

BOOKS *in* CANADA

VOLUME 3 NO. 2

MARCH, 1974

in which MORRIS WOLFE pulls
grass roots & MATT COHEN grad-
uates from the sixties & FRASER
SHERLAND teutonizes
MATT MACLENNAN, while
JOE CALLWOOD discovers jim
christy, michael sutton frames WALTER
WEDON, douglas marshall gives
WILFRED ROHMNER an
ultimatum & BICKERSTAFF
draws and writes

IMPULSIVE FRONTIER HACKS

William Henry Bartlett: Artist, Author & Traveller, by Alexander M. Ross, illustrated; University of Toronto Press. 164 pages, \$15 cloth.

Braves and Buffalo: Plains Indian Life in 1337 — Watercolours of Alfred J. Miller. introduction by Michael Bell; Public Archives of Canada Series, University of Toronto Press, 176 pages, \$15 cloth.

By RICHARD LONDON

TO PAROCHIAL collectors of *Canadiana*, the name **Bartlett** is synonymous with *Canadian Scenery*, a two-volume book containing 118 steel engraving. Few of the collectors who have paid the current market price of \$600 to \$700 for the complete work, or as much as \$90 for the most popular plates, usually hand-colored only a few weeks previous to the purchase, will have any clear idea of who **W. H. Bartlett** was. They will probably also be almost completely unaware of the existence of **N. P. Wii**, the American newspaperman who cribbed the accompanying letter-press text. **Professor Ross** has sought to rectify this widespread ignorance, easily demonstrating that **Bartlett** was much more than merely the illustrator of *Canadian Scenery*. But unfortunately he has not engaged in any close critical comparisons with the works of **Bartlett's** contemporaries; nor has he provided detailed bibliographical evidence concerning the complexities of the artist's published works.

This handsomely produced book (designed by **Allan Fleming**) is divided into two parts: the historical evaluation by a modern scholar and a memoir by a friend of the artist. In the first part **Pmf. Ross** engages what he refers to as "a twentieth-century view" of **Bartlett's** artistic endeavours. He points out that most of the artist's work was produced on commission for **George Virtue**, his publisher, and that **Bartlett** was expected to produce a series of sketches, the subjects of which were pre-determined. Thus trips down the Danube and the Rhine, to Switzerland, the Middle East and North America, as well as through

Scotland, Ireland and parts of England, were each expected to result in sketches that would illustrate an already-existing travelogue or a specially commissioned series of notes from a journalist like **Wii**. **Bartlett** did not himself execute the actual engravings that appeared in the books. Various engravers employed by **Virtue** would interpret his sketches on steel or wood, and the fidelity of the finished engraving to **Bartlett's** original vision would depend on the skill and artistic sensibility of the engraver. **Prof. Ross** has located some of **Bartlett's** original sketches, most of which have unfortunately disappeared, and one of the most interesting features of the book is the opportunity to examine **Bartlett's** often exquisitely delicate sepia wash drawings in conjunction with the harsher steel engravings.

Prof. Ross links **Bartlett** as an artist directly to the English romantic tradition of the picturesque and sublime, delineated by **Burke** in the late eighteenth century but most powerfully expressed by **William Gilpin** in the early nineteenth. The large number of illustrated travel books produced in England between 1820 and 1850 fed a Romantic imagination nurtured both by **Byronic** poetry and the many famous English travellers' narratives. **Bartlett** was himself a traveller of considerable fortitude: in 1838 he retired from Palestine to England in March, sailed almost directly to Canada (probably Quebec), journeyed on to **Niagara**, down the Erie Canal to **Lyons**, and south to **Owago** where he stayed for a few weeks with **Willis**. He then travelled on to **New York** and returned to England in December of the same year.

Bartlett was also a writer of some imagination and power, although most of his literary endeavours were in the form of notes that accompanied his sketches and letters to friends. He did, however, compose such works as *Footsteps of Our Lord and His Apostles; Forty Days in the Desert and The Pilgrim Fathers. The Middle East*, especially the Holy Land, exercised a considerable control over **Bartlett's** imagination. His deeply felt religious convictions heightened his sense of the "sublime and the beautiful" and the **Wailing Wall in Jerusalem** was, to him, even more "awefully inspiring" than

Niagara Falls. He viewed all scenic prospects with a highly developed Romantic sense of the innate nobility of ruins, and thus there is a distinct "Salvator Rosa" element in many of the plates in *Canadian Scenery*. Apparently perturbed by an obvious lack of tumble-down masonry, **Bartlett** resorted to substituting picturesque "gnarled or broken trees" in the foreground to obtain the desired artistic effect. **Ross** informs us that this "sublime" element appears more than 40 times in *Canadian Scenery* alone.

The "twentieth-century view" is followed by **William Beattie's Brief Memoir of the late William Henry Bartlett**, published in 1855 immediately following **Bartlett's** untimely death and designed to materially assist the widow and large family of the artist: some £400 were contributed by the subscribers to the Memoir. This section of the book is currently designated a "contemporary view" but although it provides almost all the basic information that exists concerning **Bartlett's** life, and contains selected portions of his letters, it makes no attempt at a critical evaluation of **Bartlett's** work: **Beattie's** "view" was as the oldest friend of the artist who desired to honour the friendship and assist the family. It is, however, worthwhile to have this very scarce book once again in print.

Ross substantiates a few general observations about **Bartlett's** position as a nineteenth-century English artist and provides a much more complete account of **Bartlett's** life than has hitherto existed. Even here, however, a really detailed critical assessment of **Bartlett's** art is lacking. No bibliographical information about the books with which **Bartlett** was associated is given. For instance, one is led to believe that they are at least three editions of *Canadian Scenery*, the one dated 1842 on the title page being the first. Is this true, and what is the evidence? One wonders as well about the numbers of copies of **Bartlett's** books that were issued. A prominent Toronto bookseller once told me that he estimated he had, over the years, personally sold about 1,200 sets of *Canadian Scenery*, which easily makes it the most common expensive book on the antiquarian market to & y.

Curiously, the **University of Toronto** Press has just issued a volume of the work of an American artist of the same period with whom Bartlett could be compared and contrasted. Alfred J. **Miller** was **born** in Baltimore and **received** formal training at the **Ecole des Beaux Arts** in Paris. In 1837 **Miller** was invited to accompany a footloose Scottish **adventurer**, Capt. **William Drummond Stewart**, on a journey overland to an American Fur Company "rendezvous" in Oregon. Miller enthusiastically embraced the lifestyles of the Plains **Indians**, fur **traders** and mountain men he encountered and sketched a **series** of striking scenes that



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record the life of the Western plains just before the westward migration of Europeans. Miller's sketch of Fort **Laramie** is said to be the only extant representation of that legendary fort, and he was the **first artist** to paint the **Rocky Mountains**.

Upon his **return** to the East, Miller executed a series of oil paintings for Stewart which **were** removed to the ancestral home in Scotland. However, he continued to produce, according to demand, copies of the original sketches, and in 1867 Alexander **Brown** of Liverpool **commissioned** a series of 40 watercolors. These are now in the Public Archives of Canada, and are superbly reproduced **in colour** in this book.

Miller was subject to the **same** Romantic impulses as Bartlett, but his **American** temperament **seems** to have transformed the concept of "aweful and sublime" into "grand and inspiring." What most caught **Miller's imagination** was the sweep of the Prairie landscape and the tens of thousands of buffalo thereon. There is some evidence that in his Baltimore studio **Miller romanticised** his original sketches, and his most often reproduced painting, "Indian girls," is certainly **Rousseau-esque** in its interpretation of the noble savage.

This volume contains a short introduction by Michael **Bell**, which could profitably have been expanded into a critical and historical account of **Miller's** life and work, and notes by **Miller himself** that accompany each **watercolour**.

To seriously compare **Miller** and Bartlett as artists would be to stretch a publishing coincidence to absurdity. **Miller is** in fact complementary to Peter **Rindisbacher**, George **Catlin** and Karl **Bodmer**, the other well-known pictorial chroniclers of the North American West. Much of the potential interest in these two books will be historical. Bartlett recorded scenes, particularly in the cities, that have long since been obliterated, and **Miller caught** permanently on canvas a **glimpse of a departed lifestyle** on the Western plains that now is of great historical value. Their techniques differed as did their perspective but **both** have contributed to our understanding of North American civilization, as we **know** it today. □

Richard Landon is assistant head of the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library at the University of Toronto.

UMBRAGE & UNCTION

THE CANADIAN CONNECTION

Sir:

There is an interesting and revealing connection between two pieces in the January-February *Books in Canada*. In her review of Stuart Trueman's *The Fascinating World of New Brunswick*, Susan Rice notes that there are no hints in the book of "the discontent caused in many quarters by the ever-enlarging empire of 'tamed industrial giant' K. C. Irving..." OF course not. As the opening sentence of the review states, *Stuart Trueman* is the "former editor of the Saint John *Telegraph Journal* and *Evening Times-Globe*," both of which Irving owns. Rii complains about Trueman's (as she no doubt would call it) lack of awareness, but what about her own?

And then there was Doug Fetherling's two-page piece on Robert Fulford's writing style. Everyone knows, of course, that, as Fetherling notes, Fulford is the editor of *Saturday Night* and that he writes weekly for the *Toronto Star*. And, of course, Fetherling's poems and articles appear frequently in *Saturday Night* and he too writes for the *Star*. Everyone knows this. But no matter what we may think, he writes this incredible article - and *Books in Canada* publishes it!

I have not wanted to realize that Canadian critics really do believe that they write solely for other book reviewers. But I cannot help wondering whether Canadian literary society is in its decadence before the literature has really got off the ground or whether, given that society, the literature will ever get off the ground.

Also, it seems terribly unfair to me that you do not confront your reviewers with the letters sent in response to their particular reviews and that you do not present your readers with evidence of their reactions. Why don't you allow your reviewers to redeem themselves or to damn themselves even more? Why don't you allow them to reply to letters? In a number of cases it seems as though an apology is in order. And I, for one, like to see book reviewers apologize.

Randall Robertson
Toronto

Doug Fetherling replies: *Several of Robertson's assumptions are mistaken. The editors of Books in Canada do print, in the interest of accuracy and debate, readers' letters they consider make interesting comments. When they believe it similarly appropriate, they also encourage the accused to defend himself as I do here, though I feel no apology is in order. The piece of Fulford was as critical as it was praising and may have strained my relationship with Saturday Night as much as it cemented it, though personally I think it did neither. It wasn't supposed to. The low quality of literary life Robertson laments will not, I feel, improve if certain reviewers have large sections of it labelled off limits for reasons of conflict that exist only in the*

Cont. on page 21

BESTSELLERS, WHAT ARE THEY?

RICHARD ROHMER'S quarrel with Time Canada Limited about the list of best sellers in that company's nominally Canadian magazine needs to be put in perspective. The quarrel may have undertones of petulant self-interest. But it also involves broad issues of national policy and publishing economics that affect us all. Among other things, it raises a couple of questions that have long bothered Canadian readers. What is a Canadian best seller, anyway? And what is the value of a best-seller list?

It's arguable that a Canadian best-seller is any book appearing on the national best seller list put out every week by the Toronto Star — although that definition must be qualified, as we'll see later. The Star's list, which ranks the 10 top fiction and non-fiction books, is based on sales figures supplied by booksellers across the country. How accurate is it? Since booksellers are sometimes suspected of pushing books they think Canadians should be buying rather than the ones they actually are, that's anybody's guess. But this is the only game in town.

At time of writing, there were only three Canadian novels on the Star's fiction list. Rohmer's *Ultimatum*, a polemical thriller about how an energy-hungry United States takes over Canada in 1980, was still holding first place. It had been on the list for 19 weeks. W. O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* stood seventh and *The Devil's Lighter* by John Ballen was eighth. Significantly, the Star's non-fiction list contained no fewer than six Canadian books, with Barry Broadfoot's *Ten Lost Years* standing first, Mark Orkin's *Canajan, Eh?* second, and Fmg Fables & Beaver Tales by Stanley Burke and Roy Peterson in third place.

However, not one of those Canadian books appeared on the best-seller list published in the Canadian edition of Time. That list, based entirely on U.S. figures, is simply a reprint of the version prepared by the magazine's parent edition. Time's acknowledgement that there are such things as Canadian books is confined to occasional feature reviews in the Canadian section. So far, it has not designed to notice *Ultimatum*.

In general, Rohmer thinks Time Canada should pack up its ludicrous Canadian content and go home. He

By DOUGLAS MARSHALL

wants to abolish the special tax advantage Time and *Reader's Digest* have enjoyed here since 1964, an advantage that by 1972 was allowing the two magazines to cream off more than one half the \$32 million in magazine advertising revenue generated in Canada that year. In this, Rohmer has the whole-hearted support of every Canadian magazine that refrains from indulging in mutual masturbation with Time under the advertising blanket of the Magazine Association of Canada. (Most blatant Time-partner: Maclean's.) Indeed, a lot of us were fighting the tax advantage before *Ultimatum* was even a gleam in Rohmer's eye.

Specifically, Rohmer claims he was "damaged" as an author by Time Canada because it was "misrepresenting" its American best-seller list as a Canadian list. Through his lawyers, he demanded that the magazine justify its privileged tax position by compiling a truly Canadian list. Time countered that this was "much easier said than done" but agreed that henceforth it would label its list as American.

Again, Rohmer's cause is unquestionably just. A 1970 survey for the Canadian Book Publishers' Council showed that a majority of Canadian readers cite Time as their primary source for information about current books. In other words, they are relying on a source that virtually ignores Canadian books. That's one of the main reasons *Books in Canada* was founded as an independent national magazine three years ago.

Time Canada's plea about the difficulties of compiling a Canadian list, coming from an operation that made a net profit of nearly \$1.2 million last year, is an insult to our intelligence. The Canadian edition already expends considerable editorial effort on substituting the Canadian distributors for the U.S. books it reviews, a service that benefits American publishers as much as it does Canadian readers. By comparison, setting up the mechanism for a Canadian best-seller list would be child's play.

But now we come to the larger question. Supposing Time decides it would be prudent to go along with Rohmer, who stands to gain? Note Rohmer's language; he claims to have been

"damaged" by the omission of *Ultimatum* from Time's list. The inference is obvious. Authors and publishers see best-seller lists as commercial indexes that can influence book-buying habits as much as they reflect them. Once a book makes the list, its value automatically increases in the mind of the public. It follows that, with enough promotional hype, a book can be "run up" in the best-seller marketplace much like a pop record or a penny mining stock.

The trouble with looking at the best-seller list as the weekly Dow-Jones average of publishing is that it's a remarkably crude indicator of what is really going on. At best it is merely a guide to a book's relative popularity during a given period. The list fails to tell us how much the book cost to produce and promote, what it sells for, how many copies have been sold altogether, and whether these factors represent a profit or a loss.

For a better idea of the situation, *Books in Canada* asked various Canadian publishers for details about what they considered their recent best seller. The survey is by no means definitive — we weren't able to talk to everybody and publishers are notoriously cagey in this area anyway — but it reveals some interesting patterns and confirms some long-held theories.

To start at the healthy end of the shelf, it's plain that English-speaking Canadians crave non-fiction Canadian books. Statistically, we buy them out of all proportion to our numbers and it's not hard for a smart publisher with the right title to hit the jackpot. Take *The Art of Making Wine* (Longman, 1968, \$5.50) by Stanley Anderson With Raymond Hull. To date it has sold 108,000 copies. If extrapolated on the rough 10-to-one basis, that would mean sales of more than one million in the U.S.

Of course, it doesn't hurt sales if the author is also a well-known broadcasting personality. Pierre Berton's *The Comfortable Pew* (McClelland & Stewart, 1965, \$4.50 and \$2.50) sold 175,000 copies. His two CPR books, *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike*, both at \$10, each racked up sales of 150,000 — and a new \$4.95 paperback abridgement of the two books, tied in with the CBC-TV series, is expected to do at least as well. Mom astonishing, *Charlie Farquharson's His-*

try of *Canada* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, late 1972, 05.95) by Don Harron has pushed past 90,000 and is still going strong after 64 weeks on the best-seller list.

Here are some other facts and figures about non-fiction best sellers turned up by our house-to-house survey:

□ Cook books, hockey books, art books and consumer service books are the four cornerstones of Canadian publishing. *The Kate Aitken Cookbook* (Collins, \$1.25) has been reset three times and sold 625,000 copies since 1950. A cook book for diabetics put out by Bums & MacEachren sells at the rate of 12,000 a year. Harry Sinden's *Hockey Showdown* (Doubleday, 1972, \$6.95 and \$3.95) scored a total of 60,000. *Canada in Colour* (Hounslow Press, 1972, \$5.95 and 53.95) sold 25,000. Your Income Tax (Fitzhenry and Whiteside, \$2.95) sells at 12,000 a year. *Law, Law, Law* (Anansi, \$1.25), 50,000 since 1971; *The Edible Wild* (Pagurian, \$7.95), 17,288 since 1971; and *Where to Eat in Canada* (Oberon, \$3.95), 20,000 since 1970.

□ There's a surge of interest in books of social criticism, particularly those dealing with Indians and the North. James Lewis & Samuel says its *An Unauthorized History of the RCMP* by Lome and Caroline Brown has sold 18,000 copies at \$1.95 in less than a year, while Heather Robertson's *Reservations are for Indians* (1970, 92.95) has reached 19,000. Similarly, Hurtig puts sales for Harold Cardinal's *Unjust Society* (1969, \$2.95) at 57,566 and for Duncan Pryde's *Nunaga* (1971, \$8.95) at 19,165. Ray Price's *The Howling Arctic* (Peter Martin, 1970, \$7.50) sold 35,000 copies.

□ Certain semi-academic titles have established themselves as perennial best sellers. John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* (U of T Press) has sold 71,578 copies in various editions since 1965: Donald Creighton's *Dominion of the North* (Macmillan, 1966) is running at 14,000. Several other books are edging into this category: both volumes of *Mike* (U of T Press, \$12.50 each) have passed the 20,000 mark; and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (Anansi, late 1972, \$3.25) has reached 35,000.

□ As the above figures prove, the small houses can come up with non-fiction best sellers just as often as the large publishers. For instance, Tundra Books has sold 10,000 copies of *A Child in Prison Camp* (1971, \$7.95) by

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NASBY'S SCENIC ROUTE

Permanence and Change: A Rural Ontario Document, photographs by David Nasby, Anansi, 66 pages, \$7.50 wrappers.

By DAVID NASH

CONDITIONED AS WE ARE by television and cinema into seeing in terms of action and movement, it is easy to forget to simply look at what is around us. This has not always been the case. When, for example, a Dutch artist such as Vermeer painted the surface of a table in a highly detailed manner he was concerned with more than the display of painterly skills. He was also drawing attention to the wealth of visual interest and beauty in an apparently arbitrarily chosen everyday object, and further, in everyday events. This is one of the functions that a photograph can serve — it can remind us to stop and look rather than watch and evaluate.

Such a description well suits the purpose of Nasby's work. His photographs — taken in the towns and countryside around Guelph — are all concerned with everyday events. He neither idealises his subjects nor treats them as nostalgia. He is not a tourist but an impartial observer of a particular lifestyle in a particular space-time location.

The photographs are divided into five sections, each preceded by a brief matter-of-fact description of its sob-

ject matter. Various aspects of life in the country are covered — a butcher at work in Powasson; a farming family in Pickering; farm people and their activities in Wellington, Waterloo and Bruce counties; relaxation at several of the fall agricultural fairs in Huron County; and finally a section devoted to the Kitchener stock yards.

The first section, concerning the butcher Shop and slaughterhouse of a family in Powasson, is almost humorous in a grotesque way. In the introductory passage we are informed that Irene, the butcher's wife, now has an "automatic pig de-hairer which replaces a kettle over an open fire for scalding." Such is modern technology! The slaughterhouse scenes — including the rather strange image of a pig's carcass being sawn in half by an electric saw, which appeals rather like a Dali painting come to life or the dream of an overworked surgeon — culminate in a photograph of the grinning butcher poring triumphantly beside a disembowelled pig.

A photograph of a wooden door in the third section — "Farm Sales and Farm People, Wellington, Waterloo and Bruce Counties, 1970-73" — well illustrates the point I made concerning the ability of a photograph to make one look closely at an object for its own sake. The texture and variety of the surface of the wood are clearly brought out through Nasby's careful choice of lighting and his meticulous attention to the reproduction of a full

Riel

Strange Empire
Louis Riel
and the Métis People
Joseph Howard
Introduction by Martin Rothen



First published in 1952, and widely regarded as the finest biography of Louis Riel. *Strange Empire* portrays Riel, not as a charismatic rabble rouser, but as a political organizer and leader — a true spokesman for the Métis people.

... by far the best biography of Riel, and one that shows how strong the Métis people were collectively. It is one of the few books on Canadian history that reads like a novel."

-Bob Davis

5½ x 7½
600 pages
Paper \$5.95
Publication: April

James
Lewis &
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Publishers

tonal range. This photograph is typical of Nasby's craftsman like approach, none of which has been lost in the consistently high quality reproductions.

The title, *Permanence and Change*, has perhaps a two-fold meaning. In a literal sense it relates to the subject matter the technical innovations seen against the relatively more permanent values of country society and the country landscape itself. On the other hand the title can be seen as referring to the purpose of the book: that of supplying a permanent record of a set point within a certain changing society. In photography, Nasby (who holds a degree in sociology) has found an excellent medium through which to express his interests in a way accessible to a wide public, and with this book his place among the front rank of Canadian photographers is surely confirmed. □

HERR HUGH

Hugh MacLennan, edited by Paul Goetsch, McGraw-Hill/Ryerson, 184 pages, \$4.95 wrappers, \$8.95 cloth.

By FRASER SUTHERLAND

IT'S SOMEHOW FITTING that a scholar at the University of Freiburg should edit this collection of critical views on Hugh MacLennan. After all, *The Watch That Ends the Night* has sold 220,000 copies in Germany, and in retrospect, it's easy to tell why he's popular there. The Germans, whatever else they may be, are a philosophical people, a preoccupation which probably derives from their cuisine — too many potato dumplings. MacLennan's novels abound with philosophy, particularly of the historical variety; his sermonizing tendencies would go down well with the German reader.

But though popular, MacLennan hasn't received much German critical attention. Paul Goetsch is helping to plug the gap with his study, *Das Romanwerk Hugh MacLennans: Eine Studie zum literarischen Nationalismus*

in Kanada (1961) and this collection, which includes an essay by Hermann Boeschstein, originally published as 'Hugh MacLennan, ein kanadischer Romancier.' Thus one useful function this collection performs is to remind us that MacLennan is far from being the insular nationalist he is sometimes taken to be. Two *Solitudes*, perhaps his most "Canadian" book, has been translated, Goetsch tells us in his introduction, into eight languages.

Among the interesting inclusions is a Robertson Davies review of *The Watch That Ends the Night*, tint published in *Saturday Night*, which calls Catherine Carey, the novel's heroine, "a fine example of the spiritual vampire, living on the vital force of others." Worth noting, too, is Keiichi Hirano's point-by-point comparison of the remarkable parallels between MacLennan's Odyssean figure, Jerome Martell, and Norman Bethune, the Canadian surgeon and Chinese hero. But in piecing together his book *Goetsch* makes a blunder common among academic critics. "The purpose of this collection [is] to document the major trends in MacLennan criticism," Goetsch says. He adds that "for reasons of space" he has not reprinted articles from books still available, such as George Woodcock's survey 'A Nation's Odyssey' and Edmund Wilson's discussion of MacLennan in *Canada*. Instead, he merely reprints a 1950 Woodcock review of MacLennan and omits Wilson.

Now it is a matter of the most profound indifference to me and, I suspect, the university students for whom this book is intended, to know what are "the major trends in MacLennan criticism." But for a certain type of critic the stock market "trends" are seen as more important than the individual verdict, thus providing an excuse for leaving out the best of these. Certainly a student with an essay deadline is going to be awfully annoyed to know he'll have to scurry around trying to find books that his library probably doesn't own. Goetsch refers to "reasons of space" as if he were only given 179 pages to fill. If the difficulty were high permissions fees why couldn't he be honest and say so? Whatever the problem, the absence of the two best discussions of MacLennan's work seriously undermines the usefulness of this book. □

Fraser Sutherland, a regular contributor, is author of *The Style of Innocence*, *Strange Ironies* and other works and is editor of *Northern Journey*.

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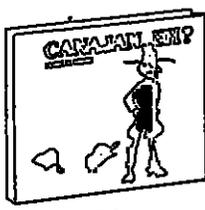


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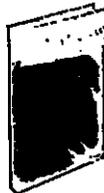
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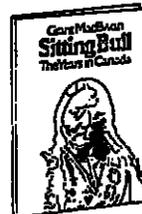
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MILKING THE PRAIRIES

Grass Roots, by Heather Robertson, with photographs by Myfanwy Phillips, James Lewis & Samuel, 421 pages, \$10 cloth.

By MORRIS WOLFE

"FAMILIARITY," WROTE Gertrude Stein, "does not breed contempt. On the contrary the more familiar it is the more rare and beautiful it is."

"Beautiful" is perhaps the wrong word to describe the world of, say, Oscar Lewis's *La Vida* or of James Lorimer's *Working People*. But Stein is right; real familiarity usually breeds not contempt but the kind of compassion one finds in the work of Lewis or Lorimer.

That kind of compassion can be found in Heather Robertson's first book, *Reservations Are For Indians*, a book that effectively avoided all the familiar stereotypes of the Indian. Now Robertson has written a second book, *Grass Roots*, a study of life in western Canada. Given the quality of *Reservations Are For Indians*, I'd expected that the present book might do for Canada's rural working class what Lorimer's *Working People* had done for the urban working class. That expectation, unfortunately, is largely unrealized.

Much of the trouble derives from the fact that Robertson hasn't become "familiar" with her subject. A great deal of the book, for example, is devoted to an economic, social and oral history of each of five Western towns — Moose Jaw, Miami, Winkler, Bienfait and Biggar. Robertson's reports on each of those places are based on her spending "about a month, off and on" in each of them. Compare the superficiality of that approach with Lorimer's living for three years in the urban working class community he wrote about. Not surprisingly, Robertson's approach results in a book that is frequently superficial and patronizing.

At one point in *Grass Roots*, Robertson complains that "strangers in Biggar are stared at relentlessly, shamelessly, like sideshow freaks." It's curious that she should say that, given her

own tendency to be a kind of Diane Arbus of the typewriter, for whom many of the people she writes about are "geezers," "scarecrows" and "hens." Over and over again Robertson takes the easy route, choosing to fix people in clever phrases instead of trying to give some sense of what it means to be those people.

Her superficial research leads her to a large number of easy and clever generalizations. "Government in Bienfait," she tells us, "as in all dying Prairie towns, is government by inertia." "You can tell a lot about a town from its teeth." "The West has no history because everything has remained the same."

In those few cases where she appears to have genuinely become familiar with her subject, she writes about it with warmth and understanding. Her opening chapter, for example, about the Gordon Taylor family, is excellent — the best in the book. Reading about the Taylors, one understands why the rural population of Saskatchewan decreased by 50,000 people between 1966 and 1971. One is struck by the courage of families like the Taylors who stick it out despite what appears to be a deliberate government policy to drive them off the land. A later section on the reeve of Miami, Rudy Hink, is also extremely good.

As well, there are a lot of nice tidbits — the fact, for instance, that Tommy Douglas' campaign manager in the federal election of 1935 was a former Ku Klux Klan organizer. Or this delightful paragraph from the *Canadian Gazette* of 1902: "The women wanted in Western Canada are those healthy, country-bred women who love and understand animal life and who prefer the freedom of the country to the conventionalities of the town. They must be women of some culture, but who have had training in domestic arts by practicing them and who will keep up the tone of the men with whom they mix by music and book lore when the day's work is over." Or reference to E. A. Partridge's *A War on Poverty* (1925) with its separatist plea and proposed Western cooperative commonwealth, "which would have no taxes, no rent, no debt, no profits, no interest, no banks, no politicians, no lawyers."

Myfanwy Phillips' photographs are a disappointment, and not helped by the fact that 17 of them are mislabelled. I'd admired her work very much in *Working People*. There, she'd reminded me of Walker Evans. Here, her

photographs, like Robertson's prose, are a bit too reminiscent of Diane Arbus for my liking.

Heather Robertson wrote in *Maclean's* a couple of years ago: "We grow up with different perceptions in the West. We become conscious of light, of the minute gradations from hour to hour and from day to day. We are in tune with the contours of the land." I'd expected *Grass Roots* to give me some sense of those "different perceptions." No such thing happens, because of Robertson's failure to get inside her subject. □

HIGH STEEL ACT

Beyond the Spectacle, by Jim Christy, preface by Doug Fetherling, Alive Books, 204 pages, \$2.95 wrappers.

By JUNE CALLWOOD

JIM CHRISTY'S collection of 20 essays is presented in a crude, dreary binding and printed in faded sepia ink, like something left for 80 years in a trunk. The typographical errors are egregious and the publisher so obscure as to almost guarantee that the book will be impossible to find. Never mind, find it. It is Jim Christy's first book and that's enough for a celebration. Christy started writing in the underground papers about five years ago and recently has had his byline here and there in Canadian newspapers and periodicals of impeccable reputation. He is now, as he began, one of the finest writers around. If he doesn't fall off the high steel, which is where he dwells, he will be one of the greats.

Beyond the Spectacle has as its theme Christy's reverence for non-fits. He can recognize one in her grave, as in the case of Emma Goldman, or on the stage of the Electric Circus, where he saw the fire-breather, or when the non-fit is Jack Kerouac or an unforgettable figure, Charlie Leeds, who may be between jail terms now or may not. He can spot them anywhere because they are all him, Jim Christy, who followed leaders in the peace movement and will never be a follower again.

Most of his essays deal with his experiences in that movement, which he came to believe was purely a spectacle

staged by the same **firm** of puppeteers who gave us the **Somme** and **Dieppe** in those other **wars** to end all **wars**. His solution for the **post-coital depression** which has devastated so many of his **generation** is to cut the strings. Stand alone. Don't **join** the revolution, *be it*. Don't join anything.

He was a long **time** on the **barricades**, looking suspiciously **like** an idealist trying to create a brotherhood of man out of **flowers**. He was with the sons of Dylan who **tried** to stop troops bound for **Viet Nam** in 1965, started one of the **first** campus **protests**, **drifted along** Haight and **Ashbury**, attended the march on the Pentagon, tried to get to **Martin Luther King's funeral** and almost got **himself killed**, witnessed **the** Columbia University dots and was in costume for the **Great Canadian Hippie Impersonation** that followed the summer of 1968. He insists he was never taken in. It was his fate to **witness** students wrapping **their** heads with gauze bandages dabbed **with mercurochrome** to represent blood and to watch a distinguished poet fitting a fashionable arrest into a busy social schedule.

He therefore was less shattered by the **futility** of **the** movement than the

believers were; **they** ~~ate~~ truly maimed by **their** despair. He **also** avoided being one of the perennial enthusiasts who can still be seen in the full **Crazy** David uniform, unaware the war is over and plotting delicious schemes to overthrow the government by petition.

Christy is **groping** for something he calls self-liberation. He won't be part of the spectacle **again**, won't submit to manipulation if he can help it. He has been down and out in Toronto and, like Orwell, found poverty an obscenity without any redeeming social value. His **writing** about that period is among **his** disciplined best, with spare words that **get** out of the way.

He has **thrown in** some oddities for fatteners: disparate articles on jazz, country music, a **film** director, a writer or two. They **aren't** all worthy **of him**; sometimes he **slithers** around, looking gauche or pompous for a moment. As a writer he's a risk-taker. It's a perilous way to operate **but**, **when** he wins — which he does most of the time — he **wins** big.

Beyond the' Spectacle displays Christy's astonishing range and **ferocious** talent. Surely the book **will** be available *somewhere*. □

CANNIBAL DOVES

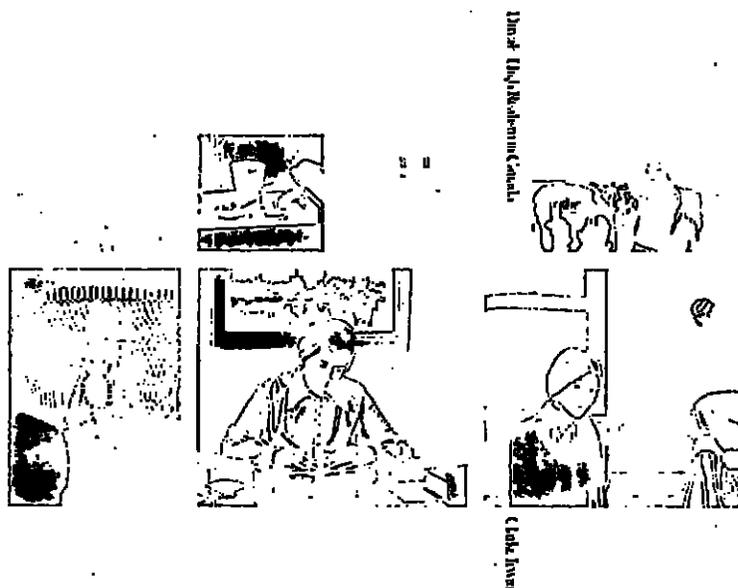
The Tyranny of the Group. by Andrew Malcolm M.D., **Clarke Irwin**, 190 pages, \$6.50 cloth.

By **RICHARD LUBBOCK**

"WE TEACH NOTHING but Love, **Spirituality** and Human **Fellowship.**" **This** is the message softly cooed by the dove-like **practitioners** of **the** human potential and **sensitivity** training movements. However the fact is that the human potential people will readily **turn** to coercion and brutality to further their ideals. I bumped **into** this **ugly** quality recently, **when** I interviewed an official of the quaintly named James Joyce Memorial Liquid **Theatre** in New York.

At the time, the JJMLT was **practising** a form of mass sensitivity training and psychodrama in the basement of the Guggenheim Museum. I attended a "performance" there and was struck

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by an **atmosphere** of manipulation and calculated frenzy that had, for me, disturbing political implications.

In the CBC studio afterwards, I remarked on this to the JJMLT producer. and he responded with sympathetic **snakishness**. "I wonder," he mused, "where the hostility is in you, that you **experienced** such feelings?"

On my **return** to Toronto, the group's agent phoned me long **dis-**
tance, and in a voice like a horseradish grater, threatened me with unmentionably harsh **legal** penalties if I let the tape be broadcast. This incident reminded me of **Konrad Lorenz's** question about his bloodthirsty doves: "How could these paragons of love and virtue dream of harming one another?" Woe betide anyone who declines to concur uncritically with the sensitivity **folk's** protestations of ten- & mess and love.

Far more experienced and **battle-**
scarred than I in observing the human potential movement (**h.p.m.**) — **com-**
prising sensitivity training, T-groups, gestalt therapy, **Synanon** and similar dregs **from** the sump of the Aquarian Age — is Andrew **Malcolm**, a Toronto psychiatrist, who has written a witty and **scholarly** book, *The Tyranny of*

The Group, which decisively lays **bare** the exploitative realities of **encounter-**
ism.

Much of the power of Dr. Malcolm's skillful discretion of the Movement, and its messianic philosophy which he **calls** "magic humanism," **derives** from his own clinical and personal experience. He cites among other reports, a 1971 study showing that **there** was a psychological casualty rate of ten per cent among university students **pro-**
cessed by the human **potentialists**. Group leaders usually conceal these unpleasant **facts** **from** their customers.

If people participated voluntarily and knowingly in the dark rituals of magic humanism, then could be little complaint. But subjection to the dishonest, despotic ministrations of **encounterism** is frequently compulsory. Many corporate **brothers** (Malcolm points to Ontario **Hydro**, Aluminum **Company** of Canada and IBM, among **others**) **have** **eagerly** stocked their anti-personnel departments with weapons bought **from** the h.p.m.

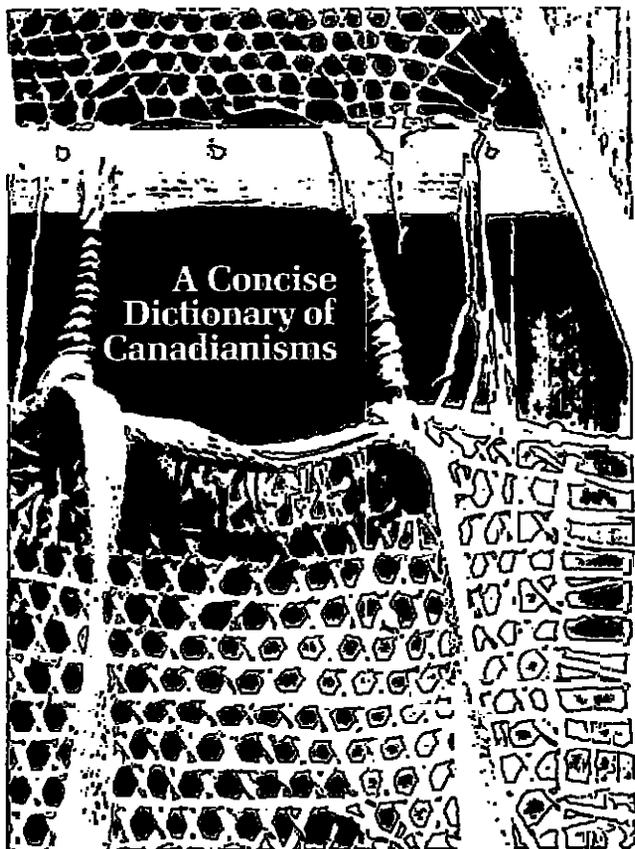
Dr. Malcolm traces the ideology of magic humanism and its cockeyed **epigoni** **from** the twelfth century down to the Nazi "philosopher" **Al-**
fred Rosenberg, and the contemporary

Yale savant, Charles Reich, of Con III **fame**. He also demonstrates the **h.p.m.'s** fraternal reliance on brain-washing techniques perfected in the People's Republic of China. Friendly Fascism knows no **frontiers**.

Though it would seem that the influence of human **potentialism** is on the wane, Dr. Malcolm contends that **only** the media hype is subsiding. **He** **says** that the disease continues to **fester** in many **bureaucracies**. Ontario's Addiction Research Foundation **is** still addicted, along with the York County school system and other powerful **or-**
ganizations.

Sensitivity methods may well have valid **clinical** uses when administered under **proper professional** supervision. But most group **leaders** are **self-**
accredited and unqualified charlatans. There is a **crying** need for federal or **provincial regulation** and control.

If you don't believe it, read Andrew Malcolm's thoroughly documented indictment. If then you **still** feel **like** **de-**
filing your **dignity** and **sanity** at the behest of some **ragtag-and-bobtail** assortment of encounter groupies dredged off the street, and their loopy leadership, your blood is on your own head. □



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CANADA'S TENNIEL

A Caricature History of Canadian Politics, by J.W. Beugough, Peter Martin Associates, 269 pages, \$10.

By **RICHARD LANDON**

THIS BOOK CONSISTS of a selection of cartoons from **Bengough's original** two-volume work of the same name published in 1886 by **Grip Printing and Publishing Co.** It has a **new** introduction by **Doug Fetherling**, providing a great contrast to the introduction to the original edition by the Rev. **Principal Grant**.

J. W. Bengough billed himself on his letterhead as an "entertainer, lecturer, cartoonist, illustrator, writer," and he appears to have fulfilled this promise in all fields. He founded **Grip**, the "Punchy" Canadian magazine with which his name is most closely associated today, in 1873 while still a young man, and from then until his death in 1923 volumes of lectures, verse (illustrated), fiction and drama flowed from his pen in an endless stream.

He used these talents in his rôle as an active political campaigner, enthusiastically embracing such movements as the prohibition of tobacco and alcohol, single taxation, free trade and women's suffrage. (*Everybody Votes but Mother*, a Canadian Suffrage Association broadside poem, is one example of his participation in the latter cause). In later life Bengough continued to participate actively in a number of political and cultural societies. One such was the **Bon Echo Whitman Society**, established by the prominent Canadian suffragette **Flora MacDonald Denison** and Whitman's biographer **Horace Traubel**. This group's enthusiasm was carried to the extent of their arranging to have a large rock in **Lake Muskoka** lettered with the inscription "Old Walt" on the occasion of the **Whitman centenary** in 1919.

Bengough's cartoons are a curious combination of caricature, in the best English tradition of **Cruikshank and Tenniel**, and straight political editorialising. Almost every one is filled with words — bubbling out of the mouths of the characters, on tickets hanging from their pockets, on signs in the background and on papers apparently

strewn at random. The initial visual impact of the drawing was designed to secure the attention of the casual reader, who would be sufficiently intrigued to go and "read" the cartoon as an editorial. Unlike many modern cartoons, Bengough's work encourages a second look; there is always a pointed detail or a subtle reference that one misses the first time.

Bengough began **Grip** at a propitious moment. The **Pacific Scandal** and **Sir John A. Macdonald** provided him with subject matter rich in possibilities for satire, particularly as he was himself a **Grit** (his first job in Toronto had been with the *Globe*). Bengough must have made hundreds of drawings of **Sir John A.**, an aspect of his work emphasized by the compilers of this volume. He could hardly have approved of the **bibulous Tory**, but at the time of **Macdonald's death** he wrote: "For many loved and worshipped old **Sir John/And none could hate.**" Bengough was remarkably free of malice for one so intimately involved in political life, and his cartoons are never vicious.

Some understanding of late nineteenth-century Canadian politics is necessary to appreciate many of the reference in Bengough's cartoons, but short explanatory notes accompany each one, as they did in the original edition. For example, the full flavour of "Othello Brown's Apology" will be lost to those who do not know about **George Brown's mission to Washington in 1875** to secure a reciprocity treaty with the United States, and some understanding of Othello will also be of assistance. In fact, many of Bengough's cartoons contain oblique literary allusions, the significance of which were presumed to be apparent to his readers; the present *Globe and Mail* makes no such assumption.

The cartoons are well reproduced in facsimile in this edition. One might argue with some of the selections (and omissions), but the book does present aspects of Canadian nineteenth-century politics and history in a uniquely palatable form. I would urge the publishers to repeat this successful experiment and consider a facsimile of *The Up-to-Date Primer*, one of Bengough's most delightful works, as their next production. □



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MATT COHEN

graduate of
the sixties

By NANCY NAGLIN

IN 1968, WHEN Matt Cohen's first novel *Korsoniloff* appeared, followed three years later with *Johnny Crackle Sings*, he was hailed as a "experimental" writer, one of the *avant-garde* of Canadian fiction. He wrote about aimless youth strumming guitars and coming to post-adolescent epiphanies on acid. His short stories were peopled with shadowy figures who shopped for fathers for their babies, discovered lovers on their lawns and wound up in freak shows. To the critics, he was a "voice" of the 1960s, a writer whose

lapses into fantasy and imagination were chronicles of an era.

His newest book, *The Disinherited*, is a realistic narrative, far removed from the youth scene of the 1960s, concerned with an epic theme of generation. In more ways than one it marks the end of an era.

According to Cohen, *avant-garde* fiction in Canada has come and gone. "At the end of the '60s, there was a sense of Political optimism and the publishing scene had broken wide open. People indulged their sense of play. They weren't trying to be incomprehensible to readers, they were inviting the readers to play with them.

"The '70s are going to be a time of tremendous political repression. People will seek entertainment in books and films for relief and to make sense out of what's happening. Fiction will become more conventional."

Cohen was a perfect chronological member of the 1960s generation. He was born in Kingston in 1942 and entered the University of Toronto in 1960. He distilled his involvement with drugs and politics into *Johnny Crackle Sings*, the story of a rock star who succumbed to the hustle of the American entertainment business and then fell from money and fame into a cocoon of introspection.



Ironically, Cohen “ever thought of himself as a” avant-garde writer. “I’m not a” experimental writer,” he **insists**. “I don’t know **what a**” experimental **writer** is. It implies you don’t know what you’re doing and I always know. **I do it on purpose.**

“**When** you get older,” Cohen says with a **reserve** and thoughtfulness that marks everything he says, “you face the consequences **of what** you did **when** you **were** younger **and** to live the **same** way is harder.”

His **new** book is unlike **any other** book he has written. “Compared to **Johnny Crackle**, which didn’t have complete sentences, it’s a straight-looking book. I could have written narrative **any time.**”

But it seems only now, after the years of **first** being published and the last confusing years of the **1960s** have died away, that has he found the form and **discipline** for a **story** like **The Disinherited**.

The book is a saga of sorts, **Faulknerian** in scope and **obsessed** with **rejuvenation**. Richard Thomas is the **dy-**ing **patriarch** of an Ottawa Valley farm family. He is immersed in **family** roots that stretch back to the **first** settlers of the land, connect to hostile sons and involve a number of mythic relationships with women.

Cohen considered writing a **series** of books with **some** of the **same** **characters**. “Only after about 20 books would it **all** make sense.” For a while he thought that was **what** he would be doing for the next **10** years. “But I’m just too lazy to knowingly take on such a huge project.

“**I** “ever **really** know **what** my intention is when I set out to **write** a book. As I **write** along, the whole meaning of the book changes to me. **It seems** to **challenge** my life as I’m living it and **I** have to **re-understand** the way I’m living.”

Technic&y, each book he does **seems** to get easier. “The other day,” he says **with** undisguised glee, “I found out how to make paragraphs work. **I was** really proud of myself. **I**” **The Disinherited** **I** learned how to do **punctuation** — the semi-colon, the colon. I thought that **was** really good. I’m progressing along and I’ll soon be **at the** end of grade nine grammar.”

Slender and self-contained, he states matter-of-factly. “I’m **an** indirect person.” He always wanted to be a scientist and is rather proud of **his** theoretical mind. He **studied** economics and

has a **PhD** without a thesis in political science.

Cohen is **reticent** to talk about himself. He doesn’t volunteer information. He enjoys peeling **behind-** words to decipher their exact meaning. Yet, he has a shy, wry **humor** that finds itself in quick **one-liners**.

He **grew** up in Ottawa, the son of a” impoverished professional, without much money but with lots of books. He thought he was going **to be** a” academic until he discovered how boring the life was. He is vague as to how **or** why he started to write.

Getting his **first** book published **seemed** blissfully easy. Someone at **Anansi** offered to publish it, sight unseen, if he wrote it. “Who knows?” he says. “He may have **said** it in jest, but he did it.”

To Cohen this haphazard beginning is another **example** of the way **things** were a few **years** ago. “**You** have to remember the **swarm** of **first** novels by people in their early and mid-twenties. There was a **sense** of playfulness then that’s just not happening now. Not even” in poetry.”

He is critical of **his** only collection of stories, **Columbus And The Fat Lady**. “Good short stories are harder to **write** than mediocre novels. They’re limicky. If you **mess** up a page, you **destroy** the **story**.”

“**One of the** things I had always heard was the way to learn to write short stories was to write one a week and be prepared to **throw** most of them out — **or all** of them — for **months.**”

In **retrospect**, he thinks some of those stories should not have **appeared**. Then, as now, he is trying to say something about **possibilities**, **about** ways of being alive: “After you’ve been **published** once or twice, you have no trouble getting published again. You have to decide for yourself if you **want** something published.”

Cohen may be off-hand about how his writing strikes **others**. He admits to a loose writing **schedule** — “**I** just **sort** of do it when I feel like **it**” — but he’s not as undisciplined as he pretends.

“**You** can be blind to 85 per cent of **what** you’re doing and get away with it, but **if you’re** blind to 85 per cent of what you’re writing, it’ll be terrible. Each book **I write**, I live a different **way.**”

The **first** two books reflected the consciousness of the characters. **Johnny Crackle** was written on the mad, in tents and in cars. **The Disinherited** took two years to finish. Most of the

work’ was done in three months in the quiet of his **Kingston** farm.

He knows **when** he has a short **story** but he’s afraid of the middle of novels: “When I’m in the beginning of an **novel**, I just have no idea of what’s going to be in **that** vast area that goes **from** the beginning to the end — where you **can** get lost for years. I don’t **think** it ever gets easier. In fact, **perhaps** it will grow harder as I **grow** older.”

He thought **The Disinherited** was the book he was trying to write but he won’t **know** until he’s read it **again** in a couple of years.

He doesn’t feel — he is exclusively a Canadian writer. The term has been pushed to the point where he doesn’t know **what** it means. “Canada is a Christian, conservative country and **I am** neither Christian nor **conservative.**”

A writer like Cohen, who emerged in the 1960s and published three novels and a collection of short stories in the past seven years, may be a **particularly** Canadian phenomenon. Publishing has been **more widely** encouraged here than elsewhere. Cohen is **bemused** by the **thought** that if **The Disinherited** were to have been published in the U.S., it probably would have been **misunderstood**.

The characters are **rural** people who are **caught** between the move to the city and the ties of inherited land. Cohen is recording a present-day **migration** that every year draws thousands of people to Toronto. **To** outside eyes, the situation in **The Disinherited** seems strangely dated. In the U.S., the novels that **dealt** with Cohen’s theme were written in the 1930s and the 1940s.

Cohen is only half-serious about turning **The Disinherited** into a **trilogy**. He is at work on a book about the West **Coast**. He **writes** short stories, **plants** vegetables and tried to get on with his life. In a way he typifies what the young writers of the 1960s may become in this decade. The rhetoric **and moral** lessons **of that** decade will fade as lives and books become **more** reflective and cautious. People **will** become more interested in the consequences of their private acts. Witnesses to the changing nature of **relationships**, writers will record what is said behind closed doors and in bedrooms.

“Most people spend a lot of time in periods of stress,” **Matt** Cohen said about Johnny Crackle. “Lives have to be reassembled.” In his newest **book**, Cohen has begun the process. □

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PROPHET AND LOSS

Gentle Patriot. A political Biography of Walter Gordon, by Denis Smith, Hurtig, 416 pages, \$12.50 cloth.

By MICHAEL SUTTON

THE APPEARANCE of Professor Smith's biography of Walter Gordon accompanies a spate of books on the politics and Liberal party affairs of the 1950s and 1960s, including the awaited second volume of the Pearson autobiography. Gentle Patriot is not a full-dress objective history of Gordon's career or a proper history of his dealings and non-dealings with Pearson and the Liberal party.

At the core of Smith's overlong "political biography" written with the benefit of access to Gordon's private papers, is Gordon's influence on Canadian politics. Smith gives an account of Gordon's unpopular and premature advocacy of nationalism in the foreign-ownership debate of the Pearson years

and **recollects** Gordon's **falling** out with the **Pearson** government brought into the open in 1967 by Gordon's importunate speech **against** the Viet Nam war, which cast doubt on the wisdom of Canada following the lead of American imperialism in this matter.

Gentle *Patriot* has already drawn critical **fire** for taking Gordon's side against Pearson and his government's **continentalist** economic policies. Certainly Smith has become Gordon's apologist, but it is unkind to **lambast** his book if it operates as a **salutary** balance **against** the forces of received opinion and Liberal orthodoxy.

Given **the lame virtue** of hindsight, the whole business **seems** incredibly spongy. In pursuing Gordon's career and lack of it Smith succeeds in pointing up some **of** the historical **contradictions** of Liberal economic policy. The real question **behind** the **Gordon-Pearson** controversy is of **course** just how beneficial it is to pursue any **form of laissez faire economic** policy in the context of multi-national corporate monopoly. The quarrel is only over whether to sell out the nation wholesale following **an** expansive **continentalist** policy or in odd **lots** following a mom protectionist nationalist policy.

Whether Gordon's 1963 budget proposal would have been the **disaster** that **Pearson's** government suspected **remains** a matter best left to **historians** of political economy. Nonetheless, Gordon was early to recognize the **freebooting** dangers of **continentalist** policy. **That recognition** led hi to become a founding member of the **Committee for an Independent Canada**. However, the protectionist **tendencies** of the UC seem only to encourage stop-gap &sums that cannot work during a period of the consolidation of capital. This is **only** to encourage **big fish** in the pond to eat little fish, large interests to gobble smaller ones and powerful regions to cannibalize **their** waker **neighbours**. A **continentalist** policy seems only to substitute "**nations**" for "**regions**" in the paradigm.

Gentle Patriot is a welcome, if **limited**, commentary on contemporary Canadian affairs, and is **well** enough constructed to make it accessible to readers outside the **circles** of political pundits and intellectual **cognoscenti**. Exciting *Gentle Patriot* is **not**, but it is **the rare** book of Canadian history that manages to breathe **into** the subject the life it deserves. □

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LAMBS NO, TIGERS YES

Songs My Mother Taught Me, by
Audrey Thomas, Talonbooks, 234
pages, \$8.50 cloth.

By ELIZABETH BRADY

THE Gnostics had a good symbol for it. Whenever they wanted to express the idea of Nature continually returning, within a cyclic pattern, to its own beginning, they drew the Ouroboros — a dragon biting its own tail. In mood and structure Audrey Thomas' new novel *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (her fourth book of fiction) very consciously exemplifies this circle motif. Rather like the Ouroboros, the tortured memory of the female protagonist obsessively circles in upon its own obsessions as she narrates the

story of her childhood and adolescence.

The narrative, divided into "Songs Of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience," is framed by two short circular tales and, as if to underscore the motif, the first sentence of chapter one recurs as the first sentence of the final chapter. And so Isobel Cleary returns to the very point from which her childhood chronicle started, with her character modified by the intervening years but essentially still the same.

This is a lyrical novel — which is not to suggest that it conjures any bucolic idyll of the past. On the contrary, it is a raw, open-sore kind of a book: But the plot, the story of a young girl's growth to a frail and tentative maturity, is held strictly subordinate to a poetic rendering of experience. Isobel loves words and fears death. As if words held some talismanic power over the passage of time, she hoards memories, transfixes sensory experience into the more enduring patterns of language: "If something truly unusual happened I tried to impale the whole complex of sight/sound/touch/taste/smell on my consciousness and memory as though such an experience

was like some rare and multicolored butterfly."

The narrator hovers over things, naming and cataloguing them, from one object building up a rich complex of minutely detailed observations. Entire sections of the novel take shape around single objects — houses, meals, cemeteries — linked associatively through the peculiar logic that emotion traces in recollection.

The events in "Songs of Innocence" transpire almost entirely within the close confines of Isobel's too-nuclear family in upstate New York during the 1940s and 1950s. Mother is typecast as neurotic housewife, perpetually bitching, perpetually holding up her despair and self-abnegation like votive offerings to long-defunct household gods. Father, failed as a breadwinner and latterly failed in bed, limps about in the shadows like the undead. Older sister Jane is a fellow-traveller in misery, but remains a stranger. Not surprisingly in such a bleak environment where "misery spread like damp along the walls," Isobel's personality doesn't so much grow as deform: "I wore fear like a hump on my back." Her one abiding source of joy and stability is

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grandfather **Harry** who she loves with a pathetic intensity.

The two events that "Songs of Experience": unfolds — the **death** of the "mind's virginity" and the subsequent **loss** of that other, lesser **virginity** — signal **Isobel's escape from the cloistered world** of innocence. The **Blakean** categories are **paradoxically** inverted in a perverse affirmation of the virtue of losing Eden for the real world. This **illumination** comes in a madhouse where she works for a summer. Them **Isobel discovers** "a beauty and self-control that was created out of pain and ugliness and decay." For all their convincing depravity, stench and horror, the **scenes** that take place in Ward 88, the "Shit Ward," are the most moving I have read.

Songs My Mother Taught Me appears to have originated in the short story "Aunt Hetti James and the Gates of the New Jerusalem," published in an earlier collection *Ten Green Bottles* (1967). The author also invites us to trace its origin to an autobiographical source: both photographs of the writer and her sister on the dust jacket are taken from family **albums**, and the novel itself makes an **explicit** reference to the front-cover photograph. Even if the narrative only marginally draws upon the facts of her own **childhood**, we can be grateful that Audrey Thomas survived to write about it.

Whatever its **provenance**, *Songs My Mother Taught Me* is an exceptionally **fine** book (and compliments to Talonbooks for such a handsome production job). It's like... well, it's like "some ram and multicolored butterfly." •

HISTORY 'ON LOCATION

The Craft of History, edited by Eleanor Cook, introduction by **Ramsay Cook**, preface by Vincent **Tovell**, **CBC Learning Systems**, 145 pages, \$2.50 wrappers.

IN THE SUMMER of 1971 **Ramsay Cook**, professor of history at York University in Toronto, interviewed for television three of his most distinguished colleagues. The conversations were casual and rambling but frequently were marked by insights, subtleties and anecdotes seldom captured in **class** or **colloquium**. Part of the **reason** for

these candid **revelations** came from the **settings** — Cook undertook his assignment in the **field**. He talked of the **Laurentian system while cruising on Lake Ontario** with Arthur Lower; **Michel Brunet** spoke of bin relationship with Quebec's emergent collective consciousness while they promenaded **round** the Citadel; and Donald **Creighton** discussed the **achievements** and **personality** of Sir John A. **Macdonald** in an **office**, in Parliament's West Block, once occupied by the first prime Minister.

These conversations were boiled down and **broadcast** during two seasons — first as **prologue** and then as epilogue — to CBC Television's **successful Images of Canada series**. The present book is an edited **version** of the longer, original recordings of the **discussions**.

Ramsay Cook, a superior historian himself, **proves** to be an **accomplished** interviewer **as well**, and the value of his **personal** intimacy with his subjects, **permitting him to** portray them as human beings as **well** as historians, contributes much to the charm of *their encounters*. At the same time a **serious** weakness is **suggested in** this approach. It is difficult to estimate **precisely** for whom the book is **intended**. At some stages, for instance in Cook's **rather** simplistic introduction, it **appears** that potential readers are considered sublimely ignorant of history and the peculiar functioning of historians. In the course of the interviews, however, many assumptions are made that **suggest** the reader should be in possession of a professional understanding of the themes and issues involved.

Another limitation is the lack of a bibliographic guide to the writings discussed; surely this could **easily** have been incorporated. Some of the author's works are mentioned in the introductory notes but a fuller **list**, **possibly** annotated and certainly including dates of publication, is a necessity for those whose interest has been kindled by the interviews.

The weakest part of the book, however, is the preface written by Vincent **Tovell**, executive **producer** of *Images of Canada*. Here is slick commercial patter of the most glib and unwieldy type; swift generalizations **are** pushed up **against clichés** and commonplaces that have no relevancy in a book which purports to be part, as the title page informs us, of federally funded "learning systems." □ ROGER HALL

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WESTERN UNION PHEANS

Adrian Waller's *Guide to Music*,
Clarke Irwin, 152 pages. \$5.50 cloth.

By WILLIAM LITTLER

DURING THE mid-1930s, the American composer Aaron Copland delivered a series of lectures at the New School for Social Research in New York City on the subject "What to Listen for in Music." Though no one was better qualified to give the lectures, Copland prefaced the book they became with a cautionary note. It went as follows: "You cannot develop a better appreciation of the ad merely by reading about it." However much of a truism this statement may be, it is surprising how many so-called music-appreciation books assume the road to

musical understanding is paved with potted biographies, anecdotes and paeans to the internationalism of what Li. L. Mencken used to call the Tone Art. A recent representative of the species, *Adrian Waller's Guide to Music*, continues this less than admirable tradition.

Like everyone else who has tried to write a layman's music guide, Waller admits there is no substitute for auditory experience. "Listen to as much music as possible," he advises us at one point. "Allow the music to create pictures in the mind," he suggests at another. But one can almost hear Igor Stravinsky groaning in his Venetian grave over the second statement. It is symptomatic of the trap into which so many commentators fall of trying to explain one art in terms of another. And as far as the first statement is concerned, it smacks of trying to learn to swim by diving off the end of a pier.

The approach is too simplistic. It ignores both the fact that music is a unique language, with its own vocabulary and syntax and the corollary that a guide must therefore set the layman on the path toward literacy if it is to

live up to its name. Copland recognized this and as a consequence devoted the better part of his book to a discussion of what makes music tick. Waller devotes the better part of his to such secondary concerns as musical biography and historical reportage.

What is more, one often questions the value of the information he offers. Does it really help anyone understand Faure and his music to read: "Gabriel Faure (1845-1924): French. Sixth child of a schoolmaster too poor to give son musical training. Fine organist. Deafness forced retirement"? Yet dozens of similar Western Union biographies occupy the pages of *Adrian Waller's Guide to Music*, some of them containing the bluntest of over-simplifications (Telemann's music is categorically dismissed as "facile but shallow").

But the book is not without merit. A feature writer with the Montreal *Gazette*, Waller has taught music, sung with the Canadian Opera Company and produced a couple of LP records (two of his 15 chapters concern recording), experiences that have left him a legacy of sometimes useful ob-



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servations on performance, jazz and the musical education of children. He has also brightened his pages with pertinent photographs, including some of **Canadian** Opera and National Arts Centre productions. But **none** of these features disguises the basic shortcoming of **this slim** volume. It simply doesn't come to grips with **the question** of what **makes** music music. On **that** shockingly **short shelf** of **Canadian** books about the Tone Art it represents yet another missed opportunity. □

William Littler was music critic of the Vancouver Sun before moving to the Toronto Star. He also lectures in the Faculty of Fine Arts at York University.

MENTAL TRAFFIC JAM

Explore Canada: The Reader's Digest/CAA Illustrated Guide, illustrated, **Reader's Dii** and the Canadian Automobile **Association**, 472 pages, \$19.98 cloth **prepublication..**

THERE IS A plaque in **Collingwood, Ont.** that **honors Mrs. Alfred Watt**, Bat president of the International Associated Country Women of the World. I didn't know that **until I** read it in *Explore Canada*, **even though I** used to be editor of a weekly **paper** in Collingwood and on **first-name** terms with the likes of Rose Bush, **the J.P.**, and Handshake **Harry Bell**, the mayor, and **Marge Butters**, who superintends the best dam lunch-counter in town.

And there you have **the** greatest strength as well as **the** greatest weakness of this intriguing parcel of facts and oddments and **photographs** and maps, courtesy of **Reader's Digest** and **the** Canadian Automobile Association. To **peruse** it is to be quickly surfeited with more remarkable **information** about the country's museums, art **galleries, tours, festivals, dioramas, Indian artifacts, commemorative plaques, scale models, natural marvels, historic reconstructions, cairns, statues, monuments, regattas and centennial projects** than your mental traffic will bear. At the same time, you get little sense of a

region's real character and you learn next to nothing about the human beings who live there. **In brief, Explore Canada** is an **armchair tourist** trap.

The book consists of **five** sections, beginning with a five-page geological survey and an **essay** by **Kildare Dobbs** called "The Heritage of Canada" that evidences none of the writer's quirky wit. Then comes **the main** section, a **386-page** gazetteer of almost 1,200 cities, towns, **villages** and national parks, and the **curiosities** you must see when you visit them. Rather **than list** places according to **some geographic** scheme, **the** editors **present** them alphabetically, from **Abbotsford, B.C.** to **Zurich, Ont.**, a method useful for **reference** purposes but uninviting to the reader **who wishes** to deal with the material consecutively.

The saving **grace** of **the** gazetteer, and indeed of **the** entire **volume**, is the regiment of **colour** photographs, most **specially** commissioned for this enterprise, that dresses up handsomely each and **every** page. **Chiefly** the work of **Paul Baich, John de Visser, Pierre Gaudard, Freeman Patterson and Richard Vroom**, the **excellence** of the **pictures** puts the **grey** prose to shame.

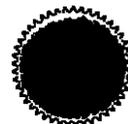
Explore Canada concludes with "The Building of Canada," a **12-page** guide to **pre-twentieth-century** styles in houses, churches and other **structures**, and with "The Faces of Canada," a portfolio of 23 maps. The **architectural** guide consists of **several** dozen small Line drawings that are pleasant to look at and easy to understand. The maps are so arranged as to be **baffling** and infuriating.

Anyhow, I sum do hope that **Rose and Harry and Marge** up there in **Collingwood** know where to locate that **pesky plaque**, because sure as shootin', come tourist season, they're going to be pestered to death about it. •1

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BESTSELLERS

continued from page 5

Shizuye Takashima. Perhaps the high point in sales — if not in taste — for Canada was recorded by two books that never have and probably never will make the best-seller list. They are Bob Tulk's *Newfie Jokes* and *More Newfie Jokes*, both distributed by Saanes at \$1.50 each. Together with a combined edition, *Bob Tulk's Newfie Jokes*, the books have smirked their way to more than 500,000 copies. If Tulk substituted Okie for Newfie, he could anticipate sales of five million in the U.S.

The middle of the shelf — poetry and plays — has always been sounder in Canada than a casual reader might suspect. A good example is George Ryga's play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (Talon Books, \$2.50), which has reached 13,000. John Coulter's *The Trial Of Louis Riel* (Oberon, 1968, \$2.50) sold 12,000 copies and a paperback edition of Yesterday the *Children were Dancing* (Clarke Irwin, \$1.75) by Gratien Gelinus reached 11,699 in 1973 alone.

As for poetry, Anansi could point to three slim volumes with fairly thick sales: Al Purdy's *Poem for AU the Annettes* (1968, \$3.50), 9,000; Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of*

Billy the Kid (1970, \$2.95), 9,500; and Atwood's *Power Politics* (1971, \$2.50), 13,000.

Fiction remains the weak end of the book business in terms of sales. Canadians simply won't buy English-Canadian novels, although they form the core of our creative identity. Apart from Anne of *Green Gables* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$4.95 and \$1.50), which has been selling at the rate of 23,000 a year since 1942, one of the best-selling novels in a long time was a translation of Roch Carrier's *La Guerre*, Yes Sir (Anansi, 1970, \$2.95). It reached 27,000. More typical is Robertson Davies' *The Manticore* (Macmillan, 1971, \$7.95), which was celebrated internationally but sold a grand total of 7,000 cloth copies in Canada. (Some McClelland & Stewart novels may have done better, but the publisher refuses to divulge figures.)

That brings us back to *Ultimatum* (Clarke Irwin, \$7.25). With reported sales so far of 10,000, it is doing exceptionally well. But it has also had unprecedented promotion for a Canadian novel, and some trade insiders are wondering whether Clarke Irwin has been able to break even. Which may explain a lot of this.

There's a curious footnote to all this. Some weeks ago *Books in Canada* asked Rohmer to review *Rage Under the Arctic* (George J. McLeod; 56.95) by Basil Jackson, the science editor of *The Financial Post*. Like *Ultimatum*, it's a thriller about northern resources ("The lines of conflict ate crisply drawn," said the New York Times review). Since January it has sold 5,000 copies in the U.S., which is where Jackson finally found an interested publisher. Rohmer agreed to do the review. The deadline came and went. Upon inquiry, Rohmer reported back from Barbados through his secretary, that he didn't like the book and didn't feel he could do a critique.

Now any reviewer is free to change his or her mind about a book. But considering the circumstances, Rohmer showed a singular lack of grace toward a fellow Canadian novelist — to say nothing of his rather cavalier treatment of one national magazine in this country & voted to the cause of Canadian books. The irony is that *Rage Under the Arctic*, unlike *Ultimatum*, may yet make *Time's* best-seller list on its own right. □

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STRESS BUT NO NOISE

Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed, by Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Vol. XIV of the Canadian Centenary Series; McClelland & Stewart, 426 pages, \$12.50 cloth.

By DANIEL WILLIMAN

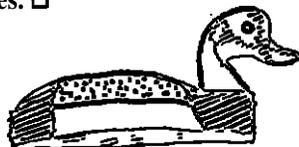
THIS IS FINE scholarly history for the great literate public. Its faults are mostly the faults of the Canadian historical tradition; its virtues, which are the work of the authors, deserve first consideration. The best style of historical narrative, free of unnecessary subjunctives, empty noise, cuteness, and ambiguity, easy to read and upstanding enough to shoot at, is a difficult one to sustain: but Brown and Cook have it mastered. One of the least-exploited, though naturally self-renewing resources of this exuberant land is the fund of theses in its university libraries, the masterpieces and doctorpieces of hundreds of generous and disciplined young scholars, many of whom never do so well again in the same line of work. Sixty-four theses are distilled directly into this history and listed in the only section of the prepared bibliography that survived the editors' axe. The index is nearly complete for proper names if nearly useless for topics. The notes, gathered at the beck, are complete but annoyingly peppered with *opera citata* somewhere *supra*.

History is a literature grounded on fact — and directed at understanding. The base and purpose, then, are antithetical, and the art is a dialectic between them. The concrete fact is incommunicable: while it can be copied, described, photographed or staged, such performances are not history because they are not connective narrative. The abstract conceptions that can be communicated and understood, conversely, can lose contact with the hard facts that guarantee their truth; and a narrative of abstractions is also not history, but a sort of coded cosmology. The tendency of this book, as of Canadian history in general, is toward the latter heresy, the propaganda of abstractions.

Its unifying principle is an abstraction — the nation of Canada — that makes sense only in Ontario, where its best blessing have been felt and where self-interest reinforces faith. Social movements are understood here as stresses upon Confederation rather than as expressions of the needs of persons. The immigrant mass remains a mass and presumably mindless; we learn what Borden did about the Winnipeg Soviet; but nothing of the making of the Prairie radicals. The Manitoba schools problem is understood as a problem of Laurier and the Vatican against the hierarchy of Quebec — but surely its true meaning lies in the content and manner of teaching in the Catholic schools of Quebec and the public schools of Ontario, and if these were described, further understandings would become possible. I honestly don't mean to be nasty about it, but the only artifact I found mentioned 'was one that caused the deaths of Ontario boys in Flanders and the shuffling of a ministry: the Ross Rifle.

It may be that in the present state of the art of Canadian history, its general practitioners are limited to a more or less concentrated distillation of the paper generated by the state. That's not healthy for history, and for the state it's an intoxicating poison too. Our history ought to be as concrete, complicated and separatist in its data as the rest of our literature is; it should be as disturbing to government as a general election. A federal government is either the solution that emerges from the clash of interests or the force that prevents interest from finding expression. Historians also must choose whether to write the life-stories of nations in a way that is mentally delightful and morally useful because it is true to the human base, or to chronicle the workings of governments without examining their legitimacy.

This chronicle of the governments of Laurier and Borden is so state-oriented that its photographs of immigrants, urban poor and soldiers are so many subversions of the text. We want to know how their needs affected the grand events of their times and what Laurier and Borden did that gave them the circumstances of justice and peace. These are the reasons that validate states. □



Foo

UMBRAGE AND UNCTION

continued from page 3

minds of a few readers. That I have contributed to Saturday Night has absolutely no bearing on the place in Books in Canada, which (except in the purely biographical part) was about Fulford as a type, not as individual. As for the Toronto Star connection, neither of us is on staff there, so neither buys or sells things to the other. Indeed, neither of us is even around the place much. We just happen to be (on far different planes) Star freelancers — the two of us and about 900 other people.

GUT REACTION

Sir:

Concerning Doug Fetherling's reference to GUT in the January-February issue as "grimy." If he had called GUT "dirty" in- & my fortune would have been made and I could have gone off to write the life story of Maxwell Bodenheimer as well as to make my own film from the book, a blockbuster which would have made Kung Fu look like a nutty putty expert.

Alfred Rushton
Toronto

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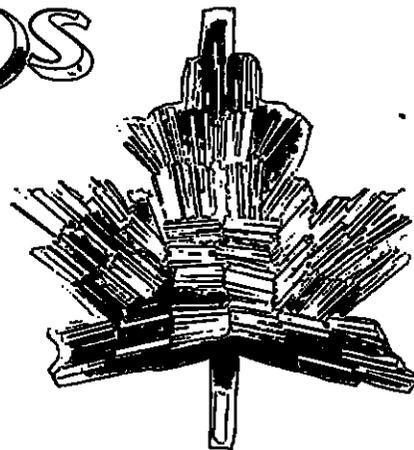
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