

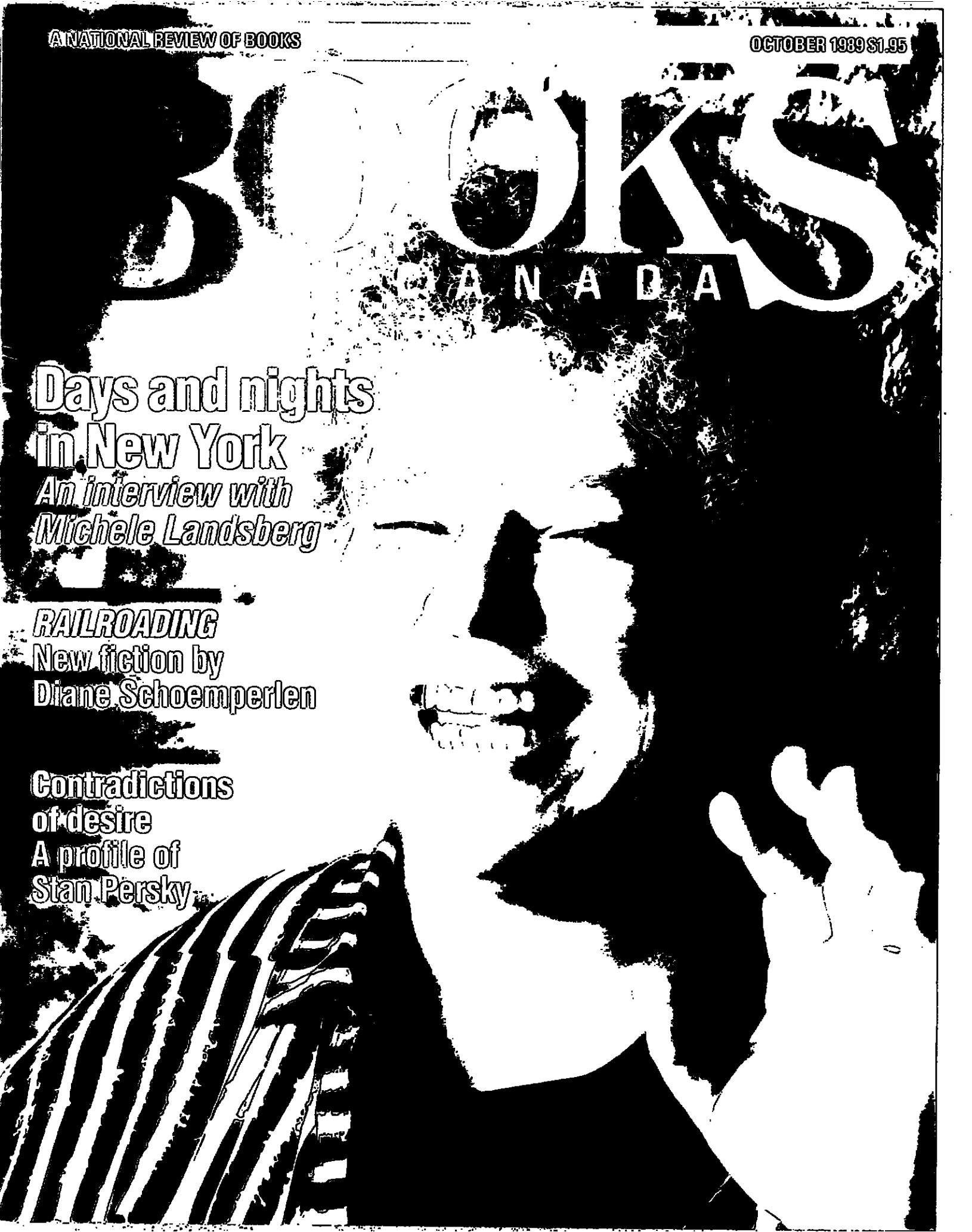
# BOOKS

CANADA

Days and nights  
in New York  
*An interview with  
Michele Landsberg*

**RAILROADING**  
New fiction by  
Diane Schoemperlen

Contradictions  
of desire  
A profile of  
Stan Persky



# BOOKS IN CANADA

## CONTENTS

VOLUME 18 NUMBER 7

### FEATURES

<b>Bronwen Wallace 1945-1989</b> .....	5
INTERVIEW	
Days and <b>Nights</b> in New York	
<b>Michele Landsberg</b> talks about the high points and horrors of life in "the epitome of cities." By Doris Cowan .....	11
PROFILE	
Contradictions of Desire	
<b>Stan Persky</b> refuses to capitulate to what others think his practice ought to be, in politics or private life. By Bruce Serafin .....	15
WORK IN PROGRESS	
Railroading	
<b>New fiction</b> by Diane Schoemperlen .....	21

### REVIEWS

#### FEATURE REVIEWS

<b>Family News</b> , by Joan Barfoot .....	26
<b>FutureHype: The Tyranny of Prophecy</b> , by Max Dublin .....	27
Brief Reviews	
Short notices on recent fiction, non-fiction, and poetry .....	7
<b>Breaking with History</b> , by Lawrence Martin .....	29
<b>Wormwood</b> , by Seán Virgo .....	29
After the Fire, by Jane Rule .....	30
<b>Outlasting the Landscape</b> , by Robert Hillis .....	31
<b>Homesick</b> , by Guy Vanderhaeghe .....	32
<b>The Life of Graham Greene: Volume One, 1904-1939</b> , by Norman Sherry .....	33
<b>Blind Date</b> , by Susan Kerlake; <b>Writing Home</b> , by Barry Dempster .....	34
<b>The Day They Took the Children</b> , by Ben Wicks .....	35

### DEPARTMENTS

<b>Field Notes, Winter Light: Ralph Gustafson's poetry</b> has undergone a process of simplification and refinement since his first book was published in 1935; <b>A Space for Argument: A Quebec literary magazine's feature on English-speaking intellectuals in the province</b> stirs up controversy; <b>A Canadian in Rome: Barry Callaghan</b> discusses the overseas CanLit scene .....	1
<b>The Written Word</b> , by I. M. Owen .....	6
<b>Children's Books</b> , by Linda Granfield .....	36
<b>First Novels</b> , by Joyce Marshall .....	37
<b>Letters</b> .....	38
<b>Received</b> .....	39
<b>CanLit No. 141</b> , by Barry Baldwin .....	39
<b>CanLit Acrostic No. 23</b> , by Mary D. Trainer .....	40

## CONTRIBUTORS

Barry Baldwin teaches classics at the University of Calgary. Pat Barclay is a novelist and former syndicated reviewer for newspapers and CBC radio. Donna Bennett is a freelance editor and critic. Laurel Boone is book review editor of *Fiddlehead* magazine. Brian Fawcett's newest book, *Public Eye*, is forthcoming from Harper & Collins in Canada and Grove Press in the U.S. Linda Granfield is the author of *Canada Votes!* (Kids Can Press). David Homel is a Montreal novelist whose first book *Electrical Storms* (Random House), is out in paperback this fall. Dawn Hood is an artist and illustrator living in Toronto. Lawrence Jackson is a freelance writer who lives in Labrador. Myrna Kostash, an Edmonton writer, is at work on a book about eastern Europe. Joyce Marshall is a Toronto writer and translator. Erin Mouré won the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1988; her next book, *West South West (W S W)*, is forthcoming from Véhicule Press. Barbara Novak has recently been appointed writer in residence at the St. Marys Public Library. Paul Orenstein's photos of literary personalities often appear in these pages. John Oughton is a Toronto writer and teacher. I. M. Owen is a frequent contributor to these pages. Drawings throughout this issue are by Maureen Paxton, a Toronto artist and book illustrator. H. R. Percy's latest novel, *An Innocent Bystander*, has just been published by Macmillan. Helen Fogwill Porter is working on a book about tuberculosis in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1930s and '40s. Barbara Wade Rose is a Toronto freelance writer. Diane Schoemperlen is the author of three books of short fiction; the excerpt featured here is from a collection to be published by Macmillan next year. Bruce Serafin is a Vancouver writer. Kent Thompson was most recently a theatre film and perfume reviewer for radio station CBL in Toronto. Mary D. Trainer is a freelance writer and puzzle-maker living in Port Coquitlam. B.C. Eleanor Wachtel is a writer/broadcaster with CBC radio's "The Arts Tonight." Bruce Whiteman's new book of poetry, *The Invisible World is in Decline (Books II to IV)*, is forthcoming from Coach House Press. Nancy Wigston is a Toronto freelance writer.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY  
Paul Orenstein

EDITOR: Dons Cowan  
MANAGING EDITOR: Barbara Carey  
ADVISORY EDITOR: Brian Fawcett  
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Ward McBurney  
LAYOUT: Ann Marie Aldighieri  
GENERAL MANAGER: Susan Traer  
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Susan Aihoshi  
CONSULTANTS: Linda Crawley; Robert Farrelly;  
Jack Jensen, Mary Lu Tomis  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Laurel Boone (Mar-  
dimes); Ray Filip (Quebec); Don Nichol (New-  
foundland); K. GProbert (Prairies); Bruce Ser-  
atin (British Columbia)

*Books in Canada* is published three times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 366 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. SUBSCRIPTIONS: Individual rate in Canada: one year \$15, two years \$28. Libraries and institutions: one year \$20, two years \$38. For delivery outside Canada, per year: additional \$3 surface mail, \$11 airmail to U.S.A., \$15 airmail to other countries. Please direct subscription inquiries to the Circulation Department. Back issues available on microfilm from McLaren Micropublishing, P.O. Box 972 Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2N9. Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index. Member of the CPPA. Material is commissioned on the understanding that both parties are bound by the terms of the standard PWAC contract. The editors cannot be held responsible for unsolicited material. Second Class Mail — Registration No. 2593. Contents © 1989. Typesetting by Colour Systems Incorporated. ISSN 0045-2564.

# Winter light

*Ralph Gustafson is one of those rare poets  
whose every book gets better.  
He turned 80 this year, and two recent collections  
contain the best poems he has written*

IN THE opening scene of Donald Winkler's new N.F.B. film, *Winter Prophecies: The Poetry Of Ralph Gustafson*. Gustafson cites with a puzzled air the remark of a friend about needing no more money. You always need more money, he says at first. And then, thinking about it, he is forced to agree. "You can eat, travel, have music, a fireplace and poetry," he states: "there's nothing much left that you need or want even." The titles follow, to the accompaniment of Chopin's sombre and simple B-Prelude, played by Gustafson himself.

Gustafson turned 80 on August 16 this year. Over the last few years his poetry has been undergoing a process of simplification and refinement, as his remark in the film might lead one to expect. His wife Betty mentions a serious illness in 1985 that led him to concentrate on those few things that to Gustafson represent life lived in its essentials: poetry, music, and the mutuality and domesticity represented by that fireplace to which he refers.

This process of development, of refinement, in Gustafson's poetry has been going on over the more than 50 years that have passed since his first book, *The Golden Chalice*, was published in 1935. One has to agree with the poet's own description of his early work as imitative and derivative, and certainly there are other reasons for the long gap between *Flight into Darkness* (1944) and Gustafson's first books published in Canada, *Rocky Mountain Poems* (1960) and *Rivers among Rocks* (1960). He was, for example, working seriously as a short story writer and supporting himself in New York as a freelancer. But one suspects too that in those years of poetic silence he was undergoing a reconsideration of the kind of poetry he wanted to write. He also married then (1958), and following his return to Canada in 1963 to teach at Bishop's University (his alma mater) the flow of new collections has been steady.

Steady, but not without changes, for

Gustafson is one of those rare poets whose every book gets better; and recent collections like *Directives of Autumn* (1984) and *Winter Prophecies* (1987) contain some of the best poems he has written. Not surprisingly, they are darker, more conscious of death, for as he says in "The Question of Priority for the Moment,"

*I have doubtful heaven and ambiguous  
God  
To settle accounts with, exquisite ques-  
tions  
About the end of Us universe, decisions  
Whether the stars are going anywhere  
And who cares...*

But the "joyful encrustation" as he once named it in a letter to W. W. E. Ross, the complicated tropes and self-conscious technical flourishes have all gone, to be replaced by a moving and frequently flawless language of the kind found in the poem "Winter Prophecies," which Winkler quite rightly chose for the title of his film:

*Beyond all wisdom is the lonely heart.  
Beware of love. It calls up winter  
prophecies.*

*The firewood is piled, the chimney  
solid...  
And the hours are counted that leave*

*Belief of her astonished still.  
Tim is a harsh consultant. I warn*

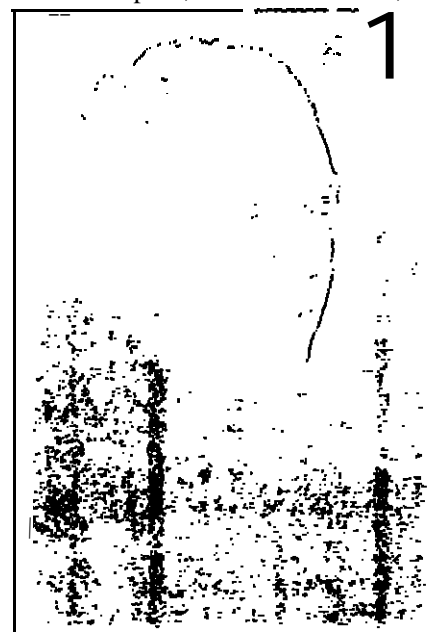
*You. Without that love there is no hour.  
With love are winter prophecies.*

Notwithstanding Gustafson's long career — he wrote his first poem at seven ("Not precocious — Mozart was writing symphonies at that age," as he says in the film) — his place in Canadian literature is a curious one. Frank Davey's savage dismissal of his work in *From There to Here* has never properly been answered, nor have the critics treated his work with the sort of serious attention deserved by a major poet. But perhaps the tide has begun to turn. The N.F.B. film had its première last March 10 at Bishop's University during an evening in

his honour; in April, the composer Andrew MacDonald's new work for string orchestra and chorus, based on Gustafson texts, was first performed, also at Bishop's. The same month, Gustafson was honoured among a small group of writers at a QSPELL extravaganza held at the Faculty Club of McGill University. So the poet who once supported himself by writing liner notes for classical music recordings and crossword puzzles for the *Spectator* has certainly come a long way. All the same, his *Collected Pam* of 1987 — two volumes in cloth — received very few reviews. Robert Kroetsch's call in his essay on the Canadian long poem for a reconsideration of Gustafson's work has still to be taken up.

Gustafson has lived in London and New York, and has travelled throughout much of the world. Most summers the lure of the Old World finds him returning to the south of France, to Venice, and to Bayreuth for the annual homage to Wagner. His wide travels are frequently the subject of poems that focus on aspects of European civilization through a perceptive pair of Canadian eyes. And he has done the reverse as well, taking Canadian poetry to English-speaking readers all over the world through his editing of the *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*, an anthology that in its earliest form first appeared in 1942. It has never been out of print since its first major revision in 1958.

But finally it is that two-by-four refuge of his own space, as he has called it, his



Ralph Gustafson

"Absorbing...stunning...  
a must for Phantom fans!"

The Official and definitive book  
of Andrew Lloyd Webber's  
all-time smash Broadway hit:

## THE COMPLETE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA



by George Perry

150 full-colour photographs,  
50 black-and-white photographs,  
and the complete libretto.

Read The Book...See the Play!

\$34.50 cloth

And don't forget the kids...

## THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

by Peter F. Neumeyer  
illustrated by Don Weller

This is the first fast-action  
retelling of the original  
Gaston Leroux story for  
children.

All ages, 44 pages,  
full colour throughout

\$19.95 cloth

Fitzhenry & Whiteside  
Publishers of the Funk & Wagnalls  
Canadian College Dictionary

backyard in the **Eastern Townships** of Quebec, which is the central influence on his writing. The hills and lakes, the sky and flowers around North **Hatley** form together the sensuous ground of his poetry, the stimulus for his deepest poetic meditations. Sometimes his poems fly into darkness, as the title of that early book had it, but as often into

the light of a deep passion and a world acutely observed. "Poetry is a very wonderful pleasure," he says at the end of the N.F.B. film. and that deceptively simple statement says a great deal about **Gustafson's life** as a poet. May he continue through many books to come to feel and to make us feel the deep pleasure that is poetry. — **BRUCE WHITEMAN**

# A space for argument

*Is it possible to be English in Quebec?*

**THERE WAS** a joke going around Montreal a while back that ran like this: On the day the atom bomb is dropped on Canada, the **Gazette's** headline will read, "More **Anglos** Flee Quebec." So when this daily paper, a bastion of **English** hypersensitivity in la **belle province**, devotes two full pages to an issue of **Liberté**, a French-language social and literary periodical whose criticism of Canadian confederation has often been ferocious, you know that something unusual is going on in the province of Quebec. Strange bedfellows, indeed.

Ninety pages of **Liberté's** 172-page June issue were turned over to 16 English-speaking intellectuals, as **Liberté** calls them, which tells you more about the magazine's projected audience than about the contributors. The issue's title is a not altogether successful pun involving the words "strangers" and **étranglés** (which means "strangled"): **Strangers in Paradise/Etranglés au Québec**. "Is it possible to be English in Quebec?" the introduction asks, tongue in cheek. The editors go on to speculate, "Are the English our blind spot? Have we ever truly seen them, our next-door neighbours?" In a spirit of good will, the editors (**François Hébert** and **Yvon Rivard**) add, We wanted to build bridges of friendship from both sides, and make a space for reflection and even argument; we wanted to complicate things a little... With such laudable intentions, how could there possibly be any controversy?

**THERE WOULD** not have been any, it's safe to say, had the **New York Times** not run two short pieces on July 4th on pages four and five about what a reporter named Paul **Lewis** thought was happening in Quebec after Premier Bourassa used the notwithstanding clause and brought down Bill 178 on the language-of-signs issue. One of **Lewis's**

two pieces was an error-filled discussion of the **Meech Lake** accord (the put the lake in **Ontario**) and Quebec's reaction to the striking down of Bill 101 (**Lewis** called the 60,000-strong peaceful demonstration in support of the voided legislation a "riot"). Eleven days later, the **Times** printed a correction of the facts. But the article that cast the **Liberté** issue front and centre was the second one by **Lewis**, featuring the magazine under the head "Quebec's English Speakers Protesting Minority Status." Suddenly, because the **New York Times** decided to pay attention to the issue, **Liberté**, a magazine read usually only by the academically and literarily inclined, became an object of curiosity on both sides of the border.

What attracted the most attention was a polemic by **Witold Rybczynski**, an architect and author who teaches at **McGill University**. In his contribution, he declared that "Montreal is in danger of becoming a linguistic Beirut." A week later, Montreal's daily **Lo Presse** responded to that insult to the victims of the war in Lebanon, under the headline: "Quebec Is No Linguistic Beirut." Replies **Quebec's** New York Delegation to the **Times**. With a title like that, every other newspaper and TV station in Quebec, as well as Toronto's **Globe and Mail** through its Montreal correspondents, suddenly rushed out to buy a copy of **Liberté**. The little mag never had it so good.

Just exactly what was in the issue, and how were the contributors selected? English Quebec is no monolith: it has no other common denominator than its use of English, which is not much of a denominator at all. Which of the factions of Anglo Quebec were to be represented? Overseeing that task, along with **Hébert** and **Rivard**, was **Sheila Fischman**, who has translated many **Quebecois** writers into English. She did not choose all the

contributors, but by her own account, she wanted to cut a swath right down the political middle, avoiding the Anglo-weights organization Alliance Quebec on the "right," and on the "left," those English writers who have identified themselves too strongly with French Quebec. Set the image projected by these 15 writers (and one photographer) is not one of moderation; above all, it is one of frustration. The novelist Trevor Ferguson is among those who complain about the English community's lack of visibility in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Merrily Weisbord insists on her Quebec mote; her people are buried in Quebec soil. she tells us, and her maternal grandfather was the chief rabbi of Quebec City. Mr. Rybczynski speaks of fleeing southward to escape "narrowness of spirit." Henry Beissel, head of the English department of Concordia University, rambles on for nine pages, giving such opinions as, "Authoritarianism is a dominant element in the Québécois psyche," and "French will never conquer the world, because its

grammatical structures are the frozen reflection of the rationalist era and of neoclassicism." Thank goodness for Carlos Ferrand, a Peruvian-born filmmaker, the only one to stick his tongue out at the traditional French-English dichotomy and give both groups the raspberry.

In sum, the *Liberté* contributors reflect the same old image of English Quebec quarrelsome, closed, defensive, uninquisitive. French-speaking Québécois will find little to stimulate their curiosity in this issue. A shame, since the editorial board missed an opportunity to break new ground. Ironically, if it had not dipped into the same old clichés (in Quebec, anyway) of English oppression, the august and mighty *New York Times* would never have noticed it. But the role of a little magazine like *Liberté*, especially one with the important record it has had since the Quiet Revolution, is to frustrate expectations and challenge its readers, wherever they are — not to deliver anyone's party line.

-DAVID HOMEL

## A Canadian in Rome

*Barry Callaghan's experience seems to prove the existence of an international tribe of poets bonded by their art*

**BARRY CALLAGHAN** — poet, professor, short story writer, translator, publisher, novelist — spent the spring of 1989 in Italy as writer-in-residence for the Canadian studies programs at the universities



Barry Callaghan

of Rome and Bologna. On a recent visit to his Toronto home, I asked him about the overseas CanLit scene, as Callaghan, a man of ruffled mien and growly voice, genially fought off the attentions of Jive, his golden retriever.

How to explain the interest in Canadian literature in Bologna, of all places, at some 900 years old the most venerable institution in the West? "As with everything else, these things get started simply because some wacko — I use the term affectionately — gets interested. The man responsible is Alfredo Rizzardi, a distinguished professor who has been interested in Canadian literature for about a decade. Originally the focus was on Irving Layton because Rizzardi was devoted to Layton. There is a small Irving Layton industry over there, which comes about partly through Rizzardi but also because Layton has extended his goodwill to them. That's very important. But the whole thii has become bigger than that. In Rome, Augustino Lombardo — another very distinguished professor — set up the huge American studies pro-

General Richard Rohmer  
returns with...

## LIBERTÉ ARCTIC

An exciting, new docu-novel of historical detection and realpolitik drama that explodes in Canada's High Arctic islands.

"Here is Richard Rohmer at his best -- describing some futuristic high jinks in Canada's arctic which, like most of his novels, ring all too true." Peter C. Newman

Publication: October 12.

National tour: October 16-20, including Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, plus London, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax.

\$24.95 cloth

Fitzhenry & Whiteside

Publishers of the  
Funk & Wagnalls

Canadian College Dictionary

gram there, and *has now* begun to **seriously** set up the Canadian studies program. It's still **small**, but **Lombardo is a slow-moving dynamo.**"

**Slow-moving or swift**, the same ten" could apply to **Callaghan**, who, in addition to his time in Italy, has assumed a" independent role as literary ambassador to Yugoslavia. Why Yugoslavia? Ten years ago the doorbell rang at **Callaghan's** Toronto home and a man introduced **himself as Miodrag Pavlovic**, in town for a poetry **reading**. **Callaghan** remembered the name; **both** of them had been translated by the French poet Robert Marteau. "Wonderful. I said, come in. **have** supper. When supper was over, he asked me to look at the English translations of the Serbia" poetry he was to read. I read them. I told **him** it was **impossible**. people **will** wonder why they've come to see you, why you're supposed to be a great poet."

Admittedly obsessed **with** bad **translations**. Callaghan" blames the "bands of merry **translators** out there" for serious, plodding, **unmusical renderings** of good poems. Sitting down with **Pavlovic**, a" expert linguist. Callaghan" used his knowledge of the **Cyrillic** alphabet and Russia" to translate the poems. I" **1982**, at Pavlovic's behest, **Callaghan** read at the International Poetry Festival in **Bel-**

grade, where they finished the **translation** (*Singing at the Whirlpool*) **together.**

Callaghan got to know the Serbian writers; he discovered a burgeoning Canadian studies program in Belgrade and another in **Ljubljana** and **still** another in Zagreb. **Callaghan's** press, Exile Editions, published more Pavlovic and featured Croatia" writers as well. Last year in Zagreb Callaghan gave the inaugural talk in the Canadian studies program, and lately has agreed to edit an anthology of Canadian poetry, in hands off fashion. Hell send them, for Instance, all **P. K. Page's** poems, marking the ones he thinks are the best, hut leaving the **final** choice to the **Yugoslav** poets in charge.

Does this **mean** that the peripatetic Callaghan speaks Serbian, if not **Croatian**? Not at all. There is something **mystical** and wonderful about translation." Witness his English rendering of **Marteau's** French **translation** of another Pavlovic book, *The Voice Beneath the Stone*. Pavlovic was delighted — he told **Callaghan** it even sounded like the **Serbian original**, and was **wonderfully** accurate in meaning. Thanks are due to Robert **Marteau**, replied the Canadian. **He**, after all, knows Serbia". "But **Robert** does not speak Serbian!" came the response.

**Callaghan's** experience seems to **prove** the existence of an international **tribe** of poets bonded by their **art**. Thus may we understand his bah-humbug **attitude** to some of the most cherished beliefs of **CanLitcrit**. "There **are** some **people** who have reputations abroad I think are ridiculous, and I don't **mind** saying so," he states flatly. How does this happen? "People are at the mercy of what **they're** told. If a **writer** comes to Canada to **find** out **what's** going on, and **runs** into somebody who says the focal point of the Canadian experience is the prose poem that explores **the** nature of Canada through the **Arctic**, he's had a" **unlucky** beginning. He'll get passed on to **this** person's friends and they'll **confirm** **this** view-and hell go back and write **absolute** nonsense. I do not **think** that Canadians **continue** to **define** themselves in the north country. I think that what you get in the north country is **bitten** by black flies. It is always a surprise for people **abroad** to discover that we are 75 to 80 per cent a" urban culture. I also do not **draw** the **line** at the Quebec border. I see **everything** in **this** country as part of the **same** experience. When I speak of **Canadian** culture I speak of Quebec **writers** and English **writers**." As one of the few publishers in the country who **publishes** translations from Quebec, he can **testify** that the market **is** nil. "The bloom

is off the **rose.**"

Callaghan's mood darkens, but only briefly. This is one of the wonderful things about translation — **if** you are interested in translation you are interested in the experiences of others. Translation **is** an enlarging **experience**, a" **extension** of the self. It is what I **think** lies at the heart of all great **poetry: generosity.**"

So **Callaghan** is not a **cultural nationalist**? "A dead end. In Quebec a" important journal for the **first time** bothered to ask English Canadian writers how they feel about living in Quebec — they didn't **eve**" know who to ask. And I **think** English Canada has gone into a **kind** of sullen snit.

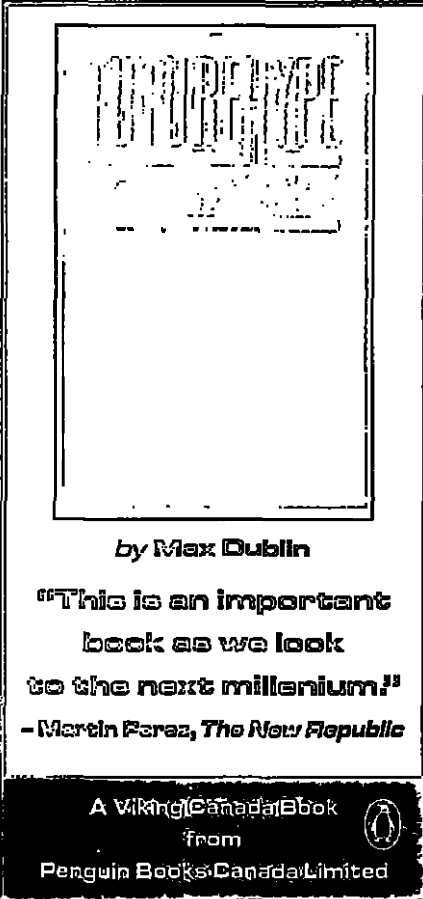
"All that matters is real writing. It doesn't matter that **Mavis** Gallant is sitting in Paris and does not participate in the cultural debate in tbls country. What matters is that she **writes** those **extraordinary** stories.

"**This** time when I went back to Zagreb I arranged that **certain writers** — **Seán Virgo**, Patrick Lane, **Lorna Crozier** — went with me. I discovered that in Rome and Bologna Patrick Lane is unknown. In Rome they're busy giving **courses** on **Sinclair** Ross and **Frederick Philip** Grove. Not, of course., that there's **anything wrong with that**, but it's hardly enough. With all the boompf and brouhaha that you've read about the boom in Canadian literature in Italy, you'd think that they'd know a **lot**, but they don't. By and large what they know about is Jack McClelland's **list**. He took the trouble to **promote** those writers over there. But they desperately **want** to know more. Pm going to **continue** to **try** and **tell** them. **It's** no **trick** for a best&ler in Canada to be translated and end up in the book stores in **Italy**: what you **teally** want is to have the important poets, **novelists**, and prose writers in Italy feel some **sense** of a bond with the culture that's going on here."

So in Rome, **Callaghan** kled to **widen** the range of Canadian poetry already know" to **Italians**. The response? "I-here was a good deal of surprise, I suppose, at what our poets are doing." He grows humble. "Honest **to** God, I'm not the only person who has ever **said** this, or who has been a writer-in-residence in Rome. I'm simply saying what I did when I was there."

And **the** proposed Italian anthology he means to **edit -due** to replace the **present** one in three years or so? **Sweeping** humility aside, he mentions the **names** of four poets alone "who'll make their heads **spin**." **Glowing** with the Idea of it, Barry Callaghan sounds for a minute like the most passionate nationalist of them all.

— NANCY WIGSTON



by Max Dublin

"This is an important book as we look to the next millenium!"

— Martin Paraz, *The New Republic*

A Viking|Canada|Book from Penguin Books|Canada|Limited

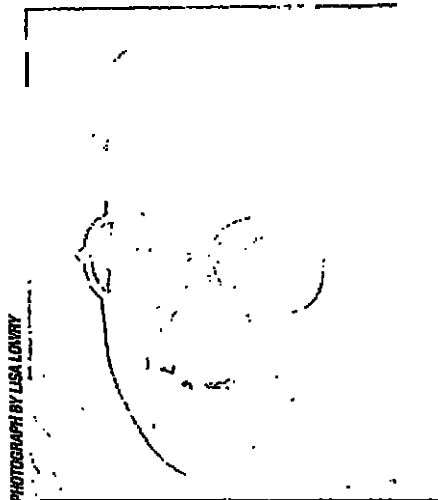
# Bronwen Wallace 1945-1989

WE BEEN thinking about why Bronwen Wallace's death has affected many of us so much. Certainly we are beginning to feel that the poetry community has been marked by early death — Robert Billings, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Robin Nichol, Caroline Heath, and now Bronwen Wallace. Certainly also we now experience a sense of future emptiness where once wonderful new Wallace poems might have been. Certainly, for those of us who knew Bronwen personally, we suffer the loss of a good and loving friend. But there is more about the effect of Bronwen Wallace's death than these things. Even people who did not know her well, who were not well acquainted with her work, seem stunned. In part, perhaps, they are shocked by a sense of their own mortality — the postwar generation is beginning to die. But their reaction goes deeper. What people feel is the loss of a guide, of a shaman, of someone who was teaching us something very important that we had not yet quite got the hang of. For example, in the poem called 'Bones,' Wallace taught us how to use the terrible experiences of life by conveying what she earned as she told a friend about her work at Interval House, a crisis centre for abused women and children:

*Everywhere I went, my work experience  
drew me through confessions I couldn't  
stop,  
and I couldn't stop talking about them  
so you had to listen  
but, being you, in that way that listening  
can be active, when the listener  
re-enters  
the country of her own damage  
from a new direction*

This poem shows us not only how her friend used Bronwen's experiences to reveal herself, but something we can all learn: "how the mind, like the body, takes shape/of what's left, the terrible knowledge/it labours through, slowly regaining itself." Here and in poems like it, Bronwen Wallace was for Canadian readers and writers, and particularly for women poets of her generation, a Wise Woman. She spoke the truth — unembellished. She told us things we were not yet able to see. She opened up her life to let us learn about ourselves.

Bronwen Wallace's revealing of her own experience was not what we often find these days: self-indulgent confession, an act that thinks itself validated by documenting the writer's every



PHOTOGRAPH BY LISA LOVARY

Bronwen Wallace

emotion and activity. She chose very carefully what she told us about. What makes Wallace's work different lies in the "stories" her poems tell about herself and those whom she knew and loved. Because they are stories, and not chronicles, they also — and this is a bit "also" — tell us what their author thought about her experiences. Wallace didn't just relate what happened. She dared to draw conclusions. Writing that attempts conclusion often winds up didactic and moralistic, the writer reading out of her life "set tales," rigid codes of behaviour that usually seem imposed and inadequate. We do not have this feeling when we read Wallace's work, because she always avoided this kind of absolute closure. We learn from her poems about how difficult and essential it is to draw conclusions, to think about one's life.

In this poetry, Bronwen Wallace rejected easy "truths," and she also doubted the efficacy of a completely "rational" reality, in which things are seen as unrelated and random or as fitting into a sanitized perspective. She found suspect a society based on observation alone, trying to live by "polls" and the segmented proof of "data." For Bronwen, observation was not enough, even though it was always a point of departure. She grounded her work on the "objects" she possessed: a Mickey Mouse T-shirt, a jack-knife, the existence of KoKo, a family grace. All these and more were the "treasures" that enabled her to tell us her stories. Through these stories of her own life and those of the people she knew, she provided a way "To begin to see, a little, what they taught me/ of them-

selves their place/ among the living, and the dead/ thanksgiving and the practical/ particulars of grace." Within her words, everyday experience provided "the stubborn argument of the particular." For Wallace then, living and writing were inextricable: writing is a necessity, even a duty, for it is a means of enabling. Through her writing she found a way of teaching us how to live intelligently, how to approach the ambiguities of experience. In one of her last — and not yet published — poems she told us, even, how to understand our limitations. There, talking about how she couldn't carry a tune, she concluded:

*What if some tuneless wonder's all we've  
got to say for ourselves? off  
key, our failings held out, at last,  
to each other. What else have we  
got to offer, really? What else  
do we think they're for?*

Reading and rereading Bronwen's poems, as I have been this summer, I have been struck by how much of her writing deals with dying and death. These poems let me continue to hear her voice and to feel the touch of her mind and spirit, but more than that they also have taught me a lot about how I could and should respond while my friend's life was ending. Today we have so few codes, so few signposts to guide us in our feelings and actions. Reading Bronwen Wallace's work can show us what it is that we can or should do: it may even help us deal with the complicity that we the living always feel in loss of the dead. Try "Anniversary" or "Testimonies." They are Bronwen's offerings to us. This is what they're for. — DONNA BENNETT

*Bronwen Wallace is known chiefly for her poetry, but her first and only collection of short fiction was accepted for publication by McClelland & Stewart last summer and will be published next year. Shortly before her death, she requested that an annual award be made in her name to a younger Miter (under the age of 35) for achievement in short fiction or poetry. To this end, a fund as a basis for this award is being set up under the auspices of the Writers' Development Trust, and those who wish to contribute are invited to do so NOW. Please specify that your donation is to go to the Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award, and whether or not you require a charitable donations receipt. Cheques are to be made out to the Writers' Development Trust and mailed to: 24 Ryerson Avenue, Suite 201, Toronto, Ontario M5T 2W2.*



# Neither rhyme nor reason

*The Canadian word **tuque** comes from the French **toque**, but it acquired its own form and meaning early in our history. It should be preserved, and pronounced to rhyme with **Uke***

By I. M. Owen

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONFUSION: Some familiar phrases get converted by carelessness into **unfamiliar** and less effective ones. For instance, I wonder what impels writers who want to use the phrase **fill the bill** (which is useful, **expressive**, and easy to remember because of its rhyme, though stigmatized in **ictionaries** as "informal" or "slang") to change it to fit **the bill**. A dislike of rhyme? No: I find that the same writers will bungle the very clear phrase **thin end of the wedge** by putting **edge** for **end**, as if they feel the need for rhyme at the expense of **meaning**. A **wedge** by **definition** has a wide end and a thin end; the relative thicknesses of its edges have nothing to do with its function.

This one may be a **pure typographical error**, but it's **worth recording** that a column by George **Oake** in the *Toronto Star* recently said that Roy **Romanow** once seemed to be a **shoe-in** for the federal NDP leadership. And in the same column Oake recalled the constitutional collaboration between **Romanow** and Jean **Chrétien** as the **Uke and Toque Show**. This misspelling of **tuque** is often found, but it's especially glaring here since it spoils the rhyme with **Uke** (for Ukrainian), which was 'the point **it's** de pressing that the most familiar and characteristic Canadian headgear can be confused with a **toque**, which is either "a small brimless, close-fitting woman's hat" or "a plumed **velvet** hat with a full crown and small rolled brim, worn by men and women in 16th-century France." Of **course tuque** is derived from this, but it acquired its own form and meaning very early in our history. It should be preserved, and pronounced either **teuk** (to rhyme with **Uke**) or as French.

GEOGRAPHICAL MUDDLES: When the **fires** started in northern Manitoba last July, the **first** news of them came to me

from a television-network anchorman who said Major **forest fires** have **broken out on the prairies**. As a **prairie** is a **flat treeless** plain, he was stating an **impossibility**, and must have strengthened the western part of his audience in their **belief** that we in **Toronto** are plumb **ignorant** of the West. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta are called the Prairie Provinces, and that's all right because they all contain **prairie** and **it's** on the prairie that most of their people live. But most of Manitoba, over a third of Saskatchewan, and a substantial corner of Alberta are in the Canadian Shield, and Alberta has a lot of Rocky Mountains too. It's in these parts that the forests are. So never **write the prairies**, or even **the Prairies**, if you mean **the Prairie Provinces**.

A kind of geographical misconception that's still more widespread arises from the convention whereby maps are generally drawn and printed with north at the top of the page. This leads people to speak, write, and even think as if in the real world, too, north were up and south were down. They will write of going **up** the Mackenzie River to the Arctic Ocean, whereas rivers always obey Isaac Newton and **flow down to the ocean**. You often hear **down the coast for south along the coast**; yet **coasts** by definition have no ups or downs: **they're** all at sea-level.

I once edited a **geography** textbook in which the author, a trained geographer and not a member of the Flat Earth Society, wrote **above the Arctic Circle**. I wanted to change it to **inside the Arctic Circle**,



but he wouldn't have it. We compromised on **north of the Arctic Circle**, which was correct enough but in my view missed an opportunity to get **12-year-olds** to see the earth as the globe it is, and of **the Arctic Circle** as literally a **circle** going right around the world, and not just as an arbitrarily named thin **line crossing** Canada near the top of the Page.

And then there's the very **common** use of the phrase **below the 49th parallel** to mean the United States. Even if you make it **south of the 49th parallel** it's still **wrong** — even if you live in the West, where that **famous parallel** actually is the southern **boundary**; the **fact** remains that the most densely populated region of Canada **lies south** of it. I was born, and still live, about **halfway between** the 43rd and 44th parallels, some 340 miles **south** of the 49th — and, incidentally, on about the same latitude as **Nice** and Genoa, which puts our claim to be the True North Strong and Free in an oddlight.

MASTERFUL, MASTERLY: In the early days of the language these two words were interchangeable, meaning either "imperious" or "highly skilled." Gradually the two were **sorted out**, so that **masterful** was confined to the **first** meaning, **masterly** to the second. In 1926 Fowler said boldly, "The **differentiation** is now complete. . . Disregard of it is so obviously inconvenient that it can only be put down to ignorance." And **Gowers reproduced** this article unchanged in his 1966 revision of **Fowler**. Unfortunately, what Fowler thought mere ignorance is still widespread among generally well-informed **writers**: a **masterful novelist** often appears in **reviews**. (Of course, the **novelist** in question may be notably bossy in private **life**, but if you **want to praise** his work, it's **masterly**.) The **trouble** with **masterly** is that it's hard to form an adverb from it: **masterlily** would be ridiculous, and to use **masterly itself** as an adverb is inconvenient, though Shakespeare did it (**masterly** dons).

Maybe we should condemn both words as sexist, and banish them from the language.

STRICTURE: *The government placed strictures on political activity by civil servants.* This is a very common slip: the word wanted is **restrictions**. **Stricture** means "a severe criticism: **censure**." Thus, **civil servants** **observed canvassing** in an **election** may indeed receive **strictures** from their **deputy** ministers, but the rules **against** it are **restrictions**. □



# BRIEF REVIEWS

## CRITICISM

IN *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 271 pages, \$29.95 cloth). Terry Goldie quotes and explicates 350 different stories, novels, and plays from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in support of his thesis that, in the three literatures, the "Indian" or native person is invariably defined by way of a small number of factors or stereotypes. They are: *violence* (the blood-thirsty redskin giving way to the knife-wielding drunk in the Kamloops bar); *sexuality* (the complaisant maiden, the whore-squaw the sexy boys on the reserve); *orality* (the poetic because non-literate native person, usually represented by way of dialogue that reads like blank verse); *mysticism* (the shaman, sacred places, spirit-dreams, etc.); *ahistoricism* (the native person outside history, living in a kind of mythical, seasonal time); and underlying all the rest, *naturalness* (the native person close to nature, versus the white or European person cut off from nature). These "commodities," as Goldie calls them, make up the "semiotic field" that determines how aboriginal people have been represented in our literature. Those who say that native people are "close to the land," "mystical," "in tune with the seasons," etc., are as locked into this "semiotic field" as those who say that native people are "drunks," "violent," or "undependable." One set of stereotypes is as "arrow as the other, and each set depends on the sense that the native is essentially different

from everyone else. The strength of Goldie's book is to show us that the native person isn't a *person* in our literature, but a kind of literary construct fed by our desire for a particular kind of Other. Though he doesn't come right out and say so, what *Fear and Temptation* ultimately exposes is the social and psychological apartheid that is at work in the three countries Goldie examines (and whose most obvious manifestation in Canada is the reserve system). This is an important book, but the reader should be warned that it is badly written — full of jargon, and constantly indulging in unnecessary authority-quoting. — BS.

## FICTION

THE IMPORTANT things about Emile Ollivier's *Mother Solitude* (translated by David Lobdell, Oberon Press, 176 pages, \$15.95 paper) are its enthusiastic, detached tone — as if Ollivier were putting on a sort of literary show for the reader — and its imagistic, declamatory style, made up of sentences that go on and on and yet always remain calm and "literary," no matter how many phrases are added. This river of words tells the story of a boy named Narces Morelli. He lives in the Caribbean, surrounded by characters who are as full of monologues — or more exactly, arias — as the characters in Dickens. The servant Absalon ("In the Morelli household, the domestic servant has always been called Absalon"), Edmond Bernissart ("for whom words held no secret" and who "found expressions that were more and more judicious in his attempt to elucidate the problematics governing the phenomena underlying the size and shape of all the known species of dinosaurs"), Mademoiselle Hortense, Astrel and Sylvain Morelli, Noemie Morelli — these characters and many others explain, elucidate and,

above all, rhapsodize in front of the endlessly curious and wildly passionate young Narces. Those who are fond of "magic realism" and the sort of linguistic *joie de vivre* that characterize a lot of Quebecois and Latin American narrative will like this book a lot. Others may find it to be less a story than a sort of verbal spectacle in which the dazzling language puts up a barrier that prevents any real fellow-feeling with the characters. — BS.



I KNOW what Donald Jack's detractors mean when they complain they don't find him funny. Jack's humour is cumulative, like one's respect for his developing hero, and if you join it in midstream there's no way to quite catch up. Also, his publishers do him no favour in billing *The*

*Bandy Papers* as 'wildly funny'; *Me So Far* (Double day, 346 pages, \$22.95 cloth), for example, will elicit no more than the occasional chuckle. What the books do offer is a uniquely Canadian\* eye view of the 10-year period between 1916 and 1925, during which the world fought a war and this country, like Jack's hero, came of age. *Me So Far* rounds off the saga with Bandy's adventures as air force commander for the Indian state of Jhamjarh, a post that lands him upside down in the air, a prisoner underground and at loggerheads with the British viceroy. He also encounters mysticism and regains that amazing human phenomenon, belief — which the war had knocked out of him. "Wildly funny," no. But a memorable example of wit and adventure filtered through a fine moral screen, definitely yes. — P.B.

## BREAKING WITH HISTORY

is a fascinating portrait of the Gorbachev revolution by an author-journalist who was there. Lawrence Martin, the former Moscow correspondent for the Globe and Mail offers a compelling account of Soviet society moving from totalitarianism to the edges of democracy.

"BREAKING WITH HISTORY is a major contribution to our understanding of the issues at stake for world peace."

Geoffrey Pearson, cd", Ambassador to Moscow, 1980-1993.



DOUBLEDAY  
CANADA

Available at your  
local bookstore



◆ ◆ ◆

WITH THE Canadian royalties of his 1988 book *Journey*, James Michener is funding a \$10,000 prize to be awarded each year to the best short story published in a literary magazine by a writer who is not already rich and famous. McClelland & Stewart has sweetened the pot by awarding \$2,000 to the journal publishing the winning story. The Journey Prize Anthology (McClelland & Stewart, 224 pages, \$14.95 paper) consists of the 1989 finalists.

As a memento of the occasion, the book has its value, but it is a hodge-podge. It would be a little more shapely if the introduction announced the winner as well as describing the prize and the book's *raison d'être*. By the time the book was launched, the winning story, "Rapid Transits," by Holley Rubinsky, had been chosen, but a person buying the book would never know.

There are some splendid stories here, particularly those by M. G. Vassanji, Ann Copeland, and Francis Itani.

- L.B.

0 0 0

ALL THE fiction manuals say, "Write about what you know," and Tony Aspler has followed their advice with moderate success in his novel *Titanic* (Doubleday, 304 pages, \$24.95 cloth). Aspler's hero, Henry Blexill, is a wine steward aboard the doomed liner, which gives Aspler (author of *Vintage Canada*, 1983, and *Tony Aspler's International Guide to Wine*, 1986) a free hand to establish verisimilitude and dispense interesting information — such as the correct (and safe) way to open a bottle of champagne — at the same time. Aspler's also very good at describing the Titanic, both before and dur-

ing the disaster. This lends the novel an air of significance rather than of proportion to its real subject the hero's search for revenge against his former master, one Thaddeus Nugent Tarr, a raging capitalist if ever there was one.

Though Tarr's machinations are convincing enough, especially in this age of rampant free enterprise, Aspler's hero has a wooden quality that falls to endear. Perhaps this was necessary, to keep him afloat when the ship goes down. Still, when you're writing a suspense novel, it's a good idea to plug all potential leaks.

— P.B.

### THE PAST

WHAT a treat to read historians who can write! A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War 1939-1945 (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 287 pages, \$35.00 cloth), the second of a two-volume series on Canada at war by J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, is a highly compressed but vivid exploration of the theme that Canada came of age in World War II. Nearly everyone has already said so, but a brisk, generously illustrated book on the subject still satisfies a layman. Bright phrases and arresting detail carry the tale forward.

On stories that Churchill drank: "Better Churchill drunk than Chamberlain sober."

On wartime shortages in Canada: it was illegal to sell men's suits with two pair of pants, or women's dresses with more than nine buttons.

On the weather conditions convoys faced in winter: they 'varied from dreadful to appalling."

On CBC radio newscasts of the war: Canadians heard "the doom-laden voice of Lorne Greene."

It is gratifying to see academic historians rivalling Pierre Berton at his own game. This is history at a dog-trot, as bracing as a lap around the park

— L.J.

0 0 0

IN The Canadian Labour Movement (Lorimer, 188 pages, \$14.95 paper) Craig Heron offers a concise history of what he admits is not a single movement but a fractured, regional medley of struggle, like the country itself.

Heron defines four brief waves of labour militance and effectiveness. In each, workers sought to consolidate gains made in a period of relatively full employment. In the second-last wave, labour got collective bargaining entrenched in Canadian law, but at the cost of adopting structures that tamed the movement. Unions became large and bureaucratic, their leaders legalistic.

Unable to cope with the turbulence of the late '60s and early '70s, union leaders faced revolt from below. One and a half million strikers — some of them newly militant public servants — marched on more than a thousand picket lines in 1976. Soon government and industry launched a sustained counter-attack, which by the mid-'80s had rolled back much of what labour had gained since the '50s.

For now, while neo-conservative forces have the upper hand, the author hopes labour can renew itself for the next drive.

— L.J.

### POETRY

A CRITIC once commented that the poetry of the late Raymond Carver gives "the sense this man has lived more than most of us." The acclaimed American writer was dying of cancer when he wrote *A New Path to the Waterfall* (Atlantic Monthly Press (Little, Brown), 126 pages, \$19.95 cloth), but the nearness of death only intensifies the spirit of a fully lived life in these poems. They are very personal — an account of growing

up in a working-class family, his failed marriage, his happy later years with Tess Gallagher (who wrote the introduction to this volume). And the best of them are so characteristic of Carver's finest work, both in poetry and short fiction: the apparently effortless settling of simple language around an emotion or experience, the tenderness toward even the "traps and violences" of life. There is honour, passion, great happiness, and urgency here — but very little bitterness.

The design of the book is impressively lavish; it does seem somewhat at odds, though, with Carver's poetry, which is so unembellished. Here is the final poem, "Late Fragment," in its entirety:

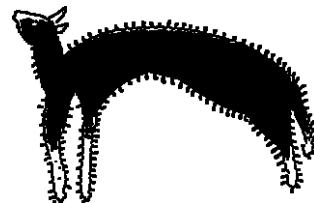
*And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even  
so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel  
myself  
beloved on the earth.*

— B.C.

0 0 0

THE TITLE of Maggie Helwig's *Talking Prophet Blues* (Quarry Press, 77 pages, \$10.95 paper) and its effective cover (the author's collage of aged fabric with icons of Adam and Eve and the Velvet Underground) suggest a blend of the vernacular and the oracular. The talking blues form, a laid-back ancestor of today's turbo-charged rap style, lets the singer improvise a funny story or deliver a wry apology for his/her life against a bask blues riff. But Helwig's new poems, in three series dedicated to Simone Weil, Glenn Gould, and some of the early Christian Church Fathers, have to be scored Prophets 1, Blues 0.

She does poll off the difficult feat of writing interesting





contemporary poetry based on religious experiences: her poems in homage to **Origen, Simeon**, and others are neither preachy nor impenetrably mystical. She manages **this by grounding her lines in the flesh as well as the spirit** "This is our gift — that God speaks the fragrant / language of the poor, is one / with our saliva, muscles. enzymes. skin." **The Gould** poems also **largely** succeed, perhaps because he **was** a prophet as well as a **pianist**.

But her **humourless** voice and somewhat mannered style (which **alternates verse and looser structures**) **sound artificial** in the **Simone Weil** series. A staccato account of an industrial accident neither mentions **pain** nor makes the anecdote memorable — which blues singers like the Reverend Gary Davis certainly **would** have accomplished **with the same theme**. **Helwig's** fourth poetry book reveals a talented and developing young poet who **can pray and praise**, but not always **wail**. — J.O.

0 0 0

EVERY THREE years since 1977, David **Donnell** has published a new poetry collection. The latest, **Water Street Days** (McClelland & Stewart, 136 pages, \$9.95 paper), mines **Donnell's** Ontario **past**: growing up in **St Marys**, then **Galt** (now **Cambridge**) and finally **Toronto**. His poems and short prose sketches vividly evoke those places, and the people around him **then**.

Like someone who puts cut-up snapshots into a kaleidoscope, **Donnell** keeps **turning** over the **same facts and moments**. The repetition of these can be irritating, but usually he manages to make the echoes add fullness. His style fits the various ages he **recalls**: boyhood memories are in short declarative sentences

and **straightforward chronology**, while his scenes of adolescence and adulthood **are** more **surreal**, interweaving **memory** with his present concerns and **desires**.

The particulars **that embellish** each poem or tale make **them, paradoxically**, of general interest. Neither **Donnell's** background (Scottish and **American**) nor his **times** (he is now **SO**) are especially **dramatic**, but the **clarity and honesty** of his **recall** open up private memories for the reader. **Donnell's** unique mixture of sophistication and **naïvete** is evident in one poem's **digression**: "How can you write about skin & involve family photographs / and rage or despair in the same sentence? .. Don't **think** about it so much. **Just/do** it."

On the whole, this book does it — **with a fine** balance between art and artlessness.

— J.O.

#### SOCIETY

I'M **SORRY** to report that **Brushes with Greatness: An Anthology of Chance Encounters with Celebrities** (Coach House, 156 pages, \$36.95 cloth) is a silly piece of self-indulgence on the part of the editors. **Russell Banks, Michael Ondaatje**, and **David Young**, because the **royalties (if any)** are to be donated to **Amnesty International**. The **editors** asked a wide circle of pen-pushers great and small to tell about the **time** they met a celebrity, and they published 34 of the contributions without editing them. Some of the anecdotes — such as **Timothy Findley's** about meeting **Katharine Hepburn** — are amusing; the rest are trivial and boring, even though some of them are **Deeply Meaningful**.

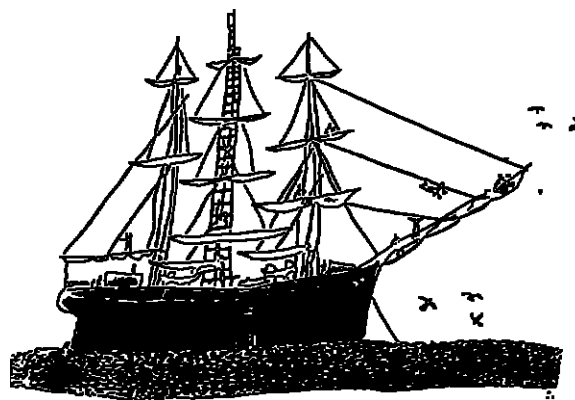
Too many trees died for **this**. — LB.

*These brief reviews were prepared by Pat Barclay, Laurel Boons, Barbara Carey, Lawrence Jackson, John Oughton, and Bruce Serafin.*

## When the Whalers Were Up North

Inuit Memories from the Eastern Arctic

Dorothy Harley Eber



Never before has the hey-day of whaling been told from the rich viewpoint of the Inuit, who welcomed the whalers and served on their crews. Oral memories, illuminated by a remarkable collection of drawings, photographs, and illustrations describe the close contact with a foreign world that marked the beginning of change in previously undisturbed Inuit culture and traditions.

McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series

17 colour and 60 b&w illustrations  
Cloth 0-7735-0702-7 \$29.95

McGill-Queen's University Press

# Fine fiction for fall



**Straight  
No  
Chaser**  
A Mystery  
by Jack  
Batten

Jazz. Cocaine. Vietnamese triads. Jack Batten's got them all in his second mystery novel starring Crang, the unconventional lawyer. A clever, entertaining romp!

\$19.95 cloth



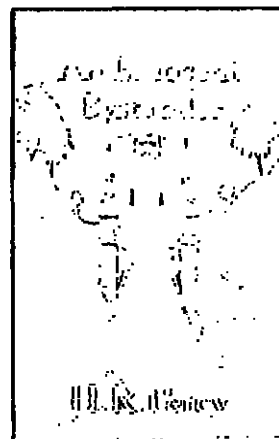
**After  
The Fire**  
by Jane  
Rule

The author of *Memory Board* tells the moving, poignant stories of five women who confront the joys and sadness of being alone.

\$12.95 paper



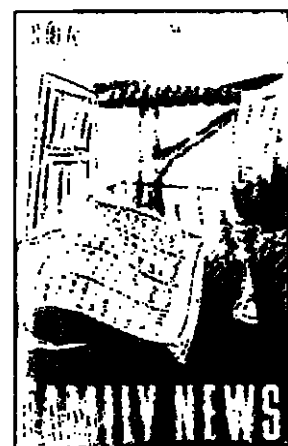
Macmillan of Canada



**An  
Innocent  
Bystander**  
by H.R. Percy

**Gaspar Sanchez** doesn't know why he has been imprisoned in a South American jail. But the terrible secret he harbours may mean he's not such an innocent bystander after all.

\$22.95 cloth



**Family  
News**  
by Joan  
Barfoot

A new novel by the award-winning author of *Dancing in the Dark*, and *Duet for Three*. In this, her fourth book, **Barfoot** explores the emotional **minefields** of family relationships.

\$19.95 cloth



# Days and nights in New York

*The boutiqueing of Toronto strikes me as hideous.  
People are always saying to me,  
"We're just like New York. We're little Manhattan."  
Yeah, in all the worst ways'*

**M**ICHELE LANDSBERG's career in journalism began at *Chate-laine* in the '60s; she was a staff writer and then articles editor. She has since worked as a columnist for both the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*. She has won many awards for journalism. Her first book, *Women and Children First* (first published by Macmillan, 1982 now published by Penguin Canada), was based on her *Toronto Star* columns dealing with the lives of Canadian women. From 1986 until 1988 she lived in New York with her husband, Stephen Lewis, who was Canadian ambassador to the United Nations: while living there she wrote a weekly column for the *Globe and Mail*. A collection of those columns (and some new material), titled *This is New York, Honey*, has just been published by McClelland & Stewart. Doris Cowan talked to her in Toronto.

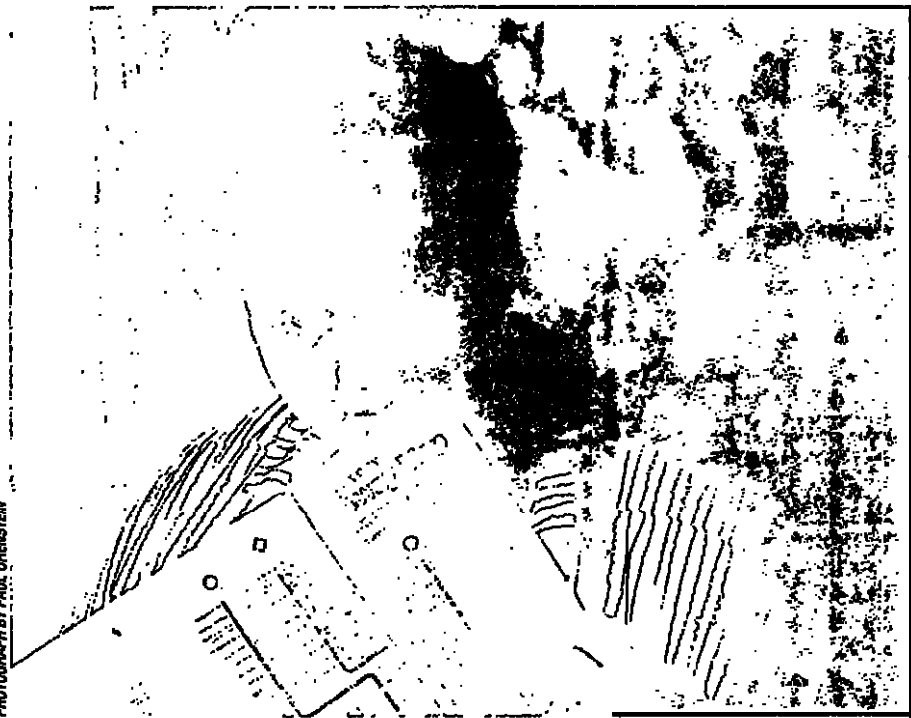
**BiC:** What is the new book about?

**Landsberg:** This book was Douglas Gibson's idea — just like my first book. He called me up when I was writing daily columns for the *Star* and suggested collecting them into a feminist book, and I was adamant that newspaper writing was ephemeral and shouldn't be collected into books — books are sacred — and so I said no. But he finally persuaded me. And I realized that he was right because when I collected the columns thematically it did make a book — a popular feminist book, not theoretical but very much pinned to issues and daily life — and people are still buying and responding

to it, and it was published six or seven years ago. I was astonished by its success. I'm still getting letters, calls, people talking to me about it. When Doug called me and said, let's base a book on your New York columns I again said no. But he kept after me. And in fact there did, once again, seem to be a book in it. There's fresh material as there was in *Women and Children First*. When you're doing a daily or weekly column you don't realize the patterns that are there.

**BiC:** What themes does it break down into?

**Landsberg:** It's really a celebration of urban life. I was madly in love with New York. I never dreamed I'd get a chance to live there. It's the epitome of cities. I can't think of any other great urban capital that represents all the wonderfulness of city life cheek by jowl with all the horror. I never tired of it in my three years. There's a popular image of New York as a city of glit-ter and insane wealth and extravagance. ... that's just one thin layer that's been represented in movies, television, and all that, but that layer is relatively insignificant. They don't



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORNSTEIN

Michele Landsberg

make New York wonderful — all the ordinary New Yorkers do that. There is a New York personality and a New York way of life that's utterly different from Toronto, strikingly different. People live very fast and very intensely. They're very busy. My friends in New York are writers, moviemakers, not all bii famous successful ones — most of them are people who have had some success but are struggling and in some ways marginal — but they are busy. They scramble to live but people who are not at the highest income levels go to off-off-Broadway theatre, they go to experimental opera, they go to see their friends no matter how hectic and wild their schedule; they lead a sort of public life. In Toronto every one of us has a tendency to be isolated, to go home and close the door. New Yorkers don't do that.

**BiC:** *It sounds like a tremendously speeded-up village life.*

**Landsberg:** Exactly. That's what I describe in the book. It's like being in a village. That's what stunned me. People would write to me and ask, How do you do your grocery shopping? They had a vision of New York as being a huge metropolis of skyscrapers with no human amenities. But the fact of New York is that it's built on a series of tiny villages and every block has its baker, a shoe repair, a greengrocer. All that is rapidly being eroded by rent speculation and that is terrible. But it was so much more convenient living in New York than here. Here I get in the car to go anywhere, but in New York you never need a car, you go everywhere on foot. I had five magnificent bookstores within five minutes' walk.

**BiC:** *Did you structure your time around your columns?*

**Landsberg:** Yes. First of all, it was a fabulous break, to live somewhere else in middle age. I've always wanted to live somewhere else. I didn't really have friends the first year I was there, but I wasn't lonely. I was just giddy with excitement at being in this fascinating new place. I'd shoot out the door every morning and just explore, go places, I kept discovering more and more and it was a great pleasure that my task was to write about whatever interested me every week. A dream assignment, right? The parks, the museums, the galleries, the streets... stories would just jump up and greet me, I hardly had to look.

Of course I got interested in the homeless and I did research. I went

out with an outreach team that keeps tabs on people in a certain area in the street, takes them medicine and food, and things like that I went out in the van with them. I did do active research like that. But it was a sort of dream life — just the one column a week. I'd been used to writing five or three, which is a hundred-hour-a-week grind. In the book I talk about things that really struck me there, patterns that I think we're on the verge of repeating in Canada.

**BiC:** *Do you think those patterns are inevitable?*

**Landsberg:** No. I don't think they are inevitable at all. New York represents choices made by corrupt, self-seeking

---

*New York is a city  
whose whole basis of  
existence is difference  
. . . . There's racism,  
but there is also  
a relishing of  
difference, of  
different ethnic  
origin, of eccentricity.  
They're proud of  
the differences and  
it has always been  
that way. . . . It's  
like heaven on earth  
to somebody who  
grew up as an  
outsider in Toronto*

---

politicians. Homelessness is a direct result of Reaganomics. There's no dispute about it. It's just that Reagan's government decided that they didn't care. It just wasn't important to them. They wanted to — and I use their foul language — maximize the profits of the capitalistic class. And the rest of the people? Well, it was their fault that they weren't rich. That's putting it very crudely, but that's absolutely the atmosphere in the U.S. for the past eight years.

And in Toronto — I was horrified when I moved back. In three years things had changed so much! I saw the same kind of crazed pandering to speculators, reckless overdevelopment, abandonment of the poor and the immigrants, disregard of doing

anything about housing stock. The kind of non-policy we've had around housing is lethal. I always assumed that Toronto governments, municipal governments, were pretty honest. But I think I was naive to believe that, and recently we saw — in the series the *Globe* and *Mail* did on land speculation, for instance, and the ties that city council had with developers — that there is corruption. I can't point at anyone and say he received a bribe, but even if they never did get bribes, they were pandering to people who appeared glamorously rich and powerful. And that's a sort of moral corruption. And in general, the boutiquing of Toronto strikes me as hideous, it goes along with a really complacent sensibility of people always saying to me, "Well, we're just like New York," "we're 'little Manhattan.'" Yeah, in all the worst ways! They think glib has something to do with being a great urban centre. Absolutely not! Don't they know what real cities are all about? Boutiques and stockbroker wealth don't make New York. New York has a depth of cultural industry and commitment that has made it a magnet for creative, ambitious people. There's a kind of intelligentsia in New York. It doesn't have to do with universities or great wealth either. I'm not sure Toronto has that or ever had it. We're different historically, socially, economically. The patterns have been different. In New York, for example, I saw a tiny ad for Gertrude Stein's opera, *The Mother of Us All*, written with Virgil Thomson. It was being performed in Alice Tully Hall at the Lincoln Center. I went and it was packed, and there were hundreds of people being turned away. It was a magnificent production. I'd never heard it before and it's out of print so you can't read it. It's written by Stein, about Susan B. Anthony. It was so moving. Virgil Thomson was there, celebrating his 90th birthday, and he spoke. The whole audience was in sympathy, was responsive. . . I don't think I ever experienced anything like that before. I walked out in a trance of happiness. I floated home: it was a beautiful soft night. It had been an experience shared with strangers who at the same time were in complete empathy with the production and with what I was feeling. . . such a rare experience for me. I don't mean it as a negative comment on Toronto to say I haven't had that kind of experience here. It's not, to me, the nature of this city to foster

that **kind** of audience. New York is a much older city, it was richer at a time when it counted. Whoever you are, you can find people like you in New York. It was wonderful, **liberating**.

**BiC:** So *the book is as much about Toronto as it is about New York?*

**Landsberg:** It was a dilemma for me, **writing** this book. I don't want to be denigrating about Canada, because I have strong feelings about our positive qualities, but Toronto was a rotten city for **me to grow** up in. a **hateful** place. I **was** born here in 39 and my whole childhood was very like what Margaret **Atwood** describes in *Cat's Eye*. People here were nasty, bigoted, small-minded, exclusive ... if you **wrote** poetry you were a butt of scorn and contempt, if you read books you were a weirdo, if you were Jewish you were **fit** for the gutter. If it hadn't been for our wonderful library system I probably would have just died.

I don't **think** Canadians are as **nice** as they think they are. I think we have a better social system, a better **government** system than a lot of other countries, but I don't think we're nicer. I grew up surrounded by bigotry. It wasn't a question of a crowded **immigrant** ghetto, I would have been happier had I been in one. I was living in a non-Jewish neighbourhood and the **bigotry** was blatant and continual. In schools, teachers, principals, other **kids** . . . **my grade** hvo teacher asked, "Horn many Jews are in this class?" **Two** or three of us put up our hands, and she said "**Will** you stand up? **All** the rest of the class is going to pray to Jesus for **these** heathen souls so they **won't** go to hell."

We were routinely despised people. Tomnto **was** a city of absolute **conformity** to a very narrow standard. New York is a city whose whole theme, whole basis of existence, **is difference**. **I've** never seen greater tolerance for difference than in New York City. **It's true** there's **racism**, particularly in the **boroughs**, but there is **also** a relishing of difference, of **different** ethnic **origin**, of **eccentricity**. They're proud of the **differences** and it has always been that way. In the 17th century when New York **was** just muddy **little** New Amsterdam filled with roaming pigs, the first English to arrive wrote home **complaining** that the town was nothing but a riffraff of Negroes, Jews, and Dutchmen. They were already complaining about too much racial **mingling**, even in 1650. **It's** like heaven on **earth** to somebody who grew up as an

outsider in Toronto.

**BiC:** *It sounds as if New York is a whole city of outsiders.*

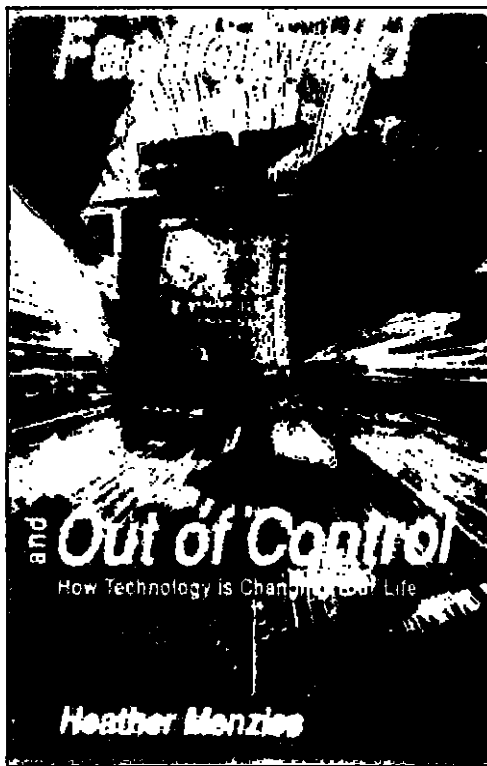
**Landsberg:** Exactly. **It's a wonderful** city for outsiders. They don't care where you came from or when. There's a **tiny** aristocracy of old wealth there but the majority came from somewhere else. It's quite unlike Park, for **example**. My aunt has lived in **Paris** for **50** years and she's still considered a foreigner. In England they sneer at foreigners. In New York nobody notices, or if they do they're **proud** that you came to **their** city: after a week **they** consider you a New Yorker. It was **wonderful**. I never felt as if I belonged in Toronto even after winning the National Newspaper Award. I was always odd woman out, different, separate from the others. In New York I felt part of something bigger than myself. I found a group of **like-minded** friends, and I was taken **in** very **openheartedly**; and these are friends for **life**.

**BiC:** *What about the other side of things, the horrors of New York life?*

**Landsberg:** They are so blatantly **obvious**, more obvious than anywhere else. And the danger is more present; **it's** a far more dangerous city than

Toronto, and of course that side of **living there** is very hard. But my strong feeling is that we're headed in the same direction, and because we're such smug Canadians, we're not doing anything to prevent it. We're not doing nearly enough to integrate our immigrant population; we're not doing anything about housing or to prevent **over-congestion** of the downtown core, to keep the small stores **from** being driven away by **rising rents**; we're not controlling rents. Our public schools here are quickly losing the middle **class**. **It's** still a small percentage that goes to private schools but it's **increasing**. We're heading for a **two-tier** city, the very rich and the very poor. In Manhattan, if there weren't a large stock of rent-controlled apartments there would be no middle class left. And if you've got no middle class you haven't got anything. Rich people don't make a city, they're just consumers, they're not the creative people, who can 6x **things** or **write** things. They're not socially useful except as spenders. When the middle class is gone you don't have a city — no artists, no artisans, no working people **BiC:** *That's happening in Toronto, too.* **Landsberg:** It's happening so fast,

## FASTFORWARD AND OUT OF CONTROL



*How Technology  
is Changing  
Your Life*

by Heather Menzies

A controversial, hard-hitting analysis of the effects of globalization on Canada's economic and technological climates. With Free Trade now in effect, this is must-reading!

\$19.95 paper



Macmillan of Canada



and nobody's doing anything about it. I used to complain about the schools here but now that I've seen the public school system in New York ... **I want to talk** about how it got that way and how we're going the same way, unless we **smarten up — quickly.**

**BiC:** *The schools in American cities are very divided racially, aren't they?*

**Landsberg:** Yes. **Eighty-two percent of the children in public schools in Manhattan are minority kids. All the white population send their kids to private schools. That's just accepted. That means the public school system is starving, it's badly run, yet you have that familiar New York anomaly — fine, wonderful, dedicated teachers working in horrifying circumstances and they're slogging it out, and they're excited about the kids. I would say that the core of the New York population is very civic-minded. It's just that they feel hopeless and defeated by the corrupt government and systems. The Mafia runs the school buses and school lunch programs. School construction is in the hands of the Mob. School janitors had a crooked union that ran the physical plant at the schools. If parents wanted to have a bazaar the janitor would allow it if they paid him a bribe. They were the proprietors of the schools.**

The children are extraordinarily alienated. There's a big problem with weapons — it's a frightening place for ghetto children. On the other hand for kids from drug areas it's the only sane place in their lives. I was at public schools where the entire budget is spent on feeding the kids breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and clothing them. Education is minimal. They're expending their whole effort on bringing up these children physically. I was at schools where two or three kids in each classroom had lost both parents to AIDS.

When I moved to New York all the news reports about children in school was about how they were starving. Then crack appeared. The ghetto kids discovered the crack trade — free enterprise, the American dream! — suddenly at the schools they're talking about banning gold jewellery, heavy chunky gold jewellery. Have you ever seen those knuckle-duster gold rings? Massive grotesque chunks of gold.

What we don't have yet, in Toronto, is an entrenched population of despairing and totally isolated poor people. We're developing it, up in Jane-Finch. What a moronic idea, to isolate people

up there, where there isn't anything except windswept barrenness, to put immigrants up there! We could stop it becoming a hell-hole like the Bronx, but we could only stop it by an effort of will, doing much more for the schools and social services. I don't see any signs that we're doing any of that. There are a lot of lessons Toronto could learn from looking at New York City. Look at civic amenities. **It's true that there are** constant cutbacks and things being let go to wrack and ruin — but there are so many lovable things right in the centre of the city: little parkettes, places to sit down, that make it a wonderful pedestrian city. Toronto is far too sprawling for that. **It's** all big commercial towers and emptiness. There's no felt life on the streets, whereas in New York almost every street you walk on has a personality, an anarchic clutter. Unfortunately New York is trying to Torontoize itself; to get rid of the pushcart peddlers, the newsstands. Now Mayor Koch has taken away a lot of the licences. I don't know what's behind it; there must be some fix in.

**BiC:** *Are Manhattan buildings being torn down and replaced, as they have been in Toronto and Montreal?*

**Landsberg:** It's been absolutely dizzying in the past 10 years, since Koch got in. The irony is that he was elected as a reformer, the candidate for the Village Independent Democrats. After he was elected he repudiated them and became the darling of the developers. Unbelievable crimes have been committed — the demolishing of protected buildings in the middle of the night without a permit. Harry Macklowe knocked down two single-room occupancy hotels that were specifically protected. No safety inspectors, no notification to the gas and electric companies, just empty the buildings with goon squads and smash the building down. Macklowe is now building a high-rise hotel in mid-Manhattan on that site, getting tax breaks from the city — after violating the law and being convicted.

**BiC:** *How much new material is in the book?*

**Landsberg:** It's about half and half I went through all the columns I wrote in the three years and found 75 to 50 specifically on living in New York. The book is built around them — it's about a Canadian living in New York. I know that people loved reading about New York; that was a big surprise. When the first column appeared in the *Globe*

about some specifically New York thing I thought I was being very self-indulgent but I started getting letters, people were so interested. People used the columns as a kind of tip sheet to interesting places to see or things to look for when they visited. New York is an icon of urban life for all North Americans. Everything we talk about here got talked about first in New York; a lot of Canadians resent that, it makes them feel colonial.

**BiC:** *It makes the rest of the Americans feel colonial, too.*

**Landsberg:** That's right, they hate New York. If I were an American I wouldn't waste my time in Iowa hating New York I'd just go live there.

**BiC:** *Did your time in New York change you?*

**Landsberg:** That's an interesting question. I miss a lot of things now, back in Toronto. that I didn't know I missed before. But yes, I think I'm going to live my life differently as a result of my time there. I'm going to consciously try to pull together a group of friends who'll be involved the way my friends were in New York. I swore when I came back that I was going to be more ambitious in my life, not for fame and glory, but the way my New York friends were — they want to use their time, use their talents.

**BE:** *Do you see your role — as writer, columnist, social critic — as a political one?*

**Landsberg:** Everything in life is political. Every word we write, every action we take civically. Certainly at the *Star* my role was political. I wrote about feminist concerns, about women's lives, and I was hoping to convince my readers of certain things. My columns from New York are different, but I wrote from a feminist and social democratic perspective, of course. Not as a conscious propagandist; it just comes naturally. If I'm genuinely indignant about something, it emerges in my writing.

People who define themselves as apolitical are usually part of the establishment and also define themselves as "normal" — just as men have defined themselves as "the norm," thereby excluding women from power. My writing is my political contribution. Absolutely. My writing life is the way I hope to have impact. The word is the most powerful thing in human life, though it's different from direct political power. Consciously and conscientiously used, political power is good. I'm proud to be political. □

# Contradictions of desire

*I resist the use of the term "homosexual" as an identifier except as a political term, ie., if there's someone out there who doesn't like homosexuals, I'm willing to be one'*

By Bruce Serafin

**S**TAN PERSKY lives in Kitsilano, an all-white section of Vancouver, across the Burrard Bridge from downtown. More precisely, he lives on York Street, near Cornwall Avenue: an area close to the beach where women in their 30s wear Spandex biking shorts and young men with heavily muscled arms wear white running shoes and loosely billowing T-shirts with logos printed on them. Renovated houses, apartment blocks, gardens, high cedar fences, bright stone walls, immaculate streets and sidewalks all make it a pleasure to walk there in the morning sunlight, as I did recently on my way to Persky's place. The ease and beauty of the area made my first sight of Persky's house a shock. It was run-down, dilapidated. An old convertible — a junker — sat out in front. The steps — the house was set on a small hill — were worn, and the house was a sort of brown hulk, pushed at on the side by an enormous, half-wild hedge. I felt disillusionment: the house's address as well as Persky's notoriety had led me to expect something grander. But as I stepped onto the porch, everything snapped into place. The chipped concrete steps, the shabby lawn, the hedge, the old door with its glass oval and manual buzzer that you turned with thumb and finger: it was a hippie house, no different from the ones I knew almost 20 years ago. On the porch I even thought I smelled cats.

Then another shock: Persky himself. sloppy jeans (cut graphically full: I thought, "Dogpatch jeans"), an old black T-shirt, enormous bum, huge gut; and long strands of hair combed old-man style across a balding head animated by bright eyes. I had met him before, but standing now in his doorway, he was like the resident witch, his body and clothes as outrageous in their way as a long whiskered chin and black dress. Then all at once the seediness disappeared, erased by

a soft, curving, intensely welcoming smile that lit up his face.

"Serafin: Come on in," he said, and I was immediately at ease.

Inside the house that feeling of the old hippie world was even stronger. It was there in the shadowy halls, the big communal kitchen, the drawn floor-to-ceiling curtains in the bedroom and living-room, the shabby bookcases and old furniture — even in the piles of paper that were everywhere. It was a place (protected and darkened by the hedge, darkened by the curtains) that was both eccentric and secure. Like Persky, the house resisted fashion: it was what it was. And like Persky, it had a charm, the charm of shyness, shabbiness, casualness, and once past the shyness, a remarkable willingness to be open to inspection. Describing Persky to me, his friend Brian Fawcett had used a striking image, "He's Caliban. Years ago we put on *The Tempest* and Stan played Caliban. That's his persona. And it's the true Caliban. In the world of *The Tempest* Caliban's the one who insists on the body — on the bodily existence of the intelligence. He insists that intelligence that doesn't have the grossness of the body is nothing. I remember seeing Stan in his furry costume. I think it was a bear suit—he just didn't use the head. And it was wonderful! When you look at him and his place it's like he's made a deliberate, quite careful decision not to be in-



DANIEL  
PHOTO

Stan Persky

volved in matters of taste at any level of hi life." And as I watched Persky make coffee and answer the phone, which seemed to ring constantly ("Yeah, yeah, he's just raging nuts," he said at one point, forgetting the interview, completely caught up in the gossip that was being related to him), as I watched the waddle his body forced on him, and noticed his combination of shyness and exuberance, his willingness to say exactly what was on his mind, I did see, if not the darkness of Caliban — for Persky is sweet-tempered — at least something of Caliban's earthiness. Here in his own place Persky seemed at home with himself, a man who had worked hard to make himself what he was.

He was born in Chicago and moved to San Francisco when he was a teenager; there he became friends with Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky. While still in his teens, he joined the U.S. Navy, which allowed him to travel to Naples and Paris, then, when that was over: he came back to Frisco and in the mid-'60s emigrated to Vancouver to study at the University of British Columbia (where as a student activist he climbed up on tables in the cafeteria and, shaking with nervousness, "shouted politely" at people to get their attention). He wrote poetry, and quickly became one of the central figures in the literary scene that was coming up in the city; in particular he gained a name as an editor and publisher, someone who was involved with most of the magazines of the time (and still is: from *Tish*, *The Georgia Straight*, and *The Western Voice*, among others, he has gone on to *This Magazine* and *New Directions*). In the late '70s, he gave up on poetry and, sensing an audience, began producing book after book of left-wing political journalism, starting with *Son of Sacred* and continuing through *At the Lenin Shipyard*, *Bennett II*, and *America the Lost Domino*. He got a job teaching philosophy and political science at Capilano College, where he still works, began appearing on BCTV as a sort of left-wing commentator on local news, and in general became something of a Socratic figure in the jumpy and sometimes vicious world of B.C. politics. His good temper and common sense made him admired; the persona in his writing — if you didn't know him — would make you think of a bit, reasonable fellow who wore a beard and perhaps wrote with his sleeves rolled up. And throughout all this, in

the Navy, in Paris and Naples, in San Francisco, then in Vancouver, he was taking boys to bed and being taken by them, falling desperately in love and, as he said of a five-year affair in Vancouver, becoming "agonized over it all." None of that showed up in his writing until this year. Out of nowhere, as it were, *Buddy's* appeared — a revelatory book, and to me the best thing Persky has written — and now here we were in his kitchen discussing whether or not there was such a thing as a homosexual.

It was an argument we had had earlier, at the book launching for *Buddy's*. (A difficult occasion: I had been as nervous as Persky was exuberant, and when we finally got a few moments to talk to each other, I had blurted out the first thing that came to mind, something about what it was like to move from writing as a political figure to writing as a homosexual. Persky had said something to the effect that there was no such thing as a homosexual. I had disagreed; we argued a bit; then we promised each other we would come back to it later.) Now we did, and Persky was prepared. He had made some notes, and as he spoke he referred to the notes. He said that he wanted to talk about the "political contradictions" that his book involved. But he started with our earlier argument, and at first he was careful, even a little nervous, speaking so deliberately that I could see the teacher in him. "In *Buddy's*," he said, "I found myself using words like 'homeroetic' and 'ephebe' — in part so as not to be accused of molesting young boys! I used these words because they aren't politically loaded, they don't have a premeaning that determines their usage. I resist the use of the term 'homosexual' as an identifier except as a political term, i.e., if there's someone out there who doesn't like homosexuals, I'm willing to be one. The word is loaded, as left-handed, philosopher, college instructor aren't. That's one part of the resistance. The other part of the resistance is that it just isn't true. For example, last night I was a magazine mailer and *New Directions* collective member. I wasn't a homosexual. In the magazine I was an author of a judicial commentary. Earlier in the day I was a union member at Capilano College. It goes on and on."

AU this was clear; but it was a bit like a political line, and I must have seemed skeptical. Because as Persky kept talking he gradually changed

tack and began to speak more loosely and openly. Finally he said, "Like everyone else, I have mixed feelings about homosexuality. Personally, I like its forbiddenness. It connects with my resistance to conventionality, bourgeois society, etc. I like the outlaw side of it. Of course I defend bourgeois homosexual couples watering plants, etc., but I'm not interested in that. I don't especially understand that, any more than you might understand my interest in ephebes." He glanced at me, giving me a chance to say something, and when I didn't he kept on talking, still struggling with his earlier thought about "political contradictions." Then suddenly he said something that impressed me. "The ones that I desire are indeed the ones that I desire. Politically, this leads to great contradictions. But I didn't create those contradictions, I didn't create the fact that those I desire stand on street corners soliciting. But my concerns about that remain"

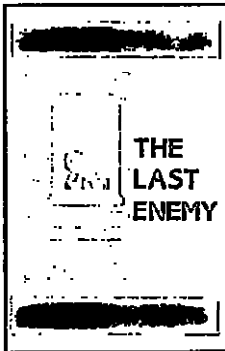
The ones that I desire we indeed the ones that I desire: There was a challenge, even a rebuke in that what he pointed to was his refusal to deviate from what he was, his refusal to capitulate to what others might think his practice ought to be. That refusal was in *Buddy's*, and while it was true, as Persky insisted, that the book was indebted to Roland Barthes, what was essential about the book wasn't the writing that brought Barthes to mind — the occasional preciosities, and dainty movement from anecdote to analysis — but the graphic portrayal of a sexual life. The great thing about the book, I had felt when I read it, was its sheer joy in telling stories in all their detail — and as I talked to Persky I noticed this joy. His conversation was quick, digressive, constantly spilling from one thing to another. When I asked him about that, mentioning the happiness in the book, and adding that in my experience there was a lot of wistfulness in gay literature, he responded quickly.

"No, I don't feel that. Because Barthes is my guide in *Buddy's* I'm determinedly seeing all these things as pleasures. Though towards the end of the book I'm getting a little weary of all this!" And here he exploded with laughter. "Seeing these guys not as Ems, Cupid, etc., which is what I call them in the book, but as young guys with fucked-up lives. Take Bret" — one of the characters in *Buddy's*. "He's a beautiful young man and all that in

# BOOK NEWS

AN ADVERTISING FEATURE

## THE LAST ENEMY RHODA KAELLIS



A moving novel of kinship and lost innocence amid the ruins of the Holocaust.

*\$12.95 paper*  
ISBN 0-88978-214-8

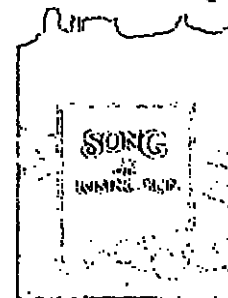
**PULP PRESS**  
A Division of Arsenal Pulp Press Ltd.  
Distributed by UTP

## Song to the Rising Sun

**Paulette Jiles**

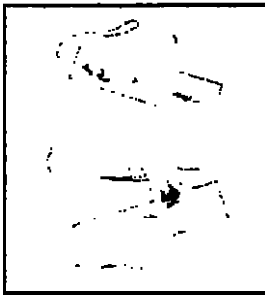
PAULETTE JILES

Pick up a copy of the latest collection from the award-winning author of *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Karma Cola*, then catch her reading at Harbourfront November 7th.



Published by Polestar Press  
Distributed to the trade by Raincoast Books

## WOODMARKS



New ultrathin genuine wooden bookmarks, made from exotic woods from around the world. Complete with attractive marker tassel. Ideal for the avid reader or that special gift.  
**\$3.00 ea. 2/\$5.00** postpaid to:

Picture Woods,  
Box 123 Stn. A, Willowdale Ont.  
Canada M2N 5S8

## UNEXPECTED FICTIONS: New Icelandic Canadian Writing



UNEXPECTED FICTIONS  
EDITED BY KRISTJANA GUNNARS

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

Nine of the best Icelandic Canadian writers are gathered in this wide-ranging contemporary collection, including David Arnason, W.D. Valgardson and Betty Jane Wylie. These stories reflect their heritage and the "fresh breeze" blowing through their culture.

Edited by Kristjana Gunnars  
**TURNSTONE PRESS**

ISBN 0-88801-144-X \$10.95

Distributed by University of Toronto Press

With WK in the Workshop:  
A Memoir of William Kurelek  
by Brian Dedora



A Memoir of William Kurelek

"Like Kurelek, Dedora has translated memory into art."  
— Ramsay Cook  
from the INTRODUCTION

0-920544-68-1  
64 pp \$13.95 paper

6 full colour plates &  
22 b&w images by William Kurelek

AYA PRESS/THE MERCURY PRESS  
DISTRIBUTED BY UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS



0-910544-63-0  
216 pp. \$15.95 paper

The most comprehensive guide to publishing opportunities for Canadian poets ever assembled.

A League of Canadian Poets /  
Aya Press m-publication

AYA PRESS/THE MERCURY PRESS  
DISTRIBUTED BY UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

my story, but he had had a disastrous life in the past year, including an attempted suicide."

Persky paused. "I seem to be writing this without regrets, I am not looking for the kind of romantic love that you might be looking for. It's true that earlier on I was much more agonized about love, but now the world of desire seems fairly comic to me. I love the stories. In the gay world love stories are a basic mode of exchange. Cupid's basic mode of exchange is gossip. He hated that when I pointed it out to him!

"There's a biographical point here I grew up in the same homophobic America as everybody else. And at the age of 14 or 15 I was terrified by it all, as well as being additionally terrified by any contact with human beings. I was terrified at the junior prom. But early on, from about 16, I was in contact with Allen Ginsberg, then later on from about 18 I was in contact with Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, so I was in a society where homosexuality was taken for granted. Then the navy. And the navy was nice enough to ship me to Naples, and gave me time to go to Paris where Ginsberg and Orlovsky were staying at 9 rue Git-le-coeur, the beat hotel. So I was in unusually safe surroundings. And I had the advantage of speaking another language. Talk about insults! I couldn't get wounded by the foreign language. And I remember very distinctly, at about 19 or 20, being engaged in sex and thinking, I really like this. This was a phenomenological fact for me. Boy, that was about the clearest moment I've had on this very complicated subject. In the navy there wasn't a moment that I wasn't in love, and I remember being very terrified about this. But these French boys — Luc and Jackie — weren't disturbed about it at all."

And Canada?

"Oh. I loved Canada. I was immediately at home here. And I loved the boys. They were different, reticent; and they were sexually unafraid, willing to try different things. I was in love from the first minute I was in Canada."

Hearing this about Canada, I was reminded of something else that had struck me in *Buddy's* — and that was my sense of seeing Vancouver in a way that I never had before. Its bars and apartment buildings, its street corners and back doors and storefronts — the entire West End in fact — were suddenly made alhuingly distinct by the sexual desire animating the gaze

looking at them, as if everything were flooded with Mediterranean light. This warm, clear world was very different from the world of 1&-wing B.C. politics that Persky was usually associated with. That was a world of rain and umbrellas, hoarse voices trying to make a point in stuffy, crowded halls, obese men and women, desperation, anger, and endless cups of coffee tasting of Styrofoam. That other world was where Persky was best known, and when I asked him about it he responded with a sort of critical tenderness that made his statements gentler than they appear on the page.

He said, "I'm in favour of social justice, so that puts me on the left. I'm engaged with the left and I regard that as more important than undoing any of the mistakes the left might make."

---

*Persky keeps returning to the same theme: being responsible. He worries that 'the idea of legitimate authority' has all but disappeared*

---

"At the same time I'm appalled by the left? — and this word, "appalled," was one he would use again and again. "Just appalled. I have a sense of humour. I remember one time at a radical left meeting in the '70s — an awful meeting, horrible — I just sort of shyly got up and wrote on the blackboard, 'MAO HAS A BIG DONG.' Well, this was silly and people hated me for it, but I was just oppressed by the righteousness and heaviness of what was going on."

I mentioned writing.

"There's no excuse for bad prose," Persky said, "and there's especially no excuse for bad left prose. I'm always appalled by the writing. What I tell people is, 'You guys ought to lift your eyes high enough above the barricades to notice that Langara College has a journalism school in this town. You ought to forget your leftist views for a moment and learn how to write a lead.' I compare their stuff to the Vancouver Province. They're appalled when I throw the Province at them as a model. But I do a lot of that. I'm self-confident enough now that I'm not intimidated. I say, You people are contemptuous of your readers. I find you

insufferably arrogant in not writing warmly and clearly enough to attract readers."

We talked about Randy Shilts's book *And the Band Played On*. The book had impressed Persky, and he had used it in an article he had written for *This Magazine* on some of the issues surrounding AIDS. This article — essentially a report on how an unlikely alliance of the left and light in B.C. had ended up producing an intellllt piece of legislation outlining what should be done if someone "willfully, or carelessly" spread AIDS to others — was clear and judicious, animated by reason. It was a reasonableness that Persky had worked hard for. and it had got him in trouble.

"Gay leftists hate Shilts's book," he said. "They think he's internalized self-hatred. They blame Shilts for the emphasis on Patient Zero — Gaetan Dugas. They feel that Shilts was on the side of those people who wanted the bathhouses closed. Well, I cited some of what he reported on, and said that interestingly enough these are the very issues that are being debated in B.C. The response to that from the gay left was vitriolic, particularly in *Rites Magazine*, which is a Toronto mag. They just conflated Shilts and me. There's a piece in there by George Smith, who's a blustery sociologist, which is really a hack job, the worst kind of denunciatory propaganda. This attacking people on your own side — like the attack on Shilts, who really just produced a superb piece of reportage — I've always been clear that I think this is the most destructive thing the left can engage in. It's understandable if you're part of the viewpoint that's marginalized — as leftists are in this society — you can get paranoid, etc. But you have to get past that I try to. I've got a large populist streak in me: I want to communicate. I'm also very practical-minded, so I'm willing to work for what can be done."

I had begun to see what this meant. Persky wasn't an ideologue. Sitting across from me in his worn-out T-shirt, smoking, digressing, trying out one idea after another — "I have opinions on everything," he said with a laugh — what kept coming across was the idea of "service." Politics was service; writing was service. He would see something that he could do, and he would try to do it. He was constantly at work, and the evidence was there in the piles of paper that filled his house. Brian Fawcett had said to me

that Persky was an educator, a teacher. someone who encouraged at any cost free public discourse, and he had added, trying to pin down this freedom that he saw in his friend, "Stan's the quintessential commie-faggot-jew-nigger. He's the weird one, you know, that you always try to scare your kids away from." A burst of laughter. "And yet," Fawcett added, "there's this enormous reasonableness, this complete willingness to consider another side. There's no bitterness in him, just a huge courage." Fawcett spoke sharply about Persky's relationship to the left. He felt that while Persky had remained true to himself and his principles, had stood fast in that way, the left had moved, slipping down into fundamentalism and a kind of denial of reality.

Persky was kinder than that — in all he said it was plain that the left was his community — but listening to him I could understand what Fawcett meant. There was a subtlety in his position: on the one hand, he was someone who could operate only as he was (he spoke, for instance, of how bored he got at NDP meetings "because so much of reality is cut off; desire, for instance," and went on to mention his admiration for people like Ginsberg, and how he himself tried to be as "effusive as necessary in public, so the public doesn't fag asleep"); but on the other hand he had a deep respect for the actuality of the situation that confronted him. "If the Province gave me 500 words a day," he said, "I would try to write to fit the format of the paper and still get across some of the things I want to say. And if I'm on TV and they ask for 30 seconds, I'll give them 30 seconds. I think it's a good idea to have some respect for the situation you're in." This side of Persky. — the realistic, adaptable side — was foreign to much of the left that I knew, and when I mentioned this to Persky he looked worried. Yet he kept returning to the same themes: being responsible, using reason. He was worried that what he caged "the idea of legitimate authority" had all but disappeared. He mentioned the situation he had described earlier, when legislation was passed in B.C. to deal with the "willful" spreading of AIDS. Persky said, "Even after the legislation was passed and it was plain that nobody was being hauled off the streets or anything like that, people were recalling grandmothers incarcerated in the Second World War. It was overblown. It did nobody

any good. And that's the problem — reactions like that that pay no attention to the actual nature of what is being legislated. We have no sense of what it's like to have someone who's a public guardian. Our sense of legitimate authority has just dwindled. We have no feeling for what it would be like — authority that doesn't chafe."

Persky said, "On some days. I think that leftism has just disappeared in some sense. The situation right now is the politics of absolute emptiness. The Mulmney government is trying to fill up the vacuum with consumer goods. They're trying to bore us to death. In order to stay interested, you have to notice what they're doing to you. These are people who have no understanding of the universe they're living in. But sometimes you see people — I think David Suzuki is one of them — that have a real authority. When somebody is on — when they've got their hands on something, and they're moving with it — they operate with a kind of non-egotistical energy that's very attractive and draws people to them. Suzuki, I think, has acquired that by knowing his own mind, by not deceiving people. And you can find it in yourself. You go to a meeting, for instance, and for one reason or another you're caged on to lead it. Usually you do so-so. But at other times, at rare moments, you have this sense of conviction and certitude. You can see yourself being useful, and others are grateful to you for it. That's how I'd like to be.

About a month later I stood with Persky on his porch. He was wearing another T-shirt that was just as worn out as the first one. We looked at the new concrete curb — so smooth and white — that had been put in around his house since I had last been there. It looked completely out of place, and when I remarked on that, Persky said, "Dust. It was dust that brought that curb. It was still a little countryish around here, a little dusty. Well, I liked that. But the neighbours have nice cars, and they didn't want dust on their cars. So there you are." Persky looked tired, and I remembered something he had told me when I first met him. It was about his house. He had lived here 20 years, he said, and there were constantly buyers coming around. They made offers. And here Persky looked at me, giggling, exuberantly happy. "I just tell them that the newt move I'm going to make is when I die." □

DOUGLAS &  
McINTYRE  
*Fiction*

## MIDNIGHT TWILIGHT TOURIST ZONE

Sharon Riis

*An erotic danse macabre, a two-step between reality and what seems to be simple hallucination... Sharon Riis's new novel blends time and place into a world that is both comfortingly familiar and fearfully unknown.*

*A Genie Award finalist for best original script for Loyalties and Latitude 55, Riis is the author of numerous short stories and award-winning television dramas. Her first novel, The True Story of Ida Johnson, is also available from Douglas & McIntyre. Margaret Atwood describes Riis as: "... an exciting new writer with a sure grasp of the vernacular, complemented by a quirky sleight-of-hand."*

\$21.95 cloth

Also available from Douglas & McIntyre

## CROSSINGS

Betty Lambert

*"Lambert tears a woman's psyche inside out and examines it with searing honesty."*  
—William French, *The Globe & Mail*

\$14.95 paper

## TEARS IN A GLASS EYE

Kevin Roberts

*A sensitive and frightening journey into the psyche of an AWOL soldier searching for the isolation that might help him to come to terms with the horror of waste and destruction.*

\$14.95 paper

## ZERO AVENUE

Leona Gom

*The impossible happens. A woman finds herself in a more-real-than-television drama when she is kidnapped following a TV news broadcast that dealt with her husband's lucrative career.*

\$14.95 paper

## FROM THE BELLY OF A FLYING WHALE

Byrna Barclay

*An exploration of the lives and passions of people who live with fear and on the edge of madness. A collection of haunting and disturbing tales that spans the globe.*

\$12.95 paper



DOUGLAS & McINTYRE

# BOOKNEWS

AN ADVERTISING FEATURE

*At last! A simple book about a complex problem*

## ALCOHOLISM: From Recognition to Recovery

by Arthur Herscovitch ISBN 0-88868-183-6  
102 pages, softbound ..... \$12.95

ADDICTION RESEARCH FOUNDATION  
(416) 595-6059

**ookstore**

33 Russell St., Toronto, ON M5S 2S1

**ARF**

VISA and MasterCard accepted

## A LEGIONNAIRE'S JOURNEY

Leslie Aparvary

Leslie Aparvary, fleeing the Soviet Occupation in Hungary, was sold to the French Foreign Legion in 1948, and for two years he travelled from Europe to Indochina where he fought in Vietnam. This is his story. B/W photos and maps.

\$11.95 pb 6x9  
0-920490-93-X



Detselig Enterprises Ltd.  
Box G 399 Calgary, Alberta T3A 2G3

## PLANNING A PROFESSIONAL CURRICULUM



## Planning a Professional Curriculum

A Guide to Understanding Programme Design

by L.A. Fisher and C. Levens  
*"For those who want to learn more about educational planning, for those who develop interest in the scholarship of professional education, this book can be both a stimulus and a guide."* Stephen Abrahamson, Ph.D., Chairman-Elect, GME, Association of American Medical Colleges.

\$10.95\* paper + P&H  
ISBN 0-012913-20-0

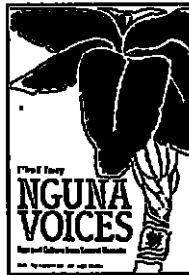
\*Prepublication price. Subject to change without notice.

University of Calgary Press

2500 University Drive N.W. Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4

## Nguna Voices

Text and Culture from  
Central Vanuatu  
by E.E. Facey



NGUNA VOICES is unique in several respects: it is the first monograph to be written concerning this pacific culture; it includes 33 oral texts in their original language as well as in English translation; it contains an exhaustive glossary of the foreign vocabulary; and it provides involved textual transcription, translation and presentation.

\$24.95\* paper + P&H  
ISBN 0-016313-72-0

\*Prepublication price: subject to change without notice.

The University of Calgary Press

2500 University Drive NW Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4

## ASSU OF CAPE MUDGE

Recollections of a Coastal Indian Chief  
*Harry Assu with Joy Inglis*



A personal memoir by an important native leader of British Columbia as well as the story of the Lekwiltok people of the Kwagiulth Nation. This book gives a rare view from inside Indian culture.

184 pages, 45 b/w photographs, maps, and drawings  
cloth \$29.95, paper \$19.95

UBC  
press

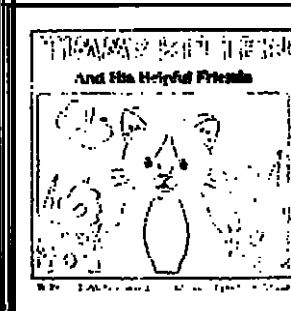
The University of British Columbia Press  
6344 Memorial Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

## MOONSTONE PRESS

P. O. Box 96  
Goderich  
Ontario N7A 3Y5



**TIMMY KITTEN**  
and **His Helpful Friends**



ISBN 0-920259-21-9 28 PP.. 8" x 8" 56.95

French: Timmy le petit chat et ses amis serviables  
Italian: Timmy il micio e i suoi amici simpatici  
Ukrainian: Koryk Murkotyk i yoho vimi druzi  
German: Timmy Kätzchen und seine hilfsbereiten Freunde



# Railroading

*In his letter, Cliff told Lesley that he loved her like 10,000 freight trains. That was like saying, I love you to death. Who wants to be loved to death?*

By Diane Schoemperlen

## LOVE TRAIN

**F**OR A LONG TIME after Lesley and Cliff broke up, Cliff was always sending her things.

Flowers.

Red roses by the dramatic dozen.

Delicate frilly carnations dyed turquoise at the edges (which reminded Lesley of a tradition they'd observed at her elementary school on Mother's Day when each child had to wear a carnation, red if your mother was alive, white if she was dead — there were only two kids in the whole school whose mothers were dead — and what then, she wondered, was turquoise meant to signify?)

A single white orchid nestled in tissue paper in a gold box, as if they had a big date for a formal dance

Cards. Funny cards.

I thought you'd like to know that I've decided to start dating seals again, and ... oh yes, my umbilical cord has grown back!

Sentimental cards.

I love wearing the smile. . . you put on my face!

Funny sentimental cards.

You You You You You You You You You  
You You You  
These are a few of my favourite things!

Apology cards.

Please forgive me. . . my mouth is bigger than my brain!

and:

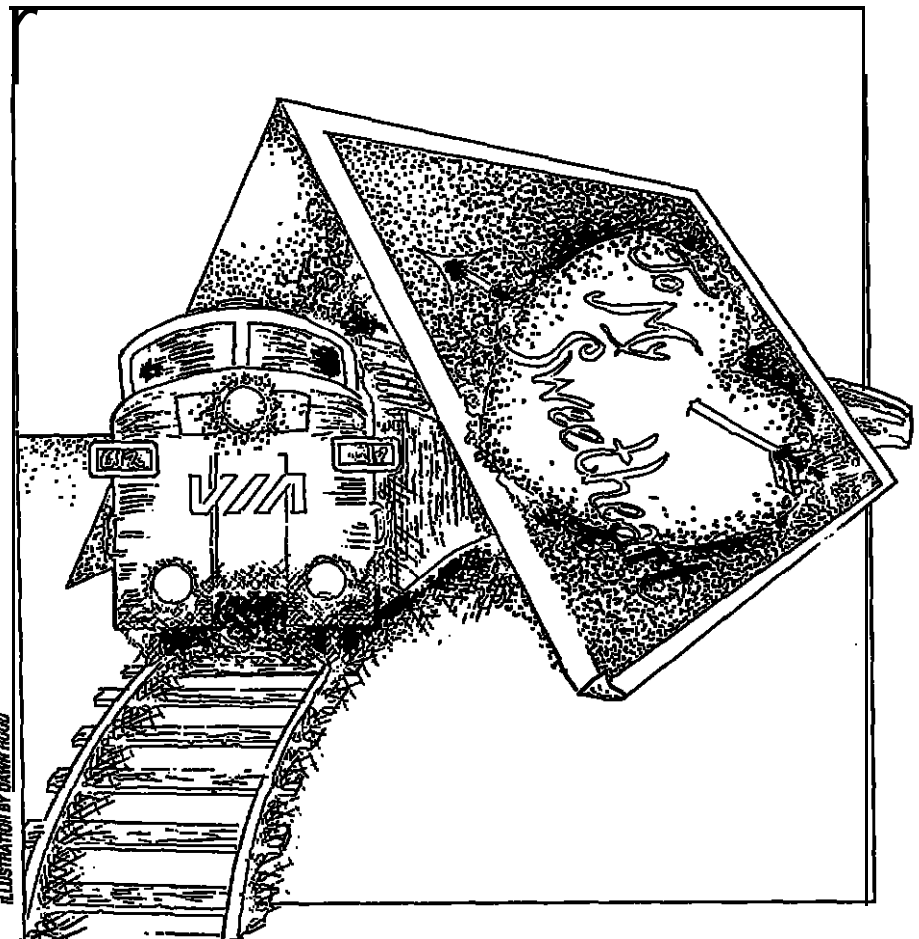
I'm sorry, I was wrong . . . Well, not as wrong as you, but sorrier!

Pretty picture cards to say:

Happy Thanksgiving!  
Happy Halloween!  
I'm just thinking of you!  
I'm always thinking of you!  
I'm still thinking of you!

Letters. Mostly letters

Often Cliff would call during the day and leave a message on Lesley's answering machine, apologizing for having bothered her with another card or letter when she'd already told him, in no uncertain terms, that she needed



some space. Then he would call right back and leave another message to apologize for hating left the first one when she'd already told him to leave her alone.

He did not send the letters through the mail in the conventional way, but delivered them by hand in the middle of the night. Lesley never did catch him in the act, but she could just picture him parking his car halfway down the block, sneaking up her driveway in the dark or the rain, depositing another white envelope in her black mailbox. Where she would find it first tbii in the morning.

At first it gave Lesley the creeps to think of Cliff tippy-toeing around out there while she was inside sleeping, but then she got used to hearing from him in this way. She took to checking the mailbox every morning before she put the coffee on. Waiting in her housecoat and slippers for the toast to pop and the eggs to poach, she would study the envelope first. Sometimes he put her full name on it, first and last; sometimes her first name only; once, just her initials.

Inside, the letters were always neatly typewritten on expensive bond paper. They began with phrases like "Well, no. . ." or "And yes. . ." or "But maybe. . ." as if Cliff were picking up a conversation (one-sided though it might be) right in the middle where they'd left off, or as if he still thought he could still read her mind.

One of the first letters was dense with scholarly historical quotes on the nature of war. Cliff had set these erudite excerpts carefully off from the rest of the text, single-spaced and indented:

In quarrels between countries, as well as those between individuals, when they have risen to a certain height, the first cause of dissension is no longer remembered, the minds of the parties being wholly engaged in recollecting and resenting the mutual expressions of their dislike. When feuds have reached that fatal point, all considerations of reason and equity vanish; a blind fury governs, or rather confounds all things. A people no longer regards their interest, but rather the gratification of their wrath. (John Dickson).

And later in the letter he wrote:

The strange thing about this crisis of August 1939 was that the object between Germany and Poland was not clearly defined, and could not therefore be expressed as a concrete demand. It was part of Hitler's nature to avoid putting

things in a concrete form; to him, differences of opinion were questions of power, and tests of one's nerves and strength. (Ernst von Weizsäcker).

Lesley could not imagine that Cliff actually had a repertoire of such pedantic passages floating around inside his head, just waiting for an opportunity to be called up. But she couldn't imagine that he had really gone to the library and looked them up in order to quote them at her either.

Still, this letter made her mad enough to call him. When she said on the phone, "I don't take kindly to being compared with Hider, thank you very much," Cliff said, "Don't be ridiculous. That's not what I meant. You just don't understand."

And she said, Well, no . . . I guess not."

He apologized for making her mad, which was exactly the opposite, he said, of what he was intending to do. But the more he apologized, the madder she got. The more he assured her that he loved her even though she was crabby, cantankerous, strangled and worried, hard, cynical and detached, mercenary, unsympathetic, callous and sarcastic — the more he assured her that he loved her in spite of her self — the madder she got. Until finally she hung up on him and all day she was still mad, also feeling guilty, sorry, sad, simpleminded, and defeated. She promised herself that she would send the next letter back unopened, but of course, there was little real chance of that. She tried several times that afternoon to compose a letter in answer to his repeated requests for one. But she got no further than saying:

What it all comes down to is this: in the process of getting to know you, I realized that you were not the right person for me.

It should have been simple.

In the next letter, two mornings later, Cliff turned around and blamed himself for everything, saying:

At least understand that all of this was only the result of my relentless devotion to you.

Lesley took a bath after breakfast and contemplated the incongruous conjunction of these two words:

Relentless.

Devotion.

After she'd dried her hair and cleaned the tub, she looked up "relentless" in the thesaurus. Much as she'd suspected, it was not an adjective that

should be allowed to have much to do with love:

relentless, *adj.* unyielding, unrelenting, implacable, unsparring; inexorable, remorseless, unflagging, dogged; undeviating, unswerving, persistent, persevering, undaunted; rigid, stern, strict, harsh, grim, austere; merciless, ruthless, unmerciful, pitiless, un pitying, unforgiving; unmitigable, inflexible, unbending, resisting, grudging; "hard," impetuous, obdurate, adamant, intransigent; uncompassionate, unfeeling, unsympathetic, intolerant.

The next letter was delivered on a windy Saturday night when Lesley was out on a date with somebody else. It was sitting there in the mailbox when she got home at midnight. The weather had turned cold and her driveway was filling up suddenly with crispy yellow leaves. When she opened the back door, dozens of them swirled around her ankles and slipped inside. She imagined Cliff crunching through them on his way to the mailbox, worrying about the noise which was amplified by the hour and the wind, then noticing that her car wasn't in the garage, and worrying about that too.

In this letter, Cliff said:

I love you like ten thousand freight trains.

Lesley thought she rather liked this one, but then she wasn't sure. She thought she'd better think about it. She hung up her coat, poured herself a glass of white wine and sat down in the dark kitchen to think. The oval of her face reflected in the window was distorted by the glass, so that her skin was pale, her eyes were holes and her cheeks were sunken. She did not feel pale, hollow or sunken. She felt just fine.

I love you like ten thousand freight trains.

This was like saying:

I love you to little bits.

Who wants to be loved to little bits?

That was like saying:

I love you to death.

Who wants to be loved to death?

I love you Iii ten thousand freight trains.

Who wants to be loved like or by a freight train?

The more she thought about it, the more she realized that she knew a thing or two about tins; railroading; relentlessness.


#### DREAM TRAIN

As a young girl growing up in Winnipeg, Lesley lived in an Insul-brick

# BOOK NEWS

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

PARTY BOOKS HEALTH BOOKS MEDICINE NEW AGE YOUNG ADULT



**Building Global Security**  
*Agenda for the 1990's*  
by Douglas Roche

A bold new plan - realistic and timely - is laid down in this provocative book by one of Canada's foremost authorities on disarmament and development.  
\$14.95 1-55021-057-2.

COOKERY PSYCHOLOGY BIOGRAPHY SCIENCE

NC Press Limited (416) 593-6284  
260 Richmond St. W., Ste. 401, Toronto, ON M5V 1W5

## Wake Up, Canada!

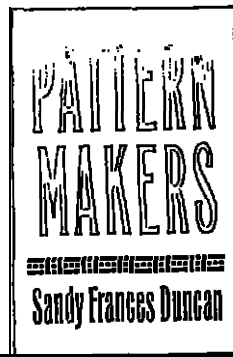
Reflections on Vital National Issues  
c. W. Peterson  
-Edited by David C. Jones-

Reflecting on the national dreams and obsessions at the end of the Great War, C.W. Peterson wrote about issues that are still with us today, including East versus West, capital versus labor, French versus English, and industry versus agriculture.

Western Canada Reprint Series  
\$14.95 paper

The University of Alberta Press  
141 Athabasca Hall, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E8

## THE WOMEN'S PRESS



**PATTERN MAKERS**  
by Sandy Frances Duncan

Duncan's double-edged wit makes this surreal journey of three women & a spider an entertaining novel of transformation.  
\$9.95 pb 204 pages  
0-88961-138-6 5 x 8

Simon & Pierre Publishing Co. Ltd. announces the 14th edition of the Canadian Book Review Annual with 1050 original reviews of Canadian titles in 5 disciplines, 40 subject areas by 400 specialist reviewers across the country complete with full bibliographic data

the Canadian Book Review Annual 1988 a valuable historical reference source reflecting the growth of Canadian trade publishing.

Call or write for further information:  
@Simon & Pierre Publishing Co. Ltd.  
\$15 Danforth Ave., Ste. 404, Toronto, Ont. M4J 1L2  
Telephone (416)463-0313; Fax (416) 463-4155

## BRAINSTORMING


The Science and Politics of Opiate Research  
Solomon H. Snyder, M.D.

In this very human chronicle, Solomon Snyder recounts the political maneuverings and scientific sleuthing that led him and Candace Pert—then a graduate student in his lab—to a critical breakthrough in our understanding of addiction—the opiate receptor. cloth

Harvard University Press

## BLACK ROSE BOOKS

NEW RELEASE



**APHRA BEHN**  
*The English Sappho*  
by George Woodcock

An analysis of the writings of this pioneer of the women's movement, social activist, and inventor of much that has become permanent in the English novel.  
ISBN: 0-921689-42-X \$16.95

3981 St-Laurent 1444 Montréal Québec H2W 1Y5 (514) 844-4076

bungalow three doors from the train tracks, a spur line **leading** to **Genstar Feeds**. Trains **travelled** the spur line so seldom that whenever one passed in the night, it would usually wake her up with its **switching** and shunting, its steel wheels squealing on the **frozen** rails. She would lie awake listening in her **little** trundle bed (it wasn't **really** a trundle bed, it was just an ordinary twin bed, but every night at eight o'clock, her mother, Amelia, would say, "Come on, little one, **time** to tuck you **into** your **little trundle** bed.")

Lesley liked to imagine that the train outside was not a freight tram, but a **real train**, a passenger **train**: the Super Continental carrying dignified wealthy people as carefully as if they **were** eggs, clear across the country in its plush coaches, the conductors in their serious uniforms graciously bringing around drinks, pillows, and magazines. She imagined the silver coaches **cruising** slowly past, all lit up, the people inside riding backwards, eating, sleeping, playing cards with just their heads showing, laughing as if this were the most natural **thing** in the world. She imagined that the Super Continental could go all the way **from** Vancouver to St. John's (never mind the Gulf of St. Lawrence -there must be a way around it) without stopping once.

If the **train** on the spur **line** did not **actually** wake Lesley up, then it **slid** instead into her dreams, disguised as a shaggy behemoth with red eyes and silver hooves, **shaking** the snow from its curly **brown** fur as it pawed the rails and snorted steam.

## TRAIN TRACKS

As a teenager, Lesley walked along the train tracks every morning to **Glengarry Heights High School**. On the **way**, she usually met up with a boy named Eric Henderson, who was two grades older and dressed all year **round in faded** blue jeans, a **teeshirt** and a black leather jacket with studs. Occasionally he condescended to the cold weather **by** wearing a pair of black gloves.

After a couple of **weeks**, Eric took to waiting for Lesley on the tracks where they crossed her street. He would be **leaning** against the signal lights smoking, when she came out her front door. **The** never walked home together at four o'clock because, even though Lesley sometimes loitered at her locker hoping, Eric was never

around at **that time**, having, she assumed, other, **more** interesting, more grown-up things to do after school.

Every morning Lesley and Eric **practised** balancing on the rails with their arms outstretched and they complained about the way the **tar-coated** ties were never spaced quite right for **walking** on. Lesley kept her ears open, looking over her shoulder every **few minutes**, just in case. Her mother, Amelia, had often warned her, "'Don't get too close to a moving train or you'll get **sucked under**.'"

Sometimes Eric would line up bright pennies on the silver rails so the **train** would come and flatten them. Lesley would watch for the pennies on her way home from school, would gather them up and save them, thin as tinfoil, in a cigar box she kept under the bed. She never put pennies on the tracks herself because she was secretly afraid that they would cause a **derailment** and the train would come toppling off the tracks, exploding as it rolled down the embankment, demolishing **her** house and her **neighbours'** houses and **everything** in them. It was okay though when **Eric** did it, because somehow he could be both dangerous and charmed at the same time.

Every morning Eric told Lesley about what he'd done the night before. Lesley was not expected to reciprocate, which was just as well, since all she ever did in the **evening** was **homework** and dishes and talk on the phone.

One Monday morning Eric said he'd gone to the Gardens on Saturday night to see the **Ike and Tina Turner Revue**. He said **Tina Turner** was the sexiest woman in the world and the way she sang was like **making** love to the microphone right there on stage. He said he **thought** he'd die just watching her and all the other guys went **crazy** too.

On the phone every night after supper, Lesley told her new best **friend**, Audrey, every little **thing Eric** had said to her that morning, especially the way he'd said, "I like your new haircut a lot," and then the way he'd winked at **her in** the hall between **history** and **French**.

"Do you think he likes me?" she asked Audrey over and over again.

"Of course he likes you, silly! He **adores you!**"

This went on all **fall**, all winter, all spring, until the raging crush which Lesley had **on** Eric Henderson could be **nothing**, it seemed, but **true true love**.

The week before final exams, Eric asked **Audrey** to the last school dance.

Lesley spent the night of the dance barricaded **in** her bedroom, **lying** on the **floor** with the record player **blasting** **Tina Turner** at top volume. She propped a chair **against** the door and would not let her parents in. She was mad at them too: at her father, Howard, because he'd laughed and said, "You'll get over it, pumpkin!"; and at her mother, Amelia, because she was old and married, probably happy, **probably** didn't **even** remember what love was **really** like, probably hadn't **explained** this **properly** in the first place, should have warned her about **more than freight trains**.

She would, Lesley promised herself savagely, spend the entire **summer** in her room, learning all the lyrics to **Tina Turner's** songs and reading fat Russian novels which were **all** so **satisfyingly** melancholy, so clotted with complications and despair, and the characters had so many different **difficult** names. Especially she would reread **Anna Karenina** and memorize the signal passage **where** Anna decides to take her own life.

... And all at once she **thought** of the **man crushed** by the hats the day she had **first met Vronsky**, and she knew what she had to do.

... And I will **punish him and escape from everyone and from myself** ..

... And exactly at the moment when the **space between** the wheels came **opposite** her, she **dropped the red bag**, and drawing her head back **into her shoulders**, fell on her hands under the carriage, and lightly, as though she would rise again at once, **dropped on to her knees** ..

... She tried to get up, to **drop backwards**: but something **hugs and merciless** struck her on the **head** and rolled her on her back ..

... And the light by which she had **read the book filled** with **troubles, falsehoods, sorrow, and evil**, flared **up more brightly than ever before**, **lighted up for her all that had been in darkness, flickered**, began to grow dim, and was **quenched forever**.

And she would **probably** carve Eric Henderson's initials into her thigh with a ballpoint pen, and she would **probably** not eat anything either, except maybe unsalted soda crackers, and she would not wash her hair more than once a week, and she would stay in her pyjamas all day long. Yes she would. She would **languish**. And for sure she would never ever ever **ever fall** in love or have a best **friend** ever **again** so long as she **lived**, so help her.

## NIGHT TRAIN

When Lesley moved away from home at the age of 21, she took the train because there was an air strike that summer. Her parents put her on the train in Winnipeg with a brown paper bag full of tuna sandwiches and chocolate chip cookies, with the three-piece luggage set they'd bought her as a going-away present, and a book of crossword puzzles to do on the way. They were all weeping lightly, the three of them: her parents, Lesley assumed, out of a simple sadness, and herself, out of an intoxicating combination of excitement and anticipation, of new-found freedom and, with it, fear. She was, she felt, on the brink of everything important. She was moving west to Alberta, which was booming.

Seated across the aisle of coach number 3003 (a good omen, Lesley thought, as she had long ago decided that three was her lucky number) was, by sheer coincidence, a young man named Arthur Hoop who'd given a lecture at the university in Winnipeg the night before. His topic was nuclear disarmament and Lesley had attended because peace was one of her most enduring interests.

After an hour or so, Lesley worked up enough courage to cross over to the empty seat beside him and say, "I really loved your lecture." Arthur Hoop seemed genuinely pleased and invited her to join him for lunch in the club car. Lesley stashed the brown bag lunch under the seat in front of hers and followed Arthur, swaying and bobbing and grinning, down the whole length of the train.

Arthur Hoop, up close, was interesting, amiable and affectionate, and his eyes were two different colours, the left one, blue, and the right one, brown. Arthur was on his way back to Vancouver where he lived with a woman named Laura who was sleeping with his best friend and he, Arthur, didn't know what he was going to do next. Whenever the train stopped at a station for more than five minutes, Arthur would get off and phone ahead to Vancouver where Laura, on the other end, would either cry, yell or hang up on him.

By the time the train pulled into Regina, Lesley and Arthur were holding hands, hugging and having another beer in the club car, where the waiter said, "You hvo look so happy, you must be on your honeymoon!"

Lesley and Arthur giggled and giggled, and then, like fools or like chil-

dren playing house, they shyly agreed. The next thing they knew, there was a red rose in a silver vase on their table and everyone in the car was buying them drinks and calling out, "Congratulations!" over the clicking of the train. Arthur kept hugging Lesley against him and winking, first with the brown eye, then with the blue.

They spent the dark hours back in Arthur's coach seat, snuggling under a scratchy grey blanket, kissing and touching and curling around each other like cats. Lesley was so wrapped up in her fantasy of how Arthur would get off the train with her in Calgary or how she would stay on the train with him all the way to Vancouver and how, either way, her real life was about to begin, that she hardly noticed how brazen they were being until Arthur actually put it in, shuddered and clutched her to him.

Lesley wept when she got off the train in Calgary and Arthur Hoop wept too, but stayed on.

From her hotel room, Lesley wrote Arthur long sad letters and ordered up hamburgers and Chinese food from room service at odd hours of the day and night. On the fourth night, she called her mother collect in Winnipeg

and cried into the phone because she felt afraid of everything and she wanted to come home. Her mother, wise Amelia, said, "Give it two weeks before you decide. You know we'll always take you back, pumpkin."

By the end of the two weeks, Lesley had a basement apartment in a small town called Ventura, just outside of the city. She also had two job interviews, a kitten named Calypso, and a whole new outlook on life. She never did hear from Arthur Hoop and she wondered for a while what it was about trains, about men, the hypnotic rhythm of them, relentless, unremitting and irresistible, the way they would go straight to your head, and when would she ever learn?

It wasn't long before she was laughing to herself over what Arthur must have told the other passengers when she left him flat like that, on their honeymoon no less. □

*These are the first four stories of 'Railroading: Or, Twelve Small Stories with the Word "Train" in the Title,' by Diane Schoemperlen. A collection of her short fiction will be published by Macmillan in the spring of 1990.*

## CRY OF THE EAGLE

ENCOUNTERS WITH  
A CREE HEALER

David E. Young, Grant C. Ingram,  
and Lise Swartz

Medicine man Russell Willier has begun to share his healing practices with non-native people. This provocative study explores the effects of his herbal remedies, sweat-lodge therapy, religious ceremony, and other techniques.

\$19.95



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

# Battle reportage

*'What an odd, stunted family that not only has no kind words, but also no gestures'*

By Eleanor Wachtel



Joan Barfoot

## FAMILY NEWS

by Joan Barfoot

Macmillan, 288 pages, \$19.95 cloth  
(ISBN 0 7715 9933 2)

IS THERE anything new that can be said about the family? That happy ones are all alike and unhappy ones make good novels? It is perhaps surprising that in late '80s North America the family has become the focus of public as well as personal politics. At the same time that it is being exposed as a crucible of violence — maybe the most consistently violent peacetime venue — it, has become emblematic of conservatism. The family as bulwark against godless America. To be pm-family has come to mean anti-choice, homophobic, even fundamentalist

How did we lose that word to the reactionaries? Can it be reclaimed and rehabilitated? Novelists, especially women writers, continue to map its diversity, to trace its folds and ambiguities, its ineluctable hold on the psyche. They pursue a "domestic" circumference first delineated by Jane Austen. In fiction, the family is alive and pluralistic. And this is what intrigues Joan Barfoot — most evidently in *Family News*, her fourth novel.

Barfoot's first book, *Abm* (which won the W. H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award over a decade ago) was about escape from family. Its 43-year-old heroine leaves a perfectly good husband, two children, a dog, and a comfortable suburban home to hole up in a cabin in northern Ontario. Even when confronted nine years later by her 18-year-old daughter, *Abra* chooses to stay alone in the country. Barfoot said she wanted to explore what might have happened had Atwood's heroine in *Surfacing* remained behind, to write about someone who doesn't go back, but can live in isolation. *Abra* was translated into German and French; when it was published in England, it was called *Coining Ground*, which spelled it out. (It was favourably reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*.)

*Dancing in the Dark*, Barfoot's next novel, revolved around the housewife who stayed — and went mad. Edna, its 43-year-old heroine, invests everything in family and the home, complete with crumb-free toaster and spotless silverware. When she discovers her husband is involved with his secretary, she carves him up with her tomato knife, then wipes it clean before putting it away. After all, Edna followed the rules. She chose safety in marriage, and was betrayed.

Family was again at the centre of Barfoot's last novel, my favourite, *Dust for Three* — three generations of women. And unlike the earlier two, which were single-perspective monologues, here the voice is split, with chapters alternating between an obese 80-year-old widow and her 59-year-old daughter, who looks after her. (The third generation, a granddaughter, is present only by her imminent arrival.) Men have left this family, through death or departure. What remains is ambivalence, duty, and the claustrophobia of familial love, or what the Southern U.S. writer Robb Forman Dew has called, "the despairing sensation of homesickness that afflicts adults who are, in fact, home."

In *Family News*, Barfoot expands the

viewpoint further. She still has a 43-year-old herniae (curious, that), but the story is told also from the perspective of her 11-year-old daughter Lizzie, and Lizzie's 45-year-old father, Teddy. Each chapter begins with a clipping ostensibly from a newspaper, a bizarre account of families of one sort or another. And each chapter ends with an allusion back to that clipping, filtered by the sensibility of the particular narrator.

In an interview a couple of years ago, Joan Barfoot, who's worked for newspapers since high school (from her home town Owen Sound Sun-Times to the *Toronto Sunday Sun*, and currently, the *London Free Press*), acknowledged the limitations of journalism. Talking about how she started to write fiction in her early '30s, she said, 'I realized that if I wanted to write the sort of stories that interested me, I was going to have to make them up myself.'

In *Family News*, she does both — a novel about family and a series of quirky, evocative "hard news" stories. The first one, for example, concerns two elderly sisters who are crushed when the collection of newspapers lining their house caves in. They'd stacked thousands of papers and had to tunnel through the house from room to room on their hands and knees. This oddity prompts Susannah, the middle-aged woman at the centre of *Family News*, to reflect on her own sister and the very separate lives they've chosen to lead, not cozily connected inside a womb of newsprint.

Susannah is a freelance journalist who writes primarily for women's magazines. Although she once dreamed of being a glamorous foreign correspondent, she now does "a different sort of battle reportage: dispatches from the field of domestic flare-ups; rumours from the front lines of distress." When we meet her, she's working on a profile of *Ida Lovender*, Woman of the Year for *Aura* magazine. *Ida* was brutalized by her first husband, who threw a pot of boiling water at her. *Ida*'s visible scars — "one side of her face purple and patched, skin puckered, the eye on that side squinting" — will be a shock to the magazine's editor, committed to featuring her on the cover. *Susannah* compares this with what she thinks of as her own invisible scars, also etched by family.

When *Susannah* was nearing 30, she decided to create her own small family by having a child. She chose her old boyfriend, *Teddy*, a confirmed bachelor, to be the father and seduced him by wearing black velvet at a candlelight and

nine dinner. Mission accomplished, headstrong **Susannah** went back to her "whitebread" small hometown to tell her folks to prepare to be grandparents. They disowned her. Her father called her a slut, her mother followed her father's lead, and her older sister told **Susannah** she'd be a bad influence on her own children. None of them talked to **Susannah** for 14 years. As the novel opens, **Susannah's** father has died and she and Lizzie go home for the funeral. For Lizzie, her small family doubles overnight when she meets a brand new grandmother and aunt.

What an odd, stunted family, though, that not only has no kind words, but also no gestures. Their estrangement can hardly be just a matter of a few moments of fury years ago, then. There must be a strong sod continuing thread of separation that reaches beyond memory. Estrangement as a bond — now there's a piece of family absurdity.

While **Susannah** and **Lizzie** reconnect with the past, **Teddy**, an aging womanizer, finds himself seeking family, or at least a good woman to take care of him. A politically active artist who paints street people, **Teddy** is arrested while demonstrating outside the American consulate. During the five days he

spends in jail, he decides he wants to formally limit his freedom by marrying a nurse he recently met and perhaps have another child. **Teddy** is **Barfoot's** first male hero and she's created a pleasant, somewhat shallow man, vain, self-conscious, and egotistical. Perhaps we are still getting **Susannah's** viewpoint, after all. **Lizzie**, on the other hand, seems a little too good. Here, the import would seem to be that carefully chosen families, however compact, are best.

*Family News* is a detailed, slowly told story, with overlapping perspectives on not very much happening. The dialogue isn't always sure, but the writing is heartfelt and unadorned, as for example in **Susannah's** final musings:

It does seem to be a matter of the small things: an emphasis on the rich, sad, terrible, joyful, and irretrievable details, all the stories and voices and moments of touch. They may have separate wonders of their own, but they do also add up finally to a few enormous things. Like death, like love.

The quietness of the story is punctuated by the sensationalism of the clippings. And the ordinary can never quite compete. Ultimately, truth — even apparent truth — is not only stranger than fiction, but more compelling. □

## Madness and logic

*Futurologists plot our lives in advance, limiting our ideas of what can or cannot be done. Their rationalizations are little more than an attempt at control*

By Brian Fawcett

### FUTUREHYPE: THE TYRANNY OF PROPHECY

by Max Dublin  
Viking (Penguin), 320 pages, \$24.95 cloth  
(ISBN 0 670 82445 3)

IN THE 20th century, futurology has become big business in more ways than most of us are aware of. We remember the Gyro Gearloose cartoons of cities of the future that used to appear on the back covers of comic books, and daytime radio, television, and the tabloids are now full of technocratic pronouncements by media futurologists like Frank Ogden. While that's pretty silly stuff, it shouldn't trick us into thinking that all futurology is inconsequential. It has a side that is deadly serious, and has gained an extraordinary degree of influence over our world. Most of that influ-

ence, according to Max Dublin's brilliant analysis of this largely subliminal or covert industry, has been socially and culturally destructive. And its influence is growing.

Max Dublin is not this year's John Naisbitt, and *FutureHype* is not this year's version of *Megatrends*. In fact, the book is the antidote to the recent deluge of futurology tomes that instruct us on everything from how to cash in on economic chaos to how to induce a state of moral and intellectual coma in the face of nuclear insanity. Dublin himself (who teaches at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, in Toronto) might be the first major social and cybernetic thinker to emerge in Canada since Marshall McLuhan.

Unlike the often flighty McLuhan,

Explore and discover  
Canada's natural resources

### THE IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO THE TREES OF CANADA

by Jean Lauriault

A comprehensive guide to everree species in Canada including location maps show in where they are found, and detailed studies of the leaves and fruit, if any.

Simply formatted, accessible and beautifully illustrated Index.

\$25.00 cloth

### FAMOUS MINERAL LOCALITIES OF CANADA

by Joel D. Grice

Magnificent colour photographs enhance an informative and absorbing text, which includes scientific fact, historical information, interesting anecdotes and practical advice for the amateur collector.

\$22.95 cloth

Co-published with the National Museum of Natural Sciences, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.

Fitzhenry & Whiteside  
Publishers of the Funk & Wagnalls  
Canadian College Dictionary



Dublin sets out to delineate the present crisis, not to unfold the grand scheme of the future. His research is remarkably **untrammelled** (and **untrampled**) by sacred cattle — a **rare** delight in itself — and the range of his knowledge is wide and heterodox. Yet the erudition is unobtrusive, as befits a man who looks to **George Orwell** rather than James Joyce for his **intellectual** method.

*FutureHype* begins by outlining the pathology of futurology by **examining** its psychological and ideological bases, both in the West and in the Soviet bloc. In tracing it back to a common root in **Hegel's** impulse to eliminate **contingency**. Dublin is no kinder to **Marxism's** strain of futurology than to our own. From there, he looks at the effects of **futurological** thinking in its three most **influential** spheres of activity: education, health, and military planning. In the **rather** frightening section on military planning, he demonstrates with **startling clarity** that madness and logic **are** not enemies but **twins**. As a bonus, his **arguments** charbroil people like Henry Kissinger and Herman Kahn without mercy. The analyses of educational and health futurology are no less penetrating.

Hera's the basic argument of *FutureHype* (with apologies to the author for attempting to summarize an enormously

rich and complex text in so short a space). At the core of all **futurology**, Dublin argues, is first and foremost a logic, and **an** essentially brainless **proclivity** towards worship of the exclusionary powers logical **fulfilment** offers. What we are trading, in our enthusiasm for futurology, is our capacity to integrate contingencies and to make the humane **contextualizations** on which **civilized** behaviour has always depended. "...prophecy today," Dublin writes,

can be **regarded** as being no **more** than an attempt by self-appointed **experts** to **rationalize** the **future**, along with **everything** else under the sun. Rationalization today has become **little** more than an **attempt** to order and control just about **everything** by pressing it into the mold of formal logic, and into the **paltry** calculus of formal means geared toward the **achievement** of what usually turn out to be **extremely** narrow ends. In the **process** of trying to fit **everything** into this mold, we are constantly deluding ourselves about what can and cannot be done

**Most** of the predictions that have **dominated** social, economic, and military planning over the last four decades have been **binary** extrapolations of what is already visibly happening. Nearly always the predictions have been **linear** extensions of short-term trends, and **some-**

**times** they have been logarithmic **extrapolations**. They're also imbued with a **dangerously** aggressive and inhumane **kind** of **stupidity**, and their power tends to engender the same in us. They **encourage** us to live in an **artificially** narrow future, moving us past the **complexities** of the present, to the exploitation of **short-term opportunities** that have a **demonstrated** tendency to blow up in **our** collective and **individual** faces when **tomorrow** actually **arrives**. He concludes that

The attack on human freedom by modern prophecy is **perhaps** the most disturbing aspect of **futurology**. Squeezed between the "terror of history" and the "tyranny of prophecy," people today. **∴** find they have **little** room to **manoeuvre**. No wonder **our** prophets **appeal**, as Orwell observed, to **our** fear and **our** **craving** for power: **these** are **precisely** the **drives** that **dominate** those who feel **trapped**.

The **truth** of the matter is that Dublin is himself a prophet, but not a **futurologist**. In the Old Testament, prophets **were** usually slightly crazed and cranky **outsiders** who excoriated the tribe for their sinfulness and lack of foresight, and made dire predictions about what **would** happen if they didn't **clean** up their act. Among them, the prophet **Jeremiah** was the **crankiest**, but he was also perhaps the best **informed**. He was **fond** of **sitting** atop the **bills** overlooking the encampment, a **vantage** point that allowed **him** to see the **idiotic** **behaviour** of his **compatriots**, and, off in the **distance**, the smoke and dust of the oncoming **barbarians**.

That **pretty** much describes Dublin's position: **Yet** *FutureHype* is considerably more than a **jeremiad**. For all his brilliance and insight into a dangerous **situation**, Dublin exercises a profound sense of **humour**, and at **key** points in his arguments he has the good instinct to **expose** what is ridiculous with wit and laughter, albeit without **letting** anyone or **anything** off the **hook**. The result is a highly readable book that is of great penetration and **urgency**.

As a former urban **planner**, I'd **recommend** that this book be made **compulsory** reading for anyone involved in the profession as either a student or a functionary. I suspect that *FutureHype's* pertinence to **other** professions, given the general crisis of method our society is mired in, is equally crucial. For the **general** reader, at whom the book is **accurately** and **accessibly** aimed, there is a wealth of **insights** about our **society** — **insights** that no one else has expressed **quite** so clearly.

So buy this book. Read it from cover to cover. □

## The Humour Magazine With a Cutting Edge

Tired of taxes? Sick of uncivil civil servants? Want to put politicians in their place? Don't get mad—get *Flash!*

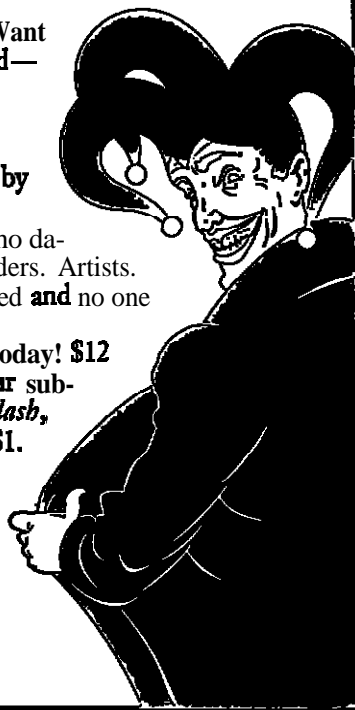
*Flash* is a new kind of Canadian magazine. Fearless, freethinking, and ferociously funny. The kind of magazine that dares to be known by outrage alone. Your kind of magazine.

Each issue takes dead aim at the people who deserve it. Politicians. Businessmen. Union leaders. Artists. Athletes. And everybody else. Nothing is sacred and no one is safe in *Flash*.

So what are you waiting for? Subscribe today! \$12 gets you four fun-filled issues. To order your subscription, send your cheque for \$12 to *Flash*, 134-2619 Alma Street, Vancouver BC V6R 3S1. And let us get even for you.

# FLASH

FOUR ISSUES FOR ONLY \$12



# BOOK REVIEWS

## In the land of the savage

By Myrna Kostash

### BREAKING WITH HISTORY

by Lawrence Martin

Doubleday, 320 pages, \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 0 395 25230 7)

**BACK** in 1986 it was one of our more perverse pleasures at the breakfast table to read Lawrence Martin's rookie column from Moscow in the *Globe* and *Mail*. What stupendously naïve observation would he have to make this day about Soviet society—its agreeable orderliness? its soulfulness? its heart-warming collective-mindedness?

Granted, Martin had a worthy aim: to break Canadians' dependence on American media interpretations of the Evil Empire, to deliver something other than the "stereotype story" of the "god-damned emissaries," as Ben Bradlee, ensui-ridden editor of the Washington *Post*, put it, to uncover for himself the astonishing revelation that Russians don't have fangs. I'm sorry to say, however, that having a Canadian in a Moscow bureau doesn't guarantee us a perceptive or thoughtful alternative account.

There is one enormous difference in Martin's perspective between those initially artless columns and the book he has written after finishing his three-year stint in Moscow: he no longer tries to cover up for the sheer awfulness of everyday life in the Soviet Union. In fact, he admits to "gaffes of judgement" and goes on to give a vivid and pungent report of its misery at the level of the food shop, the restaurant, the provincial hlllway. But this is the standard stuff of travellers' accounts, not to mention of the current Soviet press itself.

More interesting are his out-of-the-ordinary experiences. May Day, 1986, for ex-

ample, when local television gave 55 minutes to coverage of the official parade, and less than a minute to Chomobyl (the usual spelling, Chernobyl, is a Russian variant of the name of this Ukrainian city). His visit to Kabul, where he was advised to look as un-Russian as possible to avoid being beaten to death by an Afghan citizen. His visit to Magadan in Siberia, a city where no one would talk to him about the slave labour that had toiled in the nearby gold mines.

Judging from hll conversations with all kinds of folk from collective-farm man-s to prostitutes, he seems to have covered quite a bit of social territory, although it's by no means clear how many of these contacts were casual and how many he spoke to without an interpreter. He is a genial narrator. But halfway through the book I began to find his breezy, gee-whiz tone a little irritating, hll indiscriminate piling up of glasnost anecdotes wearing. Martin sees all, hears all, but hasn't a very good idea what to do with it.

I find it appalling, for example, that a journalist who spent three years in the Soviet Union falls to note that the official celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in Russia (sic) was a usurpation of an event that belonged to Kiev, in Ukraine, and to the suppressed Ukrainian Orthodox church, a suppression he liiwise fails to note in his tender admiration of the Kremlin's "fresh face" turned to religion. That he talks about the "ethnic" passion and turmoil of the Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the same paragraph in which he refers to the 198 nationalities of the Soviet Union, as though these



were squabbling grouplets of minorities rather than nations in struggle with the bonds of empire. That he has recourse to that patronizing bromide of bored westerners abroad in the laud of the savage: that Russians, not yet "spoiled" by technology, are "closer to the soil, closer to literature, capable of running greater depths of feeling," etc., as though this were something other than a people made to endure chronic shortages, economic underdevelopment and terrorization of their very self-expression, in language, in literature, in personal relations. To lake relief, as Martin does, in their lack of "materialism" is to demonstrate foolishness as well as condescension: while Martin blisses out on commercial-free Soviet television programming, the boys and girls of Khreschatyk Boulevard lay out hard-earned rubles for T-shirts that say Coca-Cola.

But all these materials are background; foregrounded in the book in unwavering, dazzling light is Mikhail Gorbachev. "From day one," Martin writes, "I had taken a highly positive line on Gorbachev. My instincts told me to believe him. . . ." One could wish of a journalist, even a perspicacious Canadian one, a more rigorous guide than his instinctual self. Some superego is in order here as we encounter, over and over again, without the slightest note of enquiry or even skepticism, the White Tornado of the Kremlin, this bolt of pure energy, passionate idealism, and moral superiority cleaning up the Stalinist m&s in all comers of the realm. Or as Martin refers to him in all serlousness: the Great Red Hope.

This is not to deny the heroic effort of those elements of the political leadership seeking to drag the Soviet Union into the 1960s. But Martin makes two large mistakes, it seems to me. One is

to fail to understand his man, a mistake that Soviet journalists do not make: far from being a revolutionary or even a maverick, Gorbachev is the establishment the Party secretary who has appointed more KGB alumni to the Politburo than anyone before him, a centrist trying to cover both flanks, and a post-Stalinist whose realization of the necessity of changing the system comes from the system's breakdown, not from the needs of his own personality. Secondly, Martin shows, by the very title of the book, little sense of history — how societies get from A to B. In his view, Gorbachev is the Great Tsar who will take matters into his own hands, banish the bad advisers and sign the decrees liberating the peasants. In this dew, the 72 million participants in 40,000 unofficial grassroots groups do not exist, there are no tear-gassed miners, arrested Helsinki monitors, underground worshippers, exiled schoolteachers, dead poets — all those unsung citizens whose collective and accumulated experience, "in the depths," of self-organization, resistance, and imagination made faith with a reconstructed Soviet reality long before the glittery arrival of the Great Red Hope and his noisy retinue. □

## How it must be

By Gary Draper

### WORMWOOD

by Sean Virgo

Exile Editions (General), 172 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 19 3)

SEAN VIRGO is a restless writer who thrives on challenge.

He does not, for example, restrict himself to a single form: he has published poetry, short stories, and a novel. *Wormwood* is his most recent collection of short fiction, and it benefits from the author's experience in other forms.

Like poems, these stories are condensed and highly polished. But they also have the narrative power of much longer works.

*Wormwood* is a book that can literally take the reader's breath away, primarily because of the shattering intensity of some of the stories, and because of the astonishing breadth of the writer's imagination and craft. The stories here are haunting, beautiful, intense, naturalistic, mythic, occasionally funny, frequently disturbing, always credible, always absorbing.

Let's start with diversity. In 10 stories, Virgo takes the reader from Ontario's small towns and cottage country, across the Canadian prairie to the west coast, then outward to Ireland, to Melanesia, to a nameless (but vividly real) Third World battleground. Nothing is lost here: every world is fully realized, largely because the author has an eye (and an ear, and a nose — this is a very sensual book) for the telling detail.

His people range from the very young to very old; they are male and female, stupid, clever, sensitive, brutal. Four of the stories are told in the first person, and the four narrators are all very different from one another, and all utterly convincing. They are, in turn, a writer visiting the Solomons, a self-educated water diviner on the prairies, a young man being held in custody in Ireland for possession of a gun, and Lilith, drawn from the lustful, vampire-like woman of Jewish legend. It is possible, I think, to tune in to the voices anywhere and know which story you're in. Piper, the prairie rainmaker, pauses after his first Rood of narrative to say, "That has to be the most words I ever set down on paper since I quit school." Lilith opens the story named for her with these words: "I woke to the cry of the stones. The moisture that seeps through my walls was calling me."

There is equally a remarkable variety of tone and subject here. "Alex," for example,



is an aging Ukrainian immigrant to Canada whose past and present don't add up to a manageable whole. His deafness a symbol of his inability to understand the world that has changed around him. "Snake Oil," based on an atrocity that occurred in Guatemala in 1982, is a horrifying depiction of man's inhumanity. Both stories are absolutely credible. One of Virgo's strengths is that he can take the reader into lives and places far, far removed from the reader's own, and make the reader say, "Yes, this is how it must be. This is how life feels." "Running on Empty" is a wickedly funny tail tale about (among other things) looking for rain in the drought-stricken prairies and finding love (more or less) instead. Life feels like this, too.

Unity is not a necessary virtue of short story collections, though the presence of some ties that bind is always a bonus. What, if anything, holds this book together? First, the wonderful crag of the writer, the sheer technical achievement of the prose itself. Consider, for example, the opening lines from "The Running of the Deer":

The air outside the church was alive and sparking. Ice motes swarmed, winking, around the clouds of breath on the steps, and the sidewalk and ears were aglint with hoar frost, the bare trees furred with it. In one hour, the world had changed.

The prose is rhythmic without drawing attention to its rhythm. The brevity of the concluding sentence mirrors the brevity of the time it means to convey. Words like "sparkling" and "winking" and, more surprisingly, "aglint" convey perfectly the interplay of light and frozen air. This is a story about — among other things — the passage of time. The opening paragraph introduces the

reader to that mystery without hitting him over the head with it. Finally, one can't help noticing the importance of the natural world in this little church-porch scene, more especially the wonderful aliveness of the "furred" trees, the "swarming" ice-motes.

What holds the book together, besides fine writing? Primarily it is the recurrence, within the rich variety, of certain themes and images. Almost all the stories touch in some way on the relation of man to nature. In some (most notably, perhaps, the title story) there is a clear conflict between the forces of civilization and the forces of the wilderness. In others (such as "Running on Empty" or "Lilith") there is a mythic sense of the deep interpenetration of human and natural forces. Animals figure very largely in these stories, not always as obviously as the metaphorical "iguanas" of "Snake Oil" or the literal bear of Wormwood." Bears, incidentally, are glimpsed in the shadows of these stories often enough to serve as a kind of totemic device.

The other major theme here is change. The stories frequently deal with people in moments of crisis, trying to adapt to new — and sometimes shocking — realities. There is also historical change: characters remember or pursue their pasts. An important recurring idea is that of alteration: the bear in "Wormwood" identifies the painful presence of humanity by the "altered" things. The life of the miracle worker of "Snake Oil" was changed when, in his tenth year, "the unclouded voice of alterations had come to him."

Is there anything not to like? Yes. I hope that Seán Virgo is better served by his editors and his proof-readers in his next book. He deserves to be. It may seem churlish to complain about typographical faults, but they are so frequent in this book that I found myself regularly being taken from the story. A story is a spell, a ritual, made of words. A word that doesn't make

sense breaks the spell, disrupts the ritual, and takes the reader from inside the story back to the surface. I was taken to the surface so often by typos in this book that I started to get the bends. It is very frustrating to be awakened from Virgo's powerful dreams by "writtem," "apologize," "venemous," "privilege," "termor," "amd," "aain." And the editor who did not tell Seán Virgo that the word "alright" is an ungainly, distracting blot on the page did both the writer and his readers a real disservice. What's happening at Exile Editions? People who are smart enough to publish a book this good should be smart enough to keep it with the care it deserves.

This is a splendid collection of stories by a writer at the peak of his form. Or maybe that's not fair to say. There may be greater challenges and achievements yet to come. Better to say, perhaps, that for now there are peaks enough in Wormwood to satisfy the most demanding reader. □

## Choosing a life

By Barbara Novak

### AFTER THE FIRE

by Jane Rule

Macmillan, 252 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 7715 9529 8)

RELATIONSHIPS — between friends, lovers, or family members — are at the heart of Jane Rule's fiction. Yet her novels are about individuals, not relationships: she reminds us that relationships have no existence apart from the people who form them.

After the Fire begins with a death and ends some nine months later with a birth. The relationship that results in this birth is a virtual non-event, over before the novel begins, significant only in that it created a new life. At the other extreme is the relationship between Henrietta and Hart. In just a few deftly written passages, Rule conveys

the depth of low and respect, of interdependence and commitment, that forms the basis of their long and successful marriage. And with great sensitivity, compassion, and even humour she portrays the conflicts that arise for Henrietta when, through illness, the man she loves gradually turns into a stranger. She visits him regularly on the mainland, where he now lives in an extended-care facility.

Between these extremes of indifference and love lies a wide range of emotional connections among the characters who people *After the Fire*. At the centre of the novel is 30-year-old Karen Tasuki, who is struggling to learn how to live alone, having fled Vancouver after the end of an eight-year love affair. Here on one of the Gulf Islands she has several possible role models. There's the above-mentioned Henrietta who lives alone, her spirits sustained by memories of her husband when he was still healthy.

Wholly accepting what had happened to him and who he was non might make visiting easier, but it would rob her of his companionship in her mind for all the time she was alone. She didn't lie about his condition even to herself, but she put it out of her mind.

From Henrietta, Karen learns something about the transitory nature of love.

Another island resident, the elderly Miss James, has always lived alone. Having run away from her family (who subsequently disinherited her), she travelled ailing over the world, earning a living as a teacher, until her retirement on the island. Karen admires the way Miss James has been able to make her own choices and take pleasure in them.

[Karen] was coming to understand that if she was to have a life, it must be a deliberate one. The exercising of choice at every level still seemed an exhausting and unnatural business, like collecting stage props before a play could begin. But unless she began, she might wait in the wings of her own life forever.

Karen recoils from Milly, a woman in her mid-40s, whose divorce has left her bitter and petulant, full of self-righteous certitude about how people ought to behave. And Karen befriends a young woman named Bed, who is much better at giving than receiving, and only gradually learning to trust. From her Karen learns something about the true nature of friendship.

While Karen learns something from each of these women, as characters they also develop and grow in their own right. There is nothing arbitrary or contrived in the plot; it is utterly believable that a group of people could influence one another in precisely the manner that these women do. The changes they undergo are relatively gentle, though significant, and are all the more realistic for that.

Occasionally, however, Rule's control of the structure falters. The most glaring example is where she ends one chapter with Henrietta driving off the ferry, having just returned from the mainland, and begins the next chapter back in time, with Henrietta still on the mainland. And she does, occasionally, have a tendency as author to intrude in the narrative: but her intrusions are so cleverly worded ("The healing wound of Karen's pride had begun to itch") that they would withstand even the most ruthless editor's pencil. □

## A circumstance of fragility

By Erin Mouré

### OUTLASTING THE LANDSCAPE

by Robert Hilles

Thistle-down, 63 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920633 61 7)

IN THIS age, finally, necessary poems are being written and published by women, scraping the edge of politesse and *politique* off the abuses endured in the hands of fathers and brothers, the crucial agony of discovering their objectness in this society. In contrast, a search for the male

poetic view uncovers (apart from perhaps in the work of Phil Hall) either silence (not a fit subject?) or a perpetuation of the unexamined self that leads to the same kinds of relationships (the not-me syndrome). Not so, for the most part, I think, Robert Hilles's new poems.

In his latest book, Hilles traces a poetry of love for his daughter Breanne, and this poetry is suffused with trust for the child, for the essential and critical independence of the child, the child never as an empty vessel to be filled with the ideology of dominance/otherness that shores up the maleness of this society. This trust, accompanied by an examination of self and a readiness to learn, on the part of the writer, is the opposite of what occurs when the father/child relationship is structured by an evidence of, a stain of, a circumstance of power. For that matter, it is the opposite of what occurs when the poem is structured by a circumstance of power,

the shored-up power of the writer, hiding, the perfect (manipulator) repository of cleverness or feeling.

Possibly because he doesn't work with a rhetorical, public surface that screams fury at the reader, Hilles's previous work (*The Surprise Element*, 1982; *An Angel in the Works*, 1983) has gone relatively unnoticed. Those who have noticed have appreciated his approach. Hilles, echoing the West Coast poets Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser who have influenced and perturbed him, isn't interested in "the poem" as iconic, lyrical whole where the author disappears behind a veil of "feeling." As a result (if in speaking of poetry one can use such a locution!) his work in longer sequential forms, using concentrated pronouns and syntactic turns, produces a quiet, meditative tone in which the reader sees the eye (I) (I) trying to speak itself without censoring its own incompleteness and decadence. In Hilles's love poems the figure of self/poem



Supply and Services  
Canada



Approvisionnement  
et Services Canada



## Weather Calendar 1990

150th Anniversary  
of the First Weather  
Report

True to its trivia tradition, this edition of the calendar is replete with meteorological events to astound, inform or amuse you every day of the year. It contains superb colour photographs as well as weather quizzes. The answers are to be found in Weather Flashes, the magazine section of the calendar. Also included are articles on weather that changed history, acid rain, 150 years of Canadian weather, and peak dates and times to observe those spectacular meteor showers.

Cat No. EN56-66-1990E \$ 9.95  
(Shipping and handling extra)

Available from associated bookstores  
or by mail from the

**Canadian Government  
Publishing Centre**  
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0S9





is not "angel" but "angel in the works."

In *Outlasting the Landscape*, Hilles has shrugged off the need to even elicit an angel. In these poems an experiential surface is used to explore and meditate on the nature of existence, death, our relation in language, the possibility of intimacy, the tremorous relation of male parent (the father) and child (the daughter). **Two charged words!** His approach is multifarious, not based on a split between the brain and body, and not centred in the father's ego or in his unquestioned assumption of "maleness." It is Hilles's most fully realized work to date: it is meditative but not self-focused, rather is rooted deeply in the clutter of the world (albeit a middle-class, white, comfortably urban world in the western hemisphere). The poems are durable as individual pieces, but are not "closed-in" as a book, as if he has brought the skills from the sequences of his earlier work, the turns and quiet rhythms, to extend the individual poem past "lyrical completeness," which is a lie anyhow. Here the poems are not lyrical fireworks where the author disappears and doesn't admit his own effect on "the view."

The work is more narrative than his earlier work and as such feels at first more conventional. But his narrative is not used as a hook and line to pull the readers through the author's magnificent insights, which emerge fully, as in a fable by Aesop, in the final lines. Rather, the narratives of the father and daughter, the father and his own father, the possible failures of "fatherness," emerge from the attentiveness to speech and words and material evidence of the world. Instead of on the story, the poems focus on how words and speech work, how language can discuss any one thing, or more than one thing.

How anger, love, incapacity are feelings that are intertwined and must be admitted and worked on.

A word that is repeatedly worked around is "fragility," the fragility of humanness and growth and love in the face of the world, the fragility of any feeling in our approach toward death, of any gesture. This fragility, and his recognition and admission of it, reduces posturing to zero. When Hilles does get to his 'self,' it's not as ego but as left and right brain, in two poems, one for each side of this brain:

*At night, I awake holding my head, the left hemisphere throbbing, anger growing like a cancer through the words folded together there. My life indented by the order, by the spark of nerve endings meeting. Mechanical devices are planted around my house to ease my descent into old age. I do not know the loneliness of each hemisphere encased so close to the other but strangers passing data like distant relatives pass dinner plates.*

*The right brain eats what the left cannot consume. It sleeps at night inside its cave of bone. For months it does not wake. Interpreting the world in its sleep. Relying on the left brain to hold up the system.*

His animal poems, too, are special: not the iconic animals of noise and power, the mammals who are safe because they resemble us, but poems to the human from the fly and the ant, and from the human to the crocodile. Of course, like all such creations of the imagination these voices show more about the author's impulses and ideological constructs than about the "animal" who speaks, but Hilles clearly uses this on purpose; he is speaking of himself, but has chosen to do it by not

making himself the centre. A necessary awareness!

The only thing I'm hesitant about in this collection is the usual lyrical support for the social structure of the middle-class, white family, in which the lyric/non-lyric image and base of "the family" is used without questioning its privilege, or its status as a doctrine. Of course, one might well argue, this is not the "goal" of the poems, nor can every poem engage in social critique. But there is something already in the vision of "the family" that, unquestioned, perpetuates one and only one vision of family: the hetero couple, their children. Not all of us live in these families, and we still pay taxes! My only quibble. I don't mean to say Hilles's poetry should represent something for everyone, or speak outside of his experience, but the hegemony of the image should at least be named, noticed.

Still, Hilles does often question the purpose and role of writing itself, and thus break its 'purity' of surface: "I am trying to say what is beautiful and what isn't as if measuring was a real instinct!" This awareness of the false surface of words helps him question the power in relationships with others: addressing his daughter, in the poem "Tone and Light," he says: "My daughter is not you," knowing what he has created does not and cannot over speak for her. Leaving her room to speak for herself.

I respect that. How many other Ports. and fathers, can open as much space as they take up? □

## Family happiness

By Kent Thompson

### HOMESICK

by Guy Vanderhaeghe  
McClelland & Stewart, 292 pages,  
\$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 8695 4)

IT WON'T alter your mind any.

Guy Vanderhaeghe's new novel *Homesick* is a book that you can put on — some of us

can put on -like an old coat. A familiar coat. But a good coat, a coat made to last the years, a coat that is never out of fashion, a coat to be admired. This is a very good novel.

But not flashy. It is written about and perhaps for those of us who live in or grew up in small rural towns — with the garage, the hotel, the Bluebird Restaurant, the feed store, and the old man who talk to one another in grunts and pauses and frequently disagree.

Alec Monkman is one of those men. He's made a lot of money without exactly meaning to; he took it up to occupy his mind after his wife died. He's a cantankerous old coot (now), and his daughter Vera is equally stubborn. Two of a kind. Pot calling the kettle black. When his wife died Alec Monkman thought it only right and natural to take Vera out of high school to keep house for him and the boy, Earl. He "ever does see he did anything wrong. Vera never forgives him, and runs off (it is the middle of World War II) to join the Canadian Women's Army Corps and makes her way as best she can after that.

One of her jobs is that of a usherette in a city cinema, where her rough tongue is an asset. But the projectionist he comes an unwanted suitor, and one of the funniest scenes in the novel is the marriage proposal he makes while she's hiding in the bathroom. Moreover, he won't take no for an answer, and the ensulug pursuit leads to a broke shop-window and Vera's brief but happy marriage to the shop-owner, a educated, exotic (to Vera — he's Jewish) man who dies suddenly, leaving her with a son. It is because she fears her son is being corrupted by the city (he's wearing his hair in a DA., for heaven's sake) that she decides to return home, where she and the old man don't get along any better than they ever did. You'll probably recognize them: you'll know people like them.

But that's not the excel-

lence of the novel. The value of the novel is that Vanderhaeghe demonstrates that there is no such thing as an **unmixed** motive or an uncomplicated emotion. Vera assumes her father has neglected her mother's grave because, to her mind, that's exactly **the kind of thing** he would do. So with her son she marches off to the cemetery to put **things** proper — **only** to find that a new stone has **been** erected and, what's more, the **site** has bee" carefully tended, and recently. She's outraged. Her expectations have been denied and **her** moral conceit revealed.

And her father, although he neither repents nor **apologues** for **taking** her out of high school, simply **will** not play the **villain**. He's **kind** and generous to a number **of** aged layabouts **whom** she wants to sweep out of the house, including one Huff **Driesen**, a foul-mouthed, lecherous, drunken old diabetic. Old **Monkman** gives **him** his injections when **Driesen** is too scared to go home and face **his** daughter. So Vera **is** persuaded to do the job (she does) and old Huff exposes himself (stupid old **fool**) and she takes the broom to **him** — **and** moves out of the house **with** her soil.

Alice Munro has demonstrated in her **fiction** that **life** in a small rural town is hard and frequently savage. There isn't the **comforting** veneer of urban civilization to induce delusions about humanity. But for Vanderhaeghe there is not only a great deal of **general** wickedness and stupidity in a small town, but also (as old **Monkman** and **his** grandson Daniel demonstrate) some virtuous acts, and even virtuous people. Mr. **Stutz**, right-hand man to Alec **Monkman** in **his** business enterprises, is such a person. He is a Christian. Not a **born-again** Christian, not a **prosely-**

**tizer**, but a quiet Christian who, without **saying** so, dedicates his **life** to serving others. He helps old Alec, night and day. He helps Vera and her son. You won't **find** his like in too many modern **novels**, but he is not so rare as you **might think** in small rural towns.

If you have a background anything like mine, you'll probably enjoy Homesick for its recognizable people and its home truths. It is, as we expect **from** Guy Vanderhaeghe, extremely well written. But the value of the novel is more **than that**. Vanderhaeghe set" out to demonstrate **virtue** in all its **difficulty**. It **ain't** easy — either to achieve **virtue** or to write about it. But Vanderhaeghe succeeds. It is a fine, rare **accomplishment**.

Not recommended for urban **postmodernists**. □

## It's a battlefield

By H. R. Percy

### THE LIFE OF GRAHAM GREENE: VOLUME ONE, 1904-1939

by Norman Sherry

Lester & Orpen Dennys, 783 pages, \$28.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 229 3)

**FREQUENTLY**, during the earlier chapters of this biography, I had the feeling that I was **learning** more about the Me of **Graham** Greene than I cared to know ("He cut his first tooth on 6 July 1905"), and with some 750 pages and another volume looming ahead I read on with apprehension; yet by the end of the book I found myself regretting there was not more.

One reason for my conversion was that the author quotes copiously from the **writings**, including the letters and **diaries**, of **his** subject, and **over** the 35-year span of the book both the **life** of **Graham** Greene and the **writing** style that Mr. Sherry demonstrates as evolving **from** it **gain** vastly in interest and **significance**.

This is not to **denigrate** the **writing** of Mr. Sherry **himself**. Indeed, there are **times** when it **would** have bee" preferable



National Library of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

## EXHIBITION

# "Let Us Compare Mythologies"

## Half a Century of Canadian Poetry in English

October 27, 1989 to March 25, 1990

395 Wellington St.

Ottawa

9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Daily

1940 1950  
1960 1970  
1980

Canada





to an over-reliance on quotation. This is especially true of Greene's epistolary wooing of Vivien Dayrell-Browning, which went on prolifically from March 1925 until their marriage in October 1927. Not that Greene's letters to Vivien are lacking in significant and revealing passages, but these lie embedded in the tailings of the writer's extravagant and sometimes abject passion, which might have been better conveyed with a certain objectivity and with greater brevity. So enamoured of Miss Browning was Greene that he not only embarked for her sake on the conversion to Roman Catholicism that was to have such a profound influence on his work, but when she confessed to a morbid fear of sex he proposed to submit himself to the living hell of a celibate marriage. Because of the one-sidedness of this quoted correspondence, Vivien's views and feelings being deducible only through Greene's responses, she comes across unjustly as a frigid, even a cruel woman. It is only after their marriage (far from celibate) that she is revealed as a person capable of great warmth, devotion, and sacrifice.

Mr. Sherry finds himself at the start confronted with a clutter of incidental information, which he apparently resolved to get out of the way as directly as possible, so that only slowly does a discernible narrative emerge from this amorphousness.

Graham Greene's childhood, like many another writer's, was not happy. His family lived at Berkhamsted School, of which his father was headmaster. This alone was a liability to one of Greene's nervous and reticent temperament, especially when in 1918 he became a boarder instead of living at home. Perhaps inevitably, he became the butt of a subtle bully, as a result of whose persecutions, and his parents' failure to perceive the depth of his unhappiness, Greene made several clumsy attempts at suicide and eventually had a nervous breakdown. He was sent to

live with and receive treatment from a psychiatrist of dubious qualification but extraordinary insight, who at least gave his patient the will to rise above his introverted nature to face, and later deliberately to seek out, the harsher realities of life: But his mental and emotional stress remained such that in his early Oxford days he took to playing solitary games of Russian roulette: not, he explained, because he wished to die, but because he needed the exhilaration to dispel his fits of unutterable boredom.

With great skill and tenacity Mr. Sherry traces roots put down by these and later experiences through the dark strata of Greene's psyche until they break surface and burgeon magnificently in his later novels. Greene was, and apparently still is, a man of many dichotomies; and, as novelist Waker Allen is quoted as saying, of "powerful idiosyncrasy." His greatness lay not merely in turning these characteristics to his literary purpose, but in deliberately exploiting them to intensify and render more adventurous the life out of which his work was to grow.

It is surely no accident that the book becomes noticeably more intense and gripping at the point where, in 1933, Greene gets his first hazy glimpse of the blighted literary terrain and its tortured inhabitants — that battleground of good and evil — that has become known as Greenland, and that would give us *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, and subsequent masterpieces.

Thus in 1934 Greene persuaded his cousin Barbara, who had "just had a glass or two of champagne" to join him on a safari through the unexplored Interior of Liberia. Both were totally unaware of the difficulty and danger of such an enterprise, but in face of appalling hardship and privation they saw it through. Greene came away a changed man. with

a sense of something very old . . . very cruel, but with something dignified in its

dirt . . . and perhaps more worth preserving than the bright slick streamlined civilization which threatens it . . .

In 1938 Greene made, alone, an equally arduous and even more fruitful journey through Mexico, which his biographer many years later followed, as he had dogged the steps of all Greene's wanderings. Out of this Immediacy of observation comes a fascinating view of the novelist's accretion of experience and an equally fascinating insight into the creative process that produced *The Power and the Glory*. This alone makes the book a must for any serious student of fiction.

This biography has a sort of crescendo quality which parallels the growing intensity of Graham Greene's living and the increasing significance of his work. If at the outset one's response is lukewarm, one lays the book down in a bemused state of something like awe, and with regret that volume two is not immediately to hand. □

## Close to home and far away

By Helen Fogwill Porter

### BLIND DATE

by Susan Kerlake  
Pottersfield Press, 112 pages, \$9.95  
paper (ISBN 0 919001 53 X)

### WRITING HOME

by Barry Dempster  
Oberon, 191 pages, \$15.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88750 760 3)

BEFORE I read these two books I was familiar with the work of Susan Kerlake but had never read anything by Barry Dempster. Now I'm a fan of both writers.

Kerlake's unique touch in dealing with the frailty of human existence and relationships, her subtle yet sure handling of fear, terror, love, and guilt, have endeared her to a growing number of readers. In "You Are Here," as in most of the other stories in *Blind Date*, Kerlake tells us a little less than we need to know.



I'm sure this is deliberate; when I reflect back on such stories I see that she's right in holding back certain facts. When the young woman in this story leaves a building after looking at an apartment there she sees herself in a mirror in a shop window: "She checked herself over, each side, front and then back. A peculiar whitish spot was in the centre of the cloth. Oh God. Christ Almighty. Spit" We're not told why she and her husband are in this strange, threadbare city. But we know how they and the citizens feel.

We've seen so much television coverage of famine and death in the Third World that we're almost hardened to what goes on. A story like Kerlake's "Foreigner," telling as it does of a Canadian doctor's desperate struggle to understand the people she's serving, sets what's happening before us with horrifying clarity. After reading a bronze memorial plaque that tells in three languages of the generals and the brave men who had fought and died in battle, "We thought she'd gone to sleep standing up again, she got so quiet . . . Then she kicked dii on the words. . . ." Where does it say about the women and children?" she asks. "Where?"

Perhaps because most of the stories in the Kerlake collection are sombre I was happy to get to "Margaret's Dreams." Its tongue-in-cheek account of Margaret's close encounters with her New Age sister-in-law, newly named Tansy, gave me great pleasure and a few ideas.

Susan Kerlake's language is the language of a poet occasionally she overdoes it, with such phrases as "the signature of her ear," but most of the time she's right on.

Like Kerlake, Barry Dempster has a way with language but he is generally more orthodox in style. The stories in *Writing Home* are much



longer than those in *Blind Data*; they succeed equally well. However, **having** had no previous acquaintance **with Dempster's work**, I might well have stopped reading after the title story **if I** had not been asked to review the book. Once into the second story **I** realized that the **first** had been **mainly** an introduction to a series of tales about the inhabitants of **fictional Cliff Park Road** in Scarborough, Ontario. As one story ends and the next one begins the viewpoint switches from neighbour to **neighbour**, emphasizing the vast gulf between a person's own self-concept and the way another looks at **him** or her.

In "Beyond the Tomato-Patch," Marion Palmer, a **kind** of anti-hem who has trouble **with** alcohol and a number of other **things**, is **convinced** that all of his neighbours have made more of **their** lives than he has:

In the economy of love Marlon Palmer is **an** old green peony, a clinking heart. . . . There are no similarities between himself and Peter Wallace, a tall, handsome **man** who **rustles** when he walks as if his limbs are made of **something** organic, like leaves. To see Peter wheeling **Tammy** down the street is to catch a **glimpse** of chivalry.

But when Dempster takes us on to **Tammy** Wallace, Palmer's next-door **neighbour**, we **find** that chivalry is the last thing on **Tammy's** mind. As she sits alone in the wheelchair into which multiple sclerosis has forced **her**, she is tired of being the plucky **heroine** the world **expects** her to be. By the end of the day she has bruised the feelings of her teen-age daughter and **quarrelled** with her husband. **In** recent years **I've** read a great deal about the **rights** of the disabled but I've come across very few pieces of **fiction** from a disabled person's point of **view**. **Although** you might not **expect** to **find** it in such a story there's **humour** here, as **there** is in most of the other stories. but there's also compassion and, perhaps most important

of all, **understanding**.

The other **neighbours** are also well served by Barry Dempster. **Dash Ainslie** is in and out of the Queen Street Mental Health **Centre**, Walt Apple longs for a child and has his longing **misunderstood**. **After years of trying** to paint in the traditional way, Jo Wynters at last **almost literally** sees the light. But even then she must get all her house work and related **chores** done first: "Since painting is supposed to be a pleasure she ignores it" And so it goes.

The **stories in Writing Home** are vital and funny, **realistic** and sad. They are about **ordinary** people who **live** on an ordinary street. But wasn't it Margaret Laurence who told us that **there** are no **ordinary** people? **I'm** sure Barry Dempster agrees with her. And so does Susan Kerslake. □

## War babies

By Barbara Wade Rose

### THE DAY THEY TOOK THE CHILDREN

by Ben Wicks

Stoddart (General), 160 pages, \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 7737 23331)

**LAST YEAR** Ben Wicks published his **first** volume of reminiscences of British World War II child evacuees, *No Time to Wave Goodbye*. **With a foreword** by the actor Michael Caine, who was **himself** one of the evacuated children, the book presented hundreds of the 9,000 reminiscences by one-time British schoolchildren that **Wicks** and his **assistants** collected from over a year of research. They were interwoven **with Wicks's** narrative and account of **his** own experience with **four** sponsoring families in the English **countryside**.

*The Day They Took the Children* is **essentially** volume two of this collection, with more **first-hand** accounts by former **evacuees** and **even less narrative** than *No Time to Wave Goodbye*. **Once** again we follow the **children** from their homes and classrooms down to the train station, wave goodbye to weeping mothers,

and **ride with** them off **into** the **unknown**.

The **adventures** of the children varied **with** the **compassion** of the country people who had been paid a small stipend by the **British** government to take them in. Some were introduced to new-laid eggs and rich butter, and there are **many wistful** reminiscences of freshly baked bread. Others were not so well treated. One little girl was forbidden to sit with the rest of the family at dinner. Another was called a dirty pig by her sponsor when she began to menstruate. **Eleven-year-old** Sally Koklmsky was lucky enough to be billeted with a rich family, complete **with a chauffeur, a maid, and** a pampered daughter of their own. They were astonished when they discovered that Sally **washed** her own clothes every night **in** the sink. By the end of several weeks they were so impressed **with** her self-sufficiency **they** decided, **with** the insouciance of the British gentry, that they would **like** to keep her, some **thing** like an exotic household pet. **The** child was asked to choose **between** rich **food, exotic** holidays, personal servants and her own mother, who had been **invited** to tea to discuss the barter and sat "dumbstruck like an alien from another planet." **Sally** chose her mother. She recognized **that** the homesickness **she** was feeling was not being **affected** at all by the **wealth** around her

Modern-day parents who lose sleep **worrying** about the correct tone of their children's preschools **or** who **invest mortgage money** in the **proper** nanny are **light** years away from these **families** who, with a **wave** and a **kiss**, were **split** asunder for months and years. One six-year-old returned **from** a country village to **find** her mother **sitting** in the front **parlour** talking to a strange **man**. She **ignored** hi



until her **mother** pointed out **that** it was her father home on leave from the army. Yet it was the **British** evacuees who, **in spite** of **trauma** and homesickness for many of them, were the lucky ones — compared to their European **confreeres**.

*The Day They Took the Children* feels hastily put together **in** the wake of the success of *No Time to Wave Goodbye*. **It** may be **cathartic** for more of the former evacuees to put their experiences down on paper, but it **&es** **little** for the reader when their stories have not been assembled in any way **that** moves **the** book as a whole thematically or dramatically. Many of the same anecdotes are told by different people — trying to keep brothers **and** sisters **together**, feeling unwanted at the countryside station **while** other children are picked first **Reading** about them over and over has an unintended, **ironic** effect: the evacuee is again unwanted whose story is **the** seventh or **eighth** version of one wicks has already told. Repetitiveness was a minor complaint voiced by **critics** of *No Time to Wave Goodbye*. **In** a second book it becomes a major **fault**.

A **thoughtful** analysis of the success or **failure** of the **evacuation** would have been welcome. The program, which had been investigated as a possibility during wartime **as** early as 1924, was **the** largest of its kind in **British** history. **Of those** children whose parents chose to **defy** their government and keep them at home, 8,000 were killed by German bombs. Some of the evacuees moved closer to danger rather than away from it when the Allies retreated **northwards** in France towards **the** British southern coast **Of** the children who grew to **enjoy** wild **flowers** or farm **animals** or, if **they** were lucky, to love their foster families, some **still** have mixed memories of the experience. Most of **the** adults who had become parents told **Wicks** **they** would never let **their** own children be **taken** away **under** similar circumstances. □

# Dislocation

*Lori has what Sherri wants: a sense of place, one place, one home*

By Linda Granfield

ONE OF THE **birthday** guests in Jo Ellen Bogart's latest **picture-book**, 10 for Dinner, (Scholastic, 20 pages, \$11.95) surprises everyone with his creativity, guaranteeing he'll be **invited** back Young Margo has invited 10 **friends** to her party. Bogart presents **different combinations** of guests: 3 guests wore T-shirts and shorts, 1 guest wore a pink lace dress" and so on. The number of guests, and the **action**, changes **with** each illustrated page, challenging a **young** reader to keep track of the **numbers and solve** the mystery of the **enigmatic** person in the **Hallowe'en** devil costume. The **illustrations** by **Carlos Freire** are **colourful** and humorous and match the text precisely. Children can see **their own** reactions mirrored **in** the expressions of a wonderful cat, especially **when** the odd **guest** asks for "a peanut butter sandwich with olives **and** sauerkraut." Here's a guest who dares to be different yet doesn't alienate. And when the party is over, guess who stays to clean up? Bravo!

The strong editing and design of the Bogart **picture-book** is not matched in Patricia **Quinlan's** latest effort, Kevin's **Magic Ring** (Black Moss Press, 24 pages, \$4.95). Indeed, Black Moss, **in** publishing a book in this state, has done **the** author a disservice. First impressions do matter, to **the** purchaser as **well** as the reviewer, and it's hard to justify **spending** even \$4.95 **when**, to **begin with**, the author's name is misspelled on the cover. **Different type-faces** have **been** inserted where corrections were made,

punctuation has been left out, the typesetting has a "cut-and-paste" look, and there are **spacing** problems. The disappointing story **and** these **visual** elements detract from the vibrant illustrations and appealing cover design by **Jirina Marton**, whose tilted **settings** are alive with washes and **textures**.

A number of recent fiction titles for the young adult **explore** the theme of dislocation, of families moving from one province or country to another. The obvious parallel theme of adolescent angst and maturation is blended with a peek at **life** "abroad," **in** some cases more successfully than in others.

The opening line of **Prairie Pictures** by **Shirlee Smith Matheson** (McClelland & Stewart, 111 pages, \$9.95) is a **portent** of the writing to follow: "The town hung like a **necklace** of costume **jewellery** from the shoulders of the **Trans-Canada** highway." Ugh. Does a 12-year-old really **think** like this, or is **this** story being told by the character, Sherri **Farquhar**, as an adult years later? Confusion caused by this ambiguous narrative voice clouds the plot.

Young **Sherri's** father moves the **family** three **times** **in** a year because of his packing-plant job. The latest move has brought **them** to **Gardin**, Alberta a **month** before a **new** school year **and** an angry Sherri must face all those new kids. Neighbours provide **local colour** here, and as the **cover says** "times are tough." **Prairie** people are depicted as **lacking** intelligence and social **graces**. Good money made on the job only **creates** **greed** and

destruction. A trip to Dinosaur Park seems plopped in to **justify** the title of the book **Framing** bits at the beginning **and** end are the **only** "photos" offered the reader.

Perhaps the strongest **element** of the novel is the sub plot **involving** Sherri and **Lori** Swenson, the descendant of an original homesteader in the area. **Lori** has what Sherri wants, a sense of place, **one** place, one home, no more moving. But **Lori** and **Sherri** get lost in a confusion of sub plots, most of them inadequately developed. A year passes and Sherri gets what she's always wanted — the **family** heads back to **Calgary**. Too bad this "travelogue" left out so much.

Mary **Woodbury** likewise plants **11-year-old** Jenny in a new home and leaves the reader to listen to her complaints. **Where** in the World is Jenny **Parker?** (Groundwood, 141 pages, \$6.95) is a **television-drama** script **nothing** more. It's **hard** to imagine that any self-respecting **10-year-old** could read **this** book **without** laughing — and one has the **feeling** that the novel was not intended as a comedy. While the need for a story about terrorism is in itself questionable, the depiction of terrorists as people with whom a child could **battle** **successfully** is downright unconscionable. Newspapers and newscasts are filled **with** the bombings, murders, and kidnappings: no youngster should be led to believe a kid can be victorious because some terrorists are working the wrong way but for the right reasons.

Jenny Parker is a very **bad-**tempered character. Again, Dad's job takes the family **away**, in this case, to **Italy**, the land of sunshine and romance. However, **the** plot is as **unwieldy** as the **title**, **and** in the end, the reader doesn't **really** care very much about **Jenny's** adventures.

Camel Bells (Groundwood, 96 pages, \$8.95) is what the other two novels could have been. **The** author, **Janne**

Carlsson, won the **International** Fiction Contest-Sweden and the book was translated by Angela **Barnett-Lindberg**. This is a **sensitive** portrayal of young people attempting to come to **grips** with their **new** reality, here the Soviet **invasion** of Afghanistan. The **subject** sounds weighty, even off-putting, but the characters' come alive on the pages. Young **Hajdar** is by no means a boy without faults. Like **Jenny** and **Sherri**, Hajdar is a victim of circumstances: no one asks if he'd Eke to take hi **mother** and **sister** and flee to Pakistan under the worst conditions. His spirit and strength are remarkable, yet he **retains** the **naïveté** and curiosity of a younger child in the big city. **Life** is **changing** around Mm and he **is** changing with it, not resisting at every step.

Carlsson, unlike the other fiction authors mentioned, **depicts** **Afghani** daily life with **humour** and attention to detail: occasionally he overextends **this** "documentary" element. Young readers will be interested to learn that the country people don't wear glasses even when **they** need them, and will laugh at **Hajdar's** reaction to city dogs being kept **inside** houses **with** the family. To his community, dogs **are** unclean and **should** be kept outside the dwelling at all times. How strange the city is — and yet how wonderfully **entertaining** and dangerous.

Carlsson **provides** his characters with appropriate speech and reactions geared to their ages. Dialogue is swiftly paced; the plot is **well-**formed. A map of the places mentioned and a brief historical note give just enough information. **This** is the story of a boy and his nation and Carlsson never loses sight of that fact. Yes, "times are tough," but history **and** geography are only secondary in **Camel Balls**. Hajdar's **tale** is that of a child-hero who can find new strengths in **himself** and yet still **enjoy** a dream and a good laugh. □

# Death by drowning

*In Sandra Birdsell's spacious, strange first novel, an entire community is doomed to destruction by flood. Or is it?*

By Joyce Marshall

**FIVE** first novels in this lot, all but one by people who are already published writers in other fields, and at least three of such complexity and strangeness that they cry out for much more space than I'm able to give them.

Take Sandra Birdsell's *The Missing Child* (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 320 pages, \$24.95 cloth). A novel by a writer as skilled at the demanding form of the short story as Birdsell is an event A query too. Can she manage the larger form? Not to worry in this case. Here is all Birdsell's skill at fashioning prose, at homing in on detail, at carrying us further, and more surprisingly, than seems to be possible from what has been presented on the page. Here is spaciousness too. As well as the central figure of Minnie Pullman, who wanders about in galoshes summer and winter, talking to someone she calls Jeremy, Birdsell has given us the portrait of an entire community, Agassiz in this case — Mennonites, Métis, Mounties, a woman who mallows live frogs as a cm-e for cancer, a boy gifted with an instinctive knowledge of the Bible, chapter and verse, and other eccentrics of various stripes. The community seems threatened at the be pinning and by the time events have worked themselves out — murder and other deaths, ominous mutterings from native people, events many of which might

seem ludicrous if baldly recounted but have mythic force here — it is doomed to destruction by flood. Or is it? We're never quite sure how much we should accept, how much is the result simply of the rather curious workings of Minnie's mind. Only Minnie knows, as she drifts slowly downstream in the last pages, singing to herself.

Sharon Drache, also a short story writer, also, in *Ritual Slaughter* (Quarry Press, 166 pages, \$11.95 paper): offers a study of a community, a fictional Hasidic sect that she calls the Datschlavers. Led by the rebbe away from the temptations of Montreal, the sect has established itself in the Laurentians on the estate of Richard Vincennes, a wealthy French Canadian who protects the group and manages the abattoir by which it lives. The situation isn't particularly credible, nor are many of the events as they unfold (of little importance perhaps, now that consistency, or even reasonable inconsistency, of characterization is no longer a requirement of fiction). Still the book holds the interest, especially in the many fascinating pages devoted to the religious rituals of the sect, including those connected with the ritual baths women are required to take after menstruation. The community is fatally flawed. Vincennes, we discover (or rather Baruch, a renegade Datschlaver turned painter,

discovers when he returns home after the death of his father, the ritual slaughterer) has been bribed by the sexual favours of Baruch's sister Faigele. The hook ends with the community in shambles in every sense. Vincennes has sent the profits from the abattoir to Switzerland. Faigele has decided to go to Montreal to live as a Jew in her own way, and even the rebbe isn't what he seemed.

Marilyn Bowering has brought to *To All Appearances a Lady* (Random House, 325 pages, \$22.95 cloth) (an unfortunately arch and misleading title) the gift for compression and the spare sharpness of phrasing and imagery that mark the style of poets when they write prose. This is a ghost story — an account of the voyage of Robert Lamb, an ocean pilot in late middle age, up the coast of B.C. in the converted troller he's just purchased, accompanied by the ghost of Lam Fan, the Chinese woman who brought him up after the death of his white mother, her adopted sister, soon after his birth. He doesn't know that he's in search of his past, the circumstances of his birth, the identity of his father, until the ghost, a delightfully acerbic creation, makes it clear to him that this is so. As he copes with "real" storms and navigational difficulties (brilliantly described), the truth emerges — a tangled and tragic tale involving the opium trade and D'Arcy Island, an island off the B.C. coast on which lepers used to be dumped and left to fend for themselves. Having fulfilled her purpose, the ghost dematerializes. Robert is now ready to respond to life as he has never felt able to do before. Or is he? Have certain portents, which Bowering has chosen not to explain to us, been the planting of a final cruel irony? The novel ends with this question.

Then there is Larry Zolf. His *Scorpions for Sale* (Stoddart (General), 212

pages, \$26.95 cloth) can only by courtesy be called a novel. In a series of episodic chapters of scarcely disguised autobiography, each in itself a sketch or even short story, it recounts, not always chronologically, the progress of one Daniel Shtarker from childhood in North Winnipeg to a career in CBC television. Real characters wander in and out, sometimes permitted their actual names — A. A. Heaps (a CCF M.P.), Malcolm Mugeridge — sometimes weighted down with pseudonyms — Veronica Von Tren (Gerda Munsinger). I quickly got tired of trying to dig through these disguises. The childhood sequences are the best and liveliest in the book. (North Winnipeg never stales, it seems, as a subject for fiction.) After the death of the hero's father Menachem I became weary of the ins and outs of "Shtarker's" career as bad boy of television, complete with accounts of incidents we remember and other era that we had gratefully forgotten. This is a book for Zolf devotees, who may enjoy these insider glimpses. As for the section in which Zolf-Shtarker tries to answer the criticism that he is a Jew-hating Jew and the final coy (belated) appeal to us to buy the book, and the value of In&ding either of these in a novel, I leave this for the devotees to discover.

And what is there to say about Pat Dobie's *Pawn to Queen* (Pulp Press, 90 pages, \$6.95 paper), winner of the 11th International Three-Day Novel Contest? That it's a who dunit set in Vancouver and Toronto, the detective a tough-talking lesbian private eye, the victim an employee of an escort service. That Dobie clear-4 knows more about detective stories of the hard-boiled school than about the actual practicalities of police procedure. That events move swiftly if a shade too conveniently and there are no loose incidents or edges. What is the old saw about dogs dancing? □

# BOOK NEWS

AN ADVERTISING FEATURE

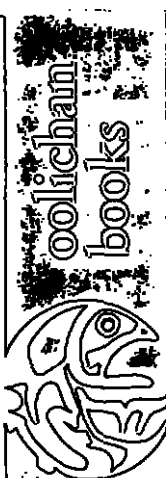
Gerrit  
Achterberg

## But This Land Has No End

Achterberg is regarded by many as the greatest poet to write in Dutch. His more than 900 poems place him in the company of other great 20th Century poets: Rilke, Mandelstam, Montale.

ISBN 0-88982-097-X  
Paperbound \$9.95

oolichan books  
Box 10, Lantzville, BC  
Canada V0R 2H0



# BREATHING WATER

a novel

JOAN CRATE

"A major change in our literary horizon."

—Robert Kroetsch

\$12.95 paperback ISBN: 0-920897-60-0

Nunatak Fiction Series

NeWest Press, Edmonton

## BROTHERS IN ARMS

Jordan Wheeler

Three compelling short stories. "Red Waves," "Hearse in Now" and "Exposure," make up this new release. All three deal with the relationships between long-estranged fraternal brothers who must overcome feelings of resentment and suspicion to once again establish family bond and learn hard truths.

ISBN: 0-921827-07-5; 4 1/2x7, 200pp, Sept. '89, \$6.95

Pemmican Publications: 412 McGregor St.,  
Winnipeg, Man. R2W 4X5

## LETTERS

### CAFÉ SOCIETY

I APPRECIATE Cary Fagan's interdisciplinary flair in calling my *The Merzbook: Kurt Schwitters Poems* "a little stage magic" (April, 1989). But in implying that *The Merzbook* represents a lonely child's nostalgia for the futurists, Fagan has misread both my work and the modernist myth itself.

First, Kurt Schwitters most emphatically did not "turn away from the art of the past." Bather, he expanded its range by the use of new materials: creating, for example, a sound poem as long as, and in the form of, a sonata. That the "anti-art" faction of modernists ridiculed Schwitters for such accommodation of old and new is merely one demonstration of the fact that the "avant-garde" was never a unanimous, eye-forward, military formation. The need of critics like Fagan to see it as such is in part responsible for Schwitters's comparative obscurity, and *The Merzbook* is meant, among other things, to upset that myth.

Second, Fagan misreads my own literary milieu as that of an isolated, disillusioned fantasist. On the contrary, I built *The Merzbook* as a framework on which to hang the diverse forms of written, visual, sound, and performance work I was already creating, especially in my exchanges with the composer Andrew McClure, Susan McMaster, a poet, the artist Claude Dupuis, and others in the collaborative group Fiit Draft. As the first audience for my Schwitters poems, they encouraged me, at our regular café meetings, to create more and to include in the series all the kinds of work I do.

This group involvement has since expanded through further collaborations, for example, with the filmmaker Ed Ackerman in the typewriter animation *Primiti Too Tea*, and with McClure and the director-dramaturge Jennifer Boyes in the stage show *Tks Cabbage of Paradise*. Both these works dialogue with documentary and biography to further explore the diverse obsessions on which art is raised. This is what Cary Fagan asks for, and I'm pleased to see he has found it in the books by Don Coles and D. G. Jones. I can't help wondering, though, whether those are the

books he understands partly because they reflect the myth of the alienated individual that Fagan has come looking for.

Colin Morton  
Ottawa

### CHARLES BRUCE

JON PEIRCE's review of Andrew Wainwright's hook on Charles Bruce (May) is malicious and cowardly.

Surely among the prime matters to be attended to in an objective review are discussing what the author means to do, saying what the author has done, and judging how intention and creation match. Peirce spends all his review describing the book he wanted to read, rather than Wainwright's book. Peirce ignores Wainwright's subtitle, "A Literary Biography," and insists that Wainwright should have written a biography. Ironically, had Wainwright done so, and omitted or shortened the analysis of manuscripts which I (inconceivably, according to Peirce) find both deeply interesting and moving evidence of Bruce's courage, patience, and creative loyalties, he would have collaborated in that neglect of Bruce as a writer which the book tries to rectify.

Ironically also, given his complaint that Wainwright has mismanaged the biographical part of his study, Peirce betrays a malice towards Bruce at several points. To say, for example, that Bruce's "contributions to Canadian journalism may well have been as great as his contributions to Canadian poetry and fiction" is to set up a pseudo-mathematical equivalence which, if it means anything other than Peirce's lack of clarity as a writer, proposes that Bruce's fiction and poetry cannot be judged as literature.

Peirce's review is cowardly because it pretends that the reviewer cares about Bruce's work and reputation. In fact if read carefully, the review reveals itself as a sustained attempt to make Bruce look inconsequential, muddled and evasive. Peirce has picked the easiest target of all: the dead. I think he has even managed to miss that. As for Wainwright and his editor, Elizabeth Eves, their names and work I knew before reading Peirce's review.

It has done **nothing** to change my opinion of them. Peirce, on the other hand, was **unknown** to me. Between the **beginning** and the end of his **review**, I **changed** my opinion of his talents and their possibilities **considerably**.

Peter Sanger  
Antigonish, N.S.

IN HIS review of *World Enough and Time: Charles Bruce, A Literary Biography* (May 1989), Jon Peirce is like Anse Gordon in Bruce's *The Channel Shore* — contemptuous of what he does **not** comprehend, with no sense at all of how he reveals himself when attacking others.

Andrew Wainwright  
Halifax

Jon Peirce replies:

I believe it was Coleridge who said that until one understands another person's ignorance, he



should consider himself ignorant of that person's understanding. Mr. Wainwright has no understanding whatever of my degree of ignorance on any subject and certainly has shown himself ignorant of my understanding in the case of his book.

Mr. Peter Sanger's diatribe is as far off base as anything I've read in 19 years of book reviewing, and I feel compelled to draw attention to his misrepresentation — I had almost said, deliberate falsification — of my attitude toward Charles Bruce. I must confess that his logic has eluded me altogether. As best I can determine, he appears to believe that any attack on a

book about any given author constitutes an attack on the author himself.

For the record, I take pleasure in retaining Bruce's *The Channel Shore* in my personal library. It is beyond me how Mr. Sanger can think I was attempting to malign the dead. Perhaps he resented my savage attack on Bruce's "clear, graceful prose style" or perhaps he simply could not stomach my description of *The Channel Shore* as a book of unquestioned merit and among the best regional novels ever produced in Canada. Now, it may be that this is the kind of language Mr. Sanger uses when he wishes to attack a book or an author. But to me such words suggest praise. The "attack" Mr. Sanger sees me as having made on Bruce is pure fiction — unlike his attack on me.

On the question of Bruce's contribution to journalism, I am at a loss to explain how even as loose an interpreter as Mr. Sanger could construe my remarks as a criticism. If anything, Bruce's journalistic achievements should add to his reputation.

The next time Mr. Sanger has the urge to write a letter like the one he has written in "reply" to my review, I hope he'll count to ten and the "reconsider and write a poem instead. Both poetry and criticism would be far better served.

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

## CanWit no. 141

By Barry Baldwin

IF MADAME Benoit had rewritten Oscar Wilde, the result might have been *Lady Windermere's Plan*, whilst W. O. Mitchell could well transmute Henry James into *Daisy Miller's Creek*. Competitors are invited to Canadianize other classics of world literature in similar style. The prize is \$25, and entries should be sent to CanWit no. 139, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide St E., Ste. 432, Toronto, Ontario M5A 3X9. Deadline for entries is October 22.

### RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 139

The invitation to make radical changes to Canadian literature by single-letter alterations of well-known titles produced a torrent of entries, including one from West Germany. Favourite novelties were *The Stoned Angel, Who Has Seen The Wine?*, and *Cocksore*, on almost everyone's list. I draw no conclusions as to what this may say about our readers' proclivities! By way of reproach, some titles made no sense, some competitors ignored the rules, and a few handwritten ones were illegible. Not an easy decision, but on balance Helen Tench of London, Ontario, put the most in and so gets the most out with a prize-winning entry that included:

*Always Tid the Healer*  
*Annals of the Pariah*  
*Cafés in the Desert*  
*The Handmaid's Talc*  
*Dome Game*  
*Wife before Man*

#### Honourable Mentions

*The Whitecoats of Jalna* — Keith Angus, Kemptville  
*Lazy Oracle* — Edward Franchuk, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu  
*The Livers of Girls and Women* — Alan Woodland, New Westminster  
*They Shall Inherit the Dearth* — J. Rouse, Toronto  
*Surf Racing* — Ed Hall, Yellowknife  
*Hybe Springs Eternal* — Mary Benham, Winnipeg  
*My Lovely Enema* — Brian Busby & friends, Montreal

## 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:

*Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*, edited by Linda Kealey and Joan Sanger, U of T.  
*Blisters and Bliss: A Trekker's Guide to Vancouver Island's West Coast Trail*, by David Foster and Wayne Aitken, Cloudcap (U.S.A.).  
*The Canadian Buyer's Guide to Life Insurance*, by William McLeod, Prentice-Hall.  
*Canadian Culture at the Crossroads*, ECW.  
*Capital Poets*, edited by Colin Morton, Guroboros.  
*A Casual Brutality*, by Neil Bissoondath, Penguin.  
*The Century That Made Us*, by George Woodcock, Oxford.  
*Christian Poetry in Canada*, edited by David A. Kent, ECW.  
*Clecinorrist: A Biography*, by Frank Nowosad, Fuller Technical Publishing.  
*Coastland: New and Selected Poems 1973-1987*, by Cyril Dabydeen, Mosaic.  
*Cocori*, by Joaquín Guillera, translated by Daniel McBain, illustrated by Shawn Stefler, Cormorant.  
*Death on a No. 8 Hook*, by Laurence Gough, Penguin.  
*Decays*, by Heather Cadoby, Mosaic.  
*The Edible Woman*, by Margaret Atwood, M & S.  
*The End of Lieutenant Boravka*, by Josef Skvorecky, translated by Paul Wilson, Lester & Orpen Dennys.  
*A Flask of Seawater*, by P. K. Page, illustrated by Ludo Gal, Oxford.

*Fruits of the Earth*, by Frederick Philip Grove, M & S.  
*The Gentle Counsel of White Cloud*, edited by Larry G. Wayne and Grace P. Johnston, Detsell.  
*The Hanging Valley*, by Peter Robinson, Viking (Penguin).  
*Japans The Blighted Blossom*, by Roy Thomas, New Star.  
*A Just Measure of Pain*, by Michael Ignatieff, Peregrine (Penguin).  
*Keep the Change*, by Thomas McGuane, M & S.  
*Life in the Clearings versus the Bush*, by Susanna Moodie, M & S.  
*No Easy Bed/Salida difícil*, by Gary Geddes, translation by Gonzalo Millán, Colichan.  
*The Observing Eye*, by Michael Thorpe, Third Eye.  
*One's Company*, by Gerald Lynch, Mosaic.  
*Pandora*, by Sylvia Fraser, M & S.  
*Part Time Paradise*, by Doo Spits, Mosaic.  
*Rainbow Warehouse*, by Ann Knight and W. P. Kinsella, Pottersfield.  
*The Refuge*, by Monica Hughes, Doubleday.  
*Roughing It in the Bush*, by Susanna Moodie, M & S.  
*Saskatchewan's Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park*, by Bill Weiser, Fifth House.  
*The Science of Everyday Life*, by Jay Ingram, Viking (Penguin).  
*Snakebite*, by Ann Dimmond, Cormorant.  
*A Social History of Canada*, by George Woodcock, Penguin.  
*The Stone Falcon*, by Joe Meagher, Purcell.  
*Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature*, by Michael Greenstein, McGill-Queen's.  
*This Side Jordan*, by Margaret Laurence, M & S.  
*Warm Wind in China*, by Kent Stetson, Nu-Age Editions.  
*A Woman's Almanac: Voices from Newfoundland and Labrador, 1990*, by Marian A. White, Breakwater.

## SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC NO. 22

Gabe had written out the circle of dominant seventh chords for him and how he could play them through slowly from memory. . . . For the first time he was beginning to hear that there really was a difference in the texture of sound between the sharp and flat keys.

Robert Harlow, *The Saxophone Winter* (Douglas & McIntyre)

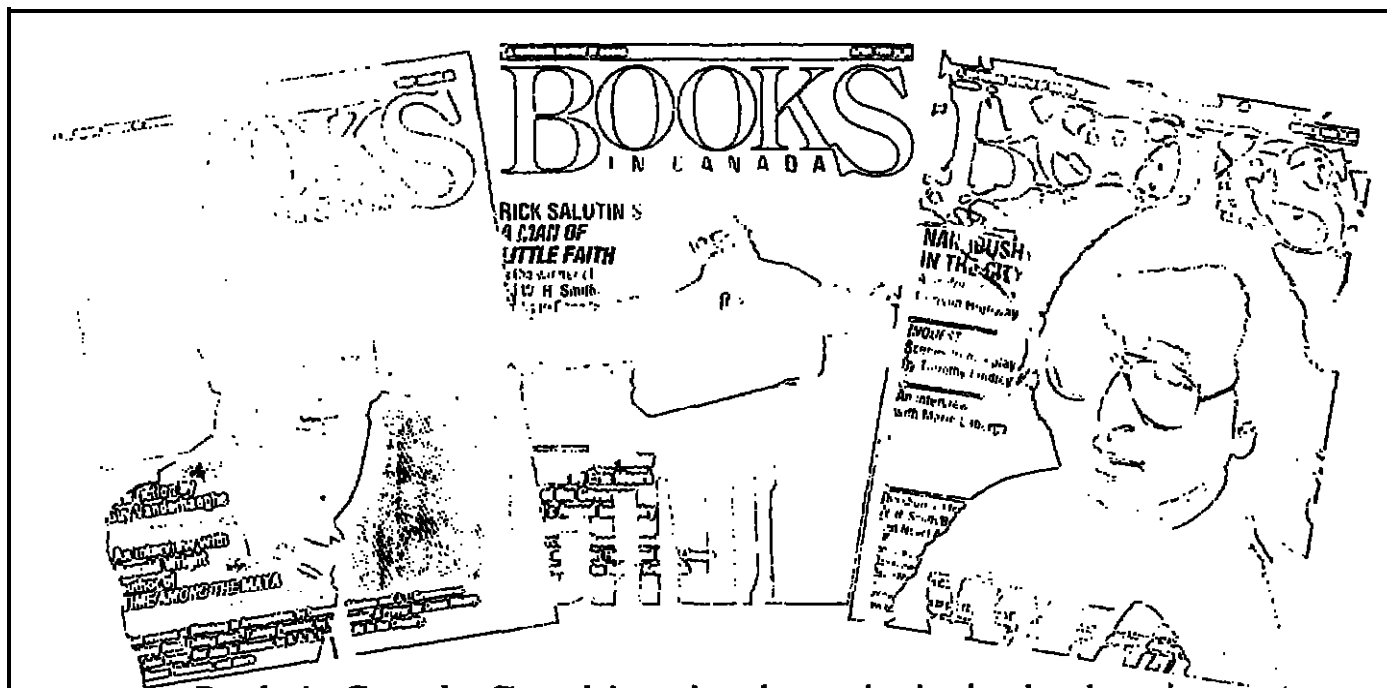
# CanLit acrostic no. 23 *By Mary D. Trainer*

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

When properly filled in, the letters in the box form a quotation from a Canadian book. Find the letters by solving the clues below and writing the answers in the numbered spaces provided. Then transfer the letters from the spaces to the appropriate squares in the box. The first letters of each answered clue form the name of the author and the title of the book. (Solution next month.)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>A. Nova Scotia summer theatre venue: 2 wds.</p> <p>3. Type of music piece</p> <p>C. Canada Post's new style of operation: 3 wds.</p> <p>D. Canadian-originated game: 2 wds.</p> <p>E. Spiny animal</p> <p>F. Directional antenna</p> <p>G. Not in agreement; in conflict: 2 wds.</p> <p>H. Ballerina: 2 wds.</p> <p>I. Sometimes hard to get a word in this way</p> <p>J. Type of blackbird: hyph. wd.</p> <p>K. Native playwright: 2 wds.</p>   | <p>L. "On the ----": election campaigning</p> <p>M. List</p> <p>N. Tall grass stalk</p> <p>O. Nova Scotia fruit-producing valley</p> <p>P. Female animal's mating period: 2 wds.</p> <p>Q. Most crazy</p> <p>R. MP's first Commons address: 2 wds.</p> <p>S. Close behind: 2 wds.</p> <p>T. TV show "King of ----"</p> <p>U. University department: 2 wds.</p> <p>V. Completely destroyed: 2 wds.</p>   |
| <p>172 64 78 127 165 58 83 2</p> <p>108 178 150 136 46 33</p> <p>99 82 48 187 87</p> <p>18 86 107 77 179 98 164 158</p> <p>195 69</p> <p>14 176 5 50 94 167 34 131</p> <p>162 109 152 118 75 200</p> <p>100 41 29 58 106 121 93 180</p> <p>120 182 171 63</p> <p>170 80 132 157 45 160 20</p> <p>129 16 135 181 102 198 53 148</p> <p>189 202 84 154 7 38 141</p> <p>177 134 191 3 66 110 26 43</p> <p>113 126 6 119 188 147 166 37</p> <p>185 174 25 72</p> <p>11 117 205 161 186 32 125 169</p> <p>184 105 73 22 52</p> | <p>15 139 156 89 85 95 203 112</p> <p>173 91 115 55 206 128 27 104</p> <p>44 12 199</p> <p>42 111 68 9</p> <p>175 28 71 204 92 190 17 58</p> <p>159</p> <p>101 57 74 67 130 146</p> <p>13 82 140 1 24 124 47 98</p> <p>36 122 8 23 90 144 63 137</p> <p>155 192 78 201</p> <p>163 193 142 31 89 21</p> <p>197 143 4 81 153 133 30 163</p> <p>54 183</p> <p>70 185 40 19 145 116 97 88</p> <p>60 103 10 51 149</p> <p>49 151 136 194 35 129 114 78</p> <p>61</p> |

# SUBSCRIBE NOW!



*Books in Canada*, Canada's national award-winning book review magazine comes to you nine times a year. Each issue is crammed with book reviews, author profiles, interviews, columns, and interesting features on the world of books in Canada.

Subscribe now and **SAVE 15%** on the newsstand price.

A year's subscription to *Books in Canada* costs \$15.00 and guarantees that each and every issue will be delivered to your door.

Fill in the coupon below. send it to us and we'll rush the next issue of *Books in Canada* to you.

**YES**

Start my subscription to *Books in Canada* immediately.

Name

Address

- Cheque enclosed  
 Bill me

**SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:**  
Individuals \$15  
Institutions \$20  
**OUTSIDE CANADA:**  
Individuals \$18  
Institutions \$23

366 Adelaide St. East, Suite 432  
Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9

**YES**

Start my subscription to *Books in Canada* immediately.

Name

Address

- Cheque enclosed  
 Bill me

**SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:**  
Individuals \$15  
Institutions \$20  
**OUTSIDE CANADA:**  
Individuals \$18  
Institutions \$23

366 Adelaide St. East, Suite 432  
Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9



# Books Worth Reading

HOMESICK

by Guy Vanderhaeghe



## HOMESICK Guy Vanderhaeghe

The award-winning author of *Man Descending* and *My Present Age* secures his reputation as one of the finest fiction writers in the English-speaking world in this deeply felt, often antic novel about the ultimate power of family bonds to destroy and to heal.

October • \$24.95 cloth

MARGARET  
LAURENCE



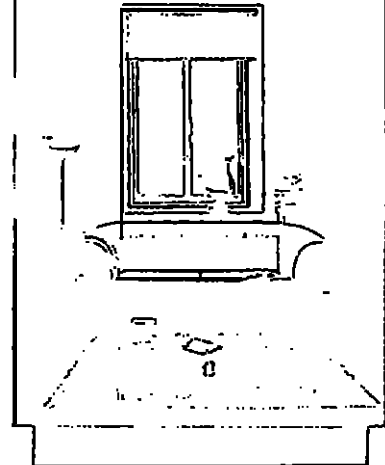
DANCE ON THE EARTH

## DANCE ON THE EARTH Margaret Laurence

Margaret Laurence's memoir, completed just before her death, gives the reader personal insights into the extraordinary human being who became Canada's most beloved writer. Included is a selection of writings and photographs, many of which have never before been published.

October • \$26.95 cloth

MICHEL TREMBLAY



## THE HEART LAID BARE Michel Tremblay

Translated by Sheila Fischman

A touching, acutely observed story set in Montreal, *The Heart Laid Bare* underscores the basic needs in the hearts of all people, and looks at the rigours of family life from a fresh and topical perspective: the mature homosexual community in the generation of AIDS.

September • \$26.95 cloth



McClelland & Stewart  
*The Canadian Publishers*

