7 149 161 20 47 207 138 / 112 28 157

J. Inhabitant of Canadian Arctic coastlines: 2 wds. (Lat.) — 46 174 102 215 212 68 9 84 109 / 160 115 167 36 121

K. Value obtained with little effort: 2 wds. — 128 97 152 73 105 173 12 222 204

L. Canada belongs to this 48-member association — 60 83 72 91 198 50 205 21 156 / 139 120 150

M. 1935 unemployment march: 4 wds. — 183 78 187 194 170 64 26 59 5 / 106 41 163 213 55

N. Affectionate name applied to Nfld. railway: 2 wds. — 85 155 33 40 134 104 74 144 15 / 98 11 175

O. Prairie folk artist — 172 100 197 119 208 43

P. Bringing nothing: hyph. wd. — 136 171 48 216 101 31 178 87 76 / 4 57

Q. Its fruit grows in long clusters — 186 123 191 61 196 169 206 81 148 / 177 90

R. Flatten out: 2 wds. — 13 117 89 181 51 220 111 200

S. Period of warm weather in late fall: 2 rds. — 77 190 70 1 34 114 166 131 82 / 141 95 66

T. Gold medal winner in swimming, 1984 — 16 184 93 65 145 214 154 39 192 / 71

U. Warrants reporting — 3 133 164 35 116 124 189 218 27 / 168

V. Understood — 143 53 17 23 67 210 180

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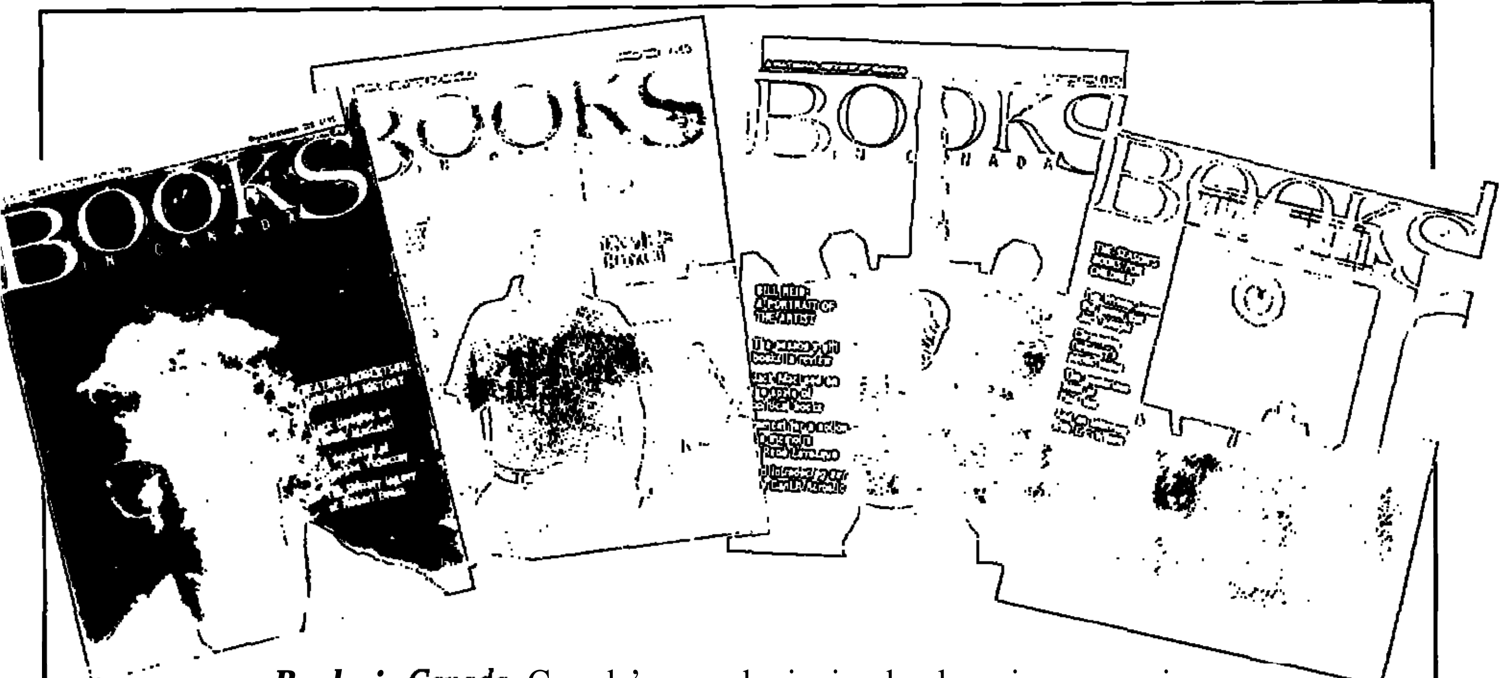

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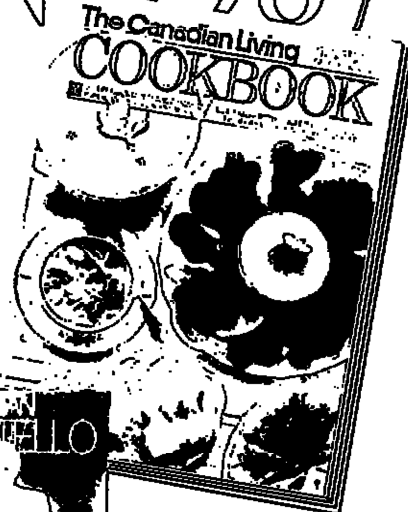

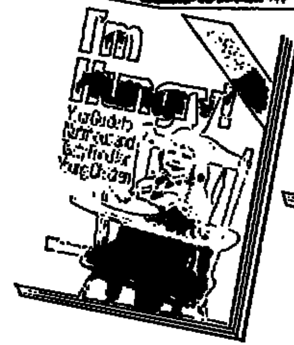

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