

Special on Don Hannah:
The theatrics
of Don Hannah
Reviews of plays
by John Krizanc,
Allan Stratton,
and Michael Cook
And an interview
with Sharon Pollock

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FIELD NOTES

McFadden's dilemma

Funny is the creation of teachers, the rich, and kings. David McFadden is none of these: he is the victim of his own self-definition.



WHILE BACK I was privileged to attend a private screening of a very funny film based on David McFadden's call-to-be-written book *A Trip Around Lake Ontario*. The first two of this five-volume set of travel books have already been published, and I looked forward to the (then) forthcoming *A Trip Around Lake Erie* (Coch House Press, 1960) are among the best comic writings published in this country in the last 30 years.

In one of the film sequences McFadden is walking along a storm-shattered concrete seawall. It is a typical McFadden tableau: he is lonely as a cloud, and the voice-over narrator — McFadden himself — is telling you why he is so bereft; he is lamenting his lost wife and children, bemoaning his outcast fate and his fall from domestic grace. At the crucial moment, McFadden actually does fall, not from grace but from the seawall. It's instantly clear that his fall was unplanned; he simply slips awkwardly on the rough concrete and disappears behind it. The awkwardness lets you know he's hurt himself, and you get the distinct impression that the cameraman is probably yelling frantically at him not to get up.

Saying that the film sequence is in the same league with Chaplin and Buster Keaton is only a slight exaggeration. After all, the pratfall wasn't planned. Saying that it is at least 10 times funnier than anything Wayne and Shuster have ever accomplished isn't an exaggeration at all. But at the same time, the comparisons don't quite work. McFadden's sense of humour is unique. At times it is distinctly unpleasant, and most of the time it is uncaring.

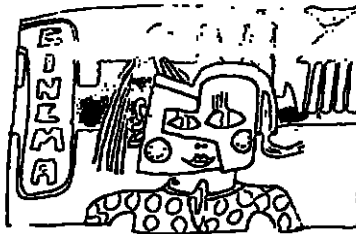
The film has been recut on video, but you're not likely to see it on television. The CEC was interested in it for a while, but wanted to cut out a couple of archetypal McFadden sequences that were thought a bit off-colour. The sequences they wanted to edit out happen to be set in a stripper bar, but the reasons don't have anything to do with bare breasts or lust or lurid language. McFadden's voice-over is describing the strippers' love of and hard luck with their pets. One of them, he reports, had a budgie, but it flew into a pan of boiling water. Another lost

four guinea pigs to an unknown accident who left them on the back step with their internal organs removed. But the public joke in the film is the usual one. It's on McFadden. No one will get to see the video.

McFadden's two *Trip* books are loaded with the same kind of bizarre slapstick self-definition. The slant is to

McFadden's unique directness of perception and by the way, the situations he depicts. The disjunction stems from the directness as well. The subject matter is focused, without being trivial, and in the tradition of great comedy it is edged with sombre undertones. There are dark pools of acid lurking in each episode. The conventional realities his characters exist in are eggshell-thin and constantly breaking to reveal what is beneath them. Consequently, the laughter evoked is often close to tears.

Any of the dozens of episodes from the *Trip* books could illustrate what I'm getting at. In one episode from *A Trip Around Lake Huron*, for example, McFadden — or McFadden's protagonist — runs afoul of some mushrooms. Throughout the book he's been mildly preoccupied with mushrooms — edible wild mushrooms, psychedelic mushrooms, poisonous mushrooms. Because he is never quite sure of anything, he's



never sure whether the mushrooms he finds are edible. Finally he eats 12 mushrooms because he is "almost totally certain" are *Amanita Frostiana*, a mushroom identified by his manual as edible.

The mushrooms turn out to be poisonous, but McFadden can't admit it to his family because he's tried to get them to eat them, too. Absurdly, but with characteristic logic, he takes his family to a movie that evening, convinced that he's going to die of mushroom poisoning but

unable to tell them because he can't bear to face their contempt. Then, after puking violently in the theatre washroom and lying to his wife about it, he realizes that he is inebriated, and proceeds to enjoy the new sensations.

In almost any other country where unprogrammed laughter is permitted (though that is a consistently shrinking list) David McFadden would be a

national treasure. But in Canada he is ignored, and is bullied into being a different kind of writer by more aggressive contemporaries. The critics (as usual) are merely confused by him.


McFadden calls himself a poet, an academic designation that is as common as ratshit in this country, and about as cherished by the public. McFadden is a poet, but in the same way Aristophanes was, or Jonathan Swift. As a thinking poet — rare these days — his closest ties are to Baudelaire and the Japanese haiku artists. Yet the skills that could bring him public acclaim are his skills as a humorist.

Canada's unctuous amateur fetishes with localism and national identity have arrested our concept of humour somewhere in the early part of the century. We are unable to move beyond the colonial humour of Stephen Leacock, and we are amused only by the sophomoric or the parochial. Our officially sanctioned humorists — Wayne and Shuster and journalists like Allan Fotheringham — plunder our sensibilities with in-jokes that contain no venom, vulgar jokes that tickle that has all the

of a herd of cows cropping a meadow. The laughter they evoke is self-satisfied. If you already know the joke, you can laugh. If you don't, you're probably from Timmins or North Battleford or Pouce Coupe. And you never learn a thing.

McFadden's humour isn't like that. He observes the rules of the modern world by turning its rulebook inside out: anything can happen; anything can be mistaken for evil monstrousness; kindness, innocence, or virtue are not a defence against anything. His humour is always loaded. However hard you find yourself laughing, it's never light laughter. It makes you uneasy. What he practices, as announced by his 1934 collection of "poems" is the art of darkness. When the *Trip* books were sent to the Leacock awards committee, they were

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returned with a note saying "Send us something that's funny."

ASIDE FROM HIS ability to write direct, clear English sentences, McFadden's governing gifts are as simple as his execution of them is remarkable and deft: he has an extraordinarily short attention span, and he is a compulsive logician. Instead of being crippled by these gifts, he puts them to work.

The first time I met McFadden, he related a story to me about a recent trip he'd made to the Shaw Festival. He'd obtained front-row tickets so he could watch the actors in close quarters, something I've learned he likes to do with pretty well everything. The performance, he said, was magnificent, although he couldn't quite remember which play he'd seen. When I looked puzzled, he told me

gleefully took a major goober right in the eye. Amazing powers of short-term concentration, he added, shaking his head with obvious pleasure.

That is precisely what McFadden sees in everything, not what is intended or what is being projected, but the slapstick that resides just beneath conventional perceptual and cultural façades and only becomes visible when people concentrate on the phenomenal.

McFadden also has the audacity to follow whatever logic presents itself to his receptors. In one poem, a young medical student brings the cadavers of children home to "practise on" in his spare time. Cadaver of children are conveniently small, and the chief problem is not the expected moral or the practical difficulty of getting them through the streets undetected. Of course McFadden's character loses one. In another poem, a cow breaks out.

swims Lake Ontario
lake because that's the only way it can possibly escape. Logical as hell. Everything is in McFadden's worlds. And if you think they're slightly crazy worlds, so is the one we accept as normal.

McFADDEN'S FIRST dilemma is that his books are not being read. That is a function of at least two distinctly Canadian phenomena.

(1) Lack of distribution: McFadden has a long association with two presses: Coach House and McClelland & Stewart. Coach House kills authors by not distributing the books they print so elegantly, and by not paying royalties. Coach House is an author-run press that had done pioneer work in the computerization of Canadian publishing, and it has published some very beautiful books. Actually, everyone I've ever met

at the Coach House is incredibly nice and well-meaning; and it's one of my favourite stopping places when I'm in Toronto. It's just that the majority of the editorial board can't believe that all Canadian writers don't make at least \$40,000 a year teaching in colleges and universities. Incidentally, McFadden sits on that editorial board, and does typesetting for them.

McClelland & Stewart are more subtle. They operate on a two-tier system, in which they hold a list of "literary" authors like McFadden, Robert Bringhurst, and others who legitimize their claim to being Canada's first and best CanLit press. The other tier consists of the people M&S think of as commercial authors, to whom they accord the real benefits of big-press distribution and publicity. Ironically, McFadden publishes

such as the *Trip* books — with Coach House and publishes his major poetry collections, which have no real chance of gaining a large audience, with M&S. He also edits books for M&S. It's a tricky situation to be in. Even if he wanted to, McFadden can't aim a hard kick at either press because they're his friends, and sometimes employers.

(2) Self-definition: McFadden has a rather peculiar background: his ancestors were Irish hobbits, and until 1976 he lived a kind of Walter Mitty existence at 9 Toby Crescent in Hamilton, Ont., working as a newspaper reporter and writing in his spare time. He doesn't have any university degrees, so he can't, as most of his colleagues do, make a living from the universities. Like most people with hobbit blood in their veins, he's not very aggressive, and he's more than paid the price.

In a sociological sense, the result is a peculiarly Canadian anomaly. McFadden is, and clearly is, a literary, intellectual, and publishing decisions on that basis. What's peculiarly Canadian about it is that his background, sensibility, and economic prospects are working class, and they don't allow him any of the privileges historically accorded to poets.

This is probably the only country in the world in which poets of working-class descent expect to earn a middle-class income from writing poetry. It's a very common aberration, and McFadden is by no means alone in his expectations. No matter that not a single one of them has been able to make a decent living from poetry. What is bizarre is that most of them ascribe the lack of income to a fault in themselves, not in the cultural system or in their expectations. They just don't figure it out.

Poetry in Canada is the avocation of teachers, the independently wealthy and,

quite frequently, of idiots. McFadden is a case of phony. But he is still a victim of his own self-delusion.

Sure, McFadden is a poet, and a gifted one. His *Gypsy Gumbo*, to be published this year, offers McFadden's intelligence at its best. The literary model for the poems is Pound's, and the subject matter is gypsy, McFadden style. I'm not sure what it has to say about gypsies or gypsies, because McFadden is no gypsy, and the language in the poems doesn't resemble the continental syrup usually associated with gypsy gait. That's part of the dilemma, too: a determinedly anti-commercial title from a writer who badly needs commercial success.

ALL THIS LEADS to McFadden's second dilemma: What kind of writer does he have to become in order to have his work read?

Anybody in his or her right mind can see that McFadden should be making a decent living by his writing. But what can he be? Given his attention span and his gift for incongruous anecdote, he could easily be a newspaper or magazine columnist. Or he could be a sports writer. Or a Zen monk administering koans to the intellectually needy. He could be any of those because he writes clear simple sentences compulsively, whether he's describing a bird he just saw fly into a pot of boiling water or discussing Being and Nothingness, both of which he's capable of including in a single paragraph. Somehow I don't think he's going to get hired to do any of those.

The only literary writers who come close to making their living from writing are the novelists. Unfortunately, I don't think McFadden is a novelist. A man who believes that the continuities and transitions in human reality are governed or set off by coincidence — as McFadden professes is the case — should not write novels. If you don't believe me, read *Canadian Senses* (Black Moss). It's his first attempt to write a conventional novel, and it's a very strange book.

Read in small parcels; it's rife with McFadden magic; small bumps against normality, coincidences, people having conversations about weird subjects in normal settings. But everything in the book is slightly off-kilter. The coincidences pile onto one another, and there are no secure motivations for the characters doing what they do, saying what they say, acting out what they act out. It's as if he took a string of perceptual anecdotes or a book of poems and ran them through a blender so they'd all have the same texture. The book doesn't demand McFadden's talent. But it is like watching Wayne Gretzky play golf, or Andre Dawson trying to be a catcher, or Erik Satie writing a sym-

phony for the accordion.

I happen to have a background as an urban planner, and perhaps it has given me a weakness for the concept of "highest and best use of urban amenities." McFadden is an urban amenity that is being grossly misused and/or underused. He needs to rethink what he's doing, and with whom we need to be generous enough, and far-sightedly insistent enough to give this man the audience he deserves.

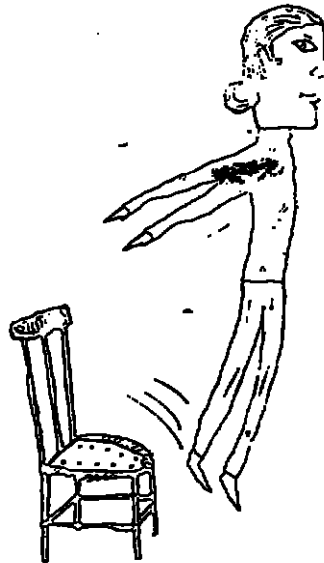
— BRIAN FAWCETT

Aural dilemmas

RADIO DRAMA demands attention in a way that film, television, and even live theatre do not: at its best it forces the listener into taking part in the creative act.

It is a form that is not a costume or a mask, except those suggested by the dialogue. Radio drama takes place entirely in the mind, which may be why interior monologues are so prevalent in the form. More important, though, in demanding so much from its listeners, it should expect close scrutiny. The six plays in the CBC's Stereo Theatre production, *Sextet* (Sundays at 7:05 p.m., beginning March 8), warrant such scrutiny, but only a few can stand up to it.

A religious subtext elevates *Drandon Willie and the Great Event*, by George Ryga, beyond that of one man's exposé of social injustice. The Great Event is a



barely disguised version of British Columbia's Expo 86 and the well-publicized problems it created. The promise of an influx of tourists has prompted shuldors to evict their tenants in anticipation of exorbitant accommodation rates. Two of

the tenants are Willie, a happy-go-lucky fellow who acts when action is needed, not when it is dictated by shallow political rhetoric, and Ned, a broken-down socialist who speaks such rhetoric.

Willie is a victim of irony: the country for which he lost half a stomach, at war, hasn't the social programs needed to fill the remaining half with food. Ned, meanwhile, rants about the exploitation of South-American coffee harvesters while he's selling skim mags. That kind of exploitation doesn't seem worthy of his notice.

It is against both the state's betrayal (The Great Event) and the individual's (Ned's) that Willie makes his statement. There is no end to the play, only a return to the beginning. It fades away without suggesting a conclusion. Willie has made his point, has acted, has risen above the crowd, and Ryga seems to be imploring us to make our own choice.

George Ryga's *Canadian Senses*, a Moribundian Memorandum, owes much of its form to Restoration comedies, which delighted in making fools of genera, hypocritical society. It owes much of its humour to the numerous politicians from across the country who make fools of themselves in Parliament. The cuckolds of old have been replaced with politicians, their spouses, cronies, hacks, pollsters, and advisers.

As its name implies, Moribundia (read Newfoundland) is in a state of decay: strikes have maimed an economy ruled by three corporations, and the island's future depends entirely upon its untapped oil supply. The question is not so much who will tap that supply as it is who cares anyway, for 20,000 polled Moribundians would rather see their premier and opposition leader drowned at sea than vote either one into office.

Cook's humour arises naturally from situation and character (no matter how contrived the situation or character), and while a few of the jokes fall gloriously flat (that being part of the point of bad jokes) the majority of the comedy is genuine. The slights at the inhabitants of Moribundia are nothing more than harmless means to an end. It is an end fully realized in this fast-paced satire of political corruption.

"Why must we churn out dullness as though it was some kind of a product?" asks a character in Paulette Jiles's *Easy Street*. If the question approaches some kind of truth, this "play" would be a marketing person's dream come true. If there is a story here, it is about two street singers and their sudden leap to stardom care of a news reporter. Apparently both singers have backgrounds of sufficient interest to justify their dramatization. But the presentation of these backgrounds is so devoid of tension, emotional depth and

NEW PUBLICATIONS OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA IN SUPPORT OF CANADIAN STUDIES

The National Library of Canada has released two invaluable sources of information on Canadian theses. These books complement the projects and specialized services on theses written in Canada, by Canadians or about Canada provided by the National Library: *Canadiana*, the national bibliography, which annually lists current theses; *Canadian Theses*, a listing of theses accepted from 1947 to 1980; *Canadian Theses (Microfiche)*, which lists theses written since 1960; and the *Canadian Theses on Microfilm Services*, which has made available some 67 000 microfilm theses (about 70% of the theses accepted by universities in Canada).

Descriptive Bibliography on Canadian Theses, 1900-1980, by J. J. Dossick, lists doctoral dissertations on Canada or Canadians, written in English or French, accepted by universities in Canada, the United States and Great Britain, as well as some in Ireland and Australia from 1884 to the spring of 1983. Entries are organized by subject in 29 subdivided sections. The book includes the serial numbers of the theses microfilmed by the National Library of Canada. 559 pages. Catalogue number: SN3-223/1986. ISBN 0-660-53227-1. Price: \$38.75 in Canada, \$46.50 elsewhere (prices subject to change without notice).

Theses in Canada: A Bibliographic Guide, by Denis Robitaille and Joan Walker, records by subject areas the documentation on theses completed for Canadian universities. It includes bibliographies, theses lists by university, and specialized bibliographies with National Library call numbers, a list of data bases with Canadian theses entries, an author index and a subject index. 72 pages. Catalogue number: SN3-87/1986. ISBN 0-660-53228-X. Price: \$9.50 in Canada, \$10.20 elsewhere (price subject to change without notice).

Both publications available from the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0S9. Telephone: (819) 997-3560.

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The selective bibliography can be ordered from the Canadian Government Publishing Centre. \$45.00 in Canada or \$48.00 elsewhere. Catalogue number: SN3-219/1985. ISBN 0-660-53123-2.



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plotline that even the actors sound unhappy.

Jiles won a Governor General's Award for poetry, which may explain the tomfoolery surrounding the exploits of a bed poet named Zeppo (yeah, Zeppo), who is working on an epic poem as confused as the script whence it came. Zeppo's poetry is supposed to be bad, but Jiles isn't good enough to depict this pretentious totter. Lines like "It's biblical. It's positively biblical" don't quite cut it.

W.D. Valgardson's *Carpenter of Dreams* is a simple story told in a simple way. A marriage fails. The wife goes off to live with her lover while husband Bob embarks on a voyage of self-discovery through planned and chance meetings with his daughter, wife, best friend, an embittered divorcee and a neurobiologist. Bob's dream therapy ends with a pat analysis of his recurring images and the realization that "Nothing I believe in matters. I thought I had an idea about it."

Valgardson has carefully thought out this awakening, injecting the play with

related to the idea contained within the title. There was a time when a newly married Bob lived in a log cabin, over the front door of which hung the sign CARPENTER OF DREAMS. Now he is neither a carpenter nor a dreamer.

Bob is arrested for inadvertently taking part in an anti-tree-cutting demonstration. That's him all over: affected by the actions of others. When asked to say "I love you" he becomes evasive, claiming that "every day I deal with words. . . . No one means them. . . . Mom tried to hear [I love you] — most women do." That's an indication of how personal this play is. It seems at times painfully autobiographical and in fact developed from the most private of public writings, a poem.

We are left with a recitation of this poem, a significant moment in the life of a man who finds words meaningless, but who once dreamed of being a writer. Beyond the resolution of this problem, however, there is little for the listener to grab onto that hasn't been grabbed by the countless many who have heard the same story or lived through a similar ordeal.

In *Scarba Arms* is the most ambitious of the six works. Silver Donald Cameron interweaves two tales that occur 250 years apart. The first, older story concerns a villainous fleet captain's whoring and heroism in the face of imminent death; the second deals with the failing marriage of Jack and Diana Matheson, both of whom are having affairs. As Jack's business fails so does his marriage.

Cameron melds the two stories in a curious piece of time-shifting, one that expects/demands much attention from its listeners. Where Cameron may have erred

is in making too great a jump from the slow moping of the stories to the quick realization of Diana that there is a connection. Had that connection remained untraced until the last moments of the play, the tension might not have diminished so rapidly. Still, Cameron has used his medium intelligently and creatively to create a work that is bold, entertaining, and engaging — a fresh look at the indestructibility of human bondage.

When Jean Anouilh adapted *Antigone* in 1942 France, its audience recognized the play's relevance. Charles Tidler's version presents neither a relevant nor a

unique vision of Sophocles's tragedy, in which Antigone risks death to bury a brother deemed a traitor by King Creon's makeshift law. It is a difficult production to grasp: it keeps slipping from the sublime to the ridiculous.

The chorus sounds as sombre as any Greek chorus in any typical production, for Tidler imbues their scenes with a poetry not heard in the rest of the play. But the scenes between choral lamentations play at best like Wayne and Shuster send-up; at worst, like a Three Stooges skit. "The spinning image of her father," says the Chorus of Antigone,

"whose spirit wouldn't break, though his world was shattered." "Oh," replies Creon, "ya think so, do ya?" Even the colloquialisms are inconsistent: one character speaks like a dockworker and a priest in the space of 10 words.

Because of distractions like these, it's doubtful just how much of what is left of *Antigone* will speak to its audience. Tidler deserves some credit for his attempt, but it's something of a tragedy that a play that has survived these 2,500 years is lost in an adaptation that sounds more like parody than homage.

— JASON SHERMAN

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Unparliamentary language

A fact is a fact. But if a fact can be untrue, where does that leave us — and the prime minister — in the matter of truth?

By Bob Blackburn



THIS IS A subject discussed here previously, but among those who ignored me was the prime minister of this country, and I think he should be given a second chance to get something right.

A fact is a fact.

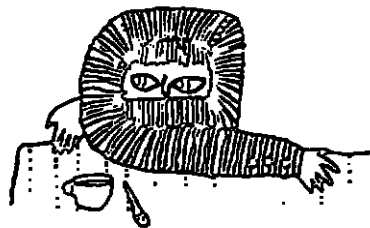
Perhaps it is naive to expect a man who spells his name one way and pronounces it another to recognize even this simple a verity, but it does not fill me with national pride and confidence in the future to watch the prime minister rise in his place in the House of Commons and accuse a member of the Opposition of stating facts which have not been established to be true. (The *which* is his, of course, and I will deal with *that* later.)

No doubt there will be a royal commission appointed to investigate this matter, and its report will make much of the fact that some modern dictionaries acknowledge without reproach that *fact* is used also to refer to something that is alleged or supposed to be true (in fact, the *OED* reports that it is often used in that sense, but *loosely*). Any such finding should be regarded as a typical government attempt at a cover-up.

In the Commons, MPs are not allowed to accuse each other of lying. If the PM were to say (using good English) that a colleague had stated as fact something that was not true, he might be in trouble, unless he put *unintentionally* or some such word in the sentence, but if he says the member quoted facts that have not been demonstrated to be true, he has obfuscated his way off the hook. Perhaps that is a consideration.

Setting aside any philosophers' arguments over the existence of reality, it is distressing that we are now being asked to regard a fact as something that might or might not be true. I remember a trick question in a school test that asked us to clarify this sentence: "If a fact does not fit your theory, discard it." The common response was "discard the fact," and the "correct" one was "discard the theory." In those days, a fact was a fact. I suspect that everyone who failed the test went on to succeed in politics, while I sit here wondering what, if a fact is not a fact, is a fact? If a fact can be untrue, can we still assume that a truth is true? I wouldn't count on it. If you look up *truth* in a large dictionary, you'll find the lexicographers have difficulty defining it fully without using *fact*, and if a fact can be untrue, where does that leave them in the matter of truth?

Fact, although not Anglo-Saxon, is a



good, hard four-letter word. It once meant deed or action, and later an evil deed (a sense that survives in *accessory before or after the fact*), but to dwell on its etymology would be to cloud the issue. The point here is that it has been an invaluable word in the primary meaning

and connotation it has held for a couple of centuries or longer, and people in high places should not be accused of degrading it.

THE QUAIN NOTION persists that the pronoun *that* is a colloquial substitute for a more formal *which*. Often someone who uses *that* correctly in conversation will make the error of replacing it with *which* in an attempt at formal speech or writing. I have been reading a quite decent British thriller rewritten (or, perhaps, edited) with that misconception in mind. I may never finish it, simply because I am brought to a grinding halt every few paragraphs by an intrusively inappropriate *which*. This, too, has been discussed here, and I will repeat only my recommendation that everyone read Fowler on the subjects of *that*, *which*, and *who*, for entertainment as much as for enlightenment. If that is too much trouble, you might simply try to remember to use the relative *which* only for epexegetical purposes.

I CAN'T BE absolutely sure of it, but I think that one night recently I heard one of the stars of the CBC television program *The Journal* wrap up an interview without saying, "Thank you for this." I may have dreamed it. I am told heads have rolled for less serious omissions, and jobs are hard to come by these days. I don't know why it is so important to *The Journal* to refer to something as a *this* when it has just become a *that*, but I suppose it can be traced to the program's earliest days, when there was almost nothing its people would stop at to give it a spurious appearance of immediacy. □

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MEMOIR

Margaret Laurence in England

'There are many things, many discoveries I don't know, but these things are also in myself, and this is where I came from, this is what I am'

By Barry Colloghan

UETTER HOME: London, November, 1983

Went today to Margaret Laurence, who lives in a grey stucco cottage in Elm Grove, Penn., just outside of London. Small and set back from the road, difficult to find, flanked by larger homes, trees, vine-covered walls. The rooms cramped, damp and dark like a doll's house (and if they seem so to me, think of her — from the Prairies. . .), but the low ceilings hold the little heat at shoulder level, an electric heater in a brick-trimmed fireplace in the sitting room, and a little stove in the kitchen/eating-room.

Mrs. Laurence is frenetic. She bolted into the room (the sitting-room is at most 10-by-10 with a tiny alcove to the side) shaking hands quickly, eagerly. She dropped two packages of Cadets onto

Margaret Laurence, 1983



a side table (Cadets, she said, because they are cheapest), then "Let's have no formally — can we talk about you and your family," and when I jokingly replied, "I'll go further . . . a hello kiss on the cheek," she said, "Up, up, up," and "up, throwing the matches onto the table. Though there seemed to be stern resolve in her open and direct almond-shaped eyes, her hands were shaking, ashes spilled over her black dress, a simple wool dress, square-necked. She flicked the ashes off her small breasts, always moving, hands waving, her head bobbing, ashes falling, brushing them away, hunched forward in her chair, swinging back, shunting from side to side, lighting up again, always talking, trying to control a tremor, apologizing, excusing herself, but articulate, with a firm stare.

"The town where I was born," she said. "I don't think it ever occurred to me that I could spend the rest of my life being a writer. No one there ever had done this sort of thing, but I was very lucky, my mother had been a schoolteacher and was a great reader, so I grew up in a house that was full of books. Still, as a writer, I was probably a slow starter."

"Why did you have to go to Africa," I asked, drawing my chair close to hers, sitting in front of her, "before your imagination really stirred?" Her legs were crossed, and she has good legs, a trim body, and her hair was short, pulled into a "French" style, her term.

"Well, probably because that whole countryside seems somehow less real than your own country, and therefore terribly exotic. This was tremendously exciting in a way I couldn't believe the Canadian Prairies could be exciting. I realize now . . . of course.

"In Somaliland, what seems to have quickened your imagination was the Somali struggle to stay alive with a little dignity in a barren land. . . . Your novels and stories, they're essentially concerned with that primitive struggle, staying alive with just a little dignity?"

"I think this is absolutely true," she said, leaning forward in her chair, "and I think that you find — sort of unknown to yourself — that the same themes tend to emerge all the time in your writing. But when I was writing about Africa, the struggle to survive was strictly a physical struggle, whereas in *The Stone Angel* Hagar's struggle is not only to survive physically, but also to survive in an inner sense. The book I've just finished, *A Jest of God*, I can see the same theme, survival with some dignity, but it's more a question of survival of the personality in a world filled with enormous strains and tensions; survival becomes spiritual."

"Did the political strife in Africa stimulate this interest in survival?"

"The political situation," she said, spilling ashes in her lap, "stimulated an interest in human freedom which, back on the Prairies, I didn't know I had. With my first novel, the whole thing is the question of independence . . . political independence, but even at that time it was also an inner independence. I mean, Nkrumah said: 'Seek ye the political kingdom and all else will follow.' Well, I don't believe that. Freedom for me

has become increasingly what is inside rather than what is outside."

"Would you say that's what's wrong with your first novel?"

"Yes, I certainly would. Yes, it's far too external."

"What about politics and the novel? You've written about the struggle between blacks and whites, and a number of short stories in the same context. Can the artist really deal with politics, get involved in actual political situations, without seeming to deliver messages?"

"Personally, I think not. I think very few writers, maybe none, can be novelists and political propagandists at the same time. I think they find themselves writing propaganda. It becomes propaganda rather than a novel because when a writer becomes highly political, he thinks he knows the answers and wants to make you hold the same political point of view, whereas a novel is almost always a kind of discovery. I don't think the writer herself knows entirely what's going to happen, or what's going to emerge, and she has to be prepared for the unexpected. In fact, you partly write to discover something you didn't know before." She laughed and lit another cigarette. "I think there's a very strong sort of evangelical strain in most political writers."

"What do you think of Doris Lessing in this respect? She's written about Rhodesia, you've written about Ghana. . . ."

"Well, I think that when Doris Lessing writes about relationships between people, whether they're Africans or Europeans, she's fine, she's at her best. But her political writing, I find quite quite dull, really. Where she is absolutely super is in this terrific ability for self-analysis; she is tremendously honest."

"And the English writers in this country who've come out of the lower classes: Alan Sillitoe, or Arnold Wesker. . . . is the laying on of a political point of view — in someone like Wesker — is that an attempt to cover up for a fundamental weakness?"

"I think with a great many writers whose obsession is a social or political theme, this is a kind of evasion, an attempt to look away from inner things. In other words, you focus entirely on the outside world." She shifted her black-rimmed harlequin glasses. "The outside world is terrifying. . . . It's terrifying as the inside world."

"Well, American writers today seem preoccupied with the inner world, even the neurotic, what with characters coming apart at the seams, their conditions explored through elaborate symbols, or fantasies, or even the fantastic. . . . But all your stories are technically so good, so forward even quite old-fashioned. How do you see your work in relation to someone like Norman Mailer . . . or William Burroughs?"

"Well," and she rested her chin in her hand, smiling a little, "sometimes I see my work in terms of deep Celtic gloom, to tell you the truth. I think maybe some of those writers are too far out, and I say to myself, 'Margaret, you're too far in' — but I can't help it. The fact is, I know that my prose style is essentially a traditional one, but for me to try to change simply for the sake of changing, or for the sake of trying to be more 'with it' . . . this would be so phony, nothing would happen — except disaster. So all I can really do is to try and put down things according to my own way of seeing, and if the style changes naturally, by itself, and develops, well . . . well and good, and if it doesn't, I'm stuck with the idiom of myself. Whereas, probably at this point, I think people like Mailer can say a very great deal to people, particularly in the North American culture, which I know I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"Well, I don't feel I can. The only thing, really, that concerns me is to try to put down things as I see them, because that is all you've got. You've just got your own pair of eyes, that's all, and the thing I would like to be able to do," she said taking a quick drag on her cigarette, "more than anything else is to create characters that step off the printed page, 'cause this is what really obsesses me, I suppose, more than anything else."

This is still what I look for in a novel. What I'm interested in more than anything else is character. As for Mailer himself, I think that his last book was most unfairly panned."

"Really? *An American Dream!*"

"Yes. I think it's a terrible book in many ways. . . ."

"I think it's an atrocious book. . . ."

"Well, I don't think it's atrocious," she insisted. "It shows a tremendous interest and understanding of basically the same thing that Hawthorne was writing about centuries ago. I mean, Mailer is obsessed with the problem of good and evil, particularly evil, and I think that in some parts of the book you get a marvellous picture of a man who is quite literally teetering on the brink of madness, but what happens, of course, is that the thing falls down again and again, because the writing starts

'I think with a great many writers whose obsession is a social or political theme, this is—a kind of evasion, an attempt to look away from inner things. They focus entirely on the outside world. The outside world is terrifying, but not quite so terrifying as the inside world'

off very strongly, in a particular chapter, and then it sort of falls to pieces."

"Sure, he's concerned with evil, but he's got no conception of good. Isn't that where the whole book falls apart?"

"Yes, I think it probably does, just on exactly that, although I don't feel he has no concept of good — but that his concept of good seems pretty unsatisfactory, sort of saccharine . . . this terribly sweet girl who's just too good to be true . . . I didn't think he was able to do that."

"Many Americans about right now . . . Mailer's *An American Dream*, *Sally*, *Sally*, *Sally* . . . that their work is done with a hatred of women. . . ."

"I would've said *An American Dream* is far more a sort of self-hatred. I mean, the thing that bothers me most about Mailer is his very strong sense of self-destruction. . . ."

"And I think something of the reverse is true here in England, among women writers, a kind of hatred of men. . . ."

"Flamboyant women novelists who. . . ."

"Yes, Doris Lessing I think has a real hatred. . . ."

"Yes, so do I," she said. "But I don't think that this is necessarily true for some of the women novelists about whom this has been said, like Edna O'Brien, but as for Lessing. . . ."

"Who are the other American writers you're reading, on this side of the waters. . . ."

"Well, instantly my mind goes blank, I can't think of anything I've read within. . . ."

"Well. . . ."

"The last 15 years, but I liked Bellow's *Herzog*, it was a fantastically good novel, simply because the character of Moses Herzog came across to me so very strongly. . . ."

"What about Canadian writing?"

"I've just got Al Purdy's book of poems, *The Cariboo Horses*, which I like very much, too."

"Were there any Canadian writers who touched you?"

"When I was quite young I read far more American and English writing, and then I lived away from Canada for quite a while."

She lit another cigarette and after such a straight run of talk with someone she didn't know she seemed suddenly tired . . . or emptied, not of energy but of words. She stared straight at

me. *Galsworthy Who Dare*, I thought, remembering tough Hogar Shipley, but then there was also some terrible vulnerability in her. That fluttering of her hands. She touched the elegant brooch of her left shoulder and then gave a wide silent sweep of her arm toward the walls. The book shelves. The room was book-bound, hundreds, nearly all contemporary, many African. On one wall — a highly polished purple hand in some kind of stone or glass. On the mantel, a wooden, fawn-coloured urn and a carved ebony head. Margaret said the urn was used in Somali religious services; after prayers the Somalis urinated in the urn. She added, if they had no urine, they could substitute sand. The head was from Ghana, one of the few good heads she thought available, and the hand on the wall, also African, was used to ward off evil spirits . . . she hoped, suddenly talking again with good openness; and she seems incapable of assuming a public face, a rôle, or perhaps heartiness is her rôle, her defence. Whatever, within the time we'd been talking she was greatly gentle when listening or defending her thoughts. And perhaps the cottage atmosphere had much to do with my impressions, but she is a country woman — bold, even brash in her shyness, with plain rough hands, fingernails bitten back to the quick, adjusted to her circumstances.

"You know," she said, "I think that I came to the point, writing about Africa, where I felt that if I continued to write about Africa I would be writing strictly as a tourist, and in fact might be spending the rest of my life as a tourist. I didn't want that. I started writing about Canada, it was very much a coming home, mentally, for the first time an attempt not to evade my own past and childhood. Essentially, the same thing very many writers do, come to terms with where you've come from, come to terms with what you are. This came out in *The Stone Angel*. There are many things, many discoveries I didn't like, in fact I deplore, but these things are also in myself, and this is where I came from, this is what I am. You don't get very far unless you come to some kind of terms with it. I don't really want to write anything any more except about people that I can know a bit from the inside."

woman in a small Prairie town, Manawaka again, a person who doesn't really make very much contact with the rest of the world, who is very withdrawn and shut in, and it really is the story of her attempt to break . . . well an . . . also to break away from the influences of the past. . . ."

"Is this the same survival. . . ."

"It is really survival, yes. . . ."

"Getting a little dignity by breaking out. . . ."

"That's right, and also finding even in the most personally appalling circumstances that sometimes you discover dignity at the very depths of the pit, as it were," she said, her gaiety gone, turned inward. "You know. . . ."

"Well, you've gone back to Manawaka in your imagination, and now your Manawaka woman's trying to break out, but you're still here living in England. Why is that?"

"It's just sort of chance, really. At the moment I like it here. I like living close to London. I've gained quite a bit through having met a number of English writers and publishers and so on but I don't intend to stay here for the rest of my life. I'll go back to Canada."

"What do you make of the whole business of Canadianism? I remember one of the reviewers of *The Stone Angel* said that the real merit of this fine new book was its Canadianism."

"Really, I feel so," and she closed her eyes, as if in pain, "I feel so strongly against that point of view. I think the thing that matters least about a novel is whether it's Canadian or American or English or African, or what it is. I think the only thing that matters is whether it's a good novel and I hate really to have my writing talked about as Canadian writing. I mean,

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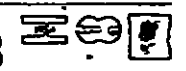
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it is Canadian writing because I'm Canadian, but this is not the central thing. This is not important. It isn't important for me to try to be a Canadian writer — I wouldn't dream of trying — but the only thing that one wants is to be a reasonably good writer. And I think, if only Canadians could quit talking about Canadian writing. We're far more sort of self-conscious about this than other people are. . . ."

"Don't you fear, when you come back to Canada, getting caught up in the whole business of being a Canadian writer, promoting Canadian culture?"

"I don't know whether this is a tactless thing to say or not, but I really am very much afraid of this. In one sense, this is a reason why I'd rather stay here for the moment, because I do think that with the best will in the world, in Canada; the writer gets too much recognition for too small a body of work. This sounds so terribly ungrateful, but I'm not ungrateful you know. I'm terribly pleased that my books have sold well in Canada and so on . . . but I don't think it's a very good idea for a young writer — not that I'm all that young — to be a beginning writer to have a great deal of recognition for one or two books. The whole thing is, can you continue, can you go on to where you've written maybe a few novels and then we can see whether you really want to do it or not. This is really all I want to do."

We sat down to lunch in the kitchen/eating-room and were joined by her children — a pretty, very English girl of 14 wearing glasses; her enthusiasm is horses. (Margaret hopes she will get over this, hopes she will not become one of those "terrible horsey women" — and then she worries that her daughter will meet no boys in England. Boys and girls, she said, never seem to meet in England until they are adults and then, like children coming together for the first time, they have no idea of what to say to each other — exactly Dickens's description; people do not meet, they carom off each other.) The boy is 10, apparently very clever with his hands, and is building transistor sets in his room.

The casserole was frugal; macaroni, peas, and chicken chunks. She served no dessert, though the boy complained because Lily seldom had dessert. She is worse than there are not enough cups to go around.

It is enraging, those academics who engineered the Governor General's Award (\$1,000) for Douglas LePan instead of for *The Stone Angel*; here she is, down and out, doing research and editing at £50 per throw. She rents the cottage from someone at Macmillan in London who gives her a good deal.

She went on talking with animation about Canada, and how the idea of the "land" has been overplayed and what interests her is people, not poplar trees. She remembers her little town not as picturesque or landscape, but as the home of her domineering grandfather, a man hated by his children and his children's children. That experience, she insisted, was far more interesting, overpowering, than any mound of rock, clump of trees, or CPR train-track across the tundra.

She said she would like to live in Toronto, where she could have a coterie of friends, people she could talk with: she yearns for Canada, though Vancouver was apparently a hell, trapped in a world of engineers (the only reference to her husband). Especially, she wants her children to be in Canadian universities, again for social reasons.

When I left she seemed a little sad to see me go, though she was hearty and abrupt in her farewells. She had relaxed completely during lunch, sitting back in her chair, picking her teeth with a wooden match. Smoking, smoking. The two little curls were still firmly pressed against her temples. She shook hands. She called goodbye and turned back into the cottage.

I drove away under a grey sky. It was drizzling. I looked back, the cottage almost hidden by half-dead autumn foliage, a frail wisp of smoke from the stove. I felt she was very alone and vulnerable there, that she must come home and settle. □

PROFILE

Going down the road

Don Hannah's gift for play-writing didn't blossom until he left New Brunswick for Toronto. Now he is turning his thoughts back toward home

By Mark Czarniecki



FOR THE FIRST 17 years of his life in Shediac, N.B., Don Hannah didn't know anyone outside his family who cared about writing. His high school in Moncton had no place for inquiring minds, and the local



his father's employment with the CNR was: while in high school,



more book stores in Saint John and Halifax. If it is true, as the New

Brunswick poet Elizabeth Brewster has said, that "People are made of places," then Don Hannah may have been born in the wrong place — much like Alex, the transsexual in Hannah's play *The Wedding Script*, who bristles at the hackneyed description of her dilemma — "You were a woman trapped inside a man's body" — while recognizing its basic truth. Like Alex, Hannah took a

Don Hannah



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROSEMARY HENNING

long time breaking out, not just out of the East but out of the self-definitions that prevented him from discovering his vocation as a writer. "I was really stupid about that," he says, pondering the delay. "Why did it take me so long to leave? That's what my work is partly about."

Hannah's work is indeed about that and a lot more. Alex is a unique creation, a woman who is both female and male, married, and the father of a son. She presides like a hermaphroditic goddess of infertility over a marriage of convenience between Rupert, a Toronto-based expatriate, and Louise, a 35-year-old P.E.I. expatriate, who impulsively agrees to marry Rupert so he can stay in Canada, even though both are involved with other people. Superficially a farce about modern manners and mores set in Toronto's renovated Riverdale, *The Wedding Script* conjures up darker and subtler undercurrents of loneliness and alienation: although Rupert and Louise are reunited at the end with their former partners, the only certainty for all the characters is that they have journeyed farther into their souls than ever before. *The Wedding Script* is an astonishing achievement for a playwright's first produced work. The sensitive production at Tarragon Theatre in April, 1986, was nominated for six Dora Awards, including best new play, and was runner-up for a 1986 Chalmers Award.

In the meantime, Hannah's only other full-length play, *Rubber Dolly*, was produced at Tarragon last November. *Rubber Dolly* bristles with the same kind of anger at the economic and spiritual conditions that have created a world where children are victims of violence and Godot is the lone worker who arrives too late, if at all. Hannah has textured this bleak tapestry with threads of love — the tortured maternal love of Fern, a home-less refugee from New Brunswick, and the enduring though often hostile affection between Fern and her sister Marie. As Ray Conlogue wrote in the *Globe and Mail*: "Hannah, who among his considerable strengths has an unerring ear for language, puts into Fern's mouth some of the roughest, funniest, most obscene and deeply human speeches any Canadian playwright has yet managed."

It has been quite a year for a playwright who started his first play on St. Patrick's Day, 1984, seven years after leaving the East for good at the age of 26. Perhaps waiting so long to go down the road wasn't such a dumb idea after all.

THE SOFT-SPOKEN painter of these penetrating urban portraits is a nervous, elfin creature in red plastic glasses whose writing until 1984 comprised less than a dozen short stories ("lousy carbon copies of Mavis Gallant"), a novel (destroyed), poetry and film reviews ("too much like Pauline Kael") for publications ranging from the Charlottetown *Monitor* to the *Body Politic*. His vocation became clear only when he found his voice in the theatre. Relentlessly modest at the best of times, he shifts uncomfortably in his chair when he considers how his characters assume voices and lives of their own: "It's overpowering — you feel you could burst. I feel I've discovered something so true about this play, these people, and ultimately about myself. . . . It all seems so mystical." The process highlights

the paradox in his life: in order to find his own voice, he had to speak honestly for others.

Joyfully labouring in his true vocation, Hannah now can view the journey that brought him there with some equanimity. His mother's family goes back two centuries in the Maritimes, and his mother, who was and remains a powerful figure in his life, has been living in the same house in Shediac for all her 70 years. His older brother studied to be a concert pianist, while Hannah himself took music lessons, as well as art from a "wonderfully loony nun who painted abstract expressionist virgins." His mother, a devout, liberal-minded Protestant, played hymns, Irving Berlin, and Gershwin on the piano — the first songs Hannah remembers are "Cheek to Cheek," "Top Hat," and "Ramona." But outside his home, he felt like a stranger in hell, an alienation that became more severe once he realized he was homosexual.

When he was in his mid-teens, his mother found a copy of Kael's *On the Movies* in a drug store and gave it to him. "It was the most important thing I'd ever read. Suddenly I realized there existed people who argued about books, movies and their own experience." After high school he studied fine art and English at Mount Allison University (he left before completing his degree) and worked as a teacher with mentally handicapped children. But the urge to leave was rapidly engulfing him: "I started to feel I shouldn't do what I didn't want to — even working with handicapped children was an escape. But for a long time leaving the East felt like some kind of betrayal."

In 1977 a scholarship to study English at York University finally brought him to Toronto, and he immediately felt at home. But, despite encouragement from a professor who said he had written the only essay she'd ever read with a plot, he quickly realized that "The world really didn't need another thesis on Hollywood and F. Scott Fitzgerald." In 1979 he gave up his graduate studies to become a day-care worker in Regent Park. Then the events at the heart of the plot of *Rubber Dolly* shattered his peace of mind and began festering in his soul.

The revelation came two years later, after a trip to New York, where Hannah atypically binged on theatre for a week. He could hear the dialogue in other people's voices — they were real voices. "I knew then that was my gift, the one thing I could really do. It was the most powerful realization of my life. I came back to Toronto and finished the first draft a couple of months later. It all came out in a big sob. I had no concept of what I was doing — I didn't understand the process of writing a play at all."

A friend introduced Hannah to director JoAnn McIntyre, who showed the script to Urjo Kareda, Tarragon Theatre's artistic director. "I've worked on a lot of new Canadian plays," says McIntyre. "Most of them just aren't there — and they're the ones that get on stage. But this one was strongly grounded and the characters were already well developed." Kareda agrees: "I was taken by the rawness and a real writer's sense of being able to turn on a dime, make you see a character from different angles. He took me by the hand through the curtain of my own fear about this material. I resisted but his compassion and humour illuminated it and made me recognize my own feelings. That kind of writing doesn't come along very often."

McIntyre wanted to direct the play, but there was no room in the 1984-85 season. Instead, Kareda invited Hannah to join Tarragon's Six Playwrights Unit in the fall and start work on a new play. Still believing that scripts were dashed off in weeks or months at most, Hannah wrote another play in August, which McIntyre advised him to put in a drawer. Meanwhile, she applied for a grant to develop *Rubber Dolly* with him through her own theatre, the Theatre Resource Centre.

As part of the Tarragon program, Hannah worked with Kareda, playwright-in-residence Judith Thompson, and

associate artistic director Andy McKim, who by chance had known Hannah at Mount Allison. Hannah decided to try a marriage comedy as an exercise in script-writing, "but the more I wrote the closer it came to home. I wasn't writing a play with a lot of French doors any more," he says. "I worked at the day-care and typed at night. It was totally exhilarating watching the characters take shape."

In one of the unit's most successful exercises, the playwright acts out a character's monologue and then answers questions in character. From the start of *The Wedding Script*, Hannah knew that the marriage of convenience needed an outsider, a landlord or lady, possibly gay, to comment on this act of misrule. Early in the first month, he did Alex in monologue and discovered that she was a transsexual from Pugwash, N.S.,

'I knew that I wanted someone like Eve Arden or Rosalind Russell, but that kind of woman didn't exist except in movies. It was as if I wanted that woman to exist so much I had to become her'

who adored Eve Arden: "I knew beforehand that I wanted someone like Eve Arden or Rosalind Russell, but that kind of woman didn't exist except in movies. It was as if I wanted that woman to exist so much I had to become her. But the most important thing I discovered in the monologue was how much I loved her. I was excited at the idea of spending time with her — it was so easy seeing things through her eyes. It was like 1,000 explosions going off in my head at the same time."

In the late spring of 1985, Hannah took *The Wedding Script* to the Banff Playwrights Colony headed by John Murrell and went through four or five rewritings. It was a difficult summer for him: his father was dying, and Hannah went home to Shediac, taking *Rubber Dolly* with him. After his father's death, he came back to Toronto and worked on the text with McIntyre in preparation for a reading in November at Tarragon. It was tough going, Hannah reluctant to immerse himself in the maternal again ("I thought, who would ever put on a play about somebody from the East Coast who killed a child?"), but the reading was stunning. Nobody had realized the power the words conveyed until they were actually spoken. Kareda immediately slotting the play into the 1986-87 season.

Surprisingly, when the play was performed in workshop at Banff, the actors rebelled against it. On the other hand, the dedication of the Toronto cast to the script in the premiere production was palpable. What the East Coast might think of it may never be known: because of a "liberal use of the F-word," as one critic primly put it, *Rubber Dolly* has little chance of being performed anywhere in Don Hannah's home territory.

THE FAMILY — displaced, brutalized, restructured, possibly redeemed — lies at the heart of Hannah's plays. Like so many protagonists in plays by Michel Tremblay and David French, his characters struggle to escape the limitations of geography and the often crippling effects of tradition. But Hannah is ultimately most like Tremblay in his exploration of role and gender reversal: just as the "average male" — more or less heterosexual, more or less non-violent, possibly a father, and perhaps remotely humane — has disappeared from Tremblay's works, the men in Hannah's plays (Rupert excepted) are either violent, absent, or undergoing sex transformation. Hannah's comic touch lightens the women's load; although Alex mocks her predicament, she staunchly believes that she has fulfilled the demands of paternity: "I was as good a father as any woman could have been under the circumstances."

Hannah's focus on the fate of children under these condi-

tions adds poignancy and profundity to his sombre family portraits. Children are conceived in *Rubber Dolly* and *The Wedding Script* only to be given away, miscarried, or murdered. Still, the children keep being conceived, and in that often random but ultimately hopeful fertility lies the parallel to Hannah's artistic creativity: the moment when the infant utters a first cry is the moment a character, through Hannah, gives voice to itself and its creator.

It is easy to dismiss plays like these as the unrefined exploitation of a violent, hot-blooded working-class minority. Michel Tremblay's use of *joual* was universally decried, yet it launched a revolution in Quebec literature. Judith Thompson's *Crack-walker* was attacked for its explicit violence and child abuse by critics who, while admiring the fidelity of Thompson's dialogue, did not understand that she was re-creating, not merely reflecting. Robert Crew's appraisal of *Rubber Dolly* in the Toronto *Star* was in the same vein:

The problem with plays about ordinary people is that they run the risk of being, well, ordinary. Such is the case with Don Hannah's *Rubber Dolly* . . . Bravely, earnestly, it tackles a thorny problem, that of violence against children. But for the most part, the style is one of intimate docudrama, something that can be done as well, if not better, on television.

In fact, the structure of *Rubber Dolly* is not a docudrama at all, since it involves an alinear narrative that frequently shifts back and forth in time. Moreover, the staging is played out on a tight, surrealistic set, suggesting isolated areas of the memory and consciousness of Fern, the central character.


Docudrama or not, nothing might seem more removed from the brutality of *Rubber Dolly* than the purity of an aria, yet roughness and delicacy are both music to an ear as sensitized as Hannah's to the poetry of language. What these modes have in common is untrammelled feeling. Says Hannah: "Opera is good for people whose emotions are so big they can't speak them — it's so passionate and sexy." In *The Wedding Script* he is not content to use opera just as background music, but weaves it into the matter of the play. With his usual insensitivity, Louise's boy-friend Bob explains to Alex that the soprano aria of Handel's *Xerxes* nowadays has to be sung by women because the boys are more frightened than they used to be. Chantelle, in *The Wedding Script*, is distilling so many of the play's ambiguous themes while at the same time earning a laugh.

That bittersweet quality also infuses Fern's final speech, and the themes are similar. Although potential life symbolized by the castrated or murdered male is snuffed out, passionate love and self-knowledge blend in a horrifying yet moving redemption when Fern recalls the moment of throttling her son and her scream, "S'about time ya stay in one place long enough to hear how much I loves ya!"

The Wedding Script is a more complex and ambitious work than *Rubber Dolly*, but its final scene is not entirely satisfying. Sudden, almost incredible transformations occur. While Rupert and Louise have been away in England awaiting permission to re-enter Canada, she has a miscarriage and then gets pregnant again. Meanwhile, back home, the couple's original partners have slipped personalities: punkish, anti-establishment Chantelle embraces money and designer clothes while Bob, a repressed colourless bank employee, discovers therapy, opera, and gardening.

The implausibility of the plot suggests that the characters, especially Bob, have not been explored sufficiently to justify their actions. Hannah's admirable generosity toward his characters may also have overflowed: explaining Louise's second pregnancy, he says, "She wanted to have a baby so much I wanted her to be pregnant." *The Wedding Script* received another production at Edmonton's Phoenix theatre in February, but major revisions do not appeal to Hannah at this point: "It's really intense getting involved with these people, but I've done

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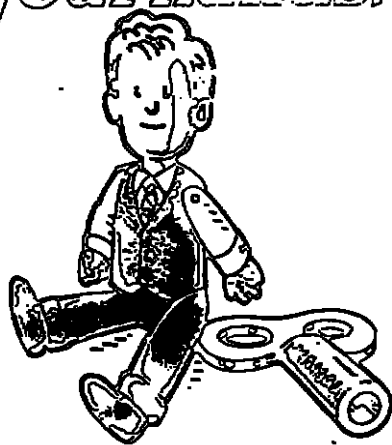
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it — the love affair is over. You could recapture it, but why would you? I find it very sad. I wish there were easier answers for them, but there aren't."

HANNAH FEELS there is now no place for him to go but back. The lost children of his plays represent a lost childhood, as if he had passed from the womb of his family into adult life in a bubble machine. That childhood can never be captured, but Hannah knows that the East Coast he rejected is a part of him that must be explored. The title of *Rubber Dolly*, for example, is taken from a Don Messer song: "Messer is terribly important to me — I don't know why. I grew up with it. What was wonderful about *Don Messer's Jubilee* was how incredibly ordinary yet so individual the people were. I never thought at the time this would have any meaning for me."

Hannah has gone back in the summers to visit his family in Shediac, but he feels restless there and stays on Prince Edward Island, where he has close friends. P.E.I. seems to be a haven for refugees from other Atlantic provinces who find their native soil overcrowded with difficult memories: David French, whose plays about the Mercers from Newfoundland struggling with their past in the urban homogeneity of Toronto bear comparison with Hannah's, also summers on the Island. Both playwrights deal with the effects of going down the road, and both have an excellent ear for speech rhythms — especially the fast, smart repartee that peppers the speech of Maritimers and the urban poor.

What Hannah will discover in his next play, *In the Lobster Capital of the World* (Shediac's motto), is still a mystery to him. The first scene has evolved, however, from that play he hid in a drawer three years before. Perhaps he will find out why it took him so long to leave — and that perhaps there were good reasons to stay. By his own admission, Shediac Bay is beautiful

country, its warm water and sandy beaches poetically evoked in *Rubber Dolly* through one of the characters' childhood reminiscences. "It's obvious from the work that I can't shake the East," says Hannah. "It's important for me to understand the place as well as I can. Toronto helps me do that better than when I was there — it also helps me love it more."

One aspect of his early life Hannah definitely wants to explore is the feeling of separateness he had as a unilingual Anglo in a predominantly Acadian part of New Brunswick. As a student, he went to films and art exhibits in Moncton and realized that Acadian cultural life was much more dynamic than English culture in that corner of the province.

Growing up English in Shediac meant looking to Toronto and New York for cultural nourishment, but that feeling changed when Hannah discovered the novels of David Adams Richards in 1980. "He's the most exciting English cultural event in New Brunswick. Those books blew me away. He cared so deeply about the people he wrote about — he was so excited by where he was from he was on fire." Last summer Hannah tried to buy Richards's books in Charlottetown and Moncton to give to friends who live there — and failed. "It was like going to Mississippi and not being able to buy Faulkner."

Rubber Dolly and *The Wedding Singer* may portray the dispossession of Maritimers from their own culture, but the struggle in New Brunswick of its own cultural voices underlines the province's cultural dispossession. It is sad that, because of their realistic language, Hannah's plays may never hold a mirror up to the people of New Brunswick wherein they might see their own nature. Hannah himself was a bit nervous when his mother came to Toronto to see *Rubber Dolly*, but she didn't flinch in confirming the credo that has guided her son to success: "That's the way those people talk — that's the way you have to write it." □

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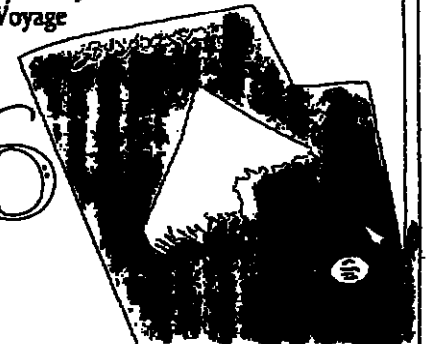
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REVIEW

To tell the truth

By John Elliott

Prague, by John Krizanc, Playwrights Canada, 102 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 449 5).

JOHN KRIZANC'S *Prague*, first performed at the Tarragon Theatre in 1934, and now published by Playwrights Canada, plays much better than it reads. And this is exactly as it should be. Unlike so many plays by young playwrights, which overstate their purpose, *Prague* in the text retains its mysteries and ambiguities, reserving its final clarity for the compelling images that only performance can conjure up. Not surprisingly, then, the play resists summary, although the bare bones are clear enough.

Prague 1983. The members of a small theatre company, *Bread and Dreams*, grapple with the problems, both personal and public, that beset artists in the oppressive climate of Czechoslovakia since the Russian invasion of '68. Will they be able to perform a play containing a critical allegory of the invasion for a group of visiting Russians? (The play written by Stefan Kura, the womanizing, flashy "official" playwright, has been given a new ending by Vladimir, the company's director. Will Lenka, company actress, get a chance to consummate marriage prospect in the West? Will she be able to leave the country? Will counterfeit U.S. dollars be traced back to Kura or eventually to Vladimir's father by the police investigator, Major Zrak?

... points out in his enthusiastic foreword, the cast members of *Bread and Dreams* embody the full range of political attitudes. Vladimir and Stefan Kura have come to an accommodation with conditions in the country: Vladimir to redeem himself, through his work, for betraying his dead father, a signatory of Charter 77 (the artists' solidarity manifesto); Stefan Kura to enjoy the privileges that allow his trips to the West and his relative freedom within the system. Against them stand Petr, former director of the company and transient opponent of the system, Lenka, and the enigmatic Honza, clown, drunk, and bitter commentator, who periodically pops up like a jack-in-the-box to pierce the face of Lenka and depart with flashes of telling truth.

For all its trappings of a thriller, *Prague* explores profounder themes. Dazzling theatricality fills in the gaps left by the

text and dialogue. The final moment of the play bursts like an epiphany on the audience illuminating in one striking effect the manifold meanings of the play. Vladimir's redemption is postponed, and the whole debate about truth suddenly crystallizes.

Prague is a political play, and its meaning reaches beyond Prague and Czechoslovakia in 1933. This could be post-Vietnam America or any political society where the "ending" is in danger of being rewritten. Truth, in a society where the counterfeit is the order of the day, where official versions prevail, is always in jeopardy.

All this is supported by Krizanc's wonderful sense of the theatrical. He exploits the constant shifting back and forth between illusion and reality, through the theatrical metaphor of the play-within-the-play, exposing roles within roles. Honza, the clown, the man of many masks, proves by feats of sleight of hand that the truth can literally be made to disappear.

Krizanc's first major play, *Tamara*, attracted a cult following. *Prague* goes a long way to confirming his talent and the fascination he holds for his audience. I for one await his next with eager anticipation. □

REVIEW

Remembrance of things past

by Marc Côté

Doc, by Sharon Pollock, Playwrights Canada, 126 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 448 7).

SOME PLAYScriPts read well, others don't, independent of their production potential. All plays must finally be tested on the stage; it is there that their strengths and weaknesses become most evident. Yet Sharon Pollock's *Doc*, first performed at Theatre Calgary in 1934, reads extraordinarily well as a script, a book, a work of literature.

Pollock's previous works include *A Compulsory Option*, *One Tiger to a Hill*, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, and the 1932 Governor General's Award winning *Blood Relations*. One of the main concerns of her plays has been the attempt to demonstrate the unveiling of truth, both personal and historical. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Blood Relations* (the ongoing refrain from it jumping to mind: "Did you do it, Lizzie? Did you do it?"), where Pollock explored the form of the play, the idea of theatre, as she

explored the question of Lizzie Borden's murder of her parents. Pollock sacrifices neither content nor form in an attempt to be "original"; her characters and her writing are always interesting and important.

Tensions and conflicts abound in *Doc*. The eldest daughter of a worshipped small-town doctor, Catherine returns home because her father has had a severe heart attack. Using memory as a guide, Pollock has father and daughter confronting their mutual and separate pasts. The play does not have flashbacks, as flashbacks have come to be used: the action jumps from father's memory to daughter's memory. The time sequences are hard to follow, as the two characters grapple with ghosts from their pasts — the father holding the letter that either blames him or absolves him of his mother's death, the daughter facing the memory of her mother's slow decline into alcoholism and, finally, her death. As Catherine's mother (Bobbie) and her courtly uncle (Oscar) and her younger sister (Katie) arise in her memory or the memory of her father, they appear on stage.

The lack of linear time structure is possibly one of the play's greatest strengths. The time shifts, as Pollock indicates in her directions, from the present of Catherine's necessary visit to the past of her father's hopes of becoming a doctor, to the past of the marital troubles that her father's obsessive dedication to his practice causes, to the past of his mother's death, his wife's breakdowns, and the loss of his daughter who, in the end, confesses to her father that she is just like him: she's got to go. The scenes flow one into the other, and the comment on what has gone before and what is to come after. Catherine, as a mature and successful writer, is able to see herself as the young and confused K... becomes able to see, if not understand, the conditions that led Katie to become Catherine. She is also forced to relive her mother's death, which, as the play unfolds, reveals itself to have been similar in many ways to the death of her grandmother, for which her father is partially held emotionally responsible.

No one in this play is happy, nor is the subject matter uplifting. But Pollock manages to avoid the general feeling of perpetual malaise that has become a trap of Canadian drama; she also avoids condescending to her characters. The people in *Doc* are neither enviable nor pitiable. They are entirely believable and, because of this, easy to empathize with.

Doc has its dramatic predecessor in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. This is not to say that Pollock is derivative of Ibsen but rather to point out the strengths of her work. As time is manipulated in *Doc* the parallels

drawn are sharp and clear; there's no guesswork as to what Pollock might be saying. Artistically as only a playwright can, Pollock is spending directly to her audience. If Ibsen had been able to manipulate time as well and efficiently as Pollock does, *Ghosts* would not be the difficult play it is. □

REVIEW

Beyond the Fringe

By Judith Ruzickoff

Five from the Fringe, edited by Nancy Bell, NeWest Press, 159 pages, \$6.00 paper (ISBN 0 920897 22 3).

A Majority of Two, by Alun Hibbert, Playwrights Canada, 71 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 428 2).

Skull Riders and Blue Hands, by Jesse Glenn Bodyan, Playwrights Canada, 207 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 413 4).

DURING ITS FIVE-YEAR history, Edmonton's Fringe Theatre Event has burgeoned into a veritable smorgasbord of theatre: productions have run the gamut from the tastefully sublime to the tantalizingly ridiculous. *Five from the Fringe* offers readers a seemingly unrelated selection of new plays culled from the first four seasons.

As a record of the eclecticism of the Fringe, where the only criterion for inclusion is the requisite entrance fee, the volume succeeds in capturing the essence of the event. As a sample of what editor Nancy Bell refers to as "the best" of the new works performed, the book falls short of expectations: the plays included are not particularly exciting, and do some of them seem suited to print presentation at all.

Small Change Theatre's *One Beautiful Evening* appears to be a rather simple clown show with virtually no spoken text. The lack of evocative photographs or explanation of style makes the theatrical viability of the piece impossible to discern. Kenneth Brown's *Life After Hockey* demands audience interaction with its lively and accessible performer to raise the play above the simplistic level of the text. Laurier Gareau's two-hander, *The Betrayal*, presents a series of conversations between Gabriel Dumont and the aging priest, Père Julien Moulin. Again, this script does not possess an inherent theatricality and its didacticism makes it an unlikely candidate for inclusion in such a volume.

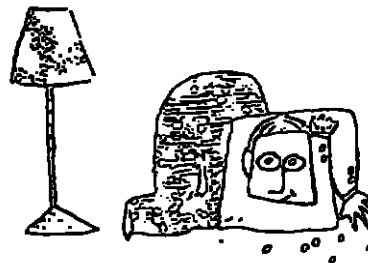
Lyle Victor Albert's *Cut!* has a clever premise (it chronicles a visit to the land

of purgatory for characters allegedly cut from famous plays) but the humour, based on local and current events, detracts from potential post-Fringe production. John Sell Kirk's *The Lord Called Morning*, an earnest but overly sentimental piece about and performed by Cree teenagers, is neither particularly innovative in content nor skilful in its expression of theme. Perhaps either the methods of creation or aim of the piece are reasons for its success at the Fringe.

If there are to be future volumes of Fringe festival bits, one can only hope that information on the producing theatres will be included — their goals, specific styles of theatre, target audiences — so that readers may understand why certain plays have been chosen.

As well, the primary goals of the Fringe and its originator (Brian Pauley of Edmonton's Chinook Theatre) are not clearly articulated. When Bell asserts in her brief introductory notes that "the best of these new works were very good indeed. Here are five of them," she is, in fact, denying the governing principles of the festival. This is an event where the basic premise would appear to be the provision of a variety of performance styles for audiences and low-cost stage time for smaller theatres and lesser known playwrights. Both of these aims are geared to allowing a relaxed, low-pressure atmosphere of experimentation to develop. And surely the real reason for the publication of this volume is to make the public aware of the scope and ambition of Edmonton's Fringe Theatre, rather than to impose or imply qualitative judgement on the new works or styles being produced.

Alun Hibbert's two-hander, *A Majority of Two*, is an uplifting, intelligent play. Set on the eve of Jonathan Wheeler's retirement, it examines how well a couple can come to know each other and the ways and means of com-



munication that decades of living together can create. Jonathan and Sophie are well matched sparring partners: neither is content to retreat into a world of complacency or stagnation. Commissioned by Montreal's Centre Theatre in 1983, *A Majority of Two* is both specific in its examination of power struggles between

opposing solitudes and universal in its appraisal of compromise as the solution to such a conflict on both real and metaphoric levels.

Hibbert, in fact, allows his play to raise issues that focus on changing roles of both a political and a social nature, drawing parallels that are easily discernible. From the plight of the upper-management executive passed over for promotion because he is an anglophone working in Quebec to the refusal of the middle-class wife to continue her unflattering, unquestioning support as adjunct to her husband's life, Hibbert explores the human capacity to adapt and to change despite an innate preference for security, stability and, at its worst, complacency.

Jesse Glenn Bodyan is a Vancouver playwright with a vision of contemporary life that is both disturbing and electrifying. He has a unique talent for a style best described as epic cartoon. His characters are victims of their own machinations, trapped in worlds of their own design. They are generally unsympathetic and selfish, petty and violent. Their vulgarity is generally so extreme that it becomes perversely charming.

Playwrights Canada's recently released volume of two Bodyan plays is tantalizing. The plays included (*Blue Hands* and *Skull Riders*) invite the audience/reader into bizarre worlds filled with the twisted inhabitants of a distorted urban cesspool (*Blue Hands*) and nightmarish desecration of the childhood world of cowboy heroes (*Skull Riders*). Both microcosmic environments are filled with amulets and superstition, mores and rituals that create a sometimes incomprehensible vision of the morass of life.

In *Blue Hands*, an expletive-filled morality play, the central character is 30-year-old South, whose hands, wrists, and forearms are covered with dark blue tattoos. Hired to replace a store detective at a Vancouver pawnshop where the inventory is primarily made up of stolen goods, he becomes involved in the fatality-ridden daily life of the neighbourhood.

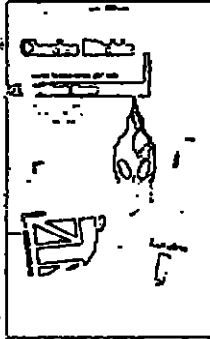
Skull Riders puts bounty hunter against grave robber in an alternately funny and horrifying battle for supremacy. Bodyan's manipulation of language creates a whole new set of euphemisms and a vernacular that seems strangely in tune with the graveyards and saloons of the Badlands world his characters have invaded.

Not easily accessible, these two plays, like Bodyan's *Midtown Aces* and *Downtown Rooms*, will not appeal to everyone. What they do offer is a unique view of the layers of the human psyche, observed through a free-fall kaleidoscope of events, characters, word-play and, somewhat fittingly, deaths. □

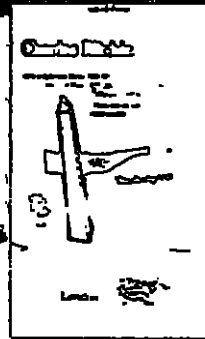
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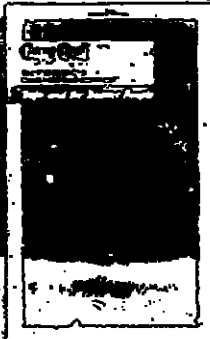
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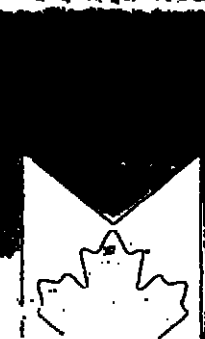
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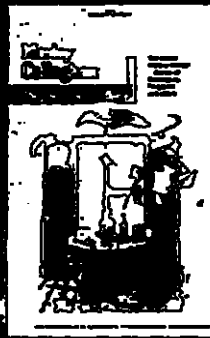
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FEATURE REVIEW

The other holocaust

If it is a crime to deny Nazi atrocities, why is the Soviet starvation of millions of Ukrainians disputed and ignored?

By Myrna Kostash

The Harvest of Sorrow: Collectivization and the Terror Famine, by Robert Conquest, University of Alberta Press, 412 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88864 110 9).

WHEN I WAS 15 years old I came across a book in my parents' library that fascinated even as it appalled. It was called *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: A White Book* and was filled with harrowing if ungrammatical accounts — accompanied by grainy photographs of imprecise but vivid detail — of death by starvation. I remember in particular anecdotes of cannibalism — a woman, mad with hunger, who had killed and pickled her children, for example — which finally forced me to stop reading and to close the book in disbelief. It purported to be an account of the genocidal famine in Ukraine in 1932-33 — the consequences of Stalin's collectivization of peasant land-holdings — but I knew it to be the hysterical outpouring of fanatical anti-Communist Ukrainians in exile. In other words, they were making it all up, for their own political reasons.

I did not reconsider this opinion until very recently, in 1983, on the 50th anniversary of the Great Famine year, when a new wave of commemorative literature was produced, culminating in the publication of Stanford University scholar Robert Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow*. I have read this literature, and of that 15-year-old who shut the book on the "lies" and "fantasies" of peasants I am now deeply ashamed.

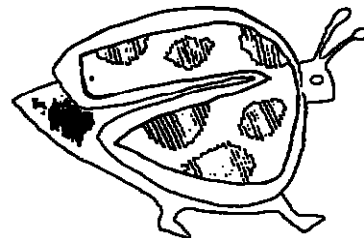
Conquest builds his case painstakingly and meticulously. He points out that the starvation of at least five million in Ukraine was the result of political and economic processes begun in 1929 when the Communist Party under Stalin's leadership decided to "dekulakize" (get rid of rich peasants) and collectivize the Soviet countryside. This in itself produced great suffering and death as peasants resisted the seizure of their property, were deported to Siberian labour camps, and died or were shot. Then, in 1932-33, from those peasants collectivized on the massive state farms of Ukraine, the Don and Volga areas, and Kazakhstan,

punishing quotas of grain and livestock were demanded and delivered, leaving behind less-than-subsistence quantities of food to be consumed by the peasants: all aid to the starving from the outside was blocked and they began to die in millions.

In this same period, the party systematically attacked Ukrainian national cultural and intellectual institutions and workers, culminating in a campaign of terror against Ukrainians in the Bolshevik Party itself.

As Conquest argues, the two campaigns — against the Ukrainian peasantry and the Ukrainian intelligentsia — were not unrelated: Stalin himself wrote that "the nationality problem is, in its very essence, a problem of the peasantry," meaning that the resolution of the "problem" lay in destroying nationalism's social base — the individual, land-based peasant farmer. What the intellectual or artist articulated — consciousness of Ukrainian history and identity — was sustained by the peasants in thousands of villages where the rituals and customs organized around the immutable agricultural cycle had been the expression for a millennium of Ukrainian culture. From Stalin's point of view, it was necessary

in order to establish the hegemony of the Communist Party and its program, to smash thinker and farmer, and to reorganize the latter into collective farms



where culture was Soviet, not Ukrainian. (That economic reorganization of the countryside still exists and dissident Ukrainian intellectuals, most recently Anatoly Marchenko, are still dying by terror.)

Using Soviet sources — unsuppressed

and "rehabilitated" statistics, studies and reports, testimony of party activists, post-war novels, unpublished *samizdat* — as well as first-hand reports of survivors and articles filed by some Western journalists, Conquest writes in a clear, unadorned, and measured style, takes his reader through some very thorny material indeed. For example the contemptuous attitude of Bolshevik intellectuals toward the peasantry (the great humanitarian, Maxim Gorky "the uncivilized, stupid, turgid people in the Russian villages"); the ambivalence of the party toward Ukrainian national feeling; that the slogan of the "self-determination of nations" was counter-revolutionary; the doctrine of the "class war in the villages," and the necessity of crushing the peasantry's power to withhold grain from the state.

The definition of a "kulak" — was this someone who owned a horse but hired no labour, or the other way around? The stubborn defiance of peasants — looting, rioting, killing — was not to be appreciated: "the basic demand was to return to the laws of the old regime and Soviet laws," as a *Pravda* editorial complained in 1929, and were dragged kicking and screaming to

abandonment, or deportation of the "kulaks" and the brutality of party activists in routing them ("Moscow does not believe in tears" was a saying of the period). The re-binding of the peasant to the soil — the internal passport, the law against migration to the cities — in an updated version of feudal relations. The appalling inefficiency of the collective farm: the utter failure of some farms to even pay their members for their work for a year at a time, for instance.

In his memoirs Boris Pasternak recalled that, joining a movement among workers in the 1930s to go out to the villages and the farm collectives to gather material about the new life, he saw "such inhuman, unimaginable misery, such a terrible disaster, that it began to seem almost abstract, it would not fit within the bounds of consciousness." The dimensions and impact of the suffering prefigure that other holocaust that was to come and its images are equally

unbearable; homeless children huddled in garbages for fish heads; the human case of cannibals; a naked man and a cat fighting over the same dead pigeon; orphans eating the grass of the cemetery; the pits of the unburied; the silent, dusty, wind-blown villages entombing the executed, the haunted, the mad.

After his visit to the countryside Pasternak fell ill, he wrote, and "for an entire year I could not write." The unrepeatable, of course, imposes its own silence. But there is more to our unawareness of this holocaust than the dumbness of writers. How, asks Conquest, is it possible that these terrible events are still not fully registered in our public consciousness in the West — even after Khrushchev's revelations of the crimes of Stalin, after the publication of memoirs and eyewitness accounts, and so on?

In the first place, the events occurred beyond the borders of "Europe" and among a people — the Ukrainians — who

unlike the Poles had not impressed the Western mentality as a "victim": in some important way, therefore, the famine remains outside our empathetic range, to the point where letters to the editor dispute the authenticity of contemporary photographs. (To dispute the facts of the Nazi holocaust, on the other hand, is considered, justifiably, hate-mongering.)

In the second place, Soviet authorities have engaged, for 30 years, in a campaign of disinformation concerning the famine — claiming, for example, that the starvation was a consequence of a drought (when even Soviet meteorological data list no drought for 1932), refusing to publish even today the results of a 1977 census, and justifying the terror against the "rich, exploitative" kulak when even the poor peasants were eventually swept up in the hurricane of disinformation and death.

In the third place, the Soviets have been aided and abetted by Western writers and intellectuals who, anxious to ally

themselves with the "revolutionary homeland" and against capitalism (or who, like the Pulitzer prize-winning Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*, were mindful of the privileges the Soviets bestowed on them for their cooperation), suppressed the truth of their own observations. The British socialists Beatrice and Sydney Webb, for example, argued in 1933, after a visit to the Soviet Union, that "food shortages" were the result of farmers' "sullen" and "spiteful" refusal to sow wheat (this, long after all seed grain had been requisitioned or eaten). Duranty blamed famine stories on anti-Soviet emigrants who wished to picture the Soviet Union "as a land of ruin and despair."

Today, the historical record speaks for itself. And thanks to Conquest's book, none of us will be able to say, when confronted with the image or story of a Ukrainian's miserable death by hunger, that we did not know. □

Lovat Dickson, 1902-1987

THE DEATH OF Horatio Henry Lovat Dickson removes a Canadian writer and publisher of distinction in his 85th year. As a publisher, Dickson was associate editor of the *Fortnightly Review* in London from 1929 until 1932; managing director of Lovat Dickson Limited, his own publishing house in London; director of Macmillan & Company from 1941 to 1964, of Pan Books between 1943 and 1964, and of the *Reader's Digest* from 1964 until 1966. He was awarded the Order of Canada in 1970, became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1932 and received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Alberta (where he had been a lecturer in English in the late 1920s), Western Ontario, and York.

As a writer, Dickson was author of *The Green Leaf* (1938), *Half Breed: The Story of Grey Owl* (1939), *Out of the West Land* (1944), *Richard Hillary* (1950), *The Ant-Room* (1959), *The House of Words* (1963), *Wilderness Man* (1973), *Redcliffe Hall at the Fall of Londonness* (1975), and *The Museum Makers* (1985).

Born in Australia of a family with roots deep in Nova Scotia, Dickson belonged to a generation whose nationalism was imperialist. "We were a colonial family, and were proud of it," he wrote in *The Ant-Room*, his first volume of memoirs. "We passionately believed in the British Empire, and especially in England." One might compare this attitude with

that of Stephen Leacock, who once said, "I am an imperialist because I will not be a colonial." Dickson's early years were spent here and there in the Empire, which in those days held dominion over palm and pine. The writer's father was a mining engineer who took his family with him to Australia, to South Africa and Rhodesia, to England and back to Canada. Of England Dickson wrote "there is no one in our family had ever been to the place which we called it Home."

There was a price to pay for imperial identity. Pride in the formula *civis britannicus sum* was offset by a certain ambiguity. In London, Rache Dickson was a colonial; in Canada, when he came home, he was a metropolitan. A tall willowy man, always dressed with the elegance that had become habitual in the West End of London, he looked like a conventional club member. This appearance was deceptive. It was no commonplace publisher that broke literary taboo by issuing the first self-confessed lesbian novel. And it was no stuffy shirt that brought *Grey Owl* to light.

Many writers of Dickson's period have faded away. He himself was made, I think, of more durable stuff than his friends. Who now reads Charles Morgan, once revered and even made a member of the French Academy? Sir John Squire, the raffish man of letters on whom Macmillan for years relied as a reader, is almost

forgotten. C. P. Snow, ascending the Establishment ladder — first C.P., then Sir Charles, finally Lord Snow — well, *ou sont les neiges-d'antan?* And here in Canada, in the city where Rache Dickson spent his last years, who now reads Mazo de la Roche, once the most widely read and admired author of romances? Now and then I pass her mansion in Forest Hill and think of her. It might be a stockbroker's house; no busloads of tourists arrive here.

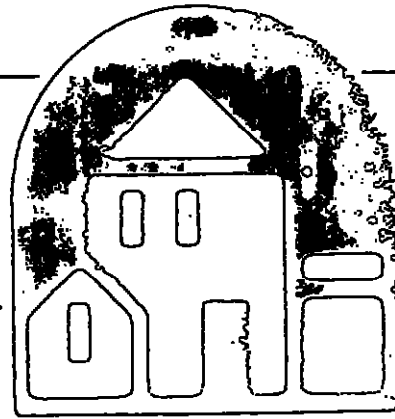
My own acquaintance with Dickson began when I was an editor with Macmillan in the 1950s. It was good to know that in correspondence with Macmillan's head office in London there was one director who knew the scene. True, one could enjoy the very different style of Daniel Macmillan, elder brother of the prime minister, whose brief missives were masterpieces of concise incomprehension. And when I came to know Rache Dickson after his return to Canada I found him charming and — something rare and pleasing in a writer and publisher — modest. I once embarrassed him by sending him flowers on his 80th birthday, but I think he was pleased too.

Even in his death he was modest — eclipsed by the demise of Margaret Laurence. Literary editors and columnists had used up their funeral prose on the novelist. And because I do not read the papers I did not learn of his death till it was too late for a wreath.

— KILDARE DOUSS

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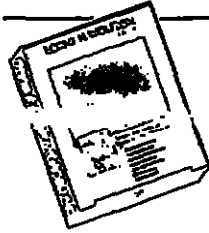


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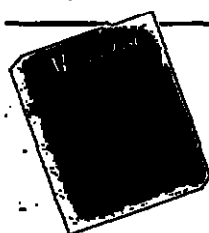


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BRIEF REVIEWS

BELLES LETTRES

Henry and June From the Unexpurgated Diary of Ann's Nin, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 274 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 15 140003 2).

"WHAT I HAVE to say," Ann's Nin once wrote, "is really distinct from the artist and art. It is the woman who has to speak." And she had to speak "not only for the woman Ann's" but "for many women." Nin published novels and erotica in the 1930s but is best known for her diaries, which appeared in the late 1960s. Women readers responded eagerly to her articulation, rarely encountered, of candid — to a point: the diaries were curiously circumspect about her amorous involvements.

We now learn, in *Henry and June*, that Nin, protective of her husband's feelings, had deleted for publication passages referring to her lovers. This book presents for the first time material eliminated from *Volume One: 1931-1934*, masterfully re-edited to concentrate on her relationship with Henry Miller and his second wife, June. Besides documenting a period in the lives of two significant writers the book is a potent account of sexual politics from a woman's perspective.

Initially, Nin was attracted to Miller, the opposite of herself. But when June left Paris for some months, Nin's friendship with Miller intensified, and they became lovers. Nin gloried in the discovery. Enthralled by Miller's vitality and his "tempestuous, obscene, brutal" writing, Nin expected the man to be equally explosive. But as the balance of power shifted from her adoration of the genius-monster to his dependence on and devotion to her, she discovered his gentleness and vulnerability; her interest in him waned. She learned that "the wish to dominate what one is dominated by" affects profoundly the interaction between men and women. Fortified by confidence newly acquired in psychoanalysis as much as liberated by passion, Nin changed from "a fettered, ethical being" to a woman who was "shameless, strong, sure of her actions" and consumed by sensuality: "Men look at me and I look at them, with my being unlocked. No more veils. I want many lovers. I am insatiable now."

No doubt influenced by Miller's vigorous prose, Nin wrote with a volup-

tuous style that reflects the passion of her experience. Because she was primarily a novelist, her narrative provides many of the satisfactions of a novel, having a dramatic structure and complex, evolving characters.

Her portrait of Henry Miller is fascinating. Many women who were early admirers of his earthy, celebratory writing were sorry to find him denounced as a misogynist in Kate Millet's 1982 book, *Sexual Politics*. Nin's book, describing a woman writer's full experience of her sensuality in a relationship with him, invites feminists to reconsider his view of women, humanism, and reveals more about sexual politics than any polemic.

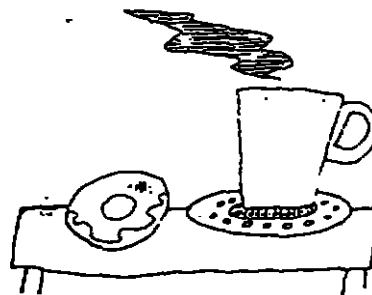
— ALISON REIL

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

No Easy Answers: The Trial and Conviction of Bruce Curtis, by David Hayes. Penguin, 256 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81056 8).

THE PLIGHT OF Bruce Curtis is an enlightening reflection of the faults inherent in the U.S. court system and the differences between the United States and Canada. Curtis, a vacationing Canadian who accidentally shot his friend's mother while caught up in a bizarre set of circumstances in New Jersey, is portrayed

David Hayes provides a complete account of events leading up to the incident, the trial, and the four-year struggle that has seen support committees for Curtis spring up internationally. Despite the sensational nature of the book's back cover, which features tabloid headlines about the



case, Hayes manages to keep the story above the level of the pulp murder pot-boiler by simply presenting the facts and pieces of evidence available to him.

Though Hayes is not choosing sides, there is a sense in this book not unlike that which appears in the writings of lawyer

Clarence Darrow. Certain passages and references allow the reader to conclude, in Darrow-like fashion, that the real criminal in this story is the kind of society that encourages the widespread ownership and use of firearms and then attacks those who suddenly find themselves in over their heads.

— MATTHEW BEHRENS

THE MIND

The Jungian Experience: Analysis and Individuation, by James A. Hall. Inner City Books, 171 pages, \$14.00 paper (ISBN 0 919122 2 2).

CARL GUSTAV JUNG died 26 years ago, and in the years and a half decades his discoveries about the human psyche have gained considerable currency. More and more people are using Jung's ideas as compass points for their own lives. The things he writes about — collective unconscious, complex, persona, shadow, animus/anima, and so on — are not his inventions. These forces exist, and have always existed, in the human mind. What Jung did was to observe psychological powers with scientific exactitude and find meaning in what he observed.

Because of this urgent sense of meaning, Jung spent much of his life helping people bring to consciousness the potent interrelationships of psychic forces. He used the term individuation to describe the realization of one's unique psychological reality. The process of psychological unfolding had, of course, been happening long before Jung dreamed up his special brand of analysis he developed was something new — and dramatically different from the reductive analysis of the Freudians. Jungian analysis is a kind of step on the gas (often with painful fits and starts) to accelerate the process of individuation, of becoming wholly who one is.

The Jungian Experience is intended primarily as an introduction for people who are considering entering into Jungian analysis. Beginning with the question of what brings a person to a psychotherapist's door ("... there is usually one underlying motivation: the sense that all is not right with one's life, that somehow a deeper meaning or purpose has been missed"), James Hall moves on to discussions of the basic Jungian vocabulary, dream interpretation, and (radical within Jungian circles) hypnotherapy and group therapy.

The most interesting sections, however,

are the chapters in which Hall considers the highly charged, carefully bounded relationship between analyst and analysand. In the midst of talk about transference and countertransference, when to begin and end analysis and fees and payment, he stresses the importance of the right match between therapist and client. During his training as a psychiatrist, Hall asked one of his professors what he did with patients he really didn't like. The professor replied, "I send them to another psychiatrist I really don't like, and they always seem to work well together!"

In his attempt to create a straightforward, encouraging model of the analytic situation, Hall simply tries to do too much in too short a book. Organized into brief, choppy sections, the book smacks more of a paragraph outline than a flowing, finished work. Just as we start to ponder an intriguing idea, we're moved on to the next topic, skittering like a waterbug across the surface of a very deep lake. And there is something dramatically absent from Hall's model of analysis: he leaves out the despair, the terror, and the killing rage analysis uncovers. There are other books, including Jung's own remarkable memoir, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, that serve as richer introductions by far. — CATHLEEN HOSKINS

ON STAGE

The Fisherman's Revenge, by Michael Cook, Playwrights Canada, 86 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 385 5).

STOCK CHARACTERS are used to happy effect in *The Fisherman's Revenge* by Michael Cook, a Newfoundland-based writer, which is somewhat misleadingly labelled on the back cover as a children's play. It is more than that, though children should enjoy it. It is a romantic comedy, but with few surprises — its characters are so transparent. These are: a poor but honest Newfoundland fisherman; his beautiful daughter; the fisherman's friend, also the daughter's timid suitor whom she spurns; a seemingly grasping merchant with a heart of gold, to whom the fisherman owes a lot of money; and the merchant's really grasping wife. There is also a Stage Manager, shamelessly and usefully borrowed from Thornton Wilder, to help shape the action.

A confrontation over the debt, engineered by the merchant's wife, turns into a brief but comic brawl, the fisherman is brought before a magistrate for a most peculiar and hilarious trial, and the problems of all are solved by a *deus ex machina*. The play, as the author notes, needs no sets, costumes, or special

lighting. The language oscillates between blank verse and down-to-the-ear realism, and one can believe that in performance the play could be a delight.

— BERT COWAN

Ha! Ha! by Réjean Ducharme, translated from the French by David Homel, Exile Editions, 94 pages, \$10.95 paper (ISBN 0-920428-35-5).

ACCORDING TO the back cover of *Ha! Ha!* "Réjean Ducharme gives us this riotous play about power, politics and the couple. [He] shows us the art of dissembling through speech." To read the script, however, is to be confronted with four characters who sound the same and whose lives never manage to touch or even interest the reader.

The play, in its original French, won the 1982 Governor General's Award. Jean-Pierre Ronfard, an important Montreal director, calls *Ha! Ha!* one of the great works of contemporary playwriting (He is quoted on the back cover of this edition.)

What can be considered great are the many references by the author, through the mouths of his characters, to theatre theory: the reader is constantly assaulted with reminders that this is only a play, that theatre is like a game of tag (wherein the person who's "it" has the plague — is this supposed to be a reference to Artaud?) and that what separates the audience from the action is the thin line at the edge of the stage.

Meanwhile, the plot stumbles forward with characters vomiting, crying, yelling, screaming, laughing, drinking, necking, ripping their own and others' clothing off; alarms go off and police-car lights turn round, shining bright red. A charming array of behaviours, wadded, no doubt, to keep the audience watching. Or the reader reading. Unfortunately, the effect was all too close to watching *Christie on Three's Company* bounce up and down. Yes, some executive somewhere in ABC believed that it was this and this alone that kept audience attention. I just turned off the TV. As for *Ha! Ha!* I suffered through it, hoping it would soon get better and reveal the reason it was awarded the GG. — MARC CÔTÉ

The Melville Boys, by Norm Foster, Playwrights Canada, 114 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 452 5).

WHEN THE MELVILLE brothers return to the lakeside cabin of their youth for a weekend of fishing their plans are diverted by the arrival and overnight stay of two sisters who live on the lake. Owen, the younger, more carefree brother con-

veniently pairs up with Loretta, the equally fun-loving younger sister, thus forcing the role of unwilling chaperone upon the elder Lee and Mary. What transpires is a humorous and at times moving look at four individuals who briefly touch one another's lives.

The weekend is one of pleasant diversion for both Owen and Loretta. It is a last fling before Owen's wedding and a means of avoiding a painful truth about his brother. It simply provides Loretta with a change from her otherwise dreary life. She would prefer the life of an actress but has made no effort since her TV commercial. She rationalizes: "Right now I'm under exclusive contract to Harry Farmer's Used Car Showroom, and that sort of ties me down." The weekend provides for Lee and Mary an opportunity

each other and to laugh together.

The Melville Boys, which premiered at Theatre New Brunswick in 1984 and since has had successful productions across Canada, is an appealing entertainment in which Norm Foster combines humour with sensitivity in portraying the brothers' relationship and the inevitable outcome of their weekend together.

— LINDA M. PEAKE

Odd Jobs, by Frank Moher, Playwrights Canada, 89 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 454 1).

IN FRANK MOHER'S new play, commissioned by Edmonton's Catalyst Theatre and premiered in a 1986 production, a young man who has lost his world of electronics and video games as a young couple quite differently. Tim's disenchantment is twofold: after eight years he loses his welding job to a robot and must attend a retraining school and succeeds in a retraining program, he will not qualify to operate the machine that has replaced him. His wife Ginette takes a computer course at night in order to free herself from her hateful job in Sears' customer complaint department.

When Tim is hired to do odd jobs for Mrs. Phipps, a retired professor and mathematician, he finds contentment in these simple tasks. Above all else, he finds fulfillment. Mrs. Phipps is dependent upon him for more than odd jobs; she suffers moments of confusion during which she wanders dangerously to the highway in search of her deceased husband. When Ginette is offered a job in Regina, Tim's world is threatened, as is Mrs. Phipps' reliance upon him.

Moher carefully manoeuvres his characters into a situation in which their individual needs and desires come into conflict. Each is resolute in his and her aspirations. Tim's odd jobs are no less

meaningful than Ginette's desire to advance her career by moving to another city. It is primarily through Mrs. Phipps that we, and Tim, gain our perspective and focus on differing sets of values. *Odd Jobs* is a compassionate look at these values. One cannot help caring deeply about the characters in this compelling and entertaining play. — LINDA M. PEAKE

Papers, by Allan Stratton, Playwrights Canada, 92 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88754 450 9).

THIS IS A technically promising play that would be a great deal better if its substance had more *substance* to it. Stratton is known to write successful plays (*Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii* and *Rexy*), but this time he has trapped himself into something close to terminal ingenuity. If a play within a play is fun, we can imagine him thinking, wouldn't a play within a play be much more fun? But the two principal players in all three plays are shallow (they are actually the same two characters), and although they have some amusing dialogue they don't say anything interesting and they get nowhere except into a clinch at the end of the core play and a slightly more passionate clinch at the end of the outer play. A better title might be "Three Stereotypes."

The male lead is a writer-in-residence at a boondocks university. The female lead is a middle-aged, neurotic (it says right here), frustrated academic, who has been instrumental in getting the male appointment. They have slightly varied names, but we may call them Charles and Myra, their names in the core play. Completing what Myra takes to be a triangle, in this play only, is Bobbi, an 18-year-old resident, a couple of times referred to as a puppet. (Puppets have usually been any one of us since the 1920s?)

Bobbi is from Ingersoll, Ont., "where the cheese comes from." She writes poetry. They don't understand poetry in Ingersoll. Bobbi doesn't understand T.S. Eliot. Charles, a novelist suffering very vocally from the *angst* of writer's block, doesn't understand what he's doing at Lakeview. He hasn't written anything for six years. Myra doesn't seem to understand anything much. She admires Charles's work and teaches it, but she doesn't tell us anything but trifles about it. He doesn't tell us anything about it. We don't even know what kind of novel it is that he isn't writing.

Stratton does come up with a memorable stage direction at the end of the first scene — *Charles blanches*. A nifty trick. It may be possible that good actors could breathe some life into these puppets. The printed page is merciless.

— BERT COWAN

THE PAST

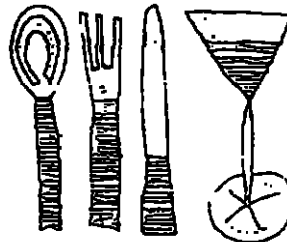
Camp X: Canada's School for Secret Agents 1941-45, by David Stafford, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 327 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 126 2).

AS ONE OF the best-kept secrets of the Second World War, Camp X has long been shrouded in mystery — and misconception. In the more than 40 years since it closed its doors, the first training camp for secret agents in North America has been hailed as everything from "the best allied espionage school of World War II" to "the clenched fist" of all allied secret operations during the

war. But how much of the nooopia about the camp, which operated on the north shore of Lake Ontario near Toronto from 1941 until 1945, is fiction and how much of it is fact? In his meticulously researched and insightfully written book David Stafford separates myth and reality to tell what he says is "one of the most intriguing tales of covert Allied co-operations to have come out of the undercover battles waged by secret armies of the Second World War." Another big claim, but Stafford — executive director for the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and author of *Britain and European Resistance 1940-45* — lives up to it.

So secret that not even the Canadian war cabinet knew of its formation, Camp X was originally established by the British to help Americans learn the art of secret operations. Opening its doors just two days after Pearl Harbor, the camp eventually turned out 500 graduates, many of whom went on to become spies, secret agents, and guerrilla fighters around the globe. Although originally set up as a training camp, the site was used for other purposes, most notably as a communications centre and a hideout for Soviet defector Igor Gouzenko.

By 1962, the communications centre had lost its importance and the property



on which it was located was sold to two neighbouring townships. The buildings were torn down. Today, all that remains on the site is a small bronze memorial plaque; an Ontario Liquor Control Board warehouse covers the area of the old officers' mess.

Stafford's book — the material for

which was culled from interviews and previously top-secret files — will bring the story of the camp back into the spotlight and correct some of the misconceptions surrounding its brief but important existence. And while the secrecy that still surrounds its operations may prevent his book from being the "definitive story" it claims to be, it is nevertheless a compelling tale, and one that deserves attention. — LARRY MORTON

Canada: From Sea Unto Sea, edited by Charles J. Humber, Loyalist Press, illustrated, 686 pages, \$85.00 cloth (ISBN 0 9692182 0 6).

PUBLISHED BY THE Loyalist Press, dedicated to the memory of John Fisher, and edited by the president of the John W. Fisher Society, this ponderous volume has kept a lot of people busy for a long time, and I'm sorry to report that it strikes me with a dull thud — just as John Fisher's speeches about the excellence of all things Canadian used to.

It's partly that the format (one foot by nine inches), the weight (about five pounds, I think), and the depressingly washable-looking cover make it uninviting. Once past these obstacles, though, we find some first-rate contributors, such as John and Germaine Warkentin on physical geography, Maurice Careless on Canada before 1800, John Holmes on external relations; yet even their contributions somehow emerge from the editorial process as bland official-communicé stuff. The design of the book calls for ill-considered commentary page. As always, this is a volume in the past dealing with early history. The result is a plethora of representations of 17th- and 18th-century people and events by 20th-century painters like J. W. Kelly. Contributions include a portrait of a 17th-century painter as Thomas Davies and George Heriot.

Later sections are sprinkled with pictures of expatriate celebrities with captions in this style: "Raymond Massey, Canadian Actor Famous for His Portrayal of Abraham Lincoln, Brother of Vincent Massey, Canada's First Canadian-Born Governor General."

A section near the end, called "Partners in Growth," consists of a series of corporate histories. The inclusion of such institutions as Apple, Mary Kay Cosmetics, and Texas Instruments puts in a curious light the editor's quotation in his introduction from a Department of Communications report: "... the domination of the domestic market by foreign companies ... creates serious obstacles ... to the expression of our cultural identity." Later in the introduction, he reveals that the "partners in

growth" are the companies that shared the funding of the book.

In sum, I don't think we need this kind of book any more. It might possibly be worth offering to a newcomer as a quick introduction to the country, but I wouldn't do so myself, since to me it's redolent of the kind of provinciality I like to think we've outgrown.

There's a companion volume called *Canada's Native Peoples* which sounds, in contrast, like the sort of book I would value. But it's issued only in the Deluxe Edition and isn't available to reviewers.

— I.M. OWEN

Hopes and Dreams: The Diary of Henriette Dessaulles 1874-1881, translated from the French by Liedewy Hawke, Hounslow Press, 344 pages, \$29.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88882 088 7) and paper (ISBN 0 88882 087 9).

HENRIETTE DESSAULLES (1860-1946) was the eldest daughter of an influential and wealthy St. Hyacinthe, Que., family. She began this diary at the age of 14, when she was in the throes of adolescent love for Maurice Saint-Jacques. Her stepmother, with whom she was completely out of sympathy, resolutely curbed the romance, until, when Henriette was almost 21, she gave the courtship her blessing. Amid ecstatic wedding preparations, the diary ends.

Hopes and Dreams is valuable because it tells how young Victorian Quebecois lived, what their expectations were, and what others expected of them. Even while it mocks and attacks the absurdities of the Church, the rigidity of the nuns, and the ignorance of the priests, it also testifies to the strength of Catholic spirituality and the determination of the people to cling to Henriette's world, social fiction arises from class distinction, not from French-English tension — indeed, Henriette associates with a thoroughly intermarried mixture of French, English, and Irish Catholics. Protestants are only curiosities.

Hopes and Dreams is also delightful to read. Liedewy Hawke's remarkable translation is idiomatic, varied, and grammatically appropriate, and it charmingly recreates the voice and character of an intelligent, sensitive, exuberant, but stifled girl growing into young womanhood.

Similar praise cannot be lavished on the editors. The footnotes are of interest only to Quebec genealogists, and there is no index. In the introduction written for the French edition (Hurtubise, 1971), Louise Saint-Jacques Dechêne admits that the diary has been greatly abridged, but abridgements are not clearly noted in the text. The original French editor is not named, and the responsibilities of the two English editors mentioned on the verso of

the title page are unknown. Adequate presentation would have made *Hopes and Dreams* useful as well as pleasurable.

— LAUREL ZOONE

POETRY

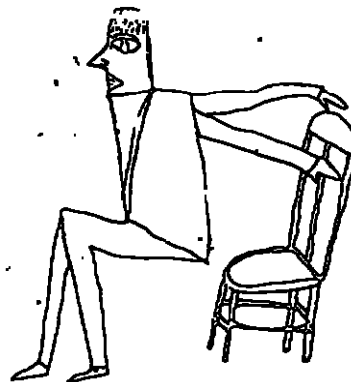
Children of Abel, by Seymour Mayne, Mosaic Press, 84 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88552 333 3).

LIKE MOST PEOPLE, I can be pretty thoroughly seduced by the beauty of some forms of technology: those watches, for instance, whose transparency makes their intricate inner workings visible. But watches have a function, too. Who cares how good they look if they don't tell time?

Children of Abel, Montreal-born writer Seymour Mayne's 13th collection of poetry, instils similar feelings. The work is carefully crafted, precise, layered with finely tuned imagery. But too often I find myself on the outside of Mayne's poetry. It looks good, but it doesn't tick.

No doubt Mayne really does care about writing; about the "glowing bolt of speech"; about resistance to silence, which is "a lost horizon." Silence means forgetting — and tradition and memory, particularly of Judaic mythology, are central here. A number of poems are addressed to writers, who carry a special responsibility for memory because of their relationship to language. In "The Poet Shirley Kaufman and the Ghost of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda," the poet is admonished: "give up the Yankee tongue/And come home on the ancient/alphabet/of prophecy and dreams."

Mayne is a poet whose quest is for



darkness (the Holocaust and Hiroshima, for example) doesn't impede his insistence on seeking light. And he can write admirably. But the articulateness and technical splendour of his poems keep me at a distance. Even his angry poems don't have any jagged edges — they lack passion's energy of inarticulateness. Am I

greedy to want both polish and engagement? Perhaps. But there are writers — Erin Mouré springs to mind — who pull it off.

Overall, my reaction to *Children of Abel* is best summed up by a stanza from one of Mayne's own poems:

*we enter
and it is all too white,
horseshoe arches and moorish arcades
mute
to the invisible rumour of blood**

— BARBARA CAREY

Through the Nan Da Gate, by Ken Mitchell, ThistleDown Press, 63 pages, \$20.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920633 22 6) and \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920633 23 4).

THE INSCRUTABLE ORIENT has held a powerful attraction for westerners ever since Marco Polo (and many other Europeans) set foot in the court of Kublai Khan in the 13th century. Ken Mitchell, well-known for his home-grown fiction and drama, is thus following in some venerable footsteps with his first collection of poetry. *Through the Nan Da Gate* is based upon his experiences as visiting professor of English at Nanjing University in the People's Republic of China. In his foreword, the Mitchell quotes an observation that the Chinese have made about foreign visitors to their country: "If they stay a week, they write a book about China. If they stay a month, they write an article. If they stay a year, they don't attempt anything so foolish."

Mitchell did stay a year, but attempts only to deliver a personal impression of China. There is no pretence of authority. Throughout the collection, he is the inquisitively self-questioning "observer" or "traveler" who is often baffled but fascinated by this vibrant, contradictory culture. From the voracious students diligently studying English and computer science to the peasants conducting funeral rites in a remote mountain village, Mitchell's subjects are presented without editorializing. The poems are complemented by photos from his travels, but these snapshots are not the only memorable images in the book. Mitchell's poetry presents us with many — the Royal Ming statues standing "in vast fields of cabbage/their feet buried in mounds/of human excrement"; a rickshaw carter hauling "live pigs, wooden desks/learning to balance a load of eighteen barrels."

This is predominantly a people-and-places collection, and at times Mitchell's straightforward style is too prosaic. I'm not sure that it would work, for instance, with less exotic material. Nor do I know if the Chinese would feel they are authentically represented. But the abiding spirit of *Through the Nan Da Gate* is one of

"Thank you
Thank you!...
for tools to do what
I feel is right and
enriching to children."

— One comment
from ten pages of praise by
participants in a Language Arts
Seminar presented by

Marlene and Robert
McCracken

Their books will give you
similar inspiration!

— *Reading Is Only The
Tiger*

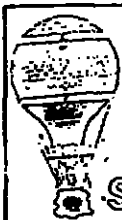
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tolerance and an appealing willingness *not*
to assume the role of expert. These traits
benefit any traveller — and they are
refreshing to find in poetry, too.

— BARBARA CAREY

POLITICS & POLITICS

The Forty-Ninth and Other Parables,
edited by David Staines, University of
Massachusetts Press, 133 pages, \$21.95
cloth (ISBN 0 87023 528 1) and \$10.50
paper (ISBN 0 87023 529 X).

THIS IS AN American book, published in
the United States, intended to provide
Americans with a Canadian perspective
on Canada-U.S. relations. As a Canadian
reader, one cannot avoid the sensation of
having accidentally eavesdropped on a
private conversation, only to discover that
the topic is you. The dignity is affronted,
the vanity teased. Finesse and book dealer
be damned, this you've got to hear.

Much of it, naturally, you will have
heard before. Monique Bégin praises the
Canada Health Act. Judy Erlich is Liberal
about the status of Canadian women, the
Ontario NDP's Bob Rae sings a paean to
the three-party system. But Quebec poet-
politician Gerald Godin discusses the
language question with unusual elo-
quence. Walter Stewart, one of Canada's
foremost opinion-holders, declaims upon
journalism north and south. Victor
Goldbloom, president of the Canadian
Council of Christians and Jews, writes
movingly of Canada's not always whole-
hearted efforts to define and defend racial
and individual human rights. Thomas
Berger extends the same theme in an
historical and constitutional study. Robert
Kroetsch discusses the
Confederation and economist H. Ian Mac-
donald assures us that Canada can and
will safeguard its own economic future.

Yet, out in the real world, the free trade
circus presents another perspective on
Canada-U.S. relations. U.S. negotiator
Peter Murphy can hit the front pages
here, and place his opponent Simon
Reisman on the political hotseat, by mak-
ing one speech at the local Moose Lodge.
In the meantime, poor Reisman couldn't
get a headline in the *Washington Post*
unless he shot up the newsroom with a
machine-gun.

— JEFF EWENER

A Homeland for the Cree: *Regional
Development in James Bay, 1971-1981*,
by Richard F. Salisbury, McGill-Queen's
University Press, 172 pages, \$25.00 cloth
(ISBN 0 7735 0550 4) and \$12.95 paper
(ISBN 0 7735 0551 2).

ONE MIGHT EXPECT a story that purports
to outline a possible path for native self

rule in this country to quote members of
the First Nations. However this account
— which seems to imply the worst is over
for the Cree — is without such comment.
Instead, it relies on the hidebound
academic approach of tables, figures, and
paraphrase.

Salisbury claims that events surround-
ing the James Bay development project
in northern Quebec eventually united the
eight bands of Cree into a single organiza-
tion. But though this process did occur,
the question remains whether things were
that much better in 1981 than they were
10 years earlier.

Salisbury seems to think things did im-
prove, based both on material gains —
such as televisions, modern appliances,
and two-bedroom homes (which nonethe-
less average eight occupants) — and
changes in the governing structure.
However, though there now are many
more Cree representatives, their power is
limited because their sovereignty was
ceded to the provincial government.

Despite his sympathies, Salisbury
decides from the outset not to take a posi-
tion. As a result, he fails to generate any
interest in this wholly uninvolved story
and chooses not to offer the opinions of
native people on the important question
of autonomy. That this account ends in
1981 is also significant, for it conveniently
ignores the disastrous potential of the
Bourassa government's plan to divert
large bodies of water to the U.S.

Reading this book is like attending a
native-rights rally at the local legislature.
Self-important, liberal-minded white
leaders boast of achievements and pro-
gress, yet native leaders reply, "Sounds
good, but what we see from our
end of the table." — MATTHEW BEHRENS

SPORTS & ADVENTURE

*Wild Waters: Canoeing Canada's
Wilderness Rivers*, edited by James Raf-
fan, Key Porter, illustrated, 152 pages,
\$29.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919493 99 8).

THE CANOEING SEASON for most Cana-
dians is short, leaving the long months of
winter to rest paddling muscles and plan
for the next summer's expeditions. This
book would be a fine companion for
those many land-locked days.

The authors in Raffan's collection give
us a glimpse of nine rivers in varied set-
tings, from the Quebec North Shore to
the outer edges of the Yukon. These are
not full-blown trip reports, but essays on
rivers and river running — the experiences
of long journeys, separated in time and
space from modern life.

All of the authors bring the requisite
paddling experience to their tasks. But the
most successful in reaching the armchair

adventurer are the past masters of wilderness canoeing, Bill Mason and Wally Schaber. Their respective chapters on the Hood and Nahanni rivers give us something of the grit of a long and challenging canoe trip: the storms endured, meals shared, rapids attempted.

Wild Waters should be savoured, a chapter at a time. In fact, too large a portion of time sitting can be a bit cloying. The contributors wrestle with a set of themes with persistent regularity — the restorative value of a long canoe expedition, the authors' links to the explorers who preceded them on their routes, the need to protect and defend wild rivers.

Each chapter is accompanied by excellent colour photography, most from the expeditions in question, some of them from stock photo agencies' files. There is also a two-page map that provides the location of each of the rivers described in the book.

— S.R. GAGE

REVIEW

From Ahmadabad to Tennessee

By Wayne Grady

86: *Best Canadian Stories*, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon Press, 215 pages, \$23.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 638 0) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 639 9).

Coming Attractions, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon Press, 186 pages, \$23.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 640 2) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 641 0).

MUCH HAS ALREADY been made of "Miles City, Montana," the short story by Alice Munro that was first published in the *New Yorker* in January, 1985, was included in Munro's latest collection, *The Progress of Love* (David Macfarlane, in a review in *Saturday Night*, called it "the most elegant and poignant story" in the book and one of the most complex stories Munro has written), and now appears as the flagship story in 86: *Best Canadian Stories*, the 16th in Oberon's annual anthology series and the third in a row edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin.

It is indeed a superb story: deceptively straightforward, it magnifies a seemingly innocuous incident into a metaphor for that endlessly fascinating jumble of emotions that is the relationship between a child and her parents. The story also contains a phrase that crystallizes exactly what it is that makes Munro's stories work so well: the narrator, a writer and

mother, says she needed time away from her family in order to pursue her "real work, which was a sort of brooding of distant parts of myself."

Two other stories in the collection deserve special mention. Bharati Mukherjee's "A Wife's Story," which first appeared in the January, 1936, issue of *Mother Jones*, is thematically linked to Mukherjee's book of stories, *Darkness* — at least to its central theme (I'm tempted to call it the heart of *Darkness*), which explores how much more successfully immigrants to the United States are allowed to integrate into the fabric of society than is the case in Canada.

I was never very convinced by Mukherjee's argument in her introduction to *Darkness*. The stories set in the United States to illustrate the theme contain many disturbing elements, and raise many doubts on the part of the characters. The loss of self required by U.S. society seems too high a price to pay for tours of Disneyland and the solitude of waiters. In "A Wife's Story" an East Indian woman studying in New York is visited by her husband from Ahmadabad, a textile town north of Bombay. Watching his excitement, she is amazed and pleased by how much she already takes for granted, the degree to which she has already become assimilated. Yet, at the end, watching her own naked body in the mirror, that loss of self haunts her: "I am free, afloat, watching somebody else."

The 10th story in the collection (for once, Oberon has thoughtfully provided a table of contents) is by Ernst Havemann, one of "a bunch of relative newcomers," as the jacket blurb inaccurately puts it (there are three). I first came across Havemann's writing in 1984,

when he won the CBC literary contest of which I was a judge. "The Interview" was a tightly controlled and chilling account of a confrontation between a black woman and a white police interrogator. The oily, persistent voice of the interrogator, as he tries to persuade the woman to inform on her friends, evokes not only the nightmare of apartheid, but also the more generalized terror of being drawn into a conspiracy against one's will.

The same voice is present in "Death of a Nation," the present story, but it comes from a different direction. This time, a white man is persuaded by a lawyer, also white, to contribute funds for the defence of a boyhood friend, who is black. ("Boyhood pals across the colour line is one thing — touching, in fact — but in adults it's suspicious.") The lawyer is no less Mephistophelean than the interrogator had been, but this time he is working, one must suppose, on the side

of good. At any rate, the man is drawn into an affair about which he knows nothing: when the police come knocking, as they inevitably will, the man will not know what he has done, nor whom, if anyone, he has helped.

The rest of the 12 stories in the anthology, though well enough written, lack the urgency that fires these three. Many of them are by poets, though that is not to be held against them. Robyn Sarah has a rather poetical story called "The Pond, Phase One," about a city family visiting a country family and all that that entails; Patrick Lane is represented with his first published story, "Rabbits," in which a city family becomes a country family, and all that that entails.

Paulette Jiles, in "Night Flight to Attiwanskat," has written about a woman journalist who travels very far north in a very small plane. It is a deft and riveting story, closer, I think, to literary journalism than to fiction, but quite good. And Tom Marshall's "Elaine's House" is an eerie story about the juxtaposition of personalities — similar to, though not as successful as, "Professor T," which was included in last year's anthology.

The only really questionable inclusion, to my mind, is Leon Rooke's "Bennett," a 26-page demonstration of Rooke's ability to mimic the popular speech of rural Tennessee — much as his first run at "Shakespeare's Dog" was an attempt to imagine what an Elizabethan canine would sound like if it could talk. The result reads like an X-rated segment of *The Beverly Hillbillies* scripted by Samuel Beckett (with Bennett playing the part of Granny). Even Rooke was identified with it: *Descant 50* carried this version; *Descant 54* ran an expanded (or inflated) version that was 95 pages long. We can only hope that the longer version appeared too late for Oberon's deadline. There is, however, always next year.

Coming Attractions, also edited by Helwig and Martin, is the fourth in a series of annual storm warnings that contain three stories by each of three new writers. This year's three are Dayv James-French, Lesley Krueger, and Robinton Mistry. Mistry's stories, familiar to readers of *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, are the strongest of the nine. Set in his native Bombay, they are gentle, compassionate probings of the relationships between people he knows well. There are no false notes. Lesley Krueger also writes out of her own experience, mostly stories of growing up in a family to which she felt she did not belong. They are harsh, unforgiving portraits, drawn with much skill.

James-French's stories seem to take ordinary situations and deal with them in an ordinary way: a son visiting his dying father in hospital, a young man coming

to terms with homosexuality, the first days of a newly married couple. The stories are descriptive rather than constructive; they faithfully record the details of a situation, but fail to give them a larger context. □

REVIEW

Through the looking glass

By Abraham Rotstein

The Patriot Game: National Dreams and Political Realities, by Peter Brimelow, Key Porter, 310 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 1 55013 001 3).

Canada has acquired the legal form of a nation-state, but it is not a nation

Canada is a sectional variation within this supernation (i.e. North America), just like the American South or Far West, but fundamentally shares the same culture

PETER BRIMELOW is an itinerant financial journalist from England — "a wandering Wasp" as he calls himself. Prior to his departure for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Barron's*, and *Forbes* magazine, his sojourn in Canada provided enough material for a brilliantly jaundiced caricature of this country. This book will gladden the hearts of the National Citizens' Coalition and make the Fraser Institute look like the research arm of the NDP. Peter Brimelow writes like an angel with a poison pen and this book is a good read — at least to get your endocrine glands going full speed.

One of the amusing features of this waning neo-conservative age is the unexpected kinship between the new right and the far left: fervent indignation, a belief in shadowy global conspiracies, all-embracing villains, and clear surgical solutions.

In the early 1970s the Waffle of fond memory argued that Canadian independence could not be achieved without socialism, nor could socialism be achieved without cutting our economic dependence on the United States. The capitalist class had sold this country down the river; its operating arm, the Liberal Party and its flunky civil service, were continentalists in thin disguise.

Turn this Waffle argument inside out and you have *The Patriot Game*. Brimelow is a true disbeliever: there never was a Canadian nation, so it is absurd to try to prop one up. French and English, Quebec and Alberta separatists look more like a hodge-podge than a nation. No homo-

geneous historical entity for Brimelow — hence no nation. This unruly team of horses called Canada is held together not by a shared sense of community but by bribes known as transfer payments, a first cousin to socialism. These distort the true verdicts of the free market and result in Canada's second-class economy.

What Brimelow advocates is continentalism and pure capitalism rather than independence and socialism. This Waffle through the looking glass retains, interestingly enough, the same binder as the original. Brimelow falls back on the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci to produce an inverted version of the "dominant ideology thesis." It was a clique of the Liberal establishment and their cronies in the civil service that both openly and secretly fomented nationalist and leftist policies on an indifferent country. Anyway we shouldn't underestimate a party whose right wing doesn't know what its left wing is doing.

Brimelow's book flows out of its two key assumptions cited above. Since Canada is not a nation by his definition, nationalism must be a "fraud." The tidal overflows of the United States on our culture and economy are hardly mentioned in his book and for good reason. If we are just a "sectional variation within this supernation," why be any more concerned about all this than "the American South or Far West"? The market giveth and the market taketh away.

Without Brimelow's two main assumptions, the case for coming to terms with the "supernation" wouldn't need Ernest Renan's definition when he founded a new nation. If you postulate an irrelevant definition of "nation" and do verbal cartwheels around it, you still get an irrelevant result. As for the fuss to make our place within the "supernation," the reader will have to judge for himself whether Brimelow is prophetic or hallucinating. (How does a northern hodge-podge join a southern hodge-podge to create a supernation? Anything more in Gramsci?)

If Brimelow prefers to be tone-deaf on the erosion of Canadian culture and has a higher loyalty to markets than to countries, that is his personal privilege. But it doesn't quite pass as effective argument. Brimelow's explanation of the cultural scene is disingenuous. He cites a statement by John Meisel, former chairman of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, that market forces in themselves cannot promote a Canadian presence on the airwaves and offers the following rebuttal:

This disguises as a market failure the devastating fact that ordinary Canadians cannot be trusted to watch Canadian programming of their own free will.

Hardly "devastating" — just dumb

Next time Brimelow is passing through Toronto, let him turn on his TV set in prime time and try to guess what country he is in. Not that this will matter much to Brimelow, but where exactly is the "free will"?

Brimelow's next book should be his magnum opus. Periodic disillusionment with the real world is endemic to the radical right. Just imagine a Democratic president succeeding Reagan: socialized medicine for the elderly and trade protectionism run rampant; more agricultural price supports and a belated industrial policy to save embattled American companies from the Japanese. Oil: North is abandoned by an ungrateful nation to sling hamburgers in Iowa.

Conspiracy has followed me down from Canada and finally taken over the United States.

No place for a "wandering Wasp" to wander any more except perhaps the Australian outback. □

REVIEW

Rough trade

By Desmond Morton

The Free Trade Papers, edited by Duncan Cameron, James Lorimer, 228 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862 972 9) and 320 pages (ISBN 0 88862 971 0).

WHETHER OR NOT Canadians like it — and current opinion polls show that about half of them don't — a free-trade deal with the United States has become the biggest single agenda item for the Mulroney government. In a phrase reminiscent of John Turner's famous gaffe in the 1984 campaign, Brian Mulroney has even proclaimed that "we have no other option."

That might seem puzzling to those who recall the Tories as the party of high tariffs and Sir John A. Macdonald. It was the Liberals, after all, who promoted the "veiled treason" of Reciprocity in 1891 and at intervals ever since. In 1984 Mulroney himself met questions about free trade with dismissive references to the dangers of living next to an elephant.

According to Duncan Cameron, the University of Ottawa political economist and former federal bureaucrat who has pulled together this précis of the free-trade issue, Mulroney's post-election conversion was really part of his Liberal inheritance, helped along by a healthy shove from Ottawa's most powerful corporate lobby, the Business Council on

National Income. While the ECNI had pushed the Trudeau government into a post-ECNI line for several deals with Washington, the real prophet of free trade was Donald S. Macdonald, the 8000-day head of the Federal Royal Commission on the Economic Union.

Having lived through the Trudeau government's international efforts to diversify Canada's trading partnerships only to see the U.S. share of our business slip from two-thirds to four-fifths of the total, Macdonald concluded that we had no other option. It was a conclusion backed by provincial premiers, terrified of losing U.S. markets to rising protectionism, by "bovies of academic economics imbued with faith in the classic free market, and by a host of Canadians who viewed the border as a barrier to the American way of life. As for the right-wing Tories who got Mulrooney his job back in 1993, free trade with the U.S. looked like a marvellous way to import the Reagan revolution to Canada. Instead of having to fight political battles for privatization, deregulation, and lower taxes on the rich, a U.S.-style "level playing field" would sweep across the border.

Unfortunately for Mulrooney, history has not quite unfolded as it should. A series of episodes, from George's Bank to the current softwood lumber crisis, have shown that Canada is not exempt from U.S. protectionism. On both sides of the border, even believers in free-market theory balk when the principle is applied to beer, steel pipe, or magazine publishing. Canada's chief negotiator, Simon Reisman, may even be right when he insists that a quick deal could have been enormously advantageous to Canada. His U.S. counterparts were ill-equipped President Reagan — obviously no man for tedious details — had a comfortable Senate majority.

Those days have passed. Reisman's own favorite bargaining chip — fresh water exports to a parched United States — was raised in Ottawa. Washington now brags with inflated and hostile lobbyists, and U.S. demands rise with each fresh sign that the Canadian government is desperate for a deal.

Yet how desperate should Canadians be? Would a free-trade deal really create the "jobs, jobs, jobs" promised by Mulrooney? Would it boost Canadian living standards by 10 per cent? Or would it annihilate a generation of social and cultural programs that have made Canada a more just and exciting place to live? Would Canadians see their industries join the flow to the market across an unprotected frontier? Would Ottawa be barred from limiting regional disparities or from a made-in-Canada industrial strategy? Would Canada come to re-

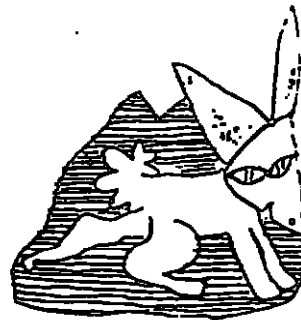
semble California — or West Virginia?

These were issues Canadians were not supposed to debate. As a secret paper in the prime minister's office reveals, free-trading free trade was just as important in Canada as in the U.S. Senate. The more Canadians thought about free trade, Mulrooney's advisors realized, the less they would like it.

Merely by publishing *The Free Trade Papers*, James Lorimer has performed a subversive act. As editor, Duncan Cameron has compiled a bundle of documents and a score of opinions, from commentators ranging from Simon Reisman to the Canadian Auto Workers' Bob White. He concludes with an appropriately vitriolic exchange between free-trade advocate John Crispo and Mel Murray, founding father of the Council of Canadians. Patient readers will emerge with enough knowledge of "counter vails," "contingency protection," and theoretical equilibrium models to entertain, shock, and perhaps to bore their friends. They will know the difference between an NTB (non-tariff barrier) and an MFN (most favoured nation). This is not light reading. This is not a trivial subject.

Nor is *The Free Trade Papers* a neutral book. While readers have enough arguments to reach widely divergent conclusions, Cameron's notes raise tougher questions about free-trade advocates than their critics. Mischievously, but legitimately, he includes sections of a government-commissioned report on the Auto Pact that, somehow, Ottawa did not see fit to publish. He does the same for a Quebec report on the impact on jobs for which Robert Bourassa preferred to suppress.

Free trade with the United States is the



biggest, toughest issue Canada now faces. If there are other options, they are not easy or cheap. People who want to understand what is happening to this country should turn off the television for a couple of nights and wrestle with this book. They can comfort themselves with the wicked thought that Brian Mulrooney would almost certainly prefer them to watch the tube. □

REVIEW

Between the sexes

by Mary El Michals

In *The Spirit of the Times*, by Ken Norris, The Muses' Company, 41 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 919754 06 6).

Undoing the Dark, by Barbara Carey, Quarry Press, 77 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 919627 01 3).

Private Properties, by Leona Gom, Sono Nis Press, 93 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 919203 59 0).

READ THESE THREE books concerned with sexual politics and find, among other things, the post-feminist man Ken Norris attempts to chronicle in long, jazzy, conversational lines what he describes as the "sexual wars" — the death of romance: "Love now recruits us into being paramilitary. I will spare your villages if you promise not to mine my harbour." Regretting the loss of a romantic tradition and its recognizably ritualistic balance of male-female relations, where power is a mute noun, Norris wishes to perceive the current struggle as "heroic," although the contemporary solutions offered are "trivial." He is nostalgic for Romance with a capital R and writes in that mode.

Norris is not ironic — he is whimsical. It is with that sense of humour that he negotiates the contradictions of what he perceives as reality and the Romantic code he values. So he laments how the women who grew in the post-romantic era

to schizophrenia and baby carriages; I suppose it would be more noble if I lost you to the war." Erotic imagery is the leit-motif for his collection; such, I suppose, is the "spirit of the times." But he doesn't want responsibility for this "war": "Call it spiritual laryngitis, call it a wiping clean/of all the fingerprints on language's gun."

Unabashedly sentimental, complaining of "emotional holocausts" in a way that suggests but does not parallel Plath's projection of fascist attributes onto "Daddy," Norris suggests that the sexual war is a great equalizer and we are all its victims. He wisely points out that we can't destroy one sex without destroying ourselves: "Scott Fitzgerald did push Zelda over the edge, then had no choice but to follow her."

Barbara Carey's collection is described on the back of the book as post-feminist — meaning, I gather from her treatment of feminist issues in the volume, not the

and/or solution of those gender-related social problems so much as their subordination to the larger political context. If we could, with any validity, shorten the term to P.F. and use it like A.D. to denote a new age, I would like it better. Too often it seems to be used to subvert or diminish a social movement, one that has its roots in the 19th century, as a fad.

Caroy's is a mature first book. The language war she describes is traditional — the male native, the female acted upon: "even in repose/your hands are verbs" and "with/holding transitive power." The poet attempts to deconstruct this traditional relationship, this grammatical given, by playing with syntax and breaking-down words into their component parts, in order to wrest new meaning from the language.

This fragmentation also slows and chops a natural lyricism she cannot fully accept even as she breathes it, somewhat like Erin Mouré but without the lightning or pace. The elevated, the extra-terrestrial (that is, what is beyond the earthly, not Spielberg's pet), and what is traditionally hierarchical in our value system, she attempts to domesticate so that the names of the planets are "braided/with whitened knuckles/of garlic strung in the spice cupboard."

This is also a gentle book. The sexual wars are comic, domestic, playful, as in "the peanut butter wars." But they fit into a larger political context, where men govern and where there are real wars, blood wars — into that public context where women are excluded. "In the family way" is a comic piece about our confederation as a nation, which effaces the pomposity of male history books: "they thought nothing wondrous/of it, that a birth could occur/without a woman's aid."

Like Gom's new book is witty, playful, and sardonic all at once. Her language is spare, colloquial and concrete, the lines lean and sparsely punctuated, the effect, punchy. There are a few poems focusing on that sexual war that we will eventually weary into cliché, but she renders them in a fresh, quintessentially feminine, and subversive way. In "Aprons," the battle imagery, which Gom realizes is male, is cleverly debunked.

There is little of the mysterious or strange in Gom's world-view; instead of complexity one gets contradiction, and that is bound to disappoint those who, like Dickinson, expect poetry to take the top of your head off. But her work is an intelligent criticism of life. Her concerns, and style are realistic. Words like "witch" from "that ancient misogyny" represent, she says, a brutal genocide and not magic or metaphysical reality. Leave the myths to the men, she seems to suggest — those

men who have historically been busy projecting all of life's darker aspects onto women.

What Gom chooses to write about is experiential and female: the body, relationships with friends, with family, are given as much attention as relationships with men or lovers. Many of her poems deal with the physical aspects of being female, from trying to tuck size-12 thighs in fitness classes to tampons and the dangers of toxic shock syndrome, which condemns women to wearing pads "harnessed to your hips." I laughed out loud when I read the solution that Gom offers to this problem:

*finally you tell your men you've decided
to carry a medic alert card
in case of unconsciousness
removes tampons*

This does not do the poem justice — pulling a few lines out of context, like delivering the punch-line without the joke. And many of the poems in this collection reflect a humane humour that seems to act as a kind of salve, a kind of release, designed to help us survive problems we're not likely to lick in our lifetimes. □

REVIEW

Oranges and onions

By Fred Wah

Travels, by Yehuda Amichai, Exile Editions, 135 pages, \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 41 X).

White of the Lesser Angels, by Janice Kulyk Keefer, Exile Editions, 100 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920304 60 5).

The Abbotsford Guide to India, by Frank Davey, Press Porcépic, 102 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 262 4).

OTHER THAN THE superficial fact that all three of these books engage "travel" in one form or another, I don't think there is a connection that is worth much attention. The authors' sensibilities seem fairly distant from one another. One is an older, major international poet, another has just published her first books, and the third is a respected critic, editor, and poet just reaching his prime. The older poet is OK but a little disappointing, the youngest shows skill and promise, and the one in his prime has just published his best book yet. All three books were published in Canada, but that doesn't have much to do with any of them.

Travels is a bilingual edition, translated from the Hebrew by Ruth Nevo, of a long autobiographical poem by German-born

Yehuda Amichai, a novelist and short-story writer as well as a poet, who has lived in Israel since 1936. His poetry is, therefore, primarily informed by the history, religion, and conflict commonly associated with the Israeli experience.

Unfortunately the writing in *Travels* is nothing new. The voice is comfortable with the broken-line, modern I-you lyric. In this case it lightly suggests background narratives of growing up, marrying, celebrating, warning, and dying. They are poems of a long lament, full of personal and cultural reference. But the poetry becomes formally predictable and, I believe, loses some of the sharpness this competent writer could bring to it.

Certainly the poems are full of the usual lyric devices. As we might expect, Amichai handles repetition and metaphor, for example, very well.

*But even then I was marked for death like
an orange
for peeling, like chocolate for breaking,
like a hand-grenade
for explosion The hand of fate held me
tight*

Standard image-building techniques. And they sometimes lead to interesting language plays and a bit of a surprise image

*Loneliness is a tense in which actions
can be
declined Tap, will tap Time is a
flavor*

And so on. Too often, however, the language simply stands still: "You ate and were full . . ." "You did not eat. Were not full." "I ate and was full."

One intriguing aspect Amichai plays with in the poem is the ambiguity of the "you." The persona seems to change from mother to lover to, possibly, the self as the reader. But, curiously, many of the characters in this story of a life become depersonalized, generic actors. They become "the bride," "a child," "my son," and so forth. Though there are the strong poems I expect from an accomplished poet, there is just not quite enough that's fresh enough to keep me reading with much engagement. I can't help but think of Edmond Jabès's wonderful treatment of a similar subject matter in a more innovative way in *The Book of Questions*.

White of the Lesser Angels is Janice Kulyk Keefer's first book of poems. She is also an award-winning fiction writer. In some ways there's not much that's new in this collection of poetry either. Once again, the poems are traditional modern lyrics with lots of I-you context to centre on. But Keefer brings some substantial skill to working in this form. She thanks teachers like Lorna Crozier and Phyllis Webb, and she has acquired some of the finesse of these poets fairly well.

The book is divided into three sections.

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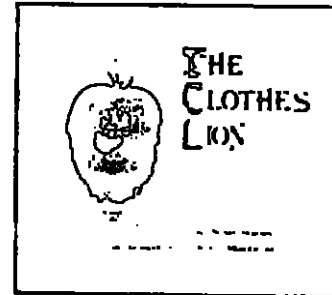
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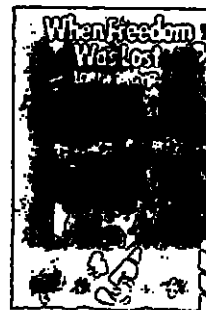
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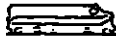
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The first, "Dark Way Home," opens with a good example of what's to follow. It's a poem called "For Teacher" and its first line, "You encourage taking risks," sets me up for a bit of risk-taking. What I find are not so much "risks" as nicely crafted images like "brain-porridge" and

*Don't take poems for onions
peeling away to water,
over the humming words
you still for meat.*

That could have been a pretty good ending for the poem, but the poet goes on to the usual metaphorical evidence, the summary image, that ominously predictable ending.

Much of the book is like that. A poem will posit a strong image and language and then undercut itself. The third section, "Exile," records travels in Europe. There are some strong poems in this section ("Return," "Brier Island"), but a number of them are weakened by simple descriptive listings and participial endings. The closing of "Amours de Voyage," for example, detracts from some nice diction ("fusty prison of our room") with a few weak similes and participial constructions (one of them dangling: "Waking before you, the room").

But Keefe is a skilled writer and most of the poems in the book engage at a particular level. She has a good sense of the line, and her attention to syllabic movement (tone-leading) is frequently outstanding. I like the way, for example, in "Noolie," that she saves her poem from an otherwise weak ending.

*... Clutching the metro's shoes
she has just sold me, I remember
her people, making their first
Europeans:*

Dog Eyes. Long Noses. Boat Feet.

I'm much more struck by the language in Frank Davey's *The Abbottsford Guide to India*. I'm also partial, as many are at the moment, to the prose poem, and in this book Davey applies to that from writing abilities gained through more than 20 books of poetry and literary criticism. As the jacket blurb says, "Davey experiments with the characteristic vocabularies, syntactic patterns and ideological viewpoints of traditional travel books and prose narratives." The book really is a travel guide, complete with photographs (there is an outstanding photo on the cover) taken by the author on a trip to the subcontinent several years ago. But it is also an engaging and expert writing event.

Surprise and incongruous juxtaposition are the most prominent compositional features in this book. It opens with a kind of *Harpers*-like index of facts and comparisons between Abbottsford, B.C. (where Davey grew up) and India. Statistics like "The Abbottsford bus sta-

tion is larger than the Banars bus station" and "The Fraser River is wider but less holy than the Ganges" set the tone for the free-wheeling observational stance throughout the book. Davey catches the unwary reader by unloading a bit of literary baggage in his advice on "Baggage":

Fellow your luggage closely. Be sure it is all placed in the same taxi. Choose your taxi carefully. Be sure it is large enough to hold all your luggage. Everywhere in George Ryga's plays we witness the over-determination of the speaker, the patriarchal insistence on symbol & reference, that dooms women like Rita Joe to silent destruction. Travel lightly. Take very little luggage & have your laundry done often.

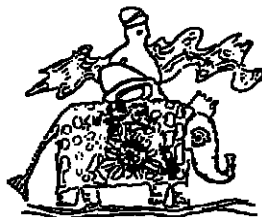
And on the facing page in a piece called "Document," we find "passport stamp is a contextualized signifier."

The book is broken into four more sections after the opening statistics: "Abbottsford and India" section. A delightful aspect of two of these is Davey's choice of subjects, which range from "Geology" ("The Quebec poet Irving Layton visited the royal harem at Amber in 1975") to "Dogs" ("Many speculators invest in Indian dog licences") to "How to Meet Indians" ("If you're a Mississauga bus driver, talk to bus drivers") to "Nuclear War" ("Indians do not worry about nuclear war. Indians worry about finding safe food on a train journey").

Besides being informative and fun, this is a careful book. It has been written carefully and meticulously. Each sentence and phrase is well thought out. In "Common Features," for example, the syntactic disjunctions work on their own as well as add to the pileup of sensory images.

Srinagar. The moon, cookies, air-conditioning. Although both Indian & Canadian men may dislike individual women, neither like to see a youthful female body-created. Orchards, ditches, rings, fear of violence, bracelets, transistor radios.

There is a greater range of writing in this book than I can suggest in a short review. I think some longer pieces in the section called "Off-Centre Cities: Some Views" are some of Davey's best writing yet. Be sure to take *The Abbottsford Guide to India* on your next trip to India, or, better still, Abbottsford. □



REVIEW

Toward a nuclear balm

By Gladson Ferman

Peace: A Dream Unfolding, edited by Penney Kome and Patrick Crean, Lester & Orpen Dennys, illustrated, 240 pages, \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0 80619 130 5).

TOWARD THE END of this fine anthology appears a short article about a Chicago institution called the Peace Museum. Its director, Mark Rogovin, explains that the museum is intended to "communicate the horrors of war and, or express the visions and dreams of peace" by means of the visual and literary arts. The article argues that Rogovin's is the only peace museum in the world and, strictly speaking, this is probably correct. But if a peace museum is, as Rogovin suggests, something that expresses the horror and the dream through writing and pictures, there is now a second peace "museum." In their *Peace: A Dream Unfolding*, Penney Kome and Patrick Crean have assembled photography, graphic art, poetry, fiction, and political prose into a three-storey gallery.

The first floor, titled "The Dream," explores visions of an ideal world; the second, "The Nightmare," charts the agony of the nuclear age; the third, "The Awakening," discusses initiatives of the peace movement.

The overriding notion of "The Dream" is that of planetary oneness, an essential unity of Earth and living things. "We are

"drawn from the same crucible." Einstein observes that people may experience themselves as radically separate from one another, but this is a "kind of optical delusion of [their] consciousness." In fact, "A human being is part of the whole, called by us the universe." The vision may be expressed, as it is in Victor Hugo, as a desire for a family of nations — the "United States of Europe" — or, as it is in the writing of indigenous people, as a wish for kinship with the Earth and its creatures.

Particularly clear in this section is the idea that outer, or world peace, is contingent upon inner peace. Writings from the Quakers, Krishnamurti, and the peace activist A. J. Muste argue that only if one works for and attains peace in oneself can one promote harmony among the nations. "A world of peace will not be achieved by men who in their souls are torn with strife and eagerness to assert themselves," writes Muste; he reminds

activities that the way in which they work may be consonant with their goals. But although these thinkers are quite right to call for personal transformation, they must be careful not to suggest that all people are equally in need of it. You and I, for all our aggressiveness, do not build weapons of planetary destruction.

Such weapons are built by scientists and governments, and in "The Nightmare" we are shown how, from beginning to end, they devastate human life. We meet Navajo children who, living in the vicinity of uranium mines, suffer two to eight times as many birth defects as the national average; we learn that "just one fifth of annual arms expenditures could offset world hunger by the year 2000"; we read the eyewitness accounts of atomic bomb survivors. "You'd think that people would be panic-stricken, running, yelling. Not at Hiroshima," recalls Setsuko Thurlow. "They moved in slow motion, like figures in a silent movie, shuffling through the dust and smoke. I heard thousands of people breathing the words 'Water, give me water.' Many simply dropped to the ground and died." When reading these recollections and examining the painful photographs that accompany them, it is important to remember that the device used on Japan is small and primitive compared with the weapons of today.

"The Nightmare" is best described as a thick catalog of horrors, documenting as it does a broad range of nuclear issues. No aspect is gone into in great depth, but this is perfectly acceptable.

The chapters — covering such matters as the bomb's development, nuclear energy, arms negotiations, Star Wars, and nuclear winter — are (and should be) introductory. One of the book's strengths is its accessibility to the general public.

Published to celebrate the International Year of Peace from a *Common Understanding* consciousness with a lesson of hope. The 110 pages of "The Awakening" chronicle a movement that has managed to draw people from nearly every occupation, scientists, artists, religious leaders, a wide variety of professionals, and even military personnel have now joined the ranks. Not only do we find a great variety of people, we find a great variety of activities. If nothing else, "The Awakening" demonstrates that the peace movement has room for every conceivable action.

Large demonstrations — such as the June, 1982, New York rally that drew a million people — are highlighted, but there is mention too of many other projects. Especially encouraging are the citizen-to-citizen initiatives, which include the pairing of Soviet and American cities, and the East-West personal peace treaty. These "détente-from-below" activities

circumvent government-to-government channels which, as the book suggests, have been generally ineffectual. (One government pointed out here, though, is that of New Zealand. Prime Minister David Lange's refusal to allow nuclear-armed ships into his country's ports felled the movement world-wide.) If one were obliged to single out the most inspiring of the groups, one would probably have to choose the women's camp at Greenham Common, where peace is both the goal and the means by which the goal is attained. Here the peace movement does not simply eschew militarism, it creates a humane, communal alternative.

As an avenue for peace-making, this book has great potential precisely because it will reach an audience not normally in contact with the peace movement. My only disappointment here is that Peace does not take the next step and include a complete listing of addresses and phone numbers for the groups it mentions. Doctors Chazov and Lowy, the Nobel laureates who introduce *Peace*, tell us that "public pressure and outrage toward the doomsday process is what generates and strengthens the peace initiative." This book will foster the education that makes outrage possible. □

REVIEW

Home thoughts from aboard

By Douglas MEE

Coasting, by Jonathan Raban, 1982, 311 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 272119 9).

Jonathan Raban writes, close to the start of this lovely book, "when I bought a real boat, fitted it up as a floating house and set out to sail alone around the British Isles." For four years, beginning on April Fools' Day, 1982 (after three weeks of instruction in the rudiments of boat-handling and navigation), he became a coaster, cruising with the "minimum of effort . . . down a slippery slope on the margin of life." His vessel, the *Coastfield Maid*, was a heavily built 32-foot ketch, tubby and capacious, fitted out for comfort and rigged for convenience. *Coasting* is the product of Raban's journals, a seemingly artless though in fact rigorously organized collage of documentary narrative, personal and cultural history, and irreverent rambling commentary on British political and social programs and current events. The book appears to drift aimlessly, but its themes boil and ebb as

rhythmically as any tide.

When Raban sets sail, a marriage behind him somewhere, three books of travel and commentary (*Arabia* among them) and a novel to his credit, he is restless, disillusioned but not quite cynical, and curious. That curiosity is wide-ranging, informed, elastic. He sees his trip as providing "a text, a reckoning, a voyage of territorial conquest, a homecoming." He will sound for insights buried in his own past, and try to read his nation's mind and mood from the perspective of a "magical solitude."

The book, like the boat, responds to complex forces. There is much good talk simply about sailing, about shoals and currents, storms and landfalls. Raban talks with fishermen and dockers, marks the decline of commerce and the sad boredom of strong men in decaying seaside towns. Fishing dies while tourism flourishes, the "merrying of England" (seen in the specious quaintness of Rye) makes "profit out of dereliction."

The Falklands War kicks up Britain is suddenly swept by jingoism that looks to Raban like mass hysteria, its causes to be found in the post-war decades of emotional deprivation and eroding national pride. The unnecessary, "totally gratuitous" Falklands business, once it becomes Raban's subject, takes an erratic but significant course through all his meditations.

By a trick of memory, the hostilities lend him to a long recall of his public-school days, of discipline, fear, and notions of brotherhood. In similar fashion one incident or intuition brings up another, stitched together with threads

which he converses with the life of Man introduces Raban to the works of the Island's poet laureate; another chance encounter raises questions about the

havens (of which Man is one) and about synthetic society in general. The miners' strike of 1984-85 is occasion for Raban's consideration of unemployment and the government's provisions for social welfare; the motif of Hard Times (England wears "a thin, hurt and sullen look") is everywhere insistent.

The numerous small touches in *Coasting*, like unexpected puffs of fairing breeze, delight. Raban seeks out his parents, now semi-retired from an Anglican parsonage to an unlikely residence in the red-light district of Southampton; he contemplates the changes in them and in the Church. He pays a fine tribute to the poet Philip Larkin, his undergraduate teacher and longtime friend; he briefly renews a prickly acquaintance with Paul Theroux, a fellow-explorer of peace genres. He returns, for an interlude ashore, to his

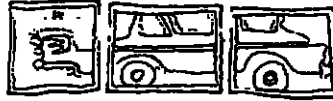
London flat and is totally disoriented. The city seems "unmanageable, unrecognizable." He heads out to sea again.

Raban's writing is expert — graceful, confident, strong or subtle as the occasion demands, all without seeming needed. Even at their most languorous his lines can bite with sarcasm, startle with a quick perception of the absurd or the incongruous. His palette is variegated, reflecting Nature's: "calms, storms, sunsets, fogs, mirrored landscapes, welcoming ports glistening in the twilight under currents of blown gulls, enormous alder, waves green as jade."

Correspondences — between the closely observed specifics of life on the fringe and the great generalities Raban sees rising from the political and economic centre — are at the heart of *Coasting*. He homes in, at the voyage, on "the island spirit," the

quite wonderfully made the sea for his countrymen "always the beginning," always a "last frontier" of the imagination, yet can still lead them to such dismaying bravado as the Falklands enterprise ("standing alone in the world was what the British liked to believe that they did best"). By the time we tie up with the *Grasfield Maid* for the last time, we have behind us four years of questions and reflections. Raban quotes Hilaire Belloc's judgement on sailing with approval (he abhors Belloc's politics): "the whole rigmarole leads us along no whither, and yet is alive with discovery, emotion, adventure, peril and repose." That's a fair assessment of *Coasting*, a book

in *The Solid Mandala* (1966) two brothers are the halves of a divided self, with diametrically opposed yet complementary characteristics. In *The Tryborn Affair* (1979) the ambivalence of the title is centred in sexual roles as Endoxia, mistress in the first section, changes to Lieutenant Eddie Tryborn, decorated hero of the



First World War and "jackaroo" on an Australian sheep station, to Edith Twist, madam of an elegant brothel in London during the Second World War. The title of this latest work, *Memoirs of Mary in One*, and the name of the supposed author, Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray, alert the reader to more complicated fragmentation.

Like so many of White's isolated,

monad-like and possibly un-understanding, Alex must pour out her "memoirs" "All that I experienced — in any of my lives, past, present, and future." Her past is exotic: Levantine, Greek, and Armenian, through Smyrna, Alexandria, Australia. The facts of the present in the house on the edge of Centennial Park in Sydney; Alex's physical decay, her undependable bones, muscles, digestive, and excretory systems; her attempted restraint by drab daughter Hilda, abetted, somewhat unwillingly, by her dead husband's friend Patrick and the threatened return of a feared psychiatrist and the straitjacket; her wild shop-lifting spree — these are sordid indeed. Some of the peritactic

of the park's *Memento Mori* seem quite palatable.

But who — Hilda, Patrick, or the reader — can be certain where fact ends

the smelly creature Alex brings in from the park to hide in the built-in cupboard upstairs (her equivalent of a priest-hole) a derelict or a mystic, or does he exist only in Alex's nimble mind? The fantastic aspect of the memoirs exploits the "many in one" of the title. Alex becomes, with no warning transitions, Cassini the nun bedded by the monk Omocyprios on a Greek island; a startling dancer scattering her jewels at a charity ball at the Adolf Hitler Hotel in Washington, D.C.; Sister Benedicte lost in the bush with Saint Bernadette; an actress on a tour of the Australian outback performing her "famous Dolly Formosa" monologues and playing a somewhat age-withered Cleopatra. At one point she announces herself as "Empress Alexandra of Byzantium Niceta Smyrna Benba and Sydney Australia." The flights of fantasy are awe-inspiring — sometimes.

The fragmentation and the multi-layered structure of the work are furthered by the editor's introduction, intrusion, remarks, and epilogue supplied by Lieutenant White, her husband's best man and friend, who survives Alex and the three generations of her family, Levantine and Australian. He is not, however, just a recorder and archivist of these memoirs. The symbiotic relation between Alex and Patrick is kept before the reader. Patrick the editor says: "Although an Anglo-Saxon Australian on both sides, I am a sybarite and masochist; some of the dramatic personae of the Levantine script could be offspring of my own psyche."

Patrick White the novelist is recording some aspects of Patrick White the man (who also, by the way, lives on Centennial Park in Sydney) and some aspects of what he terms his "persona" in these memoirs, in which he in turn appears as editor.

"Her life was mine, historically, personally, and if I cared to admit, creatively." And one of the most fascinating things about this work comes from our experiencing a life lived in the very process of writing it. Patrick continues: "She might have created me, and I her."

Those who enjoyed and sometimes regretted White's last publication, his semi-autobiographical *Flaws in the Glass* (1981), will recognize some of his obsessions here: dull pretentious Sydney society; rowdy extrovert Australians; the peculiarities of a local speech; the references to specific individuals, thinly veiled, such as K.V.H., the critic of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Here, however,

series of humour, caustic as it often is (One is intrigued by the dedication to the *Flying Nun*.)

The citation for the Nobel Prize in 1973 described White's art as "a kind of psychological art" — the latter a concern that is obvious in this book. Epic proportions were achieved by his earlier novels, particularly *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*. Here the soaring flights of Alex's fancy, from time to time, when they do not fall flat, approach epic proportions, but those of the comic epic. The comedy borders on the painful, necessarily, in the face of the ills that flesh is heir to, intensified by the inevitable decay of the aging. While celebrating the reaffirmation of the fancy over facts, the survival of the macabre sense of humour over the fear of madness, the comedy never obscures the pathos of the human condition.

It is good to have this curious, sometimes overtly self-conscious addition to the list of works by Patrick White, whom I have no hesitation in describing as the most interesting writer in English for some decades now. □

REVIEW

Fragments of a life

By Rupert Schlotter

Memoirs of Mary in One, by Patrick White, Irwin, 192 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7725 1650 2).

IN HIS FICTION, appearing at regular intervals over almost half a century, Patrick White has shown his fascination with the divisions, ambivalence, fragmentation, and multiplicity within the individual. In his first major novel, *The Aunt's Story* (1940), Theodora Goodman, finally re-interpreting, becomes in turn each of the regular characters in her hotel. In *Riders to the Christ* (1951) the four chief characters, the four riders, sharply differentiated, are the quarters of a whole, unified by a mystic vision of the chariot.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Back to the future

Whether the future threatens nuclear disaster or a worldwide corporate takeover, salvation hinges on one little girl's escape to the present

By Mary Arnold Smith



STRANGE ENCOUNTERS with the experimental or with life in another time and place are features of a number of recent books for children. In two science-fiction books by Carol Matas the same heroine, Rebecca, travels through time to two different futures. She remains in Winnipeg, her home in the present, but in both stories it is a Winnipeg changed beyond her recognition.

In *The Zann Factor* (Fifth House, 117 pages, \$3.95 paper) takes Rebecca to a complex underground city where the genetically damaged survivors of a nuclear war hope to rebuild civilization by kidnapping healthy children from the past for breeding purposes. In *Zann* (Fifth House, 116 pages, \$3.95 paper), she is transported to what seems to be a much happier future. War and disease are gone and everyone lives in a glamorous world of beautiful clothes and exciting shopping centres, with robots and computers providing every comfort at home.

However, Rebecca soon discovers the extreme pressures in this seemingly perfect society. Zann is a corporation, a big business that has recently taken over the world, eliminating all other governments. Citizens, even children Rebecca's age, must conform and fulfil daily quotas of buying and selling to support the corporate structure. If they don't, they are "cut loose" — banished from the perfect city to a wilderness dead from industrial pollution where there seems to be no chance of survival.

Both books offer bleak views of the future, but Matas suggests some hope in each case. Perhaps she has remembered, as many students must, the Ray Bradbury story, "A Sound of Thunder," so often found in high-school anthologies. A time-traveller, paying to make a safari to the age of the dinosaurs, breaks the rules, leaves the path, steps on and kills a single butterfly. The present he then returns to is not the same as the one he left. By killing that one insect from the past he has subtly but significantly altered the whole flow of history.

In both of Matas's books the only hope offered is for Rebecca to escape and return to our present time. Then, with her added knowledge, she can perhaps make

even a small change — like the death of Bradbury's butterfly — that will prevent disaster. Rebecca, spunky and ultimately optimistic, wants to believe that one person can make such a difference. Her determination to work for a better world should get some healthy ideas stirring in the minds of the readers of these two books.

In *The Moons of Madeleine*, by Joan Clark (Viking Kestrel, 221 pages, \$12.95 cloth), the heroine Madeleine (or Mad as she calls herself) faces more challenges as she comes to terms with growing up and becoming a woman. The story begins in a straightforward fashion. When Mad turns 13, her parents send her to spend a month of the summer holidays with her cousin Selena in Calgary, a city Mad's family left three years earlier for a simpler and less-stressful life in the mountains.

Clark skillfully establishes the fundamental contrasts and tensions in setting and character. Selena's carefully arranged suburban home is different from the pastoral log retreat that Mad's parents have built for themselves. Selena's father is travelling in Europe on business while her mother is seldom home during the day. Mad's family is always together, working on the crafts that they sell to earn a living.

Mad is used to relying almost entirely on her family for friendship and she has not found any friends, and her classmates accuse her of thinking she is too good for them. Selena, on the other hand, seizes any opportunity to get away from home to meet her friends. Mad thinks these friends are weird and is both angry and frightened when Selena introduces her to them.

In her jeans and sneakers, Mad feels very out of place beside Selena who, though only 14, is not the slightly pedgy girl she remembers. Mad considers Selena to be weird too — a slim, cynical, rebellious stranger who wears stage make-up and exotic clothing and who streaks her hair with a different colour every day. Mad also finds the constant tension between Selena and her mother disturbing.

Tensions such as these would be enough to propel most stories forward, but Clark introduces more complex levels. Mad's daytime confusions manifest them-

selves at night in what might be realistic dreams or perhaps actual encounters with supernatural forces, moon goddesses that appear to represent the female side of creation. The moon goddesses charge Mad with the task of finding First Woman, the mother of all mankind. Mad must confirm First Woman's existence before rebels led by Anelis (Selena backwards) find her and declare her to be dead.

All this begins to make sense when Mad finds in her waking world become necessary keys to admit her to First Woman's cave. Somehow her quest also becomes essential in keeping her grandmother, ill in the hospital with pneumonia, from dying. The dream segments tend to weigh the story down, and once or twice threaten to swamp it entirely. But the book is so well-written and the characters are so multi-levelled and complex that mature readers shouldn't lose interest.

The Moons of Madeleine becomes even more interesting when considered with its companion book, *Wild Man of the Woods* (Viking Kestrel, 1995). It tells the

has exchanged places with Mad, spending the month in the mountains with Mad's brother Louie while Mad is in Calgary. Stephen too has adventures on several levels as he learns ways of dealing with evil and aggression.

The stories are parallel in many ways, both in plot structure and symbolism. For example, Mad attends the Calgary Stampede while Stephen goes to the village craft fair. Both characters have disturbing dreams that reflect and amplify their waking experiences. Masks and masquerading are recurring motifs in both books. Both Mad and Stephen discover unsuspected aspects of their personalities through masks. In both stories water plays an important part in the climax. These two well-written and subtle books deserve reading and rereading.

The Fleece Dow, by the prolific James Houston (McClelland & Stewart, 96 pages, \$14.95 cloth), is more straightforward, although it also deals with primitive forces and powers that seem to control man's place in the world. Subtitled "An Arctic Legend," the book is

a sequel to Houston's *The White Archer* (Academic, 1967). It continues the adventures of Kungo, the Inuit youth who has learned to summon the power of the magic falcon bow when his need is great, although no one can bend it under ordinary circumstances.

When the caribou do not come to provide for Kungo's people, the coastal Inuit, he travels inland to the Indian camps to discover if they have blocked the caribou's annual migration. He discovers the Indians also starving and blaming the Inuit for preventing the fish from swimming upstream from the ocean. Kungo and his friends must use all their power to prevent bloodshed and promote understanding between the two peoples.

By the end of the story, Kungo has survived many life-threatening adventures.

He now is ready to leave his childhood. The falcon bow magically transforms itself into a bird once more and flies free.

Another story about growing up and coming to terms with the problems and moral issues of life is Mark Thurman's *Cabbagetown-Gang* (NC Press, 124 pages, \$9.95 cloth). This partially autobiographical novel describes the adventures of 12-year-old Mark and the members of his gang, the Regent Five Blood Brothers, in Canada's first public housing project in the Cabbagetown area of Toronto about 1960.

Thurman works hard to create a sense of place, including such details as smashed glass on the pavement, broken buttons in the elevator, crates of beer in a basement storage locker, but somehow the gang's adventures never seem entirely

real. The main issue facing them is whether or not to cheat on an important test their martinet of a teacher has scheduled. Mark and one of his friends decide that they will not cheat, prompting a major split in the gang's solidarity.

Mark and his friend are filled with righteous sentiments such as: "Those guys are stupid. Cheating and stealing. They're going to get caught sooner or later. Then what happens? They could go to reform school or jail . . . or worse." No one would argue with such statements, but they sound a little platitudinous coming from 12-year-old boys. For many readers, stories with such obvious morals are suspect.

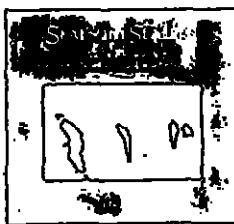
Thurman's Douglas the Elephant series for younger readers also teaches definite lessons about such values as truthfulness.

Book News: an advertising feature

Photos from the collection of the late Dr. Cater Andrews, many of them never before reproduced. Accompanied by detailed captions, they depict the history of the Newfoundland seal fishery from the mid nineteenth century.

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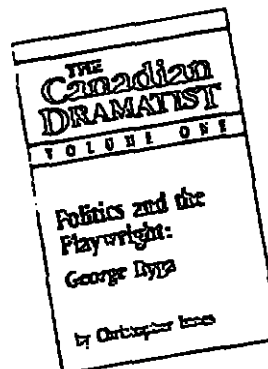
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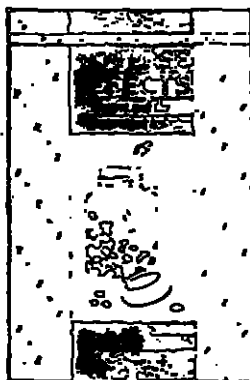


Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga
Christopher Innes

The Canadian Dramatist, Volume One International scholar Innes writes a definitive assessment of Canada's major playwright George Ryga and his contribution to the stage, film, and radio. 6 x 9, 128 pp. ISBN: 0-88924-151-1. Drama

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generosity, and loyalty, but these little books are more fun and much easier to swallow, mostly because of the glowing colours and flowing design of Thurman's art. (He was restricted to small black-and-white illustration in *Cabbagetown Gang*.)

Colour and design in his latest Douglas story, *Two Stupid Dumbos* (NC Press, 24 pages, \$10.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), are particularly important as Dr. Sighound Froid uses Rorschach-type blots, bright

picture puzzles, and optical illusions to convince Douglas and his friend Albert Alligator that they are not as stupid as they have been made to feel by a couple of unfair employers.

Also depending heavily on its illustrations is John Bianchi's *The Bungalo Boys: The Last of the Tree Beavers* (Bungalo Books, 24 pages, \$4.95 paper). Bianchi, fairly new to children's writing but well-known as a magazine illustrator, has created a story that has no heavy

moral but is just for fun.

The Bungalo Boys saddle up their trees to hunt down the Beavers, a gang of notorious tree rustlers. However, when Little Shorty — the youngest of the boys, who has been in trouble throughout the story — is assigned to night guard duty, the Beavers escape and will certainly live to rustle another day. Bianchi's text has a deadpan delivery, with his illustrations providing a wry supplement. The book is very silly and altogether delightful. □

INTERVIEW

Sharon Pollock

The best work doesn't originate in Toronto. It's the playwrights in the regions who are making the biggest impact.

By Robin Metcalfe



ALGAPY P. YWRIGHT Sharon Pollock won a Governor General's Award for *Blood Relations*, a drama based on the Lizzie Borden story. She is currently writing *Fair Liberty's Call*, a script set in the Loyalist period, for Theatre New Brunswick. The daughter of a prominent Fredericton physician, Pollock was in Halifax recently to direct the Neptune Theatre's production of *Doc*, a play incorporating elements of her own family history. She was interviewed there by Robin Metcalfe:

Doc's in Canada: You grew up in Atlantic Canada. Do you have any sense of identity with this region?

Sharon Pollock: I think so. I understand the people, the politics. There are things about the poverty, the economic

deprivation. It seemed to me, artistic, when I started that there really wasn't anything happening here. I didn't leave for that reason: I didn't think, I can't do it here. I have to go some place else. I simply left because I got an offer. The West is similar. We were all told you had to go to Toronto if you were serious about what you were doing. There I made a conscious choice to say, no, I can do it wherever I want. The best work, in fact, doesn't originate in Toronto. It's the playwrights in the regions who are making the biggest impact.

BIC: So do you feel a commitment to the West as a region?

Pollock: Yes, it's my home. When I went out in the mid-'60s, there was that wonderful sense that anything was possible. The Family Compact doesn't exist. That's what had always bothered me about the Maritimes. I've been on a new play [for Janet Amos at Theatre New Brunswick], which is set after the American Revolution. Doing the research, I came to understand that this was the private fiefdom of a few very powerful families. Real participation by ordinary people was stamped on because they were petrified of it turning into another America. What I liked about the West was that there wasn't that Family Compact. Old money didn't get you into the club: what you did got you into the club. Of course, now I see the emergence of the equivalent of a Family Compact in Alberta; only in a way it's even more offensive.

BIC: What's your sense of the theatre culture here?

Pollock: It seems very dynamic. When I came out here to hold auditions for the show, I was impressed with the talent and ability of the people I saw. In some

respects I feel I've been in a situation that would in a similar call in Calgary. The problem is that so many of those people are having to subsidize their own activity, working in conditions in which it's really difficult to create. Theatres like the Mulgrave and the Mermaid show it doesn't matter where you are — it's what you do there that counts. Unfortunately, people get tired, get burned out. It's easy to turn in on yourself and try to exclude the stimulation of outside forces. It gets into "us and them" and a big wall comes down. You lose a certain objectivity about the work you do as a result. The same thing happens in Alberta. All of us outside that golden triangle understand that Toronto is only another region, there's nothing special about it. We have to know what's going on in Toronto in order to operate. It seems unfair that we have to know what's going on in the rest of the regions.

BIC: Susan Munos, in Canadian Theatre Review, has written about the "international fallacy": that what happens in Toronto or New York is the standard against which the regions are measured. Pollock: We've had a real tough row to hoe as a result of the colonial mentality. It's always been the hopes and dreams and fears and stories of the mother country that are placed on our stages. Originally, only the lives of the gods had universal significance, so that was all you put on the stage. Then by and by we said, no, the kings' lives have universal significance too, so they got on the stage. And then it was the upper classes. In British theatre, with John Osborne and *Look Back in Anger*, the lives of the working class were seen to have meaning and significance. We are still refusing to acknowledge that our own lives have universal significance.



Sharon Pollock

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

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That is further enhanced by the "centre" syndrome, so that what Toronto does is supposed to have significance for all of us, but what you do in Halifax or Calgary is a regional work. If Tennessee Williams wrote here he would be a "regional" playwright.

D&C: John Hofsess suggested in *Books in Canada* that the focus of your work has shifted from broader social issues to "character studies." Do you see yourself as a "playwright of conscience"?

Pollock: Of course I do. The reason I would disagree with Hofsess is that he's refusing to acknowledge the politics of the home, the informal politics that permeates human relationships. If you write a play about the *Komagata Maru*, safely set in 1914, it's very easy to know what the humanistic liberal response has to be. As soon as you start dealing with the politics of the family, it's not so easy to know who the bad guys are. It's not a political issue, but that doesn't mean the issue isn't there. *Blood Relations* is a play in which the woman is in conflict, not with her father — she loves her father — but with the society around her. In *Doc*, in order for the play to work, you have to give equal balance to everybody in it. I don't want to judge them. I want to hold the mirror up and say, what do you think? You have to be honest to the characters you create. I don't know anybody who sets out to be an evil person.

BIC: How does politics fit into the creative process?

Pollock: I hate labels. All of my plays deal with individuals making choices and being forced to live with the results. Whenever individuals make choices that don't grow out of themselves, that are imposed on them, disaster follows. My plays are about the necessity of making moral choices. *Time has gone on, I trust my intuition more and more. I'm a political person; I'm involved. I have points of view; but when I start to write, I want to put all those behind me. I want to say, here are some people, here's the situation — what if? And then, what if? I trust, because I consider myself a moral person, that morality will inform my work, but my discovery of it comes through working it out in the little world of the play. At some point, after the first draft, the other part of me comes in and looks at it. It's as if the shoemaker's elves left it under my pillow. I would never make aesthetic choices based on ideology. To me, that would be bad work. Politics informs everything. That's the big lie: we pretend that when we watch *Three's Company*, there isn't a politic coming out of the television set at us. That's what would bother me: that the people in *Three's Company* would refuse to acknowledge*

that they are political writers, too.

D&C: When you are not directing, do you find it difficult to sit back and watch someone else interpreting your work?

Pollock: There was a time when I might have. I don't find it so much now. Every production is a journey of discovery; my vision is not frozen. I'm always interested in what happens as more people come in contact with it. Your play should open up like a flower. The first day of rehearsal is just the bud. Through the rehearsal process it opens up, and you're just as amazed at the flower as they are: you didn't know what colour the centre was. You thought it was bright pink but it turns out to be a very pale yellow.

BIC: Do you do much revision in your scripts as they go from production to production?

Pollock: After the first production I always do a little. You're always discovering things, like the centre of the flower.

and then you think, if I do this here and that there, that's going to be a more brilliant yellow. I'm usually connected intimately with the first production, and I'm part of that second production because I've rewritten and I'm interested in seeing how it goes. When we come to the third production, I may make small changes. By now [with *Doc*], I'm finished with the play. I'm not the person I was when I wrote it. □

RECOMMENDED

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

FICTION

Cambodia: A Book for People Who Find

Talbot Books. Using surreal imagery, startling juxtapositions, autobiography, literary and historical analysis, and the terrible facts and statistics of the last two decades of Cambodian history, Favre's double-levelled text creates a detailed and compelling picture of late-20th-century reality, especially its bitter, bathetic social ironies.

NON-FICTION

The Orangeman: The Life and Times of Ogilvie Gowan, by Don Akenson, James Lorimer. Founder of the Orange Order in Canada, Gowan was a drinker, brawler, liar, and seducer of underage girls. His biographer is likely to attract many followers among novelists and historians in one of his discoveries — namely that Ontario has in its 19th-century past a rich, appallingness that cries out for literary exploitation.

POETRY

Changes of State, by Gary Geddes, Coteau Books. A case could be made that the power of Geddes's poetry lies in his ability to get

of the essential, the childlike or radically simple. It's a difficult thing to risk (and handle well), but in this collection he scores a definite victory.

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:

- Above Myself: *Life and Other Poems*, by Kevin Roberts, Elizabeth Press.
- The *Academic Profession in Alberta*, by Alexander W. Jenkins, The Fraser Institute.
- Academy Hoopla, Domestic Crusader*, by Cheryl MacDonell, Dundurn Press.
- Alberta Tea*, by Linda Robinson, Coach House Press.
- Alberta Today*, edited by Fred Simson, McWent Press.
- The Alberta Report*, by W.P. Kinella, Tatem.
- Centrifugal of Canada*, by Mary Bennoch Fryer, Dundurn Press.
- The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume II*, edited by C. Peter Ripley, University of North Carolina Press.
- Black Robe*, by Brian Moore, Penguin.
- The Callings of Sam*, by Marvin Segen, Seneca Press.
- Canada and the European Community: An Unconformist Partnership*, by N.C. Papadopoulos, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Child of the Morning*, by Pauline Gedge, Macmillan.
- Chickadee Ghosts*, by Jim Wong-Chu, Pulp Press.
- Commonwealth Literature - Mostly Canadian*, edited by Th. L. D'haen and August J. Fry, Free University Press.
- Cooperatives*, by Michel Beaulieu, translated by Jovce Michaud, Exile Editions.
- Death Ride*, by Paul Kropp, Collier Macmillan.
- The Dancesy Miss Die*, by Gale Miller, Macmillan.
- D.P. Lithuanian Immigration to Canada*, by Malda Danov, Multicultural History Society of Ontario.
- Facing Reality: Consultation, Consensus and Making Economic Policy for the 21st Century*, by James Gilroy, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Fascism in the Ukraine 1932-1933*, edited by Roman Serbyn and Bohdan Krawchenko, University of Alberta.
- The 5th Season*, by Paul-Marie Lapointe, translated by D. U. Jones, Exile Editions.
- The 50th Selection*, by Anne Innes Dugg, Outer Press.
- Eight Against Time*, by Emily Narvalah, Ragwood.
- The German Canadians 1930-1937*, translated and edited by Gerhard P. Bassler, Jespersen Press.
- The Glass Bottom Boat*, by David Gilmour, NC Press.
- Sajo and the Deaver people*, by Grey Owl, Macmillan.
- Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, by Ben Gadd, Covax Press.
- Hitler's Holocaust*, by Heun G. Franco, New Star Books.
- Home Truths*, by Mavis Gussert, Macmillan.
- I Don't Pigeon Being Smart*, by Suzana Popadic, illustrated by Susan Kline, Black Mohr Press.
- The Iron Cathedral: C. Book II*, by John Herriott, Breakwater.
- Islands of the Gaspere*, by Helene Moskowitz, Macmillan.
- Imagining the Victim*, by Eric McCormack, Viking.
- Islands Lower than a Victim*, by Cyril Dabydeen, Porcupine Tree Press. (U.K.)
- Jo's Secret*, by Paul Kropp, Collier Macmillan.
- The Last War*, by Martya Godfrey, Collier Macmillan.
- Leaves, The First Canadian*, by Joseph Schull, Macmillan.
- The Little Immigrants*, by Kenneth Boggsell, Macmillan.
- Looking after the Future*, by Patrick Langhorne and Rose Mann Earle, Doubleday.
- Loyalty to the West*, by Dorna Michelski, Guernica.
- Mythic Nation and Canadian Literature*, edited by Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski, University of Waterloo Press.
- Plan of Government 1971*, by Kenneth Neil Cameron, NC Press.
- Handing of Geneva*, by Tony Foster, Methuen.
- Black you can read, Theory Book I*, by Giuseppe Augusto, Guel Canada Diffusion.
- Black you can read, Theory Book I*, Guel Canada Diffusion.
- The History of the Oak Island Treasure*, by Jim Betts, Playwrights Canada.
- Necessary Secrets*, by Elizabeth Smart, Deneau.
- No one to know*, by Rhea Tregebow, Ayn Press.
- 101 Year-Olded Tim Tia*, by Brian Costello, Stoddart.
- Overcoming the Red Jail*, by M. L. Knight, Child Thursday P.S.
- That's Me in the Middle*, by David Roberts, Detaching.
- The Poetics of Mister Deane (Selected Poems)*, by Andre Roy, translated by Daniel Slovic.
- Perspectives on Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michael Darling, ECW Press.
- Pushing and for dog papers*, by Sean O'Hagan, illustrated by Phil McLeod, Clock Moss Press.
- Popcorn for God's Sake*, by Donna Paul Masell, University of Waterloo Press.
- A Public and Private Voice: Essays on the Life and Work of Dorothy Murray*, edited by Lindsay Dorney, Gerald Noonan and Paul Tustin, University of Waterloo Press.
- Painters' Legacy*, by Lewis G. Thomas, edited by Patrick A. Deneau, University of Alberta Press.
- The Lives of the Mind*, by Charles Ritchie, Macmillan.
- Every Which I Sing*, by L. R. Wright, Doubleday.
- Good Luck for Dogdays*, by J. S. Osborne and J. T. Osborne, Pulp Press.

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She'll come back to me today,
pretty Sally Shaftoe.*

THOSE LINES come not from an entry to CanWit No. 116 but from *Father Gander Nursery Rhymes* ("Father Gander makes all little girls and boys feel equally important!"), published by Advocacy Press of Santa Barbara, California. Though we rejoice that the nursery now is safe for small minds, we are pleased to point out that Father Gander's earnest efforts pale beside our reader's more jaundiced contributions. The winner is Robin Metcalfe of Halifax, whose laundered verses included the following:

There was a senior citizen who lived in
a shoe,
She had so many children, she decided
to open a day-care centre.

Curly locks, curly locks,
Will thou be mine?
Thou shalt not wash dishes
Nor yet feed the swine;
But sit in a boardroom,
Program a PC,
And feed upon Perrier,
White wine, and Brue

Georgie Porgy, pudding and pie:
Kissing girls would make him cry.
When the boys came out to play,
Georgie discovered he was gay.

Baa, baa, sheep of many colours,
Have you any wool?
Yes, fellow citizen,
Three bags full
One for me, one for my co-op,
One for my co-op,
And one to help Third World producers
develop

Honourable mentions:

Little Miss Muffit
Sat on her tuffit,
And lighting a cigarette, puffed it,
When along came a spider,
And sat down beside her,
Little Miss Muffit snuffed it

Georgie Porgy, stories and sequels,
Treated the girls as consummate equals,
When the girls came out to play,
Georgie Porgy got out of their way
— Terrence Keough, Ottawa

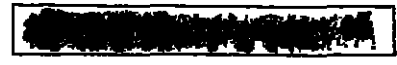
Peter, Peter, put on your boots,
Had a wife and a pair of boots,
Put her in a pump and a suit,
She divorced him for cruelty
And made out very well.

— Sharon MacFarlane,
Bechtel, Saskatoon

SOLUTION TO CANLIT ACROSTIC NO. 3

Human passions and feelings are exhibited with more fidelity, and you see men and women as they really are . . . I consider the state of society in a more healthy condition than at home, and people, when they go out for pleasure here; seem to enjoy themselves much more. — Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings*

- Socialism and Democracy in Alberta*, edited by Larry Pratt, McWent Press.
- Scandalizing the Leberg*, by Dennis Duffy, ECW Press.
- Scrambling for Myself: Canadian Writers in Interview*, edited by Andrew Garrod, Breakwater.
- Spot Dehoy's Island*, by Jack Hodges, Macmillan.
- Screen Le Heron*, by Victor-Louis Soubien, translated by Ray Chamberlain, Exile Editions.
- Storm Signs*, by Chrissie Ritchie, Macmillan.
- Stomach/Vandoo*, by Larne Irvine, ECW Press.
- Synthetic Mole*, by Paul Cameron Brown, Third Eye Publications.
- Technology and Justice*, by George Grant, Anansi.
- Technological Policy and Regulation*, edited by W. T. Stumbury, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- The Science in Paris*, by Morley Callaghan, Macmillan.
- Thursday Next: More Stories from the Thursday Group*, Child Thursday.
- Total Refusal*, by Maurice Perrou, translated by Ray Ellwood, Exile Editions.
- Vigilantes of Life*, by Catherine Warren, Detaching.
- The Wind and the Rock*, by John Ibbotson, Collier Macmillan.
- The Writing of Canadian History*, by Carl Berger, U of T Press.

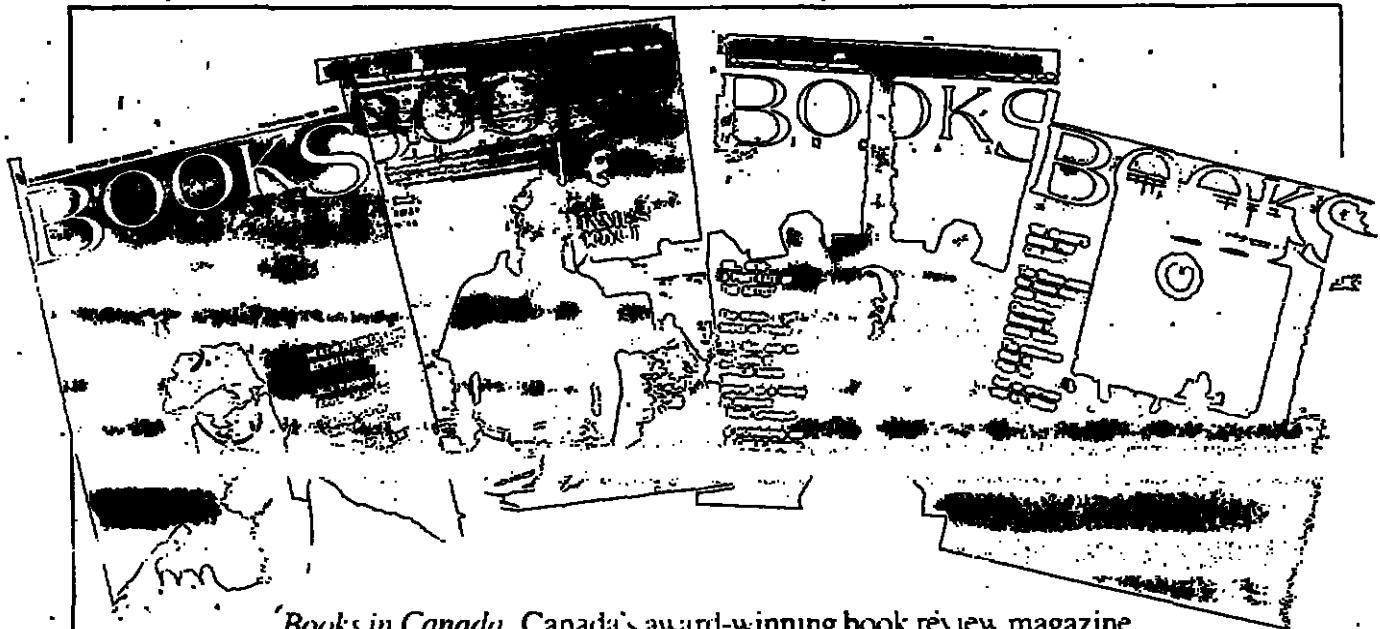


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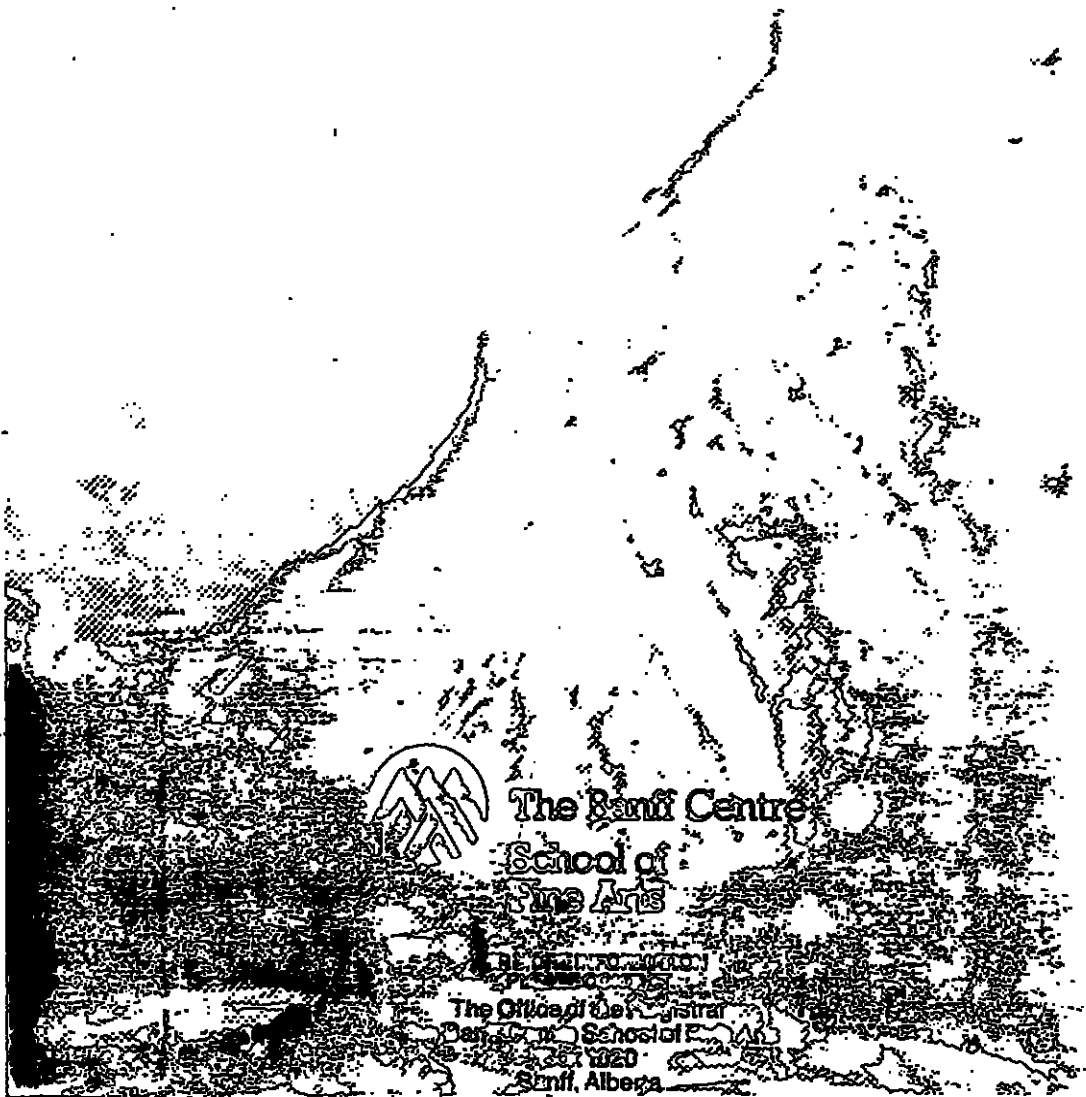
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