

# SECOND THOUGHTS ON THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS



The long apprenticeship of Timothy Findley  
George Woodcock on David Adams Richards  
Reviews of new books by Seymour Mayne and  
P.K. Page and an interview with Mark Strand

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$11.95 A YEAR  
Volume 11 Number 3  
MARCH 1982

BOOKS IN CANADA

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CONTRIBUTORS

Bob Blackburn writes frequently about English usage in these pages. Anne Collins, a country girl at heart, was recently appointed a consulting editor of *Harrowsmith*. Susan Crean's article on the cultural implications of pay-TV will appear in a forthcoming issue. David Donnell is at work on a study of Ernest Hemingway's Toronto days, to be published in June by Black Moss. Howard Engel, whose drawings appear throughout the issue, is the author of *The Ransom Game* (Clarke Irwin). Douglas Hill's thriller, *The Second Trap*, is to be published this summer by Breakwater Books. In the course of duty, freelance writer David Macfarlane recently ate back-bacon sandwiches with the McKenzie brothers. Joss MacLennan is a xerographic artist whose work frequently appears in these pages. Paul Orenstein is a Toronto photographer. John Oughton is a Toronto freelance writer. Frank Rasky is the author of *Gay Canadian Rogues* (Nelson, 1958), a book about Canadian con artists. Stephen Scobie, winner of last year's Governor General's Award for poetry, is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. Douglas Smith teaches English at the University of Victoria. Mary Ainslie Smith writes frequently about children's books in these pages. Paul Stuewe also contributes a monthly column to *Quill & Quire*. Fraser Sutherland is teaching at the University of Edinburgh through an exchange jointly sponsored by the Canada Council and the Scottish Arts Council. Eleanor Wachtel is our West Coast contributing editor. Morris Wolfe teaches film history at the Ontario College of Art. George Woodcock is a Vancouver critic and poet.

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*Books in Canada* is published 10 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. Available to the public free in subscribing book stores, schools, and libraries. Individual subscription rate: \$11.95 a year (\$14.95 U.S. and overseas). 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. Member of the Bulk Distribution Audit Division of CCAB. 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 © 1982. Typesetting by Jay Tee Graphics Ltd.

ISSN 0045-2564

# 'If you think Canada has linguistic problems, you should hear Scotland's'

## Edinburgh journal

The Facer Club, which met in Lucky Wood's tavern in the Canongate, was perhaps not of a high order. If a member did not drain his measure of liquor, he had to throw it at his own face.

— Robert Chambers, *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1624)

THOUGH IT HAS TAKEN at least half a step into the 20th century, Edinburgh retains some of the old clubby atmosphere. At Bernet's Bar near the King's Theatre, people who resemble set-painters drink malt whisky and cask-conditioned beer in a set composed of rococo carvings and stained-glass insets. In Sandy Bell's smoky domain, folksong addicts court the great Celtic scholar Hamish Henderson, who's usually accompanied by his dog. And in the tiny, anomalously named Oxford Bar, the proto-Gaelic proprietor, Wullie Ross, maintains order with what looks like a two-foot length of lead piping.

Mind you, these are islands of sanity compared to most pubs, cluttered as they are with slot machines and video space invaders in a city whose cost, if not standard of living, rivals that of downtown Toronto. Yet, the size of Halifax-Dartmouth, it's a small place, and the man in the corner seat says that if you'll meet him tomorrow he'll give you the makings of a great book. The stereotype of the pickle-faced, tight-fisted Scot doesn't apply here: people are talkative — nay, gabby — and hospitable. They hear my name and say, "Welcome home!" They're crazy, of course, yet there's something captivating about their unashamed tribalism.

If one tires of conversation, there's always the colossal postcard of the Castle to look at, looming on its spotlight rock from a steel engraving out of poor, be-knighted Walter Scott. Scott, the most endearingly gullible of the Romantics, worked himself to death to pay his publisher's debts. An example to us all.

Speaking of publishers, they exist in Edinburgh, notably Stephanie Wolfe-Murray's Canongate Press, which issues W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* in paperback. The talk of last

fall's publishing season was Canongate's *Lanark*, by the Glasgow novelist Alasdair Gray, a futurist vision of hell that has gained gratifying reviews almost everywhere.

Scots are as quick as Canadians to slap their own nationality on the unwary or the dead: I've heard one writer from Aberdeen claim Lord Byron, *né* Gordon, as "the greatest of Aberdonian poets." They're also good at heaping honours, if not cash, on their writers. Sorley MacLean, of the Isle of Skye, generally acclaimed as the greatest Gaelic poet of this century, received a bouquet of tributes on his 70th birthday last fall. The late Hugh MacDiarmid, the other boldface name in modern Scottish poetry, is to be memorialized with a £16,000 (\$36,800) sculpture, coincidentally what the Scott monument — a 200-foot pile of drunken Gothic on Princes Street — cost when it was built in 1836. Should we have something like this in Canada? Irving Layton implanted in Fletcher's Field? Al Purdy as a lighthouse in Roblin Lake? I've made myself randomly unpopular by suggesting that MacDiarmid may not be quite in the Yeats class as a poet, yet there's no arguing his enormous importance as a fomenter of cultural nationalism, and as a formative influence on Scottish poets.

If you think Canada has linguistic problems, you should hear Scotland's. The Scottish writer must choose whether to compose in English, Scots, or Gaelic. Some, like the poet and novelist Iain Crichton Smith, manage two out of three (English and Gaelic). Ron Butlin, my Scottish counterpart as writer-in-residence at the University of Edinburgh, works in English and Scots. His fine collection, *Creatures Tamed by Cruelty* (1979), with an introduction by Edwin Morgan, offers poems in English and Scots as well as translations from other languages. Consider this bit of beautifully updated Burns:

*Ma love is naethin than a sang  
upon the radio.*

*She's posin nakid aa day lang  
frae here tae Tokyo.*

One nice thing about Scotland is how, on hearing my accent, the native guesses Canadian rather than American, probably because so many Scots have

relatives in Canada, like the amiable Ayrshireman, Peter Gibson, brother of Macmillan publisher Doug Gibson in Toronto. Canadians themselves are thin on the ground. Don Nichol pores, or rather pours, over his doctoral thesis on Alexander Pope in the Post-Graduate Students' Pub when he isn't writing reviews for *Books in Canada*. Until recently the very talented British Columbian poet Marilyn Bowering (*Sleeping with Lambs*, Press Porcépic, 1980) was an Edinburgh resident with her husband, the photographer Michael Elcock. Of my predecessors as writers-in-residence — I'm the fourth Canadian to come here under the exchange worked out between the Canada Council and the Scottish Arts Council — the Saskatchewan novelist Ken Mitchell may have made the most impact. A founder of the useful Playwright's Workshop at the Netherbow Theatre, Mitchell had his play, *The Shipbuilder*, aired on BBC Scotland radio.

After two months alone I've been joined by my wife Alison. We live, courtesy of the Scottish Arts Council, in an eclectically furnished, one-bedroom flat overlooking one of the world's most beautiful ravines, through which flows (in the ravine, not the flat) the tumbling Water of Leith. Alison audits a course in Ecclesiastical History and serves as *advocatus diaboli* to a local feminists' group, while I occupy a wee office on the top floor of the Centre of Canadian Studies. The Centre's on the only side of Georgian George Square that hasn't been ruined by Edinburgh University's high-rise Bow-wow architecture.

Next door to my office labours an urban geographer from Winnipeg, downstairs a sociologist from Regina, and in the basement another geographer from Dundas, Ont. Apart from, presumably, another Canadian writer-in-residence this fall, the social scientists will be joined by Malcolm Ross of Halifax who'll be a visiting professor of Canadian Studies. Patricia MacFarlane, the bustling, friendly secretary and teamaker to the Centre's denizens, is a forthright lady from Fife. "You're in and out of here today like a bee in a jamjar," she calls after me as I head for the pub.

— FRASER SUTHERLAND

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STATIONS AND CALLINGS is the long-awaited result of studies conducted and analyzed by the late John Porter, author of THE VERTICAL MOSAIC; his wife Marion Porter, of Carleton University; and Bernard R. Blisshen, of York University.

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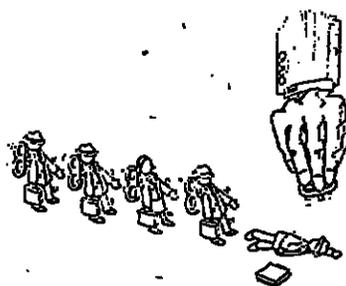
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Brian Grosman is a senior partner in the Toronto law firm of Greenglass and Grosman, specializing in litigation. He is the author of numerous books and articles, and is considered a leading expert in the legal aspects of wrongful dismissal.

**PUBLICATION: JUNE 1982**

**\$25.00 hardcover**



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# THE PERFECT GESTURE

After four novels and a Governor General's Award, Timothy Findley feels he hasn't done anything. 'I've made a few sketches,' he says, 'but I'm sick of drawing toes'

By DAVID MACFARLANE

*The weight of this sad time we must obey;  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.*  
— King Lear, Act V, Scene III

THE FIRST TIME I met Timothy Findley, I was in the middle of reading his fourth novel, *Famous Last Words*. It was an unsettling experience — though not an inappropriate one, somehow — to leave behind the history that Findley's protagonist, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, had etched on the walls of two rooms in the Grand Elysium Hotel in the Austrian Alps, and to journey by streetcar to the hotel that was Findley's base during the few days he was in Toronto promoting the book. The room was on the 10th floor and looked out over the red brick of the university and the white dome of the planetarium. Findley, who does not enjoy heights, paid little attention to the view. Wearing a comfortable-looking pair of corduroy trousers, a blue rugger shirt, and a woollen scarf that John Pearce, his editor at Clarke Irwin, had just given him, Findley sat with the ash of his Craven M pointing ceilingward. "How very thoughtful," he said when the scarf had been presented, a gift from the staff at Clarke Irwin. "And I won't let any bloody Quinn get this one." I was far enough into *Famous Last Words* to know that Quinn was one of the American soldiers who found Mauberley's corpse in the Grand Elysium in May of 1945, who read Mauberley's testament — the narrative of fascist intrigue that is the text of *Famous Last Words* — and who argued about its meaning with the fanatical Captain Freyburg. It was not until a day later, when I finished *Famous Last Words*, that I realized that Quinn had also stolen Mauberley's scarf. By then, my introduction to Findley seemed an eccentric chapter in the remarkable book I had just read.

Findley had been talking to journalists all day, and perhaps for this reason the direction of his conversation had grown unpredictable. "I remember," he said when I suggested that our second interview take place on Dec. 7, "that I broke my shoelace when the news came that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbour. I thought Pearl Harbour was in the St. Lawrence. They were playing Brahms on the radio." The information was left unprocessed by Findley; Brahms, the

shoelace, the Japanese bombers all hung in the hotel room, unconnected. It is, I later realized, a characteristic of Findley's, both in conversation and in his writing. Objects and people and events befall him ("I am the 20th century," he said to me later), and he sees it as his job not so much to make sense of them as simply to point out their curious juxtaposition. "You know the connections mean something," he said, "but you have to find out yourself. Someone makes a gesture and you have to figure out why." Referring to his third novel, *The Wars*, he asked, "Why the horses?" Of the opening pages of *Famous Last Words*, "Why the jump?" For the moment, however, he was considering shoelaces and Brahms and Zeros. Findley's laughter is gleeful, infectious, and roughened at the edges with years of cigarettes. He laughed at the memory of a child who could recognize Brahms and yet be so uncertain of geography.

Timothy Findley was born in Toronto in 1930. Although he attended public school and boarded at St. Andrews College for one year during the war, his formal education ended after grade nine at Jarvis Collegiate. Glandular fever kept him in bed throughout most of the following year — "My memory is of feeling terribly tired all the time." A private tutor was hired. "I wouldn't let him teach me anything but History

and English," Findley recalled. "And I never did go back to school."

After a trip to Europe (he worked his way across on a boat, polishing the ship's brass and setting the officers' table) he returned to a variety of jobs in Toronto and began studying drama. He was also studying ballet, and although becoming a dancer had been his greatest ambition since early teens, he had come to realize that such a career was not a possibility. Findley had a fused disc, and he turned to theatre to seek "the perfection of gesture" that had first attracted him to dance. His professional life as an actor began with the Earle Grey Shakespeare Company, performing in the quad at Trinity College in Toronto. Pay, he remembers, was \$20 a week. But what appeared to have been a remarkably unprofitable choice of careers began to look more promising when Stratford and television arrived on the scene. Findley had been doing radio and working for Drew Thompson's Kingston rep company,



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

the International Players, when he appeared in a CBC television production of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. He worked at Stratford during its first season, and afterward followed Alec Guinness back to England. He stayed for three years.

It was Guinness, during his summer at Stratford, who used to say that it takes 20 years to make an actor. The comment is one that Findley often repeats; he now feels the same way about writing. Sitting in his hotel room in Toronto, Findley lit another cigarette and made a surprising comment. He has published four novels: *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967) and *The Butterfly Plague* (1969) are not well known. *The Wars*, recently made into a film under the direction of Robin Phillips, won the Governor General's Award in 1977. And now, *Famous Last Words*. "I sometimes feel," Findley said, "that I've just written my first book."

A LITTLE MORE than 40 years after the Japanese crippled the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour on Dec. 7, 1941, Timothy Findley had lost all track of time. He was sitting in a rather gloomy office — my own — near the corner of College and Spadina in Toronto. Smoking, he was talking about his work: while his long-time companion, Bill Whitehead, was circling the slushy block in his car, wondering where the hell Tiff was. Findley, who does not drive, had promised to be standing on the corner at four o'clock. It was almost four-thirty.

"The perfect book," he was saying, "goes by in a moment in your brain. And then you ask yourself, 'How in the name of God can I make that happen on a piece of paper?'"

Findley and Whitehead met in Toronto some years after Findley's return from England. They worked together at the rep company that Whitehead was running in the old Central Library on College Street. Findley was married by then, but that, he says, "was a long time ago." Findley had spent time in New York after England, and had become good friends with Thornton Wilder, the author of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *The Ides of March* and *Our Town*. The young actor's writing was coming more to the fore — Findley's first published short story appeared in the first issue of the *Tamarack Review* in 1956 — and Wilder criticized and encouraged his efforts. "He was truly my mentor," Findley says. "My Socrates." A stint in Hollywood followed New York, rewriting dialogue for television, and by the time Findley returned to Toronto, his career as a serious writer had begun.

After a production of *The Glass Menagerie* in the summer of 1952 at the Central Library, Findley and Whitehead gave up theatre and moved to Findley's parents' house in Richmond Hill. "Acting," Findley recalled, "had simply become too nerve-wracking. I had developed an ulcer, and quit just when I was becoming known." While Whitehead worked for CBC-Radio's *The Learning Stage* — a program that eventually evolved into *Ideas* — Findley wrote advertising copy for a local radio station and began work on *The Last of the Crazy People*. Most of the novel, he recalls, was written in the garden of the Richmond Hill home. In 1946 Whitehead and Findley moved to the farm near Cannington where they still live, and *The Last of the Crazy People* began its rounds of Canadian publishers. It was three years before the novel was finally published — by an American company. "I guess all of my earlier writing experiences were excessively bitter," Findley said sadly. "I try to maintain a sense of balance about it all, but it's a very Canadian story."

Findley joined Whitehead on *The Learning Stage* and covered the arts for the program. He remembers it as "an absolutely marvelous job." Not only did he enjoy keeping tabs on plays, exhibitions, concerts, and publications, he was also discovering a way of writing. "Out of that experience," he said, "came a lot of what might be called my style — the use of

interview as a basis for narrative, the chop shots, getting into things quickly and then getting out. I had magically fallen on my feet with a way that worked."

*The Butterfly Plague* was published by Viking in 1969. Described by Rex Reed as one of the best books ever written about Hollywood, it made almost no impact in Canada. There

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"The overriding image of my life is  
that we're all here for the slaughter.  
I can't shut the door on that"

---

were only two Canadian reviews, both written by Marian Engel. "She liked it in one and didn't like it so much in the other," Findley recalled with a chuckle. And Macmillan, the house that carried the Canadian edition, seemed to have no idea who Timothy Findley was. "They kept sending my mail to Viking in New York and asking them to forward it to me."

In the early 1970s, when Whitehead and Findley worked together on the CBC's *National Dream* — a project that would eventually win them both ACTRA awards — things began looking up. The farmhouse in Cannington was steadily being transformed into a wonderful, comfortable home. Although a novel that followed *The Butterfly Plague* had been abandoned, Findley was growing more confident about his writing. His work for radio and television was good. It was also instructive. In 1974 Findley was appointed playwright-in-residence at the National Arts Centre, and it was while he was in Ottawa, during rehearsals for his play *Can You See Me Yet*, that he decided to write another book. "I wanted it to be a tremendous affirmation of life," he said. But Findley's affirmation could not ignore a vision he has always carried with him. "I resent," he said, "being called sentimental about animals in my books. People who say that don't begin to understand by half."

Findley's vision is of a cow and a calf standing in a white-washed room. One of the four enclosing walls is splashed with blood. In its eyes, the calf asks a question that Findley understands: "Mother, why are we here?"

It was late in the afternoon. We hadn't turned on any lights, and my office had become dark when Findley said, "That is the overriding image of my life, that we are here for the slaughter. I can't shut the door on that." He pressed the butt of a cigarette into the dried inkwell I had offered as an ashtray. Looking up at a reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica*, he commented on the figure of the rearing horse. "The love of life is in that rage." Outside, the five-o'clock traffic slurred by in the snow. One of the drivers had been circling the block for almost an hour, looking for Timothy Findley.

IN OTTAWA, in 1974, Findley was sitting in a room late at night with a notepad on his knees. An image had just come into his mind — from where, exactly, he was not sure. He had imagined a soldier named Robert Ross, and had seen him, a young man in a uniform, walking away from a military encampment, past a tent. In the tent was a letter, in an opened letter case, and an uncapped pen. Findley knew that the man who had written the letter was dead. It was like an explosion. "Jesus Christ," he said to himself. "I know the whole of this book." And he began to write *The Wars*.

John Pearce, Findley's editor, had never heard of *The Butterfly Plague* nor its author when, in 1976, Stanley Colbert at the CBC told him that Timothy Findley was one of the 10 best writers in Canada. "I blinked," Pearce recalls. "Who?" Pearce, who is one of the few editors in Canada who makes it his business to hunt for talent, read *The Butterfly Plague* and "made one of the most nerve-wracked phone calls of my life. I had no idea who was going to pick up the phone at the other end." He and Findley spoke for almost 40 minutes, and then

Findley excused himself. He was tired. He needed a cup of tea. He had been awake for more than 24 hours, working on a book about the First World War.

When Findley completed the first 60 manuscript pages of *The Wars* he showed them to a friend. "This book is called *The Wars*," the friend responded. "If it were called *The Three Bears*, I would be wondering where the bears are. My advice would be, 'Bring on the bears.'" Written on a strip of cardboard, the advice hangs over Findley's work table in Cannington. It still makes him laugh.

Although Pearce describes *The Wars* as a novel that was written in a burst of "white heat," Findley sees it as a project that was, in fact, a long time coming. "I began *The Wars* in 1934," he says, only partly in jest. Findley remembers that as a young boy he used to crawl under the bed of his Uncle Tif, and wait for a hand to come down over the side and pass him a stick of French candy. Uncle Tif was dying, slowly, of injuries sustained in the First World War. He died in 1934, and a few years later, when his nephew was old enough to read, the letters that Uncle Tif had written home during the war were given to Findley. "They were my comic books," he says. "My treasure."

Findley makes it clear that his uncle is not Robert Ross, but he also makes it clear that *The Wars* owes a great deal to the letters. Many of the novel's details — the day-to-day life at the front, the layout of the trenches, the duties of various ranks — were garnered from Uncle Tif's correspondence. Most important, however, it was the growing sense of rage Findley perceived in the pages of the letters that provided "the take-off point for the book." Uncle Tif had always been gentle in his descriptions of the battlefields, but as the war continued he became more blunt. He left the artillery and joined the Royal Flying Corps, and in a letter to his mother he described 25 German soldiers in a field and killing them all. "He was telling his mother," Findley says, "You have made me a murderer." And that anger is what is in the book. They seem such monsters and impossible gods to us now because they really did go for King and Country. They really believed. It is important that we remember that they were human."

Robin Phillips's production of *The Wars*, starring Brent Carver, Martha Henry, and William Hutt, is due to be released this spring. Findley, naturally enough, did the screenplay. "I will look you straight in the eye," he says, "and tell you it's a masterpiece. It's Robin's masterpiece. It is so rare that you find someone who blinks at the same time you do, but that's how I feel about Robin. I remember when I saw his *Uncle Vanya* and his *Earnest* at Stratford, every nuance was akin to mine."

THE FARMHOUSE on the road into Cannington, Ont., is a remarkably comfortable, wonderfully eccentric home that is surrounded by cats. Findley and Whitehead have adopted dozens of strays, only a few of whom are privileged enough to be allowed indoors. All the cats have names, and most of them live comfortably in the nearby barn. Sick cats are always brought into the house to recover. The two hefty malamutes who live in the pen behind the barn have long ago given up caring about the cats. And the cats, for their part, have long ago given up bothering the dozens of birds that gather at the feeder outside the kitchen window.

Findley is seated on a red couch in the parlour, beneath a wall of paintings, facing the fire. Bill Whitehead is in another room, working on a script. Findley's hands are clasped on his lap as he speaks. His eyes seem very blue. To his left, appropriately enough, is a tiffany lamp, and to his right, a wooden clock that was built by a neighbour. The sound of running water comes from a fountain in the geranium-filled conservatory.

"The difference between *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*

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was that there was no moment of recognition with *Famous Last Words*. I know there was a great deal of impatience with the amount of time I took on it, but all I could say to Clarke Irwin was, 'There's nothing I can do.' I used to walk from my room to the room where Bill was working — I think there's a path worn across the floor here — and I'd stand in the doorway and say, 'I can't do it.' At every stage of the writing I knew there was something there of enormous scope, something that was wildly exciting. But it seemed to me that the idea had been given to the wrong person. In a way, I still think that's true."

The editing of *Famous Last Words* was a long and sometimes gruelling process that lasted more than two and a half years. The novel originally centred on the murder of Sir Harry Oakes and took place entirely in the Bahamas. John Pearce's

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There were only two Canadian reviews of *The Butterfly Plague*, both by Marian Engel. 'She liked it in one, and she didn't like it in the other'

---

concern, after seeing the first 500-page draft, was that the book was a sequence of scenes with no connecting thread. After a series of discussions, Findley telephoned Pearce: "I think I've got my thread," he said, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley became the novel's protagonist. "From that point on," says Pearce, "my job was simply to push him in that direction."

In Cannington, surrounded by cartons of research books, Findley worked on. He had given up on novels before, but his instincts told him to carry on with *Famous Last Words* in spite of his doubts. "No one can write this book but you," Pearce told him. Only 18 months before the book was actually published, Findley hit on the image of a story written on the walls of a hotel room, now the principal narrative device of the novel. The connections were beginning to be made.

Pearce found throughout the editing that Findley could listen to criticism of a single paragraph, and then overnight come back with an entirely new chapter. "Tiff works in great sweeps," Pearce says, "but he does not like the process of setting up an architecture. The book has to be discovered. He is infinitely suggestible but he won't let you tamper with what he knows is crucial to the book."

Findley smiles, sitting on the couch. "The problem with Pearce was that after *The Wars* he thought he had a Mozart on his hands. In the middle of *Famous Last Words*, the last thing I felt like was a Mozart. Mozart? Mozart who? I really, honestly don't think you ever learn how to write. Every time you sit down you learn it all over again. Dancing and writing are the same. It's a question of defining beauty within a gesture."

Timothy Findley is now 52 years old. He looks much younger, but he was surprised last fall when he was carrying wood into the house and had to stop to catch his breath. He also remembers that early in the '70s he went to New York and saw Paul Scofield's last performance in the Peter Brook production of *King Lear*. Findley went backstage to say hello to Scofield after the play — they had worked together in England — and he found the actor sitting in the wings, still in costume, unable to go to his dressing room. Findley realized that Scofield had just completed the performance of a lifetime and did not want to admit that it was over. The memory of that night still haunts him.

"The deadline," he says, "is here." Findley points his index finger to his heart. "In terms of what is in my head, I haven't done anything. I've made a few sketches perhaps, but I'm sick of drawing toes. This is something that concerns me, time." □

# PRIZE AND PREJUDICE

Do the Governor General's Awards celebrate literary excellence? Or do they merely reward popularity, reputation, and promise?

By ELEANOR WACHTEL

LAST MAY about 200 people, including the premier of New Brunswick, Richard Hatfield, gathered at Mathieu Martin High School in Moncton (quite literally a far cry from Rideau Hall) to watch the Governor General present his annual literary awards. I envy the judges, said His Excellency Edward Schreyer to the assembled writers, politicians, academics, and miscellany, their opportunity to examine the collective soul of the nation.

The nation, meanwhile — or those whose business it is to ponder such events — was examining if not the soul then the sanity of the judges. "Cloud Cuckooland," declared William French of the *Globe and Mail*. The nominees in all three categories — fiction, non-fiction, and poetry — were seriously questioned. Where were Mordecai Richler's *Joshua Then and Now* and Hugh MacLennan's *Voices in Time? Havelock Ellis* by Phyllis Grosskurth had already been nominated for Britain's National Book Award; Phyllis Webb's *Wilson's Bowl* was widely deemed a significant work; neither was mentioned. "Every spring," Beverley Slopou wrote in the *Montreal Gazette*, "the various factions of Canada's literary community suspend their internecine jealousies for a few weeks to write in common hostility against the short list of nominees for the Governor

General's Award." Ken Adachi (*Toronto Star*) described the choices as "bewildering," Professor R.P. Bilan (*Canadian Forum*) "startling," and Keith Garebian (*Montreal Gazette*) dubbed it "an annual comic embarrassment." At the general meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada that month a motion was passed that the union "consider the procedure by which the Governor General's Awards for prose are chosen." (An amendment that read to "protest" the procedure was defeated.) And in a probing editorial in *Canadian Literature* William New asked plaintively, "Why them?"

In short, 1981 proved to be a vintage year for critics of the awards, although there have been few poor years. Just a decade after the awards were established, W.A. Deacon, first chairman of the Awards Board, wrote of the 1946 winners: "For the first time there were no protests that medals went to inferior books while superior books failed to win. We got two protests once that Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High*

*Heaven* was an immoral book. We ignored letters from non-writers."

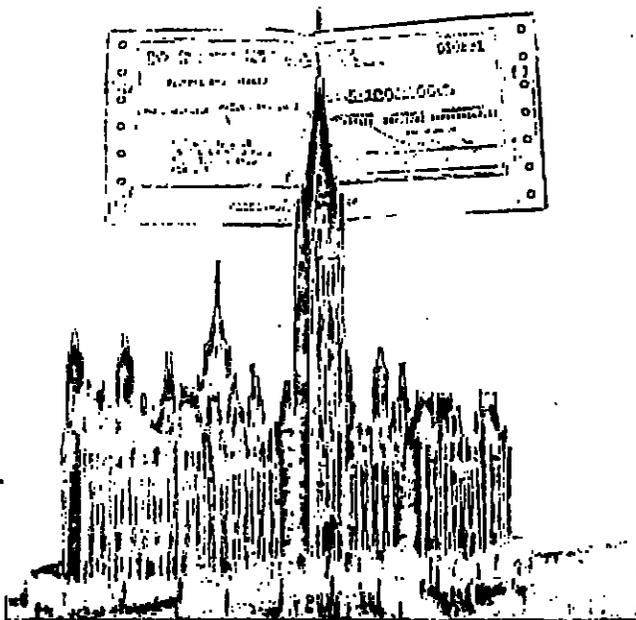
The awards' 45-year history provides several genuine howlers, especially when viewed with the smug afterglow of hindsight. Looking only at fiction, Ethel Wilson never won a GG; her 1954 title, *Swamp Angel*, lost to *The Fall of a Titan* — fiction by Igor Gouzenko. *Three Came to Ville Marie* by Alan Sullivan edged out Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* in 1941. Although Malcolm Lowry had been living in Canada since 1939, *Under the Volcano* was passed over in 1947. The

judges only caught up with Lowry (posthumously) in 1961 for *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*.

The awards are peppered with instances of honouring the writer rather than the work — Stephen Leacock in 1937, for instance, for *My Discovery of the West*, a title not even mentioned in his entry in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. This tendency merges into what might be called the Academy Award syndrome: slighting a significant book and then trying to remedy things by rewarding the next, often inferior title. Examples: Marie-Claire Blais didn't win in 1966 for *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* (which picked up France's Prix Medicis), but in 1968 she took home her first GG for *The Manuscripts of Pauline*

*Archange*. Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* didn't take the 1964 GG; *A Jest of God* did two years later. More recently, Robertson Davies won a GG for *The Manticore* rather than *Fifth Business*, and Jack Hodgins won for *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* instead of *The Invention of the World*. Mavis Gallant, W.O. Mitchell, Antonine Maillet (recent winner of the Prix Goncourt), Hugh Hood, Sheila Watson, and Matt Cohen haven't won a GG. And who, after all, was Winifred Bambrick? *Canadian Literature* editor William New once tried to find out, but was unable to unearth a single biographical detail about the author of the 1946 winner, *Continental Revue*.

Indeed, some cynics would argue the GG is as likely to damn a work to oblivion as elevate its author to renown. The first fiction winner, for instance, *Think of the Earth*, by Bertram Brooker, is said to have sold only eight copies. (Trivia fans might note that Hugh MacLennan has won the most GGs — five; that only 20 per cent of the awards have gone to women,



and that fewer than one-fifth of the judges have been women. But whatever its impact on reputation or sales, the ability of the GG to generate controversy is not disputed. In that respect, it may have far surpassed its founders' sober hopes.

Once upon a time, the 15-year-old Canadian Authors' Association asked Lord Tweedsmuir, then newly appointed Governor General of Canada, to be its honorary president. Tweedsmuir, who wrote biographies and adventure novels under his commoner name, John Buchan (most famous for *The Thirty-Nine Steps*), was delighted. He balked when pressed to put up money for a cash award, but agreed to give the name of the Governor General in perpetuity and to present the award, a bronze medal. It remained bronze until 1942, when the need for strategic metals for the war effort forced a switch to silver.

The first year, 1936, there were only two awards — fiction and non-fiction — and the Royal Society provided the judges. Thenceforth, the CAA executive and (after 1944) a standing committee took care of the selection. Only the Awards Board knew who the judges were; they neither met nor discussed their decisions. In addition to the GGs, the Awards Board administered the newly created Leacock Awards and by 1952, a dozen literary prizes.

In 1959 the Canada Council was invited to take over the GGs, replacing the medal with a specially bound edition of the winning book and a prize of \$1,000. Perhaps for this reason the number of categories, which had grown to five (fiction, non-fiction both creative and academic, poetry/drama, and juvenile) was reduced to three (fiction, non-fiction, and poetry/drama) and doubled to include French titles. This extension into Quebec produced a new variant of the Academy Award syndrome — winners refusing awards and/or using the

occasion as a political platform. (In fact, politicization of the GGs predated that of the Academy Awards: the first Oscar rejection occurred in 1970 when George C. Scott declined the award for *Patton*.) In 1968 Hubert Aquin refused the award, Fernand Dumont accepted but turned over his prize (increased from \$1,000 to \$2,500 in 1966) to the Parti Québécois, and Leonard Cohen distinguished himself as the only Anglo-Canadian ever to reject a GG. "I don't know," he said later. "I just didn't feel right about it." (Maybe it was Brando who was using the GG as a role model.) Fernand Ouellette declined the GG in 1970, Roland Giguère in 1973, and in 1977 Michel Garneau, a committed separatist, refused it with the comment that he couldn't allow himself to be considered a Canadian.

There are so few occasions in Canada for dignified symbolic political acts that the GG offered an appealing venue. In 1974 Nicole Brossard and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu accepted their awards but then made nationalist speeches. These statements were all the more effective because, until last year's ceremony in Moncton, winners were not expected and certainly not invited to speak. Fernand Dumont's model of donating the money to an anti-establishment cause was followed in 1978 when Gilbert Langevin pledged part of his prize (upped in 1976 to \$5,000) to fight for the liberation of Quebec political prisoners, especially Pierre-Paul Geoffroy and Paul Rose, serving sentences for the kidnapping of Pierre Laporte during the October Crisis. Last year Michel van Schendel announced that half of his award would be donated to the striking CBC workers and half to the victims of the war in El Salvador. He added that, although he had lived in Canada for almost 30 years, he himself had been denied citizenship apparently because of his former leftist political affiliations. Except for that laconic maverick, Leonard Cohen, however, English

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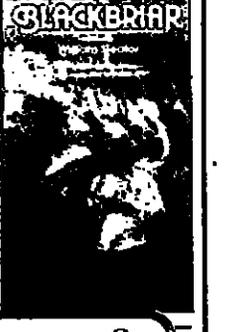




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Canadians have tended to take the money politely and run.

If politics occasionally intrude into the awards ceremony, there is a suspicion that literary politics are played in earnest in the smoky backrooms of the selection panels. The GG is designated as a writer's prize, awarded by a group of the writer's peers for the best book of its type published that year. "The GGs never pretended to be a popular prize," notes Canada Council administrator, Kathy Berg. Judges are selected from the country's writers, academics, and serious critics, with an eye toward a rough balance of regional representation, some female input, and a reasonable mix of personalities and contending literary philosophies. When the Canada Council took over the awards in 1959 a panel of three judges in each language chose all the winners. In 1971 a two-tiered structure developed; each discipline was allocated its own committee of three and then the heads of the panels formed a presidents' committee to oversee the final decision. As a rule, if the first committee was unanimous in its choice the presidents' would merely confirm that the winner had been published in the correct year and that the author was a Canadian or landed immigrant. In the event of a split decision, however, the higher committee could overturn the result and side with the dissenting vote. This is where the stories arise of outrageous doings but, to no one's surprise, committee members won't go into detail on the record.

There's no question that being a judge is a thankless job. Would you apply? Wanted: someone to read, between December and March, 80 to 100 books of poetry or fiction or 300 books of non-fiction. (The Canada Council does not screen the titles; judges are sent every book in their category published that year.) List one dozen favourites. Fly off to Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver to meet for a day with two other judges, who have their own lists to champion. Debate, reread, sweat, haggle, compromise, anything as long as the committee comes up with one winner and no more than three runners-up. Three-year term. Fee: \$450 (\$600 for the president of the jury). "With the Canada Council, you do it for love," says Kathy Berg. No wonder so many of the judges are academics; who else could afford it?

Nevertheless, about two-thirds of those asked do accept. Patrick Lane, 1978 poetry winner and poetry judge since, says that "a lot of eminent writers refuse because they don't want to have to make those compromises that are sometimes essential. They don't want the controversy that comes with the choice, and they don't want to have to live with it afterward." Lane describes his own experience in anguished terms. "I found it extremely exasperating, with a tremendous amount of emotional conflict." Sheila Watson, a poetry judge in 1973 and on the fiction jury for the past three years, is initially defensive: "Decisions are not hastily made. No one begins with unanimity; nothing is presupposed at the outset. It's a long and sometimes painful process."

The names are drawn from the Canada Council's "assessors' list," the bank of resource people several hundred strong from which the Canada Council selects all its juries. This list is revised annually in consultation with the council's own multidisciplinary arts advisory panel. Judges are also chosen from the ranks of previous winners — not automatically, but very frequently and usually immediately, before the goodwill fades, and before they can turn out another book. There are other sources; occasionally outgoing judges will suggest names, but they are not formally solicited. Perhaps most significant, however, is that the final choice of judges is made by Canada Council staff. "We ourselves who work in the field are pretty knowledgeable," says Berg.

Critics argue that the selection of the judges influences the results. For example, Karl Siegler of Vancouver's Talonbooks sees what he calls "a centralist bias": "Even if there are judges from B.C. or Newfoundland, Ontario taste can prevail

because of the extent to which a colonial mentality can exist even within a country. Worse, if you have the Canada Council choose the jury, it's really the council that decides the winners by remote control."

Not surprisingly, the judges disagree. Patrick Lane talks about "saw-off time," when any of five or six titles could win. "I have not always been in agreement with the final choice — not that the winners weren't deserving," he hastily adds. "Before I sat on the committee I had all sorts of feelings about it. I used to say, 'Those buggers out there, they all do it politically, grinding their own axe.'" Once on a panel of three, Lane learned that compromise, like rosé wine, is not always the happiest solution. "The ideal thing for me would be a committee of one — me. People who don't sit on juries are probably smarter than people who do, but if you don't do it, eventually you end up with turkeys — very ambitious people who just want to be judges."

(At the U.S. National Book Award one year, Allen Ginsberg, a member of the poetry panel, disagreed with his fellow judges in their decision to award the prize to Mona van Duyn. None of this sawing-off stuff for Ginsberg. He stood up at the ceremonies to declare his dissatisfaction, and recited an obscene poem in honour of his own choice, Gregory Corso.)

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Sheila Watson: 'Nothing is presupposed. It's a long and sometimes painful process'

Kathy Berg: 'With the Canada Council, you do it for love'

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David Watmough, who moved the resolution that the Writers' Union look into the fiction awards, feels that under the current system there is not wide enough participation in the decision-making process. In addition to writers, he'd like to see editors, publishers, and members of the public form a 12-person jury. "If it takes 12 to decide whether I hang or not, why shouldn't it be 12 to determine if I win an award? It's the basis of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence." Watmough is also impatient with the degree of secrecy surrounding the awards. As with most Canada Council programs, the names of the judges aren't released until the announcement of the winners. To Watmough this is characteristically Canadian excessive covertness. On the other side, Kathy Berg feels it would be more difficult to get judges if they couldn't work in privacy. "They don't want to be lobbied or pressured." William New, a non-fiction judge from 1975 to 1977, says he made no secret of it, but nobody much cared. Sheila Watson thinks the accusation of secrecy is misguided. "The prizes are awarded. The books are there. Either you trust the jury system or you don't."

Awards are inherently controversial. As soon as one slips into matters of taste, especially from the short-sighted perspective of contemporaneity, there's bound to be disagreement. New feels it's important to have quarrels over the judgements of any particular committee. "Works may be overvalued because they say things that people want to hear at that time; they fulfil the critical desires of literature. The GGs may be a good record not necessarily of literary history but of critical expectations."

An account of the reaction to the GGs is even more a record of public taste. But which public depends, of course, on whom you ask. While Karl Siegler and R.P. Bilan feels the GGs pander too much to the trendy, the Canadian Authors' Association decided in 1975 to re-establish its own awards because,

as Lynn Harrington wrote in *Syllables of Recorded Time*, the GGs "were apt to appeal to a relatively small and supposedly select readership, being frequently academic and arty rather than popular." Funded by Harlequin Enterprises, the CAA award now is \$5,000, the same as the GGs.

In 1981 two of the three fiction titles on the short list were first novels (nominees but losers in the *Books of Canada* first novel contest), and well-established writers like Richler and MacLennan were passed over. The question arose whether the GGs should be specifically rewarding newer writers. The Canada Council makes no rules on this; it is up to each committee, each judge to decide. It is a factor to be wrestled with. "You look for the best book of the year," says George Woodcock (who won a GG for his biography of George Orwell, *The Crystal Spirit*, in 1966, and who "everyone" says should have taken the 1975 prize for his biography of Gabriel Dumont), "but it's a very fluid thing. If you have any doubts, you look at the past record of authors. You're recognizing both the work and the writer." Shortly after the non-fiction nominees were announced, Phyllis Grosskurth, who won in 1964 for a biography of John Addington Symonds but whose *Havelock Ellis* now went unacknowledged, was quoted as saying, "Should they give awards to neophytes and ignore writers who are making it in the wider world?"

Simon Fraser University professor Peter Buitenhuis, chairman of the 1980 awards and three-time judge in the non-fiction category, considers it important for literary awards to recognize new, emerging talent and new forms. "It would be fairly easy simply to reinforce a writer's reputation. One function of the prize is to single out promising younger talent. There's not a lot of point in continuing to give a prize to someone who's already had it once, twice, three times. That person

doesn't need it as much as someone starting out." Sheila Watson speculates that perhaps the GGs should be given only once to a person so "it isn't like a horserace. After you've won for five novels, you shouldn't feel slighted if the sixth doesn't win." This now is a rule with the new CAA awards.

Last year was hardly the first time younger talent was noticed. In 1970 both Michael Ondaatje (27) and bp Nichol (26) won. It was also a year that, like 1969, saw two poetry and no non-fiction awards. A jury does have the option of not choosing a winner, but Kathy Berg notes that when you're judging a prize the tendency is to give it. You can't second-guess posterity; you choose the best thing on your plate. And no one, it would seem, favours doing away with the GGs. If anything, the more literary prizes the better.

The noisiest push for opening up the GGs has come from publisher Jack McClelland. After he wrote an open letter to the Governor General in *Maclean's*, he was invited to submit his ideas to the Canada Council, and an excerpt of his memo was circulated in the Writers' Union newsletter. McClelland complained about the method of selection. He would like 25 or 50 judges drawn from book publishers, book sellers, writers, high-school teachers, librarians, English professors, critics, and reviewers, with representatives from TV, radio, and newspapers, and members of the reading public. The Canada Council would screen the books and send 10 or 15 titles to each judge. "It could be very simple, effective," he says. His main beef is that writers are too biased, jealous, and mean-spirited to constitute a jury: "Better put a fox in a hen house than ask an author to judge his peers."

Margaret Atwood, current president of the Writers' Union and winner of but one GG, the poetry award in 1966, demurs. "I haven't won the GG so often that the whole thing has



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become a matter of indifference to me." But she adds that writers should continue to be judges. While UBC's William New and University of Toronto's R.P. Bilan favour having more academics as judges ("I don't know why it's presumed that a critic can't read a novel and judge it," says New), the literary community generally supports judges drawn from among their peers.

McClelland's second proposal was that the GGs be disassociated from the Governor General so there would no longer be any concern that unabashed flamboyance might embarrass the Crown. McClelland once threatened to pull up to Rideau Hall in a shaded limo, dressed in a Gouzenko-like hood, and plant TV cameras in the bushes to demonstrate that this was a secret gathering. He was told such behaviour would be out of place at a vice-regal affair, and dropped the idea. McClelland would settle for a black-tie dinner in Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver, televised, with separate awards for French and English, accompanied by appropriate hoopla. (Visions of Pierre Berton at the Harbour Castle reflected in the mirrors of Canadian showbiz come quickly to mind.) Or we might

repatriate Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, who some years ago read selections from the winners of the U.S. National Book Awards.

Not that the American experience has been an unalloyed media success. After near collapse in the mid-1970s the National Book Awards were rescued by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and two years later passed on to the Association of American Publishers, prompting widespread protests against such unseemly commercialization as rewarding paperback sales. There have also been complaints about too many nominees in each category (10), esoteric winners, popular winners, whether a posthumous title should be eligible, whether a writer should win more than once, and even protests that the judges were too old. And in 1977 why was a Brit, C.P. Snow, the main speaker? Sounds almost Canadian, eh?

Macmillan publisher Doug Gibson once remarked that if the GGs didn't exist something like them would have to be invented. So watch for them again this spring. The GGs. The awards you love to hate. □

#### FEATURE REVIEW

## Fires in winter

The characters in David Adams Richards's novel have been deprived of civilization. Like Hobbesian savages, their lives are 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'

By **GEORGE WOODCOCK**

*Lives of Short Duration*, by David Adams Richards, Oberon Press, 283 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 411 6) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 412 4).

EIGHT YEARS AGO David Adams Richards published a remarkable first novel, *The Coming of Winter*, and followed it up two years later with a second, *Blood Ties*. Now, after a considerably longer interval, he has published his third, *Lives of Short Duration*. The easiest way to define Richards is as a regional novelist, and for all its shallowness this is not an entirely unhelpful description. The people who inhabit *Lives of Short Duration* live and die along the Miramichi River, departing often to distant parts of Canada, but usually returning to the deprived life of a Canadian hinterland, where the primitive violence of a pioneer society has been replaced by the more insidious violence of a new colonization, by McDonald's and the Glad Tidings Temple, by the disco replacing the tavern and the dope peddler superseding the bootlegger. On this level Richards shows

himself, in his own terrain, to be a kind of Orwellian expert in the minutiae of a plebeian and vernacular culture, as he traces the fates of the Terri family from pioneering Old Simon, the discovery of whose decayed body ruins the party that begins the novel, down to his grandchildren, all of them scarred, like the region they come from, by the realities of modern Canadian existence.

But there is another level on which *Lives of Short Duration* makes its appeal, and that is as a meditation on the human condition, the processes that hold us all entrapped. After Old Simon is found — "just a skeleton and a skull," as his granddaughter Lois remarks — his son George, the novel's great hollow braggart, stands among the guests of his aborted party and tries to evade the lessons of the moment. Old Simon's remains have been found; Lester Murphy, the failed rich man of the village who once seduced George's wife, has been run over and killed the same evening, in time to evade trial for arson and insurance fraud. But George refuses to answer any of the questions

that are put to him by the seedy hangers-on, who try to probe his shaky defences.

Look, they were saying to him, we all have to work. Old Simon worked every day of his life, and when he couldn't work any longer he went into the woods and died. I know how you feel but we were born to croak and that's what all of us should keep in mind.

So the conversation, disjointed, flaring now and subsiding, then seemed to rage about him.

Regional novelists ever since Thomas Hardy have been predisposed to such dark views of existence; there is not much difference between passages of this kind in Richards and the more gloomy stretches of *Jude the Obscure*, except that Richards has a kind of gallows humour that the old Wessex master by and large lacked. That humour is reinforced by a flair for the Gothic fancy, the macabre phrase. At the party one of the guests hovers with a meagre lust around the promiscuous Lois (in her tight terrycloth shorts worn without panties): "There was a thin white stink from him, like the stink of late winter twilight." And after Little

Simon, the brother of Lois who has become a kind of minor Dostoevskian rebel against destiny, kills himself with a russian-roulette shot, he is exhibited for us at his funeral:

... Little Simon sunken into the cushions, the waxy colour not hiding the morbid greenness of the skin, the hands folded as if they'd nothing else to do but fold those waxy fingers with bitten nails...

There are times when one is tempted to equate the Richards view of hinterland Canadian society with the famous vision of the life of primitive man with which 17th-century Thomas Hobbes countered the myth of the Noble Savage:

No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

Give or take a few Big Macs, a sniff or two of hashish oil, and it may seem not to be stretching points very far to suggest that the "lives of short duration" of the novel's title are not unlike the "nasty, brutish and short" lives of Hobbesian savages. What Richards portrays, if it is not a life before civilization, is certainly a life that has been deprived of civilization. Violence looms always. The cunning prosper. The innocent are betrayed.

Savagery of a kind is triumphant.

Yet the Hobbesian model does not rule unchallenged in *Lives of Short Duration*. There is an admirable desperation, reminiscent of the aged Tolstoy, in Old Simon's escape from the hospital and his subsequent flight from his home — where he is threatened with a return to the institution — to die in the wood where he had spent 60 of his life's winters. The nihilist war his namesake grandson, Little Simon, wages against society to the point of self-destruction, is in its own inverted way a statement of vitalism; life must be lived on the knife-edge of risk. Lois, beautiful and profligate, shares with her other brother Packet a mitigating power of love, in her case directed toward her grandfather and in his case toward the Micmac girl he finds at the end of his violent wanderings. And even the weakest and most despicable characters, like George, have their moments of liberation from the sordid present when they see some times of their lives with a special visionary brightness, as when George, having heard while drunk of the discovery of his father's skeleton, drifts into memory:

Far away there was the laughter of children who'd graduated. Now and then a dog barked and another answered. A cricket twitched sleepily,

and he could hear and smell coals falling and drying into ashes.

Oh, the fires of winter. How lovely they were, and his father could walk in a straight line — straight through the worst cedar swamp, by taking readings from tree to tree.

"Don't be frightened, George," he used to say. His father smelled of balsam. Ah, the fires of the winter, beyond the lake — cold cold fires beyond the lake, the clear ice when the snow blew across it, the blue ice with rounded air-bubbles — the fires, cold and far away beyond the lake where they went to fish through the ice...

Cold fires, the petrified smell of balsam. Ah his eyes — Old Simon's eyes — far far away.

Moving laterally through time and memory, shifting from consciousness to consciousness as we see the past through many minds, *Lives of Short Duration* is not merely an account of the experiences of individuals or the history of a single family, but also the portrait of a society observed at the point of transition with an empathy that makes the questions "Was it better?" and "Can it be better?" seem equally irrelevant, since all is subsumed in a larger vision of the fate of men, collectively condemned to exist by the mortal necessities of natural life. □

## BOOKS WORTH READING AGAIN AND AGAIN

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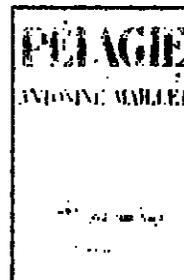
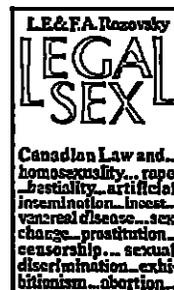
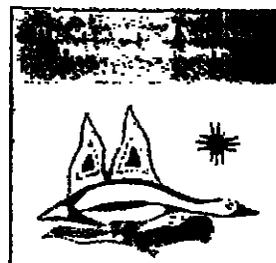
**LEGAL SEX** by L.E. & F.A. Rozovsky. Written by two Halifax lawyers, *Legal Sex* is a layman's guide to Canadian law and sexual issues, such as rape, abortion, sex change, and homosexuality. This reference book is also fascinating reading for anyone interested in sexual behavior in general and matters of social controversy. February \$9.95 pa; \$17.95 hb.

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### COMING IN APRIL

**THE JOURNALS OF SYLVIA PLATH.** Edited by Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough. Plath began keeping a diary as a young child; by the time she was in college, when this book begins, she had settled into a nearly daily routine with her journal, which was also a sourcebook for her writing. Edited by her husband, this moving book will be essential reading for anyone concerned with 20th century literature. April \$21.95



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# After the Holocaust

Seymour Mayne confronts the dilemma of our times: if millions of people can be calmly killed, what is the use of writing poetry?

By JOHN OUGHTON

*The Impossible Promised Land: Poems New and Selected*, by Seymour Mayne, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, 126 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88962 140 3) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 139 1).

SEYMOUR MAYNE'S literary career includes as many different roles as that of Fred Cogswell. Now teaching literature at the University of Ottawa, Mayne has been active as a poet (with his first publication at the age of 20, in 1964), editor, publisher (he is a director of Mosaic Press/Valley Editions), and critic. His new and selected poems, *The Impossible Promised Land*, provides a good opportunity to judge his poetic contributions in particular.

Now nearing 40, Mayne seems well set in his mode of writing. He seems consciously to ally himself with the three major Jewish poets of Montreal: A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Leonard Cohen. Mayne has edited *The A.M. Klein Symposium, Engagements: The Prose of Irving Layton*, and *Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics*, and has included poems dedicated to each man in the present collection. What those three markedly different poets have most in common is their consciousness as outsiders twice over; as anglophones in Quebec, and as Jews in a largely Christian country. That alienation works in distinct ways on the poetry of each, and also has its effect on Mayne.

Where Layton's poetry delights in muscle-flexing, and Cohen's slithers sensually over the skin like a drugged cat, Mayne's is poetry of the bone, often approaching the gnomic. He seldom extends to a lyric celebration of life or its joys. In fact, fully one-quarter of the poems in *The Impossible Promised Land* are either about death or dedicated to the dead, creating a tone surprisingly elegiac for a poet of Mayne's age. His poem "Abraham Sutzkever" (dedicated to the late Jewish ghetto poet whom Mayne helped trans-

late) contains the collection's title:

*Hurrying you seem  
always rushing and writing  
poems as all poets now do  
in haste, secretly,  
unseen in no man's  
land, invisible place,  
the impossible promised land  
where all the refugee words  
are gathered and make shelter.*

This land is revealed to have more than its obvious significations of Israel and the afterlife; it is also the white landscape of the page on which poets perform. Mayne makes it a hiding place, a node in the diaspora of language and meaning where words are the refugees: they are the Jews threatened by all-too-obvious slogans and diatribes.

Mayne's increasing consciousness of himself as a Jew was evident in his recent major collections *Name* (1975-76) and *Diasporas* (1977). For a Jewish writer, the Holocaust has become a central image and a mystery, as it should in fact for any imaginative writer in the second half of the century: if millions of people can be gassed with such calm efficiency, what is the meaning and utility of poetry? Is there any point to breeding orchids when they are surrounded by Panzer tanks? What can words do when, as Mayne asks in "For Melech Ravitch (1893-1976)": "the continent of Yiddish [is] blood soaked and staining/the blotter of Europe forever"?

Mayne's reactions to the problem are varied. He sometimes responds with simple misanthropy, as in the fine short poem "Parrots, Generals":

*A generation salts  
this earth still.  
Below Guadalajara  
the young suburbanites  
breed in the white habitations  
sold as bitter crystals.*

The suburbanites are seen as a lower life form, perhaps a species of moth that has learned to live, through adaptation, among the crystals that killed the butterflies.

More frequent, however, is his em-

phasis on remembering, bringing back to life for a moment the many who have been erased by the Holocaust and its fallout. Death negated the being of many, but Mayne is determined to replace that negation with some affirmation of their continuation in the collective memory of culture or the individual recall of the poet. He quotes Melech Ravitch: "Never succumb to cynicism — if you're a poet, you can't be a cynic." Mayne is a pessimist in *The Impossible Promised Land*, but he's not a cynic: the frequency of poems on mortality is evidence of the transience of death as well as of life. The dead stay in our living minds, in poems that preserve their essence.

Mayne's final reaction to mortality is the simplest: continue perceiving. If perception is what distinguishes life, then keeping one's eyes open is itself a life-affirming act. So he argues in the final poem, "Window," in which he recommends looking through a "Perfectly transparent/membrane, unscotched/even by a fugitive tear."

The emphasis in the book's subtitle is on "selected" rather than new. Most of the poems were contained in *Face*, *Name*, or *Diasporas*, but those who have known Mayne largely through the odd poem in a magazine will find this a good introduction to his work. In any event, Mayne's editorial experience pays off in the careful selection of poems here. Unlike the dauntingly prolific Layton, who each year seems to put in print everything he has written, Mayne works more slowly and chooses more carefully.

There are a few lapses, however. The poem "Part of My Tooth Fell In" appears in at least two earlier collections, and is not among the stronger works here. Another dental oversight is the inclusion of the slight quatrain "For the Dentist Who Extracted My Last Wisdom Tooth." In "Moving Day," Mayne tries, unsuccessfully, to construct an amusing love poem from images of apartmental domesticity — but like the "elevators or escalators" in the poem, it

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proceeds by fits and starts.

The overall impression left by *The Impossible Promised Land* is one of quiet, tough intelligence. There are few ringing lines or startling images, but the bones of the poems build effective structures. The rather tight breath of Mayne's lines and the generally unpunctuated, clipped style create a distinctive voice. Mayne may not have Layton's gift for erotic rhetoric or the melodic ear of Klein or Cohen, but he is less self-obsessed than the older poets, and his emphasis on memory and perception allows others to breathe within his recreations of Israel, Montreal, and the generally bloody landscape of our times.

If Mayne's accomplishments as a poet have not yet outpaced his other efforts as editor, publisher, and critic, they are at least of equal weight. And the promise is there for greater things if he would perhaps let his writing get a little crazier — not with the equivocal equations he sees in Klein's writing, but with the Hebraic force that sees Eros and Thanatos, laughter and tears, inextricably linked. □

**REVIEW**

**Rink rats  
and ravens**

By **DOUGLAS SMITH**

*All Star Poet*, by Stephen Scriver, Coteau Books, 101 pages, \$2.95 paper (ISBN 919926 12 6).

*The Surprise Element*, by Robert Hilles, Sidereal Press, unpaginated, no price or ISBN given.

*The Life of Ryley*, by Monty Reid, Thistledown Press, 71 pages, \$14.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920066 40 2) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 39 9).

*Rig Talk*, by Peter Christiansen, Thistledown Press, 67 pages, \$14.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920066 36 4) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 35 6).

"IN SEED TIME learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy." This epigraph to Stephen Scriver's *All Star Poet* would lead us to believe that Scriver has been influenced by Blake, and he has. But much more by Toe Blake than by William. *All Star Poet* is a book of anecdotes about, and

humorously vulgar maxims by, Saskatchewan's would-be NHL superstars, past and present. Many voices speak throughout, as Scriver allows a crazy pack of rink rats to tell their own stories and bad jokes. We overhear a coach's vituperatives to his players in "Clearing"; the fearful lament of a ref handing out penalties to the home team with the score tied and the fans screaming for his head; the pathetic story of Johnny Gervais, who "missed a shot with the Leafs in 37" because of "booze and bad lungs," and who carries around the corroborative newspaper clippings in the hope that on reading them someone will buy him a beer.

In his attempt to elevate these beer-guzzling, stogie-smoking, stick-swinging maniacs of Prairie senior hockey to the level of mythic heroes, Scriver fails. He fails because, himself included, these men who do ritualistic battle every Saturday night in bone-cold country rinks cannot raise the sport to the level of art, as do Lafleur and Clarke, or even lesser players such as Gillies and Dornhoeffer. Scriver recognizes this fact, but that does not prevent athletic failure from becoming poetic failure. Upon second reading, the anecdotes and crude bits of humour — "he knocked me flatter than piss on a plate . . . you could go to a shit fight and get thrown" — lose all impact. What Scriver does achieve, however, is the ability to render the locker-room innocence and experience of kids who never grew up, the pain of those who almost made it and of those who never stood a chance, and how they manage to ignore their fate:

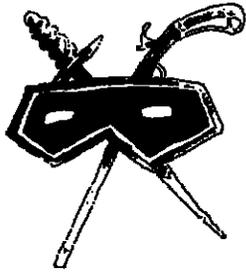
*right before a game  
some teams are talkin about the  
number  
of beer they can handle  
and some are crackin jokes or farts  
and some teams? they're not sayin  
much  
they know where they're goin*

To be truly enjoyed though, the poems in *All Star Poet* should be heard, for they are part of the oral tradition. On the printed page they lie flatter than ice on a prairie hilltop.

*The Surprise Element*, Robert Hilles's second book of poems, is actually a long poem in 24 parts. Its lines and stanzas, however, are kept taut and short (there are many one-line stanzas) in an effort to convey the tension that arises when the poet confronts familial ghosts and struggles to find his voice among theirs. This, obviously, has been done before, but many young writers feel compelled to do it again — *their way*.

Hilles's way involves calling upon four older poets for guidance: Kroetsch, Nichol, Bowering, and Wah. Using

passages from each of these poets' work as epigraphs to his book, Hilles introduces the themes of his poem: voice (breath), story/journey, history (personal and universal). And while the epigraphs cleverly provide the point of



departure for his quest to "connect" the chaotic "elements" that will act as catalysts in transforming apparent randomness into meaning, Hilles's reliance on the first of the four becomes embarrassingly heavy: one comes away from reading *The Surprise Element* feeling as though one has just read a parody of Kroetsch. There are too many lines like "how does the poem become" to forgive even self-conscious imitation. Hilles's self-consciousness, moreover, is painfully evident throughout. Lines such as "the places aren't important/its [sic] how i reveal them that is important" are not only pretentious, but rhetorically awkward.

Hilles's strength lies in his bringing forward the grief that flows in a family's blood. Several sections of the poem beautifully embody the pain that comes of his "mother's madness" and his "father's silence." When he escapes the self-conscious preoccupation with form and dares to move outside the shadows of his guides, Hilles writes originally of the tragic "distances" between people trying to comprehend their lives.

In *The Life of Ryley* Monty Reid also writes well about grief, the grief that befalls the inhabitants of the small town of Ryley, Alta. Working against the suggestion of the good life that the title would ordinarily imply, Reid renovates the clichés of Prairie alienation and isolation by filtering them through the details and cycles of landscape into a compressed mythos:

*This is the third year in a row:  
the long slow ride out of the meadows  
east of Beaverhill Lake to see  
if there are still crocuses  
to watch the cranes and pelicans  
to lie among the coarse grass  
as the evening comes in slow  
as driftwood and not to notice  
any of it.*

Reid's keen eye is both his strength and his weakness. Often Reid will begin a poem with a captivating image such as "The mist splits open for light the way the heart/is parted for clarity" (wonder-

ful sounds there), but rather than trusting the image, exploring it, allowing it to ignite his imagination, Reid records another, and another, and so on. The result is a bunch of one-to-one correspondences that do not cohere, or that fail to develop the emotion at their core. When he does use his imagination, Reid writes poems that overthrow the tyranny of logical narrative with a compelling, wild, psychic energy:

*The barrels turn all  
night and I can hear  
a river scraping  
through the house.  
A woman  
fishes in the water  
for a stone.*

We find very little of this kind of energy in Peter Christensen's *Rig Talk*, a book about the lives of the men who work the oil rigs of the West. The book is divided into three sections. The first, "Oil Rush," describes drilling operations and is filled with the industry's jargon — "powder monkey," "geogell charge," "shot point" — which, because they are not explained, lend a certain mystique to the tedium of working in the field. We also learn what a crew does to occupy itself during its time off, and their activities are nothing if not disturbing. The poet watches a worker with nothing

better to do than "blow the ass off a gopher," and then watches a raven get blown to bits overhead by a blasting cap concealed in a piece of bread. What is disturbing is not so much the moronic behaviour of the workers but the casual way Christensen accepts it. I get the feeling he enjoys these jokes. Granted, Christensen has, as he says, been made rough by these men, but his roughness comes closer here and elsewhere to acquiescence.

The other two sections of the book, though much better, never quite atone for the first. The third section balances the documentary with the lyric, as Christensen juxtaposes the men "who clang against cold nights/have money/cars/women/drive fast/live life" with those like "Patrick Plainagle," who "feeds horses" and "watches the fox steal chickens." The second section — the book's best — presents the earth, almost through aboriginal eyes, as something sacred, something to be praised and not exploited. But even amidst his praise, Christensen remains convinced that "to have culture/you've got to have dead things." This is a spurious coda, since it is true of life and not just of culture. Both life and culture are richer with live things, live ravens, not dead ones. □

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**AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE**

# Primal screen

By SUSAN CREAN

The *Telidon Book*, edited by David Godfrey and Ernest Chang, Press Porcépic, illustrated, 300 pages, \$30.00 paper (ISBN 0 88878 194 6).

WITH THE PROFUSION of wonder-progeny from the microchip, and the world's largest companies (IBM, AT&T) and richest countries racing each other to market with their state-of-the-art inventions, it's extremely useful to have a book: focusing on a single aspect of the new information technology — in this case videotex. It also helps to have a thorough-going examination of the capabilities and potential of one particular system in mid-evolution, accom-

## Inside Out

The Social Meaning of Mental Retardation

Robert Bogdan  
and Steven J. Taylor

What does it mean to be 'mentally retarded'? This book gives some of the answers... answers that are true and painfully revealing, and also powerful indictments of our knowledge of, our thinking about, and our ministrations to the mentally handicapped. The authors have interviewed two former inmates of institutions for the retarded in the US and let 'Ed Murphy' and 'Pattie Burt' tell their stories in their own words... stories of physical, mental, and emotional abuse, of incarceration and depersonalization, of neglect and abandonment. In spite of their experiences, Ed and Pattie survived to become independent members of society and to teach us, with the help of the authors, that retardation is an 'imaginary disease' and that attempts to 'cure' it are a hoax. \$14.95

University of Toronto Press

panied by a review of the obstacles (and competition) in its path to maturity. This is so for two reasons. It is one way to give interested observers, who can't follow the day-to-day, rough-and-tumble fortunes of high risk, hi-tech research, a fast introduction to Life on the Leading Edge. And by exploring the dynamics of this contemporary form of scientific investigation the book offers those of us who are only spectators in the communications revolution encouragement to develop our own opinions about it. It may help some of us find our bearings in the chaos of promises and predictions about the computerized future.

Telidon is Canada's entry in the telematics tournament (telematics being the accepted shorthand for the splicing of computer and telecommunications technologies). It was actually invented by a team of boffins in the federal Department of Communications, and since its unveiling three years ago has been purchased for use in field trials in Venezuela, the U.S., and Germany. Extensive testing in Canada continues with projects involving private industry, public institutions, and government. So far this activity has been mainly interested in testing hardware, and relatively little work has yet gone into designs for the services it will deliver.

Put simply, Telidon is a way of making pictures in a central computer that is linked to terminals in the home or office. What makes it special is the quality of these pictures, for unlike the European alpha-mosaic versions of videotex graphics, which construct images with tiny blocks, Telidon's alpha-geometric system is capable of describing curves. It takes the lumps out, as it were. Obviously, such an improvement will boost the appeal of videotex services that carry graphs, charts, and other visual images along with the plain old text.

In their introduction, editors Godfrey and Chang state that the objective of *The Telidon Book* is to present the technical facts in some detail and in as straightforward a manner as possible. Their secondary purpose is to demonstrate how small entrepreneurs and public-sector groups can take advantage of the new technology while pursuing quite different goals than those of corporations and governments (with their penchant for large-scale commercial and centralized planning). To these ends there are six chapters containing technical information about the specific functions or components of the Telidon system: the graphics system or "protocol"; methods of creating, sending, and storing "pages" (or databases); the terminal. This is prefaced by a substan-

tial, 80-page overview of videotex activities in Europe, Japan, the United States, and Canada by Richard Larratt, a professional engineer and consultant whose firm has investigated the political, social, and marketing implications of the wired city. To my mind it is unfortunate that Larratt restricts his discussion to hardware, mentioning social factors only in passing. After all, it is the curse of our times that innovation in communications media have so often been determined by the technology, with the commercial spoils going to those who get in there first with a system that, once in place, is hard to dislodge and ends up defining the rules for everyone for years to come. This is the tragedy of television — first-rate hardware delivering third-rate programming (which in Canada has the added disadvantage of being mostly imported and therefore an economic drain on our own production industry). To be fair, though, *The Telidon Book* does not set out to deal with issues of software or social impact. It is a technical handbook intended, so the jacket claims, for everyone who needs to understand this new technology. Everyone, however, isn't likely to include general readers unless they are under 18, can solve Rubik's cube in 60 seconds, and learned to spell on an Apple. Those who, like myself, have been following Telidon's career in the *Report on Business* for two years, are intrigued by it as a medium and see it as a significant departure in federal communications policy and industrial strategy, will still find the book hard slogging. Few concessions are made to readers who lack practical (hands-on) knowledge of computer basics, or who are still trying to master the lingo. A simple glossary of terms would have made the book infinitely more accessible to your average "semi-literate." Even an index would have helped. As it is, if you don't know what ASHII means, you have to wait 167 pages to discover that it stands for American Standard Code of Information Interchange and is one of the two major systems for representing videotex characters (i.e. the letters which form videotex words — the "bits" that make up the "bytes").

Though the book is valuable primarily as a source of very recently compiled and comprehensive information, it also affords a few insights. For one thing, the hardware configurations of the new technologies (that is, how the systems are organized and which components are used) seem to be as difficult to forecast as their social and cultural impact. Apparently few videotex players have thought very deeply about how to use it, which is a bit like inventing a miracle drug and then looking around to see

what it can cure. Videotex might remain what it is at the moment, a rather prosaic embellishment of existing teletex services. But, as Larratt points out, for videotex to become a mass medium (and Telidon may be a step in that direction) there will have to be a major transformation in the public's attitude toward information. What is now regarded either as a service or entertainment would have to become recognized as an "economic good." Until then, an expenditure of time, money, and ingenuity — at least equal to what's gone into Telidon's invention — is required. □

REVIEW

High crimes

By FRANK RASKY

*The Flying Bandit*, by Heather Robertson, James Lorimer, 150 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88362 520 0).

ORIGINALLY I HAD intended to write a review in parody form of *The Flying Bandit*, Heather Robertson's fictionalized biography of Ken Leishman, the Canadian bank robber and gold thief. For reasons that will soon become apparent, though, I changed my mind. After all, how can you parody something that is so preposterously hoked-up that it is already a parody of itself?

Just consider this sample of interior monologue, which Leishman is purportedly thinking while in prison:

Ken had got to thinking about Dillinger and Billy the Kid and Jesse James and all the books that had been written about them, all the movies. People never seemed to get enough. Maybe his story would be interesting too. He'd tell it from the inside, explain how and why he did things, the real dope. Gosh, it might be a best seller, make a million dollars, make a movie, he could play himself! Golly, he'd be a star! . . .

Ha, ha! Writing's a cinch. A piece of cake. Why hadn't he thought of this before? Big money in books. . . .

It may well be a hell of a story, but Robertson has botched it up. Which is unfortunate, because she is a sensitive journalist, as she demonstrated in her

earlier works. She is the author of three excellent books dealing with Prairie pioneers and has edited *A Terrible Beauty*, a superb collection of Canadian wartime paintings and reminiscences.

But here she has gone overboard in adopting that bastard literary form known as "faction." In her words, she has "surmised events" and "created conversations to make the story more realistic and to recapture its drama." The result is a hodge-podge of unverified fact and dubious fiction seemingly patterned after gangster movie stereotypes. The dialogue is unbelievably bad: "Lemme make a couplea calls. I know a guy might help ya out . . . The cops are on your tail. Jist heard it on the news. I can put ya up."

Even more ludicrous are the exaggerated claims she makes for her hero; it is the worst sort of bargain-basement myth-making. She touts Leishman in her prologue as "Canada's Scarlet Pimpernel," "Canada's most popular thief," "a modern Robin Hood" whose "capers were daring, flamboyant and fun . . . brilliant moves in a chess match with the police." I found hardest to swallow her piece of puffery in which she alleges: "Ken could charm the birds out of the trees. He had style. He had

class. Everybody who knew Ken loved him. Even the cops."

Well, he didn't charm this bird. From the evidence she presents, he appears to have been a two-bit grifter who pulled off a couple of big-time jobs only because the lawmen he tangled with were more inept fumbler than himself. At 19, the gawky Manitoba yokel won his first jail sentence for hiding in a furniture store after it had closed for the night and haphazardly ordering a truck to deliver \$300 worth of loot to his apartment. Later, after trying to make a living as a door-to-door salesman of pots and pans, he robbed his first bank in Toronto and flew home to Winnipeg with \$10,000. On his second attempt, repeating the same tactics exactly, he was nabbed easily while trying to hold up the bank for \$40,000.

He scored his major coup in 1966, spiriting \$400,000 worth of gold bullion away from the Winnipeg airport. He was captured and, because he foolishly blabbed about his escapade to a Mountie masquerading as his cell-mate, he was awarded a sentence of eight years. He was captured again after two spectacular jailbreaks. Finally released in 1974, he settled down to run a gift shop, turning out T-shirts adorned with funny slogans.

ROBERT SILVERBERG

# MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES



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# More than meets the eye

By **STEPHEN SCOBIE**

*Evening Dance of the Grey Flies*, by P.K. Page, Oxford, 96 pages, \$6.50 paper (ISBN 0 19 540381 9).

THERE'S A LINE in one of P.K. Page's poems from a previous collection in which she speaks of "the delicate jet/of my attention." It's a phrase that describes exactly (exemplifying itself) the particular gifts again evident in *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies*. The details of Page's visual acuity are always delicate, and intricate. In her drawings, as P.K. Irwin, she uses only hard-nibbed instruments; the sharpness of the line never dissolves into the softness of a brush. In one of the new poems, she speaks of imagined creatures who

*Crave mosaics  
small moorish patterns*

*checks greek key  
all intricate shapes  
fine mottle stipple  
singing reeds  
whistles of birds*

Page's vocabulary is as exact, and as delicate, as her nibs.

Yet the word "jet," with all its suggestions of a fine narrow line, also implies force and energy. The observing I, the observing eye, project upon the visible world the directed attention of a perception that seeks not only to absorb, but to penetrate through to "the rarely glimpsed bright face/behind the apparancy of things." The exactness of the observation of that objective "apparancy" — "Jonquills/red-eyed as vireos," or finches that "fall like feathered cones" and "skirl like a boiling pot/or a shallow within a river" — becomes for Page the means toward a non-objective vision, which can only be described in the mystical language of "transparent, multifoliate/Flowers of the Upper Air."

As objective moves to subjective, as the eye becomes the I, Page runs of course the risk of seeming self-absorbed, or even arrogant, in the pride of her own perceptions. A poem supposedly in tribute to the artistry of Rostropovich becomes also a tribute to

*the enduring pupil  
of my inner eye  
made in the manner  
that you made your wrist —  
of matter primal and alchemical.*

Thus, the centre of the book (both literally and thematically) is the short story "Unless the Eye Catch Fire," in which the gift of extraordinary perception sets the unnamed narrator apart, isolates her in a solitude of her own social inhibitions. Furthermore, the story takes the form of a science-fiction fantasy, in which the perceptions of those who see "new colours" are somehow linked with an increase in the temperature of the earth's surface. Eventually, the eye "catches fire" both subjectively and objectively: as the world apocalyptically burns to its end, the narrator is subsumed into the glory of the visions she sees, feeling "part of that whirling incandescent matter," concluding that "Inner and outer are the same." The vision of the artist, or the mystic, pitched at this level of intensity, consumes the world but also consumes the I. The final lines of the book (placed in parentheses, as if they were a modest aside) express the paradox of a view that is both arrogant and selfless, crystal clear and yet ineffable:

*(I know  
nothing of what I speak  
I speak  
nothing of what I know)*

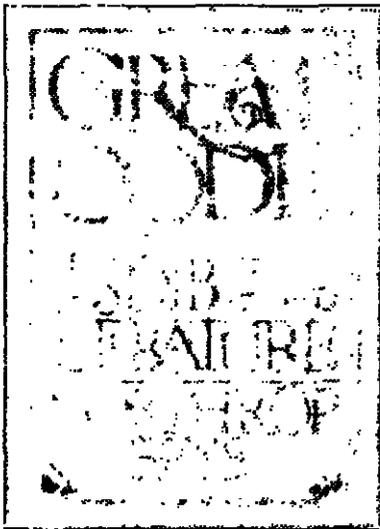
In an ironic twist, Leishman was elected president of the Chamber of Commerce in Red Lake, the mining community that had produced the gold bricks he had stolen. In 1979 he staged his last vanishing act, disappearing mysteriously in his Piper Aztec. Though fragments of the plane were ultimately discovered north of Thunder Bay, his body was never found.

Robertson surmises that he may have sneaked away on a last spree, taking with him six pounds of bullion that had never been recovered. She concludes her book with several coy questions: "Will Ken turn up, in a year or two or ten, in Rio or Buenos Aires or Hong Kong, rich, cocky as ever, with that wide grin and roguish twinkle in his eye that says, 'Ha, ha! Fooled you again! Who knows?'" And with typical hyperbole, she wonders, "Was his disappearance the biggest hoax in Canadian history?"

I remain skeptical. Forty-five years ago, Morley Callaghan took the raw stuff of fact involving a Toronto bank robber named Red Ryan and transmuted it into a fictional work of art titled *More Joy in Heaven*. Robertson has merely padded out with a lot of gollies and wows and holy cows a highly inflated magazine article whose subject merits the title of *The Flying Bromide*. □



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Ordinary people gone out of control:  
something fishy in the B.C. wilderness and  
a hostage drama down at the plant

By DOUGLAS HILL

IN *Office Party* (General Publishing, 240 pages, \$15.50 cloth), Michael A. Gilbert has an intriguing subject — domestic hostage-taking. It's an intelligent and well-planned novel, unfortunately spoiled by weak writing.

Eugene Brackin is 46, mild-mannered, solitary, and undemonstrative to the point of invisibility. On a Thanksgiving weekend in Mattsfield, Ohio, he bars the door to the office where he and three other employees of a manufacturing firm have been putting in overtime. He produces a pistol, a rifle, manacles, and chain, and announces that his co-workers now are his prisoners. By the time the incident ends, not without violence, the reader has been led through a probing examination of the reactions of ordinary people under extreme stress.

Gilbert does well with his characters. The background and emotional make-up of each are sketched in sufficiently to make the reader confident that the resolution of the affair will be psycho-

logically credible, not gratuitous. The plot builds suspense; Gilbert's choreography is at times striking.

But his prose is something else. The dialogue is often stiff and awkward, and the narrative stumbles over too many sentences like: "The sunshine conspired to further confuse him but his body was able to begin walking to work all by itself. The cool air helped clear his face but the weight of the bag required an exertion that produced its own perspiration." It's too bad; the novel's insights deserve a larger audience than they're going to get, or keep.

MORE ORDINARY PEOPLE in Charles Webb's *The Wilderness Effect* (Clarke Irwin, 238 pages, \$18.95 cloth), are caught in a situation that goes bloodily out of control. Here they're all in the mountains in British Columbia, two old friends, Scott and Errol, and Errol's new wife Gayle. Thrown together, quite by coincidence, at an isolated lake for a

## First novel awards

LAST YEAR was a particularly good one for Canadian fiction — a happy state of affairs that was also demonstrated in the 1981 crop of first novels. But while the year introduced some unfamiliar names and interesting experiments (including one book written pseudonymously and another that yoked the novellas of two writers), the list of new novelists continued to be dominated by writers who were experienced in other forms. Among the finalists for the sixth annual Books in Canada Award for First Novels — which offers a prize of \$1,000 for the best first novel published in English in Canada during calendar 1981 — are several writers already widely recognized for their non-fiction or poetry.

The five titles on the short list are: *Streetharts*, by Jim Christy (Simon & Pierre); *Final Decree*, by George

Jonas (Macmillan), *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa (Lester & Orpen Dennys); *Sunday's Child*, by Edward Phillips (McClelland & Stewart); and *Always Tip the Dealer*, by Gary Ross (McClelland & Stewart).

This year's panel of judges is chaired by Douglas Hill, who regularly contributes a column about first novels from the vantage point of Port Kirwan, Nfld. The other judges are: Montreal translator and critic Sheila Fischman; Toronto book columnist Sandra Martin; John Richardson of A Different Drummer Books in Burlington, Ont.; and West Coast novelist and short-story writer Jack Hodgins, a winner of the Governor General's Award for fiction who is spending the year teaching at the University of Ottawa. Their verdict and comments will be announced in a forthcoming issue. □

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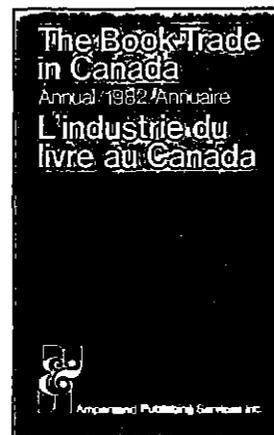
Many of the letters were written to Bertha Mahony Miller, founder of *The Horn Book Magazine*. Other correspondents included Mrs. James deWolf Perry of Philadelphia and Mrs. J. Templeman Coolidge of Boston.

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week of fishing, the trio encounter ill omens, a nasty Indian tramp, and an assortment of tensions, needs, and inadequacies, many of them sexual, in themselves.

*Deliverance? Surfacing?* Sort of, only this novel is rather mixed-up and curiously unaffecting, on whatever level you try to meet it. The characters simply aren't interesting, the scenes and encounters seem stale, Webb's insights about the woods and survival would be out of their depth in a Clint Eastwood movie. The writing is competent but

flat, almost completely without verve. The adjectives Webb uses to describe the heroine's breasts — "medium-large, shapely, and very white" — will perhaps give other readers the thrill of erotic specificity. Perhaps; I had a dog once who looked like that.

*The Wilderness Effect* has violence, sex, tough talk, lots of fishing details (Webb is very specific about the size of his trout). All the parts, but they don't add up; there's a fundamental banality of imagination at the centre of the book. □

## IN TRANSLATION

An austere account of the fall of man sets the stage for cries of anti-fascist anguish, but there is still room for days of greatness

By **PAUL STUEWE**

THERE IS A WORLD of difference between the poetic personae of Robert Marteau, a Frenchman now living in Quebec, and Abraham Sutzkever, an Eastern European Jew now living in Israel, but they are similar in that they are both excellent at what they do. Marteau's *Treatise on White and Tincture* (translated by Barry Callaghan, Exile Editions, \$6.95 paper) is an intellectually demanding epic poem of man's creation and fall into time, in which paradise is lost through the inexorable processes of natural physics rather than the seductive allure of immoral pleasures. The basic transitions are from stasis to motion and from simple perfection to complex possibility, and there are corresponding transformations in the poem's language: the austere purity of whiteness is gradually mottled by the shades of life in birth and death, and direct statement is almost entirely replaced by metaphor. Although an awareness of Marteau's thematic preoccupations is never completely dispelled by the power of his rhythms and images, this is an ambitious and largely successful undertaking that commands respect.

By contrast, the poems in Abraham Sutzkever's *Burnt Pearls* (translated by Seymour Mayne, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, \$11.95 cloth and \$5.95 paper) are so highly charged that they would probably survive almost any form of utterance. As it happens, these "ghetto poems" from the Holocaust have been fashioned with much literary craft,

which further adds to their impact. Sutzkever's *Burnt Pearls* are poems about atrocities recollected in, if not tranquillity, a state of psychological acceptance that permits the artistic expression of what he could otherwise not bear to speak. The experiences about which he writes are from an entirely different universe than the one we're accustomed to considering as the raw material of literature, as the conclusion of "For My Child" — a requiem for a murdered son — heartrendingly demonstrates:

*That drop of poison extinguished your  
faith —*

*you thought  
it was warm sweet milk.*

*I wanted to swallow you, my child,  
to feel the taste  
of my anticipated future.  
Perhaps in my blood  
you will blossom as before.*

*But I am not worthy to be your grave,  
So I bequeath you  
to the summoning snow,  
the snow — my first respite,  
and you will sink  
like a splinter of dusk  
into its quiet depths  
and bear greetings from me  
to the frozen grasslands ahead.*

No more needs to be said about these poems: they are to be read, wept over, remembered, and cherished.

The Holocaust also forms part of the background of Polish emigré Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* (translated

by Jane Zielonko, Random House, \$6.50 paper), a 1953 work now reissued as the consequence of his 1980 Nobel award. Milosz's novel is a description of the dilemma of the anti-fascist but less than wholeheartedly pro-communist intellectuals of postwar Eastern Europe, and was generally dismissed as reactionary apologetics when it originally appeared. But it is now evident that it is a brilliant piece of psychological and historical analysis. As one who initially accepted a communist regime in Poland and even served as its cultural representative abroad, Milosz is sympathetic to the agonized rationalizations that mark the transition from skeptical fellow traveller to committed party member, and he constantly seeks to understand rather than condemn the mind that opts for captivity. This illuminating exercise in intellectual investigation is also very witty, particularly incisive on the literary consequences of putting on ideological blinders, and further proof that Milosz's Nobel Prize was richly deserved.

In what seems to be a month of almost unqualified enthusiasms, I was also delighted with the paperback appearance of Italo Calvino's *Italian Folktales* (translated by George Martin, Random House, \$12.95), a massive anthology of popular stories engagingly retold by a talented writer. Some of Calvino's previous work has suffered from his penchant for intellectual gamesmanship, with his recent novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* demonstrating that an intrinsically dull plot can be only partially enlivened by a sophisticated narrative strategy. But here the abundance of story material seems to act as a steadying stimulus to his imagination, and the result is a marvelous concoction of entertaining folktales. It's a treat to just browse around in; it's also going to be quite useful when my son reaches the bedtime-story stage.

Speaking of bedtime reading, I've always enjoyed curling up with a leisurely, well-made family saga of the Buddenbrooks or Forsyte variety, the sort of thing that used to lead a publisher's seasonal list in the days before economic considerations made 150-page accounts of adolescent psychopathology the norm. Fellow revellers in such indulgences will be glad to know that Walter Kempowski's *Days of Greatness* (translated by Leila Vennewitz, Random House, \$19.95 cloth) is the first instalment of a four-part story of a family's experiences in 20th-century Germany.

Although the author's concerns are primarily sociological and historical, the large cast of characters is effectively differentiated by allowing each of them a turn as narrator, and the use of multiple viewpoints in conjunction with some judicious time-shifting adds a welcome

element of structural complexity to a tale that would drag a bit if linearly presented. *Days of Greatness* takes us up to the end of the first World War, and I'll be looking forward to the sequels as they move into what the Chinese describe as "interesting times." □

### ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Our wandering scholar can't do nothing when he hears such barbarisms as 'plus' and 'nth' creeping into the language. It discomfits him

By **BOB BLACKBURN**

A WELL-MEANING READER has given me a severe headache by sending me a clipping from the *Toronto Star* in which a columnist, attacking Margaret Trudeau's *Consequences*, states that it is "a book that taxes one's credibility with every half-hearted turn of the page."

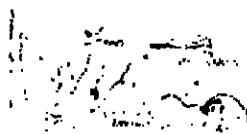
Certainly that is a deplorable misuse of *credibility*, which is the quality of deserving to be believed. It is the credi-

bility of the book that is in question, not that of the reader. It should be enough merely to point that out and then go on to something else. But the person who sent the clipping felt compelled to suggest that the correct word would be *credulity*.

That might satisfy most, but it must be pointed out that *credulity* does not just mean (as it did long ago) "readiness

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to believe"; it denotes *excessive* readiness to believe, or gullibility, and has done so for two centuries. So it doesn't quite serve in this context. And the headache came on when I started trying to think of a word that *would*, by itself, correct the sentence. I have given up, but the headache remains. I don't know how *credulity* acquired its pejorative sense, but when it did we lost a useful term that has not, in 200 years, been replaced. (Not, at least, to my knowledge).

Still picking away at the subject, one notes that *incredulity* continues to mean what it has always meant. It is a precise antonym of *credulity* in the obsolete sense of the latter word, but not in the modern sense.

Despite all this, I suspect that the misguided columnist was confusing *credibility* with *credulity*, a thesis that led me to consult my new Room's Dictionary of Confusibles (Oxford, \$17.50 cloth). Sure enough, Room says *credible* and *credulous* are frequently confused, one for the other, but he also makes it clear that *credulous* means gullible.

Room, who is Adrian Room, a British lexicographer and geographer of note, has let me down once or twice since I acquired his dictionary. He was no help with *exult* and *exalt*, for instance. And obviously he has never felt the frustra-

tion of trying to get "disparate measures" into print without some green copy editor changing it to "desperate measures"; nor written "causal relation-



ship" only to have it come out in print as "casual relationship." But he does list some 800 "confusibles," which he deals with deftly and concisely. With Room around, no one need ever again confuse *discomfort* with *discomfit* or misuse *misuse* for *abuse*. He does nothing for us that a good general dictionary would not do, but his slim volume delivers its limited services at a considerable saving of the user's time and effort. And idle

moments spent leafing through its pages might help any of us to avoid confusing or being confused in the future.

SUDDENLY (or so it seems to me), hundreds of our professional communicators, particularly those using television, have decided that *plus* is a conjunction (e.g., "The victim was robbed of \$40, *plus* he was severely beaten"). *Plus* does not mean *and*. It came into English as a mathematical term. It is the verbal expression of "+". It means "in addition to," and can be so used in non-technical language. It has other acceptable uses as an adjective and noun, but to use it as a conjunction is a barbarism. *Plus* it makes you sound stupid.

Another mathematical term increasingly misused is *nth*. It does not mean *ultimate*, as in "foolishness carried to the *nth* degree." The *n* signifies an unknown or unspecified number, not necessarily a number of infinite magnitude.

I'VE SPENT A LOT of time over the years wondering how to avoid the pain in the neck brought on by the distinction between *immigrate* and *emigrate*, and between their corresponding nouns. We all know that one emigrates *from* somewhere and that to immigrate is to move into a new place. But since you can't leave one place without coming into another, is the distinction really necessary? Does one have to say "he emigrated from Canada and immigrated into Germany"? One can say correctly and more simply that he migrated from Canada to France. But what do you call him? Is he a French immigrant and a Canadian emigrant, or is it the other way 'round? In common speech, we speak of someone who came here from France as a French immigrant. That must be wrong, but that's what we say.

Furthermore, we can no longer get around it by calling the fellow a migrant. Newer dictionaries warn us that *migrant* as a noun carries the suggestion that the person so labelled is one who flits hither and yon; one who is something of a gypsy; a migratory worker.

If only everyone in the world would just *stay put* . . . .

MY WANDERING ATTENTION was abruptly brought back to a recent TV interview when I heard U.S. Vice-President George Bush say: "The United States can't do nothing." I was already jotting the line down when I realized he had said exactly what he meant, which was that, in the situation being discussed, it was impossible for the United States to avoid taking some sort of action. It was not a felicitous phrase, but it did command attention. □

## A PUBLISHING EVENT...



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Coast-to-coast by way of small presses:  
from a girl and her pony on a Catiboo ranch  
to the sailing ships of the Maritimes

By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

SMALL PRESSES in Canada continue to show a deep involvement in the production of children's books. Generally this is a very healthy thing. Although in some cases lack of resources may be reflected embarrassingly in the product, more often the publishers' strong regional commitments and unique personalities make their books refreshing contributions to Canadian children's writing. Here is a coast-to-coast sampling of some recent books from small publishers:

*The Dancing Sun*, edited by Jan Andrews, Press Porcépic, 141 pages, \$5.95 paper. This anthology of stories and poems is intended to demonstrate "the strength and richness" that Canadian children can enjoy because of their different heritages. The high seriousness of its purpose puts rather heavy demands on this little book, but the contents, intended for children ages eight to 12, are generally readable and entertaining. There is sometimes a tendency for pat and moral endings of the type found in grade-school readers: Steve in Ann Rivkin's "Awards Day" learns the value of bravery and cooperation in a crisis; Merna in Irma V. Sanderson's "The Muslim Curtains" learns not to be ashamed of her immigrant background. Other stories are more directly entertaining — for example G. Joan Morris's "A Tale of Much Rejoicing" and Sharon Drache's "Jeremiah Proosky." Particularly enjoyable contributions are several poems about Inuit life by Alootook Ipellie and "The Rescue of the Prince," an Icelandic fairy-tale by 95-year-old R. Gutormsson of Manitoba. Illustrations by Renée Mansfield are detailed and attractive.

*Catiboo Pony*, by Eleanor Bjornson, Oolichan Books, 112 pages, \$6.95 paper. A girl and her pony make a time-tried combination for a limited but enthusiastic readership. This time the girl is Janet, the author's daughter, and Stormy Star is the pony she gets when she is eight years old. Until she outgrows him, Stormy takes her through several happy years of pleasure riding, formal lessons, horse shows, and rodeos. For

someone not involved, the catalogue of these events gets pretty monotonous, but Bjornson does convince us that a childhood spent in ranch country would be marvellous. The book is illustrated with photographs, many showing Janet and Stormy Star in competition.

*Grandfather Symons' Homestead Book*, by R.D. Symons, Western Producer Prairie Books, 80 pages, \$8.95 paper. This is an excellent book. With anecdotes, explanations, and his own fascinating illustrations, Symons takes young readers through the months of the year on the homestead, showing pioneer life on the Prairies as it was for their grandparents when they were youngsters. Special things happened: twin calves were born, the ice was right for spinning on the slough, Great-grandmother traded some homemade cheese for a real Christmas tree, and from day-to-day and season-to-season the children took their part in all the family work required to make homestead life successful. Symons throughout takes special pains to involve his young readers and to relate their experiences to those of their grandparents. Symons died in 1973, but his humour and liking for young people are very much alive in this book.

*Mr. McUmphie of Caulfield Cove*, by Ainslie Manson, illustrated by Janet Stethem, Queenston House, 80 pages, \$10.95 cloth and \$5.95 paper. This slim story tells how two children befriend an old sea captain who spends his winters living in a cave in a park in suburban West Vancouver. He teaches them lots of valuable lessons about life, and together they protect his sanctuary from the attacks of a winter works clean-up crew.

*The Indian Summer of Arty Bigjim and Johnny Jack*, by S. Joan Danielson Fossey, illustrated by Harold M. Moore, Gullmasters (4 Cromer Bay, Winnipeg R2M 4C5), 133 pages, \$8.95 paper. This is the first publication by Gullmasters, a group that intends to specialize in Canadian children's literature. They have made an encouraging start. The first part of this book, set on an Indian

reserve in Northern Ontario, is particularly well-presented. Arty Bigjim is a cheerful and adaptable boy, but his family life is becoming increasingly precarious because of his parents' drinking. His friend Johnny has no family, cannot adapt to such situations as attending white school, and is subject to fits of anger and violence. The tragic results of one of Johnny's destructive outbreaks send the two friends on the run from the reserve. Just as things are at their bleakest, they are befriended by an old man with a magician's costume and an accent reproduced here like the *habitant* dialogue in William Henry Drummond's poetry. He happens to be a wealthy retired judge who intercedes with the law on the boys' behalf and puts them up on his estate in Hull. Here the credibility of the plot is somewhat strained. But to the author's credit, there is no easy resolution to the boys' problems. At the end of the novel, Arty and Johnny are both trying to find their own ways to come to terms with the future.

*The Secret*, by Barbara Novak, illustrated by Katherine Helmer, Three Trees Press, 48 pages, \$4.95 paper. In this delicate fantasy, Anna's honesty, faith, and courage manage to break the spell on Ardeon, the handsome young stranger who arrives in her forest home. However, only when Ardeon himself matches her strength and understanding can they be united and happy. This story is gently written and attractively illustrated, but it lacks somehow the strong ties with life's realities that make traditional fairy tales work so well.

*Jenny Greenteeth*, by Mary Alice Downie, illustrated by Ann Powell, Rhino Books, 27 pages, \$3.25 paper. Jenny Greenteeth is a hideous water demon who torments the children in the town of Denim. None of the citizens has the courage to respond to the mayor's call for action until young David approaches Jenny with a lesson in dental hygiene and all is well. This little story seems unworthy of Downie and Powell, who have good reputations in children's writing and illustrating:

CHILDREN'S BOOKS from Ottawa's Borealis Press have in the past been crudely produced and very expensive. Their recent picture story-books for young children continue in this tradition:

*No Ordinary Pig*, by Marion Ramsay, illustrated by Ina K. Lee, 22 pages, \$13.95 cloth and \$6.95 paper. Albert the pig does not have a Charlotte to save him from the butcher. Instead he has a grandfather who buys him a little train and teaches him to drive it.

**Silly Sally and the Moon-Baker**, by Frank M. Tierney, illustrated by Lucia Yuzyk, 64 pages, \$18.95 cloth and \$12.95 paper. Sally and her family go to the moon for another silly adventure in this series.

**Tom's Lost Shadow**, by Glenn Clever, illustrated by Le Phan, 32 pages, \$16.95 cloth and \$7.95 paper. We learn from this story that lying doesn't pay but good deeds do.

**Tom Mouse**, by Glenn Clever, illustrated by Anne Yarmowich, 34 pages, \$14.95 cloth and \$6.95 paper. A story of what happens when the town mouse goes to visit the country mouse.

**The Care and Feeding of Parents**, written and illustrated by Louise Falardeau, 80 pages, \$18.95 cloth and \$12.95 paper. This is a workbook to improve communication between parents and children.

Three books from Borealis intended for older readers are better. They are:

**Tom, David and the Pirates**, by Betty Clarkson, 93 pages, \$8.95 paper. Two 12-year-old English boys join a fishing expedition to 17th-century Newfoundland. Readers learn some fascinating details about life in early St. John's.

**The Secret of Ivy Lea**, by Janice Cowan, 80 pages, \$16.95 cloth and \$9.95 paper. Dope-smuggling in the St. Lawrence Thousand Islands and a German prisoner-of-war who has been hidden for 40 years are the key elements in this children's mystery.

**Bob and the Rebels, 1837**, by Jean Johnston, 88 pages, \$16.95 cloth and \$9.95 paper. A young boy arrives with his genteel English immigrant family in Upper Canada just in time to be caught up in the events of Mackenzie's rebellion. This story starts promisingly and contains many interesting details of life in Canada at that time. But then it gallops to a ridiculously abrupt conclusion. Good editing would have helped.

**The Mare's Egg**, by Carole Spray, illustrated by Kim La Fave, Camden House, 56 pages, \$9.95 cloth. Camden House, the Eastern Ontario publishers of *Harrowsmith* magazine, took their time producing their first children's book, and they have done it right. Lively, full-colour illustrations accompany an entertaining text. The story is simple: a newly-arrived pioneer is duped into believing that he can hatch a horse by incubating a pumpkin. At every turn, this poor fellow is badly in need of the sort of advice to novice farmers that *Harrowsmith* hands out monthly. But he has only his own resources to fall back on, and fortunately he has a fund of optimism and good humour that allow for an up-beat ending rather than the pathetic one his foolishness deserves.

**Don't Dilly Dally, Dear**, by Joan Vowles, illustrated by C. Elizabeth Baker, Lyndon House, Box 3427, Station B, Fredericton E3A 5H2, 32 pages, \$3.25 paper. A small boy has such a marvellous time on his way home from school — studying nature, fishing, playing with friends — that it is hard to imagine why his mother should ever insist that he come right home and lose out on all that fun. It is an annoyingly illogical moral.

**Sea Dreams**, by Lyn Cook, illustrated by Mary Downe, Lancelot Press, 40 pages, \$2.50 paper. Lyn Cook was a writer I enjoyed when I was a child for such books as *The Bells on Finland Street* (Macmillan, 1950). This book from Halifax, however, does not have much textual substance. Cook's 24-line poem about ships "that used to sail the seas" is stretched over the 40 pages. Downe's sparse but pleasing line drawings are a more dominant feature. □

## THE BROWSER

The hit parade from the heady days  
of Mart Kenney to the quotable observations  
of Cyril Connolly and William Gass

By MORRIS WOLFE

I DIDN'T THINK I was going to like *The Fitzhenry and Whiteside Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I. Fitzhenry (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 340 pages, \$16.95 cloth). Fitzhenry doesn't provide sources for any of his quotations, nor has he even bothered to check the precise wording of some of them. ("No matter," he says, "in my opinion, they are in this form graceful, compact and cogent.") His preface contains typos and errors of fact: he has Stalin still going strong five years after his death. His decision to set Canadian quotations apart seems silly. And modesty isn't one of Fitzhenry's greatest virtues. Not only does he include quotations of his own, but he allows himself as many entries — five — as Northrop Frye has. Having said that, I must confess to having been won over by the actual contents of Fitzhenry's book. There are a great many quotations here that aren't in any of the other collections on my reference shelf. I was pleased, for example, to see Cyril Connolly well represented. One of his quotations made me think of Pierre Trudeau: "The man who is master of his passions is Reason's slave."

*Living Together: Unmarried Couples in Canada*, by Lynn Fels (Personal Library, 208 pages, \$12.95 cloth), is so full of Ann Landerish common sense and good will that it would take someone far more mean-spirited than I am to write ill of it. The book includes a sample cohabitation agreement, one of whose clauses states: "Both parties have agreed to continue to cohabit together, loving one another,

and neither party shall molest, annoy, or in any way interfere with the enjoyment of life of the other" (my emphasis). There's no way I could sign such an agreement: I can't even live alone without doing those things. I constantly annoy myself. How could I promise not to annoy anyone else?

THE 10 ESSAYS collected in *Eastern and Western Perspectives*, edited by David Jay Bercuson and Phillip A. Buckner (University of Toronto Press, 227 pages, \$25.00 cloth, \$10.00 paper) were presented along with 17 others in 1978 at a joint session of the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference and the Western Canadian Studies Conference. They deal with such subjects as the Acadian renaissance and Prairie cultural history as revealed by its fiction. Not surprisingly, historians from the regions suspect the historiography of the University of Toronto's Carl Berger. "His analysis," writes one scholar, "reflects the centralist preoccupation of English-speaking historians." The irony is that this book wasn't published by one of the regional presses.

FEW UNDER THE AGE of 35 will even know the name Mart Kenney. Kenney led Canada's biggest of the Big Bands during the 1930s and '40s, playing in huge ballrooms across the country and being heard weekly on a CBC-Radio program. He and his wife Norma now live in Mission, B.C., where Kenney sells real estate: in 1980 he was awarded the Order of Canada. His autobiography,

Mart Kenney and His Western Gentlemen (Western Producer Prairie Books, 177 pages, \$15.95 paper), offers a nostalgic look back at those heady days. Unfortunately, Kenney's not a writer, and his prose is flat. But the 150 or so photographs he's chosen from various archives are worth the price of the book alone. As Susan Sontag is quoted as saying in Fitzhenry's collection, "The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own." I particularly like the magic realist glow of the cover photograph.

I'VE ONLY NOW caught up with the fifth volume (1981) in the *Writers at Work* series, better known as the *Paris Review* interviews. This most recent collection, edited by George Plimpton (Penguin, 337 pages, \$8.95 paper), contains extended conversations with 15 writers, including Kingsley Amis, Joseph Heller, Pablo Neruda, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Gore Vidal. I was particularly moved and impressed by some of William Gass's autobiographical (and other) comments. "My mother," says Gass, "was an alcoholic and my father was crippled by arthritis and his own character. I just fled. It was a cowardly thing to do, but I simply would not have survived. I still hate scenes unless I make them. . . . Getting even," he adds, "is one great reason for writing . . . the clearest expression of [that motive] appears in a line [in which one of my characters] says, 'I want to rise so high that when I shit I won't miss anybody.'" Later in the interview Gass argues that the only way to read Henry James is aloud. (Certainly, that's part of the reason *The Golden Bowl* worked so well on television.) "A lot of modern writers," Gass suggests, "are writing for the fast mind that speeds over the text like those noisy bastards in motorboats. The connections are all spatial and all at various, complicated, intellectual levels. They stand to literature as fast-food to food." Gass laments the fact that we're moving away from language. Language, he suggests, isn't simply a *means* of communication (like film), but *is* communication. "There is no way of communicating inside your head but speech. And if you can't talk well to yourself, who can you talk to? You simply aren't anybody. I frequently imagine people who get bored with their own talk, who don't talk to themselves very much. Talk is essential to the human spirit. It *is* the human spirit."

A PAMPHLET ENTITLED *Music Trends: Characteristics of the Billboard Charts, 1953 to 1977*, by John Feihl (Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, Hull, Que., 29

pages, \$1.95 paper) is the result of a study, undertaken by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission in an attempt to define, for regulatory purposes, what a "hit" is. It's interesting to note how much the "hit" process has accelerated in recent years. In 1968, 15 singles became number one on the hit parade, and each single averaged three and a half weeks in that position. In 1975, 36 singles reached number one, and each

averaged only one and a half weeks in that position. Is that because we crave more and more rapid change? *Music Trends* also includes a useful glossary of rock terms. Here's a bit of the entry on MOR-rock: "Middle-of-the-Road-rock is the next best thing to shopping music. One of MOR-rock's first interpreters was Pat Boone who can best be described as taking the works of Fats Domino and Little Richard (two rock'n'roll greats) and making them bland." □

## ON THE RACKS

In pursuit of harmony: from the uplifting story of a veterinarian's daughter to the perils of a hare-lipped heroine

By ANNE COLLINS

LET'S GET THE masculine end of things out of the way first, and then settle down to the rest of the column, a nice, thematic cluster of talk about new paperbacks exploring the lives of girls and women. The masculine end of things is Farley Mowat.

I don't know how I managed to get to be a grown-up without reading a word of him; it should disqualify me from Canadian citizenship. Not that I haven't always held opinions of him. After all, "Farley Mowat" is a complete descriptive term, enveloping snow, rum, wolves, whales, caribou, risk, and man against the elements. Canadian macho.

Now *The World of Farley Mowat* (Bantam-Seal, \$3.95) has come along to thump my preconceptions on the head. The aforementioned are indeed parts of this sampler of his writing, edited by Peter Davison into a chronological survey of Mowat's passions and quests from *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be* (1957) to his war memoir *And No Birds Sang* (1979). It's not heroics that Mowat is fascinated by so much as harmonics, graceful survival on the sharp edge of the north or in the outports of Newfoundland or on the nasty North Atlantic. For a while Mowat thought he had found paradise all wrapped up and sitting by the stove in the communal warmth of the outport household kitchen. But he found that even outport people could stridently hit the dark notes of the human scale in the brutal harassment of a fellow mammal detailed in *A Whale for the Killing* (1972).

Mowat hasn't written all that much

since, and what he has done is generally bleak about the human spirit; as Davison says, "The misery of the human situation becomes less easy [for Mowat] to laugh off, the failures of love and understanding become harder to explain." It will be interesting to see where the increasing tension between Mowat's desire for harmony of humanity and beast and world, and his comprehension of the dark spots of the soul takes him. An excerpt won't be enough of the next book — I'll have to read the whole thing.

THE MOST PORTENTOUSLY womanly of the novels that are to follow is *The Tent Peg* (Bantam-Seal, \$3.50), Aritha van Herk's second novel. It's set in Mowatland, but J.L., the central character, is not an observer of the north. Her connection to the environment is mythic, rather than moral or naturalistic. She, the cook on a geological expedition, *is* the earth, the common ground in which her nine male companions attempt to mire themselves. Having read its outline in reviews of the hardcover I was rather leery of the novel, and I almost didn't recover from the experience of reading the first line: "Under the pale outrage of a breaking sky, the plane thuds."

There are equally awkward and pretentious moments in the plotting and writing of the rest of the book, not surprising considering its telegraphed themes and narrative baggage: 14 different characters get in on the act of telling the story in alternating fits and bursts. J.L. is the mystic female maypole the

men dance around, holding her sexual power intact because she won't sleep with any of them. She feeds them, despises them, condescends to them, nurtures them. She establishes her essential femaleness by communing with a she-bear and the earth itself, which only allows the men to pick up the odd geological specimen but unleashes a whole rock slide for J.L., which the men, an inch from being crushed, do not wake for ("They didn't hear it . . . Men with no ears, men with no connection to the earth"). By the end she has launched spears of consciousness into one and all. The book is bad feminist myth-making of the most blatant sort, and every now and then induces pure and simple scorn in the reader. But there is something admirable and gutsy about *The Tent Peg* — van Herk, I think, is seriously attempting to develop a language of female power, and even at her most megalomaniac one can forgive her the impulse.

Slightly resentful motherhood, not impending goddess-hood, is the focus of Marian Engel's *Lunatic Villas* (Bantam-Seal, \$2.95), a bag-lady of a novel out of which pieces hang by the strayest of threads. This is not a criticism, because none of the threads snap — Engel has allowed herself a structure that suits this

extensive social notebook, a loose-ended visit with the residents of the renovated but unlovely Toronto street they call Ratsbane Place. Harriet Ross, middle-aged and a bit depressed because of too many years as a freelance writer — particularly too many years in the confessional of her *Depressed Housewife* column for a women's magazine — is the emotional core of the book, most of the voice and much of the humour. She packs into the stuffed suitcase of her life seven assorted children, most of her cohabitants on the street, and Mrs. Adeline Saxe, a British octogenarian of minimal acquaintance who arrives one winter's day on a large black bicycle and stays. There is a lot of melodrama — run-ins with the Children's Aid, a custody battle, fights with drunken and mad sisters, a slapstick adultery — but no *Coronation Street* overtones. Engel is superb at making dingy ordinariness both funny and enlightening. Out of it all one surprising thing emerges: both Marian Engel and Harriet Ross seem to like and watch with optimistic eyes those uncomfortable beings known as teenagers. No glib write-offs of the give-me generation here.

From colloquial modern to fantastical past. On the surface of it the next two books are just going to sound weird, as

one features a heroine who levitates and the other a saintly English farm girl with a hare lip. Yes. And they're wonderful.

*The Vet's Daughter*, by British writer Barbara Comyns (Lester & Orpen Dennys, Virago Modern Classics, \$5.95), scraped down and laid out in its bones, is a horrible story about a young girl destroyed by a brute of a father who hates the dead wife he sees in her, set in the grime of turn-of-the-century London. But Barbara Comyns dreamed it out, from the inspiration of reports of a girl dressed like a bride who died in a mob on Clapham Common after "pretending to levitate herself." From the first line of the book, spoken by the girl, Alice Rowlands ("A man with small eyes and a ginger moustache came and spoke to me when I was thinking of something else"), the narrative has the funny edge of dreams, both mitigating the horror and digging it deeper. The father, with his forcibly pruned ambitions and his vet's practice in poor London, grows big like a bad genie or shrinks like an old man according to the power Alice sees in him. She levitates out of misery, out of dreaming, and out of his reach, quite unremarkable in the flow of the book. And throughout there is a kind of humour that is an acquired taste, a wry, death-bed sort, as when Alice's female

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ANNOUNCING THE 1982 TORONTO

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# BOOK AWARDS

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FINALISTS

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THE YOUNG VINCENT MASSEY  
by Claude Bissell  
University of Toronto Press

LUNATIC VILLAS  
by Marian Engel  
McClelland and Stewart

THAT SCATTERBRAIN BOOKY  
by Bernice Thurman Hunter  
Scholastic-Tab Publications

THE REBEL ANGELS  
by Robertson Davies  
Macmillan of Canada

I REMEMBER SUNNYSIDE  
by Mike Filey  
Brownstone Press

REMEMBERING THE DON  
by Charles Sauriol  
Consolidated Amethyst Communications

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM IN THE ALLEY  
by Conn Smythe with Scott Young  
McClelland and Stewart



The annual City of Toronto Book Awards consist of \$5000 presented to authors of books of literary excellence that touch upon life in this city. This year's winner(s), selected from the above list, will be announced on Wednesday, February 24, 1982.

protectress Mrs. Churchill writes to her, "My poor old Nell died, the stout black and white [dog], and the vet said I'd killed her with kindness, so I don't feel so bad about it."

*Precious Bane* (Lester & Orpen Dennys, Virago Modern Classics, \$7.95) spins its threads out of the superstitious village and farm life of the Shropshire countryside in the early 1800s. It has in it all the dark fatedness of Thomas Hardy somehow lifted up and kindled into light, love, and warmth by Mary Webb's narrator, the hare-lipped farm girl Prue Sarn. The overwrought ambitions of her handsome brother Gideon, poisoned by the sins of his father and his own desire to step out of the natural order into the world of the gentry, kill off his mother, his lover (a Tess-like pale milkmaid who drowns herself and her baby in Sarn Mere), and finally himself. In Webb's work the cruelty is there, but the judgement is kind. Prue's goodness is not used against her, as it would be in Hardy, to create that deadly sense of injustice, even though the country folk want to blame a tragedy they don't understand on the one person who is visibly different. In the end Prue is rescued by a love she thought could never come true, plucked out of the middle of a mob like the one that trampled Alice by the weaver Kester Woodseaves, pulled up on his horse and kissed full upon her damaged lips. Rarely has there been a finer happy ending.

Boarding-school stories have always been a favourite fictional torture of mine. I never got sent to one, thank heavens, but each time I read about one I suffer vestigial thrills of homesickness and outsiderhood. *The Getting of Wisdom*, by Henry Handel Richardson, who was really Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson (Lester & Orpen Dennys, Virago Modern Classics, \$5.95) is set in a mediocre girl's school in Melbourne, Australia, in the 1880s, and is an unusual and good variation on the theme. Here the focus of attention is not the "different" girl who is reviled but can't be ordinary and therefore outshines her peers, but a "different" girl, Laura Tweedle Rambotham, who tries in many awkward and dishonest ways to conform. Ouch, the recognizable bumps and clashes as Laura attempts to interpret the signals of socialization and come out like the rest. And the pain, as she crushes nice parts of herself to be liked by people. The title, *The Getting of Wisdom*, holds out only a vain hope, because Laura does not get wise to the error of only seeing yourself in others' eyes, she just accidentally manages to graduate with one small corner of her girl's spirit uncrushed. □

## INTERVIEW

Mark Strand, sometime Canadian, says poetry in North America is divided less by nationality than by a multitude of regional voices

By DAVID DONNELL

MARK STRAND, one of North America's foremost surrealist poets, was born in Summerside, P.E.I., in 1934, but lived in Mexico, Peru, and Colombia until he was 17, when he moved to the United States to attend university. His first book of poems, *Sleeping with One Eye Open*, appeared in 1964, and his many subsequent books include *Reasons for Moving* (1968), *Darker* (1970), *The Story of Our Lives* (1973), and *The Late Hour* (1980). Strand also edited *New Poetry of Mexico* (1970) and *Another*



*Republic*, an anthology of European and South American poets that appeared in 1976, and translated *The Owl's Insomnia*, by the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti. A graduate of Antioch College and the Yale School of Fine Art, he has taught at Harvard, Princeton, Iowa, and the University of Brazil, and now teaches at the University of Utah. He talked with Canadian poet David Donnell in Toronto, where he was attending the League of Canadian Poets Festival:

**Books in Canada:** *You're regarded as a leading American poet and the principal voice of "the new American surrealism," but actually you were born in Summerside, P.E.I.: you're Canadian?*

**Strand:** To start with, I guess. My mother and father met in Montreal. He was in advertising then and a part-time football coach. Then he went into newspaper work and they moved to Summerside, where I was born. We spoke French at home when I was a child

but that tapered off a bit after we moved to the U.S.

**BIC:** *Then South America?*

**Strand:** We stayed in Mexico for a while and moved to Peru and then Colombia. My father was a very restless man. I came north to go to university and it felt more or less like coming home. North is north. I haven't lived in South America or Canada for any long period of time since then, although I taught for a year in Brazil in the mid-'60s and I come back to Canada periodically. I have a sister, Judith Major — her husband's Leon Major, a theatre director in Toronto — and I own a small piece of property down east by Peggy's Cove.

**BIC:** *That's where some of the poems in your recent book, *The Late Hour*, were written?*

**Strand:** Well, either written or that's where they're about or that's the setting. I wouldn't want to say it's a Canadian book, but there are a lot of Canadian elements in it.

**BIC:** *You seem to have several countries in the back of your mind. You've also become one of the best Spanish translators around.*

**Strand:** Translating is something you can work at when you're not writing. I have periods like everyone else when I don't feel like writing or don't like what I'm writing. Translating is wonderful at times like that.

**BIC:** *Do you think some of the South American poets, like Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, are major influences on contemporary American poetry?*

**Strand:** Those three as well as a number of others who probably aren't as available in Canada as they are in the States. Spanish is a much more important second language in the U.S. than it is in Canada. Your equivalent here would be French, which is also a great language.

**BIC:** *How do you choose who you want to translate?*

**Strand:** Affinity, I suppose. They choose you to some degree, something you like very much. I like the Paz I've done and the de Andrade. The de Andrade is from the Portuguese.

**BIC:** *And Rafael Alberti?*

Strand: I spent a long time on the selected volume of Alberti, *The Owl's Insomnia*. He's a great poet but I don't think he's someone for whom I felt an affinity so much as someone by whom I felt dazzled. Now I'd probably lean more to poets like Paz and de Andrade, where there's a wider scope not of ideas exactly but of sensibility.

BiC: *Let's go back to your own work. You write some of the most concise and best-weighted poems in North America. You've become famous for a combination of precision and deep images in which ideas move back and forth as easily as personal details. Do you think this has evolved as much through translation as through experience and reading?*

Strand: I probably have a variety of influences. I'm obsessive about avoiding mistakes. I want to get precisely what I want and nothing extra. Short declarative sentences, a narrative line that moves straight forward, filmic in a sense, but not what some critics refer to as an "expanded space," where the poem simply accumulates and becomes a dense static picture.

BiC: *The poems in Reasons for Moving and Darker seem to get more sombre moving into the late '60s. Was this partly the result of having lived in Mexico and Colombia? Or was it because of changes in America during the Vietnam war?*

Strand: Part of *Reasons for Moving* was written in Brazil in the mid-'60s. *Darker* was written during the Vietnam period. I wrote a number of anti-war poems during that period, most of which haven't been collected in book form.

I remember a poem before the 1968 Democratic Convention that worked around an acrostic spelling out "Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon are the same pig." It was published in the *New American Review*. The *New York Review of Books* liked the acrostic but not the poem and someone else, the *New Yorker* maybe, liked the poem but not the acrostic. There are other poems, "The Babies," "Darker," "The Way It is," all from *Darker*, that are anti-war poems.

BiC: *There seems to be a dark, central metaphor or presence in a lot of your work which one might regard as social, as critical of the present quality of life in major North American cities. But you're not regarded as a social poet.*

Strand: Categories tend to be abstract.

I've never seen myself on the far abstract or the far social side. I spent a year at the Yale School of Fine Art. I'm still very influenced by that. That presence of the actual. And Wallace Stevens was very congenial to that experience, the sense of depiction, the emotionally resonant detail that's part of a controlled flow but graphic and revealing in itself.

BiC: *What else in Stevens? The discipline?*

Strand: Sure, but also the whole concept of the assertion of American song. Poems like "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "Sunday Morning," others, those are great poems. Stevens's sense of American experience and American language. I don't imitate anything he does. I've tried to move forward and forward in perhaps a different kind of way. Maybe a darker version of Stevens.

BiC: *Is there a political point of view in your work?*

Strand: Not in the clear, factual sense that there is in Ginsberg's work. I don't think of myself as a political person. Ginsberg's poems rely on a rhetoric of debate and particular consideration, whereas mine rely more on a straight declarative rhetoric of experience.

BiC: *What differences do you notice between Canadian and American poetry in this period?*

Strand: I'm not sure I'd split it that way. I think the whole continent in its different regions is involved in different kinds of North American English.

BiC: *Do you think a number of Canadian poets are more involved in nature in what Eli Mandel refers to as "contemporary primitivism" than their American counterparts?*

Strand: I visit here and I have a strong feeling for some parts of the landscape, but I'm not completely familiar with the literature. I've liked work I've read by Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Susan Musgrave, but I'm not sure if contemporary primitivism starts or stops at any particular geographical point in North America.

Galway Kinnell's bear poem, where the cold freezing hunter crawls into the bear after he kills it and actually becomes the bear, is a broad example of this. Joanne Kyger, perhaps, some of the ethno-poetics people around; Jerome Rothenberg, Robert Bly seems very close to nature right now. Language and subject concerns vary from period to period. There may be more emphasis on that form of expression in Canada, or parts of Canada, right now, but I think it's fairly general to the continent.

BiC: *What do you think a lot of the better writers you read are doing right now that gives them something in common? Not a group or a movement*

*exactly, but a section of the contemporary spirit?*

Strand: Well, I think there's a longer and more descriptive poem being written right now which addresses itself to America in general. The beat poem is a bit worn. This new poem is more exact. It takes its character from Ashberry, for instance, who takes something from Stevens, who certainly took a lot from Whitman. This poem has the freshness of experience and isn't limited to the streets. The other side of what you might call the new poem, whether it's published in *Antaeus* or *California* or wherever, is that it seems to take a lot in the way of ideas from critical prose, judgements, from a continual intellectual resilience.

BiC: *Is "post-beat" an acceptable term? Is "new surrealist" a better term?*

Strand: They're all good terms as far as they go. But I'm just thinking Canadian, American, the last 10 years or so, a new kind of poem which is more social than the beats but also more personal than what the beats rebelled against. At least that's one way of saying it for the time being. Neither period's perfect. I don't think how beat you are has anything much to do with sandals and Zen koans; de Andrade's very beat. But it's a different kind of music. □

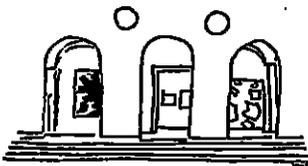
## LETTERS

# Toward a new Eden

Sir:

In his review (December) of Robert Kroetsch's *Field Notes*, Albert Moritz avoids the clichés of much critical writing and clearly examines many issues raised by the poetry. But Moritz's criticism falls short several times, and in fact often succumbs to the delusions embodied in Kroetsch's poetry.

At the core of *Field Notes* is an examination of man's relationship to nature and hence also of man's search for himself (Thoreau's dictum of "nature looking into nature"). Kroetsch's final analysis is that man is not part of nature and can find no rest or succour there — or perhaps anywhere. And this failure to find the biocentric, the real, world is in line with the historic disappointments of mechanistic science and religions such as



Christianity perverted into the imperialism of human chauvinism. Gilbert White, Henry Thoreau, Teilhard de Chardin along with others of the Romantic era, rose against this anthropocentric universe. Of course, Copernicus and Galileo also played a small part in debunking the espoused insularity of man. But Moritz agrees with Kroetsch's rejection of "primitivistic longing," and says it is "the desperate self-contradictory desire to achieve, to marry, animal innocence." Yet man is ever humbled by the natural world, and ever are we reminded of our great dependence on a vital, always changing, never static, nature. Both Kroetsch and Moritz retreat from any attempt to lay the poetic foundations for a society where the true unity of man, nature, and religion is actualized (in the case of Moritz, this statement applies only to his role as critic; his own poetry is, paradoxically, a most eloquent voice for the fusion of spirit and nature in man).

Kroetsch's version of "primitivistic longing" is confused with the coarsest definition of bestiality — however pretentiously he veils it in metaphor. This theme of man's relationship to nature manifested as bestiality recurs in much of Kroetsch's writing, particularly in *What the Crow Said* and *The Studhorse Man*. This literary — as opposed to personal — fascination with animal sexuality is most honest and direct in *The Studhorse Man*. Do we base culture upon such delirious sophisms, which do not at all engage with the task at hand? Yet the polar opposite to Kroetsch's poetry, that of Tom Wayman, offers no answer either. Wayman is totally concerned with the concrete/plastic façade of the unreal working world, and he has embarked on a personal crusade to introduce the lie of Social Realism into our literature.

Robert Kroetsch has indeed written the poetry of nothingness, of lack. Moritz, in his review, does not hit strongly enough at the facile, nothing-to-say quality of this poetry. Moritz does offer some hope, however, when he writes, "he cannot be content with the purely aesthetic resolution . . ." It's time to take the world and shape it with our words and actions toward a new Eden, the garden as it was in the beginning.

James Garratt  
Scarborough, Ont.

#### Dual personality

Sir:  
I've just read with delight Len Gasparini's letter of complaint (January) about his undeserved harsh treatment by

a reviewer. In fact, he calls it blatantly middle-headed.

Over a period of time, I read reviews by Gasparini in your magazine that I found to be so sour, so egotistical, so uncaring, so stupid, that I prayed that *some day*, he would write a book that would receive like treatment. I haven't read his book, or the review in question, but his petulant complaint that he is 3,000 miles too far away to deliver (in person) his protest really made me laugh. And I'm sure he'd offer a duel, only he has no gun.

I haven't seen any reviews by Gasparini in *Books in Canada* lately. In fact, your magazine is looking better for other reasons, too.

Lionel Koffler  
Firefly Books  
Scarborough, Ont.

#### Oral dilemmas

Sir:  
Reading Maria Horvath's review of our book *Where Were You?—Memorable Events of the Twentieth Century* (January) reminded me of a comment by Sydney Smith: "I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so."

Contrary to Maria Horvath's contention in her opening sentence, Sandra Martin and I did not write *Where Were You?* as oral history, or even as "popular oral history" as she quotes us elsewhere in the review. Wherever did she find that statement? Oral history was something that we were expressly attempting to avoid. I have written elsewhere, even in this magazine, about what in my view are the real limitations and dangers of the oral approach. Had your reviewer read our introduction with care she would have realized how misleading we feel oral evidence can be. What we wrote was popular history enlivened by the written reminiscences of many of the important and interesting personalities of our time. Now Ms Horvath might not like that either, but at



## Wake-Pick Poems

Kristjana Gunnars

In her latest collection of poems, Kristjana Gunnars explores the world of her Icelandic heritage, and, in three powerful sequences — *Changeling*, *Monkshood* and *Wake-Pick* — describes the growth of an individual sensibility escaping the bonds of ancestral dreams and superstitions. A harrowing, moving, and magical book.

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least let's get our definitions straight.

As an educator I have long been distressed by how little most students know about our contemporary world. We tried to present a history of the 20th century in terms that ordinary people could understand and appreciate. That's why we wrote about 12 — not eight as Ms Horvath states in paragraph two; so far she is producing one fundamental error per paragraph — events that had been widely reported in the media. The 20th century is the century of mass communications, after all, and we were interested in exploring how historical events and peoples' memories of them have been shaped by reportage in newspapers, and on radio and television. We wanted a history that was more than historical statistics, one that would convey the feeling of what it might have been like to be among the crowds cheering the Armistice or to hear the shock announcement that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour. That's why we interspersed reminiscences and anecdotes into our carefully researched essays. We believe that personalities help make people interested in the past, although we are certainly aware that their value as evidence is less important than their ability to recreate atmosphere.

Ms Horvath takes issue with our quotation from Benjamin Spock, finding his remarks about the abdication of Edward VIII uninteresting. That Spock felt the abdication an event of "no importance" and one about which "I don't have to take sides" says something about American isolationism between the wars and about Spock's awareness that other events were occurring at the same time. One of the points we made in that chapter was that while Edward's exertions were ruling the front pages, a civil war was being fought in Spain, and Germany, Italy, and Japan were aggressively rearming. We could also discuss the Gore Vidal quotation she finds "boring," but such recollections always require extensive context if they are to be of much value. That's why we took such care in writing our historical sections, the inclusion of which Ms Horvath chose to criticize as an "important shortcoming" — "almost two-thirds, the narrative, is devoted to putting the quotes into context." And then, having criticized us for providing context, she chides us for not providing "endnotes" — perhaps she means footnotes? Since it was our intentions to appeal to a popular audience, why should we burden our readers with footnotes? It is not a dearth of scholarly materials relating to contemporary history that we lament.

Another of Ms Horvath's "important shortcomings" is that "the views col-

lected too often provide only one vantage point on a given historic event." That is simply untrue. Perhaps she should reread (dare I say read) our chapters on the Armistice, Pearl Harbour, the death of John F. Kennedy and, to quote her own example, the chapter on Munich and the outbreak of the Second World War. What does she want, the Martian perspective?

Ms Horvath's final "important shortcoming" is that we have failed "to cover any one event comprehensively." What does she mean by comprehensively? Since she has failed to discuss a single point of history in her review we are at a loss to know which areas, or incidents, we have neglected or ignored.

Finally, if Ms Horvath knew nearly as much about history as she professes to know about syntax, she would have realized that it is not a *non sequitur* to link the hysterical reaction to Orson Welles's broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* (there's the Martian view, after all) with the Munich reports of the month before. (Perhaps dropping the paragraph break in the section she quotes helped her to find her *non sequitur*.)

Ms Horvath goes on — mainly about how badly *Where Were You?* was edited. We disagree. The only point in nearly a column of type that makes any sense is her contention that we confused "flout" with "flaunt." If we did, we are embarrassed and sorry. However, since Ms Horvath hasn't provided an example, we aren't certain where, or even if, we made a mistake. Surely a good editor would have suggested she support her complaints with examples? Talk, as one might say about oral history, is cheap.

Ms Horvath is identified as a freelance writer. She should sharpen that lance if she's to survive in the literary world, but first she'll have to sharpen her wits. Such hastily contrived reviews undermine *Books in Canada's* reputation as a serious and intelligent journal.

Roger Hall  
Department of History  
University of Western Ontario  
London, Ont.

*Maria Horvath replies:* Mr. Hall claims that he wanted to write a "history of the 20th century" because he was "distressed by how little most students know about our contemporary world." On that score, the book he and Sandra Martin wrote is a sad failure. Instead of choosing the book's contents by determining the most significant events of our time, they asked famous "personalities" what "events they remembered, the ones that were important in their own lives." While such recollections can be used legitimately to enliven a historical

report, they should not dictate its contents.

The reminiscences yielded by this approach, even taken with the authors' narrative, simply do not add up to an accurate portrait of the 20th century. Events that actually shaped this century, such as the Russian revolution and the Nazi Holocaust, are barely acknowledged, while the abdication of Edward VIII receives more attention than Hiroshima. And, although I'm sure that Hall and Martin did not intend to create this impression, in this book the only Jew actually reported to have died in a Nazi concentration camp is Anne Frank. Sloppy history can be just as dangerous as revisionist history.

As the authors' methodology is sloppy, so is their writing. Both Mr. Hall's letter and the relevant passages in the book fail to state clearly the causal connection between the Munich radio reports and the Orson Welles broadcast. Perhaps that's not surprising, since the authors exhibit funny ideas about causality anyway, as shown by their description of the downfall of the Shah as "an event that had been flashed around the globe by satellite with the result that, because of time differences, the news was known in some parts of the world before it had happened."

Finally, I find it hard to believe that a member of the Department of History at the University of Western Ontario doesn't know the difference between endnotes and footnotes. (For the difference, he should check page 49 of the *MLA Handbook*, 1977.)

#### CANWIT NO. 71

*Sir Humphry Davy  
Abominated gravy.  
He lived in the odium  
Of having discovered Sodhum.*

LONG-TIME READERS of this column will recall the clerihew, the witty little verse form that was coined by E. Clerihew Bentley (1875-1956) when he wrote, at age 16, the lines quoted above. For the uninitiated, a clerihew is a brief quatrain, rhymed as a pair of couplets, that pokes fun at an individual whose name usually supplies the first line. Its lines are usually of uneven length, with a rhythm that lends itself more to prose than poetry. In honour of the recent publication of *The Complete Clerihews of E. Clerihew Bentley* (Oxford), contestants are invited to compose clerihews on any well-known Canadian, living or dead. The winner will receive both a copy of the book and a cheque for \$25. The deadline is April

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### Results of CanWit No. 69

OUR REQUEST for film scenes from the historical past brought a winning entry from frequent contestant Barry Baldwin of Calgary, whose list included:

- Susanna Moodie on a Florida beach in January.
- William Aberhardt trying to buy food in an Edmonton Safeway's with Social Credit scrip.
- Lester Pearson trying to explain the rules of baseball to Pierre Trudeau.
- Robertson Davies eating fish and chips wrapped in the Peterborough *Examiner*.
- A postal worker working.

### THE EDITORS RECOMMEND

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

#### FICTION

**No Country Without Grandfathers**, by Roch Carrier, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman, House of Anansi. "Nailed to his rocking chair like Jesus on his cross," 73-year-old Vieux-Thomas keeps his mind alive by rehearsing the story of

his life. His silent, day-long soliloquy is both an eloquent plea for Quebec and perhaps Carrier's most anti-English work.

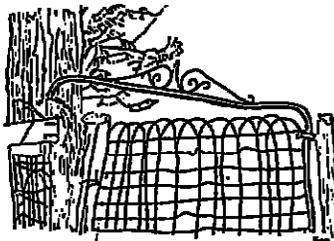
**Real Mothers**, by Audrey Thomas, Talonbooks. "A picture must be built up by means of rhythm, calculation and selection," says an art-gallery guidebook quoted by Thomas in one of these stories. The same approach applies equally well to all the other stories in her collection. They are created with a complete mastery of form.

#### NON-FICTION

**Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait**, by Mary Meigs, Talonbooks. Meigs mixes observations on her repressed upbringing, radical feminism, Freud, Edmund Wilson, and Mary McCarthy with a vivid, loving, and altogether charming portrait of her current lover, Marie-Claire Blais, in a singularly pure and vigorous prose.

#### POETRY

**The Visitants**, by Miriam Waddington, Oxford. A fearless book that tackles death, old age, and solitude in simple rhymes and verse forms that more "sophisticated" poets might scorn. Waddington's work is immediately accessible, timeless and timely, and much of it is a delight to read.



### BOOKS 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:

**Adam 2000**, by Orin Maunit, Broken Images (1981).  
**Advertising in Canada: Its Theory and Practice**, edited by Peter T. Zary and Robert D. Wilson, McGraw-Hill Ryerson (1981).  
**Against Wind and Weather**, by Ken Drushka, Douglas & McIntyre (1981).  
**A.J.M. Smith: An Annotated Bibliography**, by Michael E. Darling, Véhicule Press (1981).  
**Are You Paying Too Much Tax?** (1982 edition), by Wayne Beach and Lyle R. Hepburn, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
**The Ascent**, by M.C. Hough, published by the author (1981).  
**The Ballad of Althea Moonchild — and Others**, by Althea E. Blythe, Penmanic Publications (1981).  
**Be a Better Grocery Shopper**, by Rhonda Windsor-Maxwell, Bestsellers.  
**The Beloved Son**, by James S. Bullis, Welch (1981).  
**A Book Worthing: Six Books by Six Artists**, edited by Shelagh Alexander et al., A. Space (1980).  
**Boxworking**, by Michael Dudley, Bug Press (1981).  
**Death's My Name with a Sigh**, by Fred Wah, Talonbooks (1981).  
**Building an Igloo**, by Ulli Steltzer, Douglas & McIntyre (1981).  
**The Canadian Jewish Mosaic**, by M. Weinfeld et al., Wiley (1981).  
**Capital Week**, by Brian Bartlett, Villeneuve Publications (1981).

**A Choice of Futures**, by Gurnon Dacks, Methuen (1981).  
**Cold Pigeon Poetics**, by Ken Stange, York Publishing (1981).  
**Consequences**, by Margaret Trudeau, M & S.  
**Continuation 1**, by Louis Dudek, Véhicule Press (1981).  
**Dancee Manon Sacree Sandra**, by Michel Tremblay, Talonbooks (1981).  
**Discrimination, Affirmative Action, and Equal Opportunity**, edited by W.E. Block and M.A. Walker, The Fraser Institute (1981).  
**Engle: The Life and Times of R. Alan Engleson**, by Deldra Clayton, Lester & Orpen Denny.  
**Elusive Summit: The Biography of Sheila Henig**, by Harry Henig and Madeleine Thompson, Wilkum-Wallace International (1981).  
**entries**, by Chris MacLeod, Solus Impress (1981).  
**An Exhibition of Canadian Gameboards**, by Richard Field, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (1981).  
**The Faces of Hesperus**, by Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, Wilfrid Laurier University (1981).  
**For the Record: Canada's Greatest Woman Athletes**, by David McDonald and Lauren Drewery (1981).  
**George-Etienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois**, by Brian Young, McGill-Queen's (1981).  
**The Graphic Art of Paul Fournier**, edited by Greg Peters, Porcupine's Quill (1981).  
**A Guide to the Signy of Manitoba Local History**, by Gerald Friesen and Barry Polyoni, University of Manitoba Press (1981).  
**Hus and Is**, by Robert Finch, Porcupine's Quill (1981).  
**Homespun Gospel: The Poetry of Walt Hundley**, Welch (1981).  
**Icelandic Settlers in America**, by Elva Simundsson, Queenston House (1981).  
**Il Trovatore**, translation by Marie-Thérèse Paquin, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal (1981).  
**The Impromptu of Outremont**, by Michel Tremblay, Talonbooks (1981).  
**Jazzy**, by Margaret Doerksen, PaperJacks.  
**Krieger — In the Beginning**, by Bob Krieger, New Star Books (1981).  
**Life Sentence**, by Eli Mandel, Press Porcépé (1981).  
**Lines in the Dark Wood**, by Michael Bullock, Third Eye (1981).  
**Living in Harmony**, by Karl Menler, Bestsellers (1981).  
**Love's Shining Song and Other Poems**, by Celestino De Iulio, Canadian Centre for Italian Culture and Education (1981).  
**The Metis: Canada's Forgotten People**, by D. Bruce Sealey and Antoine S. Lussier, Penmanic Publications (1981).  
**The Modern English Halka**, by George Swede, Columbine Editions (1981).  
**The Newspaper and Public Affairs**, by Frederick J. Fletcher, Supply and Services (1981).  
**Northern Birds in Colour**, by Bill Bisset, Talonbooks (1981).  
**Office Automation**, by Robert Arnold Russel, The Institute for Research on Public Policy (1981).  
**O God, Won't Somebody Help?**, by William J. Newell, Welch (1981).  
**The One-and-a-Half Men**, by Murray Dobbin, New Star Books (1981).  
**1,165 Days: Living Faith by the Moment**, by Go Puan Seng, Welch (1981).  
**The Passion for Souls**, by Oswald J. Smith, Welch (1981).  
**Perpetuating Poverty**, by Robert Cary and Virginia Smith, Between The Lines (1981).  
**Pioneer of the Warford**, by Douglas Hill, Clarke Irwin (1981).  
**Points North of A**, by Jack Hannan, Villeneuve Publications (1980).  
**Poems on Day Care**, by Hollis L.T. Joe, Williams-Wallace International (1981).  
**Prepositions for Remembrance Day**, by Jon Furberg, Pulp Press (1981).  
**Public Corporations and Public Policy in Canada**, by Allan Tupper and G. Bruce Doern, The Institute for Public Policy (1981).  
**Quebec Nationalism in Crisis**, by Dominique Chiff, McGill-Queen's.  
**A Queen is Holding a Mummified Cat**, by Mary Melfi, Guernica Editions.  
**Ready, Willing and Disabled**, by Norman Kunc, Personal Library.  
**Remembering the Dan**, by Charles Sauriol, Amethyst (1981).  
**Rub-boo**, by Dorine Thomas, Penmanic Publications (1981).  
**Salute-Carmen of the Main**, by Michel Tremblay, Talonbooks (1981).  
**Sardines's Daughters**, by Margaret Randall, New Star Books (1981).  
**Signs and Certainties**, by A.F. Moritz, Villeneuve Publications (1979).  
**La Situation Economique au Québec 1970**, Ministère de l'Industrie, Commerce et Tourisme, Gouvernement du Québec (1981).  
**Skimmer**, by Al Neil, Pulp Press (1981).  
**The Space Between Sleep and Waking**, by Robyn Sarah, Villeneuve Publications (1981).  
**Swimmers in Oblivion**, by Carolyn Smart, York Publishing (1981).  
**Touch Me, Teach Me**, by Teri Degler Goodwin, Williams-Wallace International (1981).  
**Their Trade Is Treachery**, by Chapman Finer, Bestsellers.  
**The Twilight Dancer & Other Plays**, by Lennox Brown, Talonbooks (1981).  
**Unacknowledged Legislator**, by Chris Faiers, blowoutment press (1981).  
**W.A.C. Bennett**, by Rosemary Nearing, Fitzhenry & Whiteside (1981).  
**What About Poverty in Canada?** (second edition), by Benjamin Schlesinger, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.  
**Where Business Falls**, by James Gillies, The Institute for Public Policy (1981).  
**The Womb Rattles Its Pod**, by Cathy Ford, Véhicule Press (1981).

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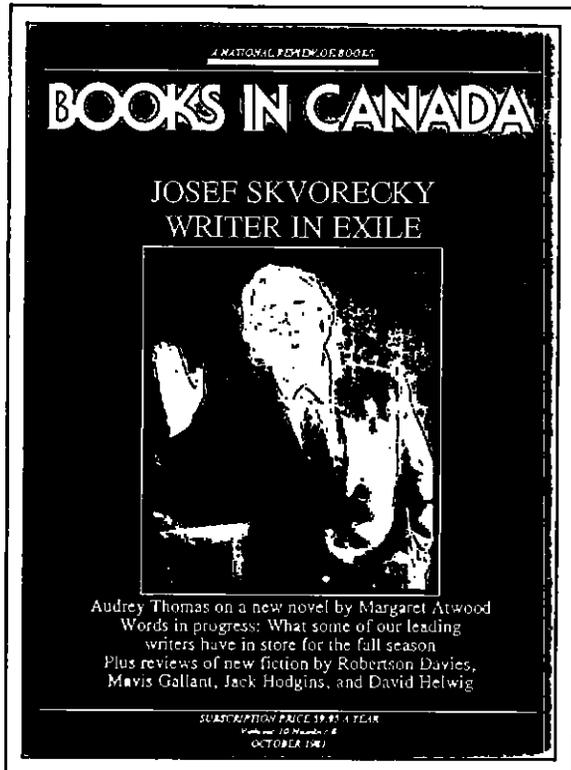
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