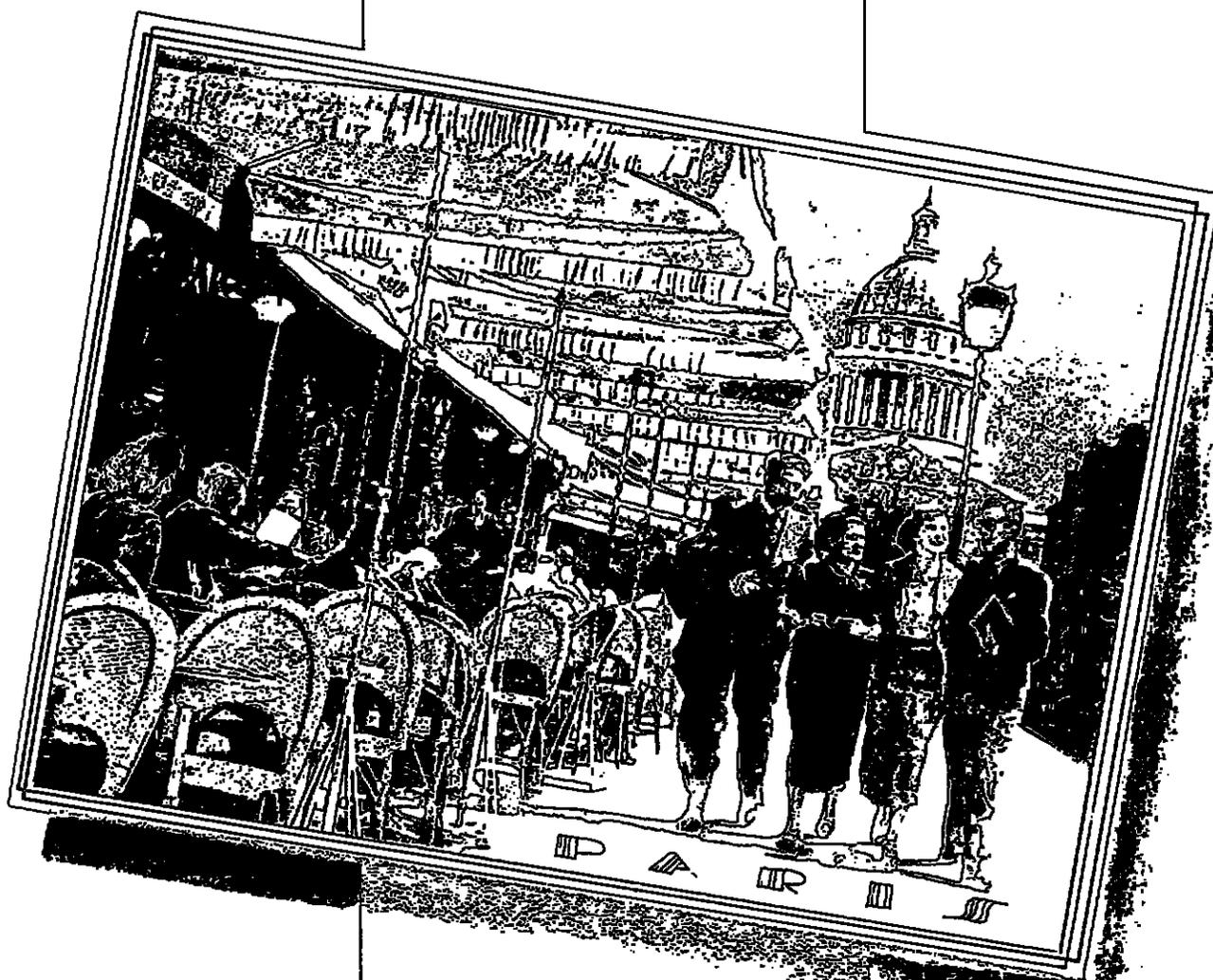


Wild bill bissett, fastest writslinger in the West, vs. the yahoos  
Solecki on Ondaatje o Ain and Wamis again  
Rideau Hall's big non-bash for this year's G.G. winners

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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# WHY b.b. INTO C.C. WON'T GO



Lower-case poet bill bissett is fighting for his artistic life, but the real victim may be the upper-case' Canada Council itself

by Eleanor Wachtel

**DATELINE OTTAWA.** Tuesday, March 21, 1978. 'Meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films, and Assistance to the Arts. Topic: The Canada Council.

MP Ursula Appolloni (Liberal, York South), vice-chairman, is concerned about creating too much dependency on Council grants: "An individual called Earle Birney — I do not know who he is and something in me tells me that I do not want to know who he is — hut he has had seven grants — seven."

Another member recommends abolishing the Canada Council entirely because many people in his riding "turn livid and apoplectic" at its mention. A third MP, Bob Wenman (PC, Fraser Valley West) tries twice to pot a motion suspending the activities of the Canada Council until it can be made folly accountable to Parliament. He fails for lack of a quorum. The brunt of their anger is directed at Council support for poets bill bissett and Bertrand Lachance, whose work is described as pornographic and disgusting.

Secretary of State John Roberts and Michel Bélanger, vice-chairman of the Canada Council, while defending the work of the Council, concur that these are "horrible mistakes, horrendous examples of bed decisions."

Wenman points out that the committee criticized a previous grant to bissett, yet the poet continues to receive Canada Council support: "So the fact is that this system of Parliamentary committee, of Parliamentary response has not worked."

**VANCOUVER, A YEAR later.** Canada Employment Centre offices.

"Are you just going to sit around on welfare?" the bureaucrat asks the poet. "I'm not sitting around," he replies. "I'm looking for readings. Last year I did more than 20 and earned over \$2,000: now I'm limited to eight. I want you to find me readings. That's my work."

"That's not your work — you're unskilled."

"I'm not unskilled. I've been doing poetry trading for eight years. I'm a skilled poetry reader."

"As far as I'm concerned, you're unskilled." A stand-off.

"Are you refusing to find me work?" (We are caught in a bill bissett poem.)

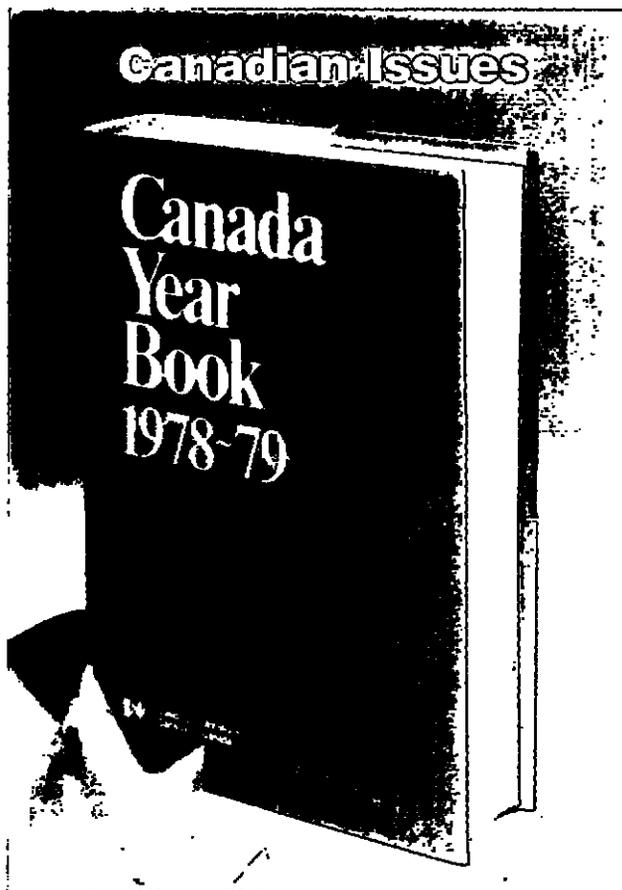
"An you refusing to work?"

Now if you say you're refusing to work, they take you off welfare. The poet pauses for a moment and ponders: What do they do with you then? Once you're off welfare, there's nothing lower. They might as well pot you in a hole and bury you somewhere.

Downstairs another worker is sympathetic. Looking in the occupation codebook under "P," she fails to find poet. "I don't care: I'll pooch you into the computer as a poet and if we get any calls for poetry readings, we'll write your box number right away."

"I guess that's why I'm still raging on," bissett concludes. "Because there's always a balance."

IT IS FORTUNATE that bill bissett manages to find a balance in the slippery-slope world of Canadian letters. Certainly his work inspires extremes of criticism. "The greatest living poet," pronounced lack Kerouac; "Disgusting, trashy, and vulgar," coeluded MP Jack Ellis (PC, Hastings). Critic Dermot McCarthy calls him a proponent of "banana-bread vedanta, a half-baked mélange of California cult-chatter and the stonewalled graffiti of burnt-out drug hype." Playwright James Reaney regards him simply as a "one-man civilization." bill bissett, the lower-case poet; b.b., who might have authored the ad, "Co you rd ths?"; bill bissett, known to certain fuddle-duddling Members of Parliament as the writer who used the line "a warm place to shit" 39 times in



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one 39-line poem, finds himself at the centre of debate on literary freedom in Canada. The issues are censorship and the autonomy of the Canada Council.

Ask an artist, even one as optimistic as bill bissett, about the Canada Council and you conjure up a tight-rope walker balancing in the passing lane of a three-lane high wire. Something about not biting the hand that feeds you because at the same time it's an inn fist in a velvet glove that's been trying to sweep you under the rug ever since it became everybody else's doormat. (It's not worth reading that again.) The point is that it has become all too evident that the Canada Council is in retreat. So one year ago, bissett and his publishers took up the fight themselves. They obtained a writ in the Supreme Court of British Columbia charging six MPs, eight newspapers, and 14 others with libel and infringement of copyright law.

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Ask an artist, even one as optimistic as bill bissett, about the Canada Council and you conjure up a tight-rope walker balancing in the passing lane of a three-lane high wire.

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For years, Vancouver radio hotliner Ed Murphy had railed against "the use of tax money by the Canada Council to support poets like bill bissett." In December, 1977, Murphy documented these complaints in a booklet entitled *A Legacy of Spending* in which poems by bissett were reproduced to emphasize his point. Bringing the poetry its widest audience ever, the initial run was snapped up and prompted larger second and third printings within six months. A number of newspapers and MPs picked up on this catalogue of government "waste," and most slammed the Canada Council for publishing pornography and worse.

At least two MPs invited their constituents to write for free copies of the "offensive" material to be used as the basis for their "citizens' campaign against the useless waste of thousands of the taxpayers' dollars." In a curious bit of irony, when Wenman attempted to table *A Legacy of Spending* in committee, he was foiled (it was entered as an exhibit) because the chairman pointed out that to have it freely available in *Hansard* might not be fair to its author.

In this atmosphere of "escalating hysteria," Karl Siegler of Talonbooks (one of bissett's publishers mentioned in the Murphy book) feels he must respond. "It is the larger issue I am really concerned about. Sure, the particular case of the credibility of Talonbooks, our loss of business, our responsibility to the 60 or 70 authors we have in print, all that is serious. But far more important is the danger that the Canada Council move under Members of Parliament for editorial decision-making. If that were successful, we'd have only state-sanctioned art."

Wenman would be the first to stress that it's not censorship he's after. Let these poets write what they will, and be published where they can, as long as it's not with public funds. This, however, is something of a fallacy. It's one of the publishing facts of life in Canada that if government support is cut, there is *de facto* censorship. The reason: literary publishing seldom makes money and consequently it's the subsidized smaller presses that provide the main opportunities for fiction writers and poets.

VANCOUVER, SATURDAY, Sept. 9, 1978. Twelve parties are convened simultaneously around the city to recruit signatories at \$10 each for a full-page newspaper ad in support of bissett, Talonbooks, and the Canada Council. It's the brainchild of Warren Tallman, a UBC English professor whose presence in the 1960s galvanized the Vancouver poetry scene, dovetailing it with the American West Coast -Black Mountain and San Francisco hip. George Bowering, Frank Davey, Gladys Hindmarch, Lionel Kearns, Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah, Roy Kiyooko, John Newlove, and of course bill bissett were among the writers finding their voices at that time.

There is still enough local activity (and residual nostalgia) to generate an impressive response. Tallman's ad campaign. a "Vox Populi for a Poet and his Publisher." attracts 434 supporters — writers, artists, actors, professors, publishers — a Who's Who of the Vancouver artistic world.

Saturday midnight the dozen parties converge for a grand bash at a faded East End night club, topped off at 2 a.m. by a reading — to be precise, a performance-by bissett. The poet as "professional" reader. Fey in a soft felt hat, a thin red bandana around his neck, wearing a uniform of T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, he chants and dances, shakes a rattle in shamanistic ritual. Elegant nostrils flared, he closes his soft hazel eyes and lets the sounds, the spirit pass through him. That night a lot of people believe.

Battle is joined and bissett is at its centre. In storybook tradition, he's an unlikely champion. The son of a lawyer who wanted his son to be a lawyer, bissett grew up in an atmosphere of illness. His mother died when he was 14, and he himself spent two years in hospital (with peritonitis) when he was 10 and 11 years old.

His first story, written and illustrated when he was 11, told of a boy who wants to go into the deep waters where there is a giant undertow. His family forbids it because the risk is too great. (Although set in an exotic country, bissett had in mind a beach near Halifax where he grew up.) One day, along with his pet parrot, the boy gets caught in the current, and the bird has to fly back to get the villagers and his parents to save him. They give him hot soup and make him Promise never to do it again. The story concludes with the boy sipping the soup, planning his next escape.

Unable to compete in sports when he was back in school, bissett "got into good spelling" and won prizes for grammar. Primarily he was an observer, forced by his illness to be non-competitive. a feature he has tried to retain ever since. When he won an art scholarship at 15, he couldn't accept it owing to Family pressure to become a "professional," a status designation that has continued to vex him. By that time, "full of existential despair," he was reading Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Ginsberg's "Howl," Kerouac's *On the Road*, and by 15 he left home.

He came straight to Vancouver — "I wanted to get as far away as possible, and I heard Victoria was too slow." After kicking around UBC and the downtown artistic community for five years, bissett started *blewointment* Press as a literary magazine, with Vol. 1, No. 1 dated October, 1963. In those heady days of mimeo, different sizes and colours of paper and type, ads and sheets from the Yellow Pages sewn in ("it seemed far out at the time"), a mélange of Poems stuffed into an unmarked brown envelope, lots of pictures, drawings by bill, *blewointment* would publish poets who couldn't get printed elsewhere.

Steve McCaffery and bp Nichol were first published by *blewointment*, along with the early works of Michael Ondaatje, Maxine Gadd, Lance Farrell, and Gladys Hindmarch. A 1967 anthology also included Peter Trower, Pat Lane, Dorothy Livesay, Milton Acorn. Put Lowther, Margaret Avison, Seymour Mayne, and on it goes.

All in all, bissett makes 8 poor victim. His playful iconoclasm, his flower-on-the-compost-heap fragility, his idealism, are surely not all that threatening.

Bissett's own first book came out late in 1965 (he went consistently lower case in '67). Since then he has published 43 books of poetry; half through other small presses (Oberon, Anansi, New Star, Air, Black Moss, Intermedia, Talonbooks), to keep *blewointment* — guerrilla gestetner — accessible, free to publish the hundred books of poetry by other writers. (Bissett refuses to be published by an American branch plant operating in Canada — "It's political: I wouldn't submit work to *Aurora* because it's Doubleday Canada.") The democratic spirit of "you write, I'll print it" prevailed. Ask bissett who his favourite poets are and he'll quickly jot down a list of 50, including some he hasn't read yet "because it wouldn't be fair to exclude them."

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In 1972 blewointment started to receive Canada Council funding through the block-grant program coupled with the book-purchase scheme. At the same time, bissett was awarded small writers' grants and Council money through readings, all of which went into the press. By the mid-1970s blewointment was producing glossy, well-bound books, including a giant poetry anthology every two years.

In 1977, 60 poets were featured in the *End of the World Speshul*. For this year, Earle Bimey had suggested the title *Heaven is a Carnival* (for what was to have been "th lest poetry anthologee"). The end of the world has indeed come, but — a little "overly prophetic" — heaven has been cancelled. Last February, with its book purchase funds cut by almost 60 per cent, blewointment folded. "A smell press is a fragile organism," says b.b.

Are bissett and blewointment paying the price for touching a nerve in the body politic? One of his publishers, Ed Varney of Intermedia Press, theorizes that it's the way bissett spells that angers people. "It can really put you off; it looks like a foreign language." Lower-case phonetic spelling hardly seems such a big deal, but the visceral chants of sound poetry and the visual designs of concrete poetry are both approaches, tapestries of words, where meaning is opaque and not of primary importance.

At the International Festival of Sound Poetry in Glasgow last fall, bissett was hailed the star of the 65 poets present. "Bill keeps the meaning component out so that different meanings can come in," explains Tallman. Who knew that in these repressive times "different meanings" would be labelled pornography? (It can't be just the four-letter words; if you threw them out, you'd rid yourself of most 20th-century writing.)

An MP asks the vice-chairman of the Canada Council: "Is it such a sin to look for literature that has meaning?" No, he's told, it's not:

ar  
 sum uv ths  
 pomes bull  
 shit see if  
 you can tell  
 wch ar  
 wch ar  
 sum  
 timez i  
 dont  
 know

This is how bissett opens his collection *Living with the Vishyun* (1974). The fact is, it's worse when the MPs think they do understand the poems.

Much of bissett's work not only has meaning, it's also down-right didactic: poems about Chile, ecology, American imperialism, local politics, the RCMP, and so on, alongside romantic lyrical verse and narratives of comic realism. The spelling is not merely deliberate, it too is political: "i dont want to spell/ correctly for me thats another tyranny" (*Sailor*, 1978). "The correct sentence," he sqs, "is a set-up for imperialism. I think the defence system is connected to good grammar."

Al 39, displaying a gentle, youthful awkwardness, bill bissett isn't crazy; he's Peter Pan. "correct grammar correct spelling punkchuashun/ar connectid to correct behaviour th condishund/ abilitee to follow ordrs that is unless sometimes we/can step floor fly outside them."

Back at the Canada Council, conditioning seems to be coming to the fore. Ten months after the chairmen of the Council, Gertrude Laing, defended the provision of grants to bissett by marshalling a list of his supporters, all Governor General's Award winners (Margaret Atwood, Dennis Lee, Eli Mandel, Earle Bimey, P. K. Page, Dave Godfrey, among others), less than a year after the heed of writing and publication, Naim Kattan, assured bissett that "if they had to open a separate department to answer letters attacking me and other writers, they would do Lat, they would back us." bissett himself is turned down for two successive writers' grants, and his fended readings are limited to eight a year.

The artists are worried: no one wants to criticize an all-too-

beleaguered Council. Instead there is cautious encouragement. Warren Tallman speaks confidently of its uprightness, but feels the Council should go out of its way to seem to be fair, to dispel thoughts of political interference. Siegler too, who is bringing out a *Collected Poems* of bissett's, along with a companion critical work by Eli Mandel, is hesitant to criticize decisions he fervently wishes to be independently made. But taking into account bissett's prodigious output, influence, and industry, he's a little surprised at his being turned down. Bissett doesn't comment on his own grant but is convinced that "the MPs were hot on the Council to get the bells of blewointment."

In the absence of Council funding, bissett has started Friends of blewointment to wipe out the \$12,000 debt (24 post-dated cheques of \$20 a month will enshrine your name forever in any future blewointment publication end bring you bissett paintings worth 51,000). The enthusiasm of the "Vox Populi" ad has carried over into a series of seven "Writing in our Time" poetry readings organized by Tallman, who is on sabbatical this year. The big names are drawing houses of 1,000, with proceeds going to aid West Coast literary presses.

In the process, Tallman is printing a newsletter to promote the readings and chronicle the vicissitudes of b.b. And bissett retains his optimism ("though it takes a lot of work") and continues to live in a Post Office box "because it's the only safe place to live." After being busted seven times, after being beet up and having paintings destroyed, "after spending many years trying to justify being an artist and get acceptance so that I could at least write and paint and eat the minimum amount, after all that I jest want my privacy."

All in all, bissett makes a poor victim. His playful iconoclasm, his Sower-on-the-compost-heap fragility, his idealism, are surely not all that threatening. A run-on sentence, a found person, bissett's energy, dedication, and willingness to go into debt to keep others in print are qualities hard to criticize. That makes the real target of attack all the more evident.

Karl Siegler, of Talonbooks: "The Council is the victim, not bissett. And my quarrel with them is that they haven't yet fully realized that. They react with compromise, doublethink, and 'healthy cynicism' instead of adopting a stance that's tough enough to withstand the degree of attack. Bissett is a major Canadian literary figure. So we're suing. Because if we don't do it for him, we won't be able to for our other 70 authors next year." The case proceeds. □



# STILL THE SEINE OLD STORY ?

Not really. Fifty summers have passed since Morley dined with Scott and went a round with Papa. And while there are still expatriates in Paris, they don't haunt The Select

by Boyd Neil

FIFTY YEARS AGO Morley Callaghan and Scott Fitzgerald went for dinner to the Trianon restaurant near Paris's Gare Montparnasse. Apparently the food was notably good. With the shy boyishness that Hemingway shamelessly caricatured in *A Moveable Feast*, Fitzgerald was particularly excited at the thought of them sitting where James Joyce often took his meals. Callaghan was surprised that "a man like Scott, talented as he was himself, got so much pleasure out of thinking he was at the master's table... He was always bring dazzled."

That was the summer when Gertrude Stein held court; Joyce was literature's god, well guarded by implacable Sylvia Beach of the Shakespeare and Co. book store; Edmund Titus edited *This Quarter*, which published Callaghan's first story, "A Girl with Ambition"; Robert McAlmon, Hemingway's first publisher, kept up Contact Press from his room at the Paris/New York Hotel; Callaghan bloodied Hemingway's nose; and Fitzgerald was struggling with *Tender is the Night*.

Since then thousands have visited Paris to be dazzled by much less than Fitzgerald's pleasant fantasy: to recognize the name of a street or café often will do. Young writers still come to live the myth that was reborn in the late 1940s when Sartre and Beauvoir again came to the Deux Maggots, Café de Flore, and Brasserie Lipp (because they were heated and their apartments weren't), the myth that Paris is "a lighted place where the imagination is free."

The cafés in which Callaghan met Fitzgerald (Deux Maggots) drank with Hemingway (The Select) and argued the business of book publishing with Ludwig Lewisohn (La Coupole) are, at least, much the same. Nothing distinctive about their drab colouring, undistinguished formica tables, and rattan chairs, although there is an elegant sparkle to the service—the hot milk and coffee of a *petit crème* is blended for you at the table rather than surreptitiously behind the bar.

At night, and on Sunday mornings, their terraces are alive with people who look like writers, artists, and movie stars. But in most cases, it's just a private film comedy scripted from memoirs, rumours, and legends when each character chooses his other own role.

The chances of finding a published writer or working actor among the leathered and trench-coated regulars is slight. Mavis Gallant sometimes eats at La Coupole and has been around The Select enough to know that "on a Sunday morning it is usually tilted with people reading English newspapers." Sartre was seen leaving the Brasserie Lipp and crossing St. Germain in the rain a few years ago. And tour brochures insist that Samuel Beckett can still be found at the Closerie des Lilas, although I suspect even a friendly misanthropist wouldn't hang out where he is supposed to. On the other hand, Beckett could find some privacy there at least from most journalists and struggling playwrights. They couldn't afford the price of a Closerie coffee.

Wherever it is that French intellectuals gather now — perhaps Harry's New York Bar? — and young expatriate writers wait to be recognized, Callaghan's *Thor Summer in Paris* isn't a reliable guide. Paris isn't "the one grand display window for international talent" it was in the 1920s and 1950s. Perhaps that title now belongs to New York's renovated lofts and galleries.

Most of the young Americans gossiping a year away at the "new" Shakespeare and Co. are well-subsidized by mothers or fathers and see Paris as an obligatory stop on the way to Greece. (Well, there is a photo of Lawrence Durrell on Shakespeare's

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Sartre was seen leaving the Brasserie Lipp and crossing St. Germain in the rain a few years ago. And tour brochures insist that Samuel Beckett can still be found at the Closerie des Lilas.

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wall.) And neither France nor Greece is chosen for its intellectual freedom or opportunity to exchange ideas on art.

So when it came to looking for a new generation of Canadian expatriate writers (with all respect to Anne Hébert and Mavis Gallant, who are from a different generation) the place to go was not these famous cafés. I found Antanas Sileika through Paris's one small English-language literary magazine, *Paris Voices*. Until Lithuanian-Canadian Sileika came to the magazine as an editor, it was subtitled "A Journal of American and English Writers." in spite of having had works published in it by two Canadians, Larry Bremner and Patrick Rogers. The arts editor of the now defunct bi-weekly newspaper *Paris Metro* knew of another Canadian journalist, poet, and Ph.D. student named Anne Tremblay, because she had written a few articles on Canadian subjects such as Margaret Atwood and Quebec theatre. And it was Antanas who discovered Greg Light.

ANTANAS SILEIKA CAME to Paris two years ago basically because his girlfriend (now wife) wanted to study at the Ecoles des Beaux Arts. But Paris was also "not Canada" and "when all your friends are asking you when you ate going to stop writing and start working, that means you have to escape or give up. Here you are safely an outcast." The first four months were like the masochistic dreams of many young writers — working night and day in a dingy hotel to finish a novel for a first-novel contest. It didn't win, but a rewritten version, called *Bird on a Rail* (it takes place on a train to Warsaw and "raises the question of why exist?"), is beginning the rounds of publisher's offices.

In the meantime, he has begun a second novel and published two short stories in the latest *Paris Voices*. The stories are decep-

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### FACADES

Edith Osbert & Sacheverell SITWELL  
by John Pearson

Edith Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell were one of the great and eccentric families of English letters. They were poets, essayists, memoirists, biographers, critics, polemicists, self-publicists, patrons and aristocrats. They loved and hated with a vengeance. T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Cecil Beaton were friends. Noel Coward, Wyndham Lewis, all of Bloomsbury were high on the hate list. This wonderful biography is full of amazing stories about the celebrated trio, their life, times, friends and enemies. \$10.05 Cloth

tively simple narrations about people who have been pushed away from the world and don't seem upset by the distance. Which isn't like Antanas, because he has begun to read more Canadian writing and has "a feeling of being cut off from something here." He will be leaving Paris soon to return to Toronto and, with any luck, will "start a popular fiction magazine."



"NOBODY COMES to Paris any more to live a myth. They come for something else and may end up writing about it." Anne Tremblay has had some poems published in a small West Coast magazine. There are more stored away "until I can pull them together into a book." She came to the Sorbonne from Montreal (anglophone, she still refers to herself as *québécoise*) to prepare a Ph.D. thesis in French on selected Canadian women writers since the 19th century. Lately she has moved from Pads (and the temptation of parties and some quick money doing CBC-Radio shows) to a small country house in Normandy where she is writing her thesis. Now the reflective personal vision and mythical imagery of her poetry may be turned to a novel about women and war.

Just before Callaghan left Pads in 1929 he told a friend, "If I were to stay on in France, I should now be soaking up French culture. I should want to be with French writers. If I didn't want the French culture, then I was here in exile." Anne's friends are predominantly francophone Quebecers involved in the arts and she has adopted French culture to the point of smoking three packs of Gauloises a day. But she concludes, "I don't know if I will ever feel at home here. The French don't let you get close to them. I'll always feel like a foreigner."

AT LEAST I met Greg Light at The Select. The coffee is expensive, but Greg is the kind of person who willingly indulges these small fancies. He's also one of the most successful young Canadian writers living in Paris. In three years here, this former Manitoban and philosophy student at the University of Toronto has published a book of poetry through Orleans Press, called *Tundra*, put together three "poetry shows" - animated readings of his own poems using lighting, music, and acting techniques as "a vehicle to reach a larger public" - and a one-man theatre piece that won a "Fringe First Award" at the celebrated Edinburgh Festival last year.

To support himself, he works as a barman at the Haynes Restaurant in Paris, and it was there that he met the young American dancers and artists he works with now. Sounding like Callaghan at his most rhapsodic, Greg says: "I love Paris. Not just because it is so beautiful, but because it's like living in a big fairground. Everything is there for you. Yet you can also lose yourself in it if you want, and you can be crazy if you choose."

The excitement of a literary revolution that spurred Callaghan to visit Paris that summer of 1929 doesn't exist now. The Canadian writers don't know each other. Besides, Greg works most nights. Anne left Paris, and Antanas lives in the suburbs. People come to Paris not to create a new myth but for the creative freedom the city still offers, the cafés that are always filled and, perhaps, with the hope that the slight gust of wind that rustles their notebook pages is a kindly muse called Fitzgerald, watching over their shoulder. □

# NOTES ON A NON-EVENT

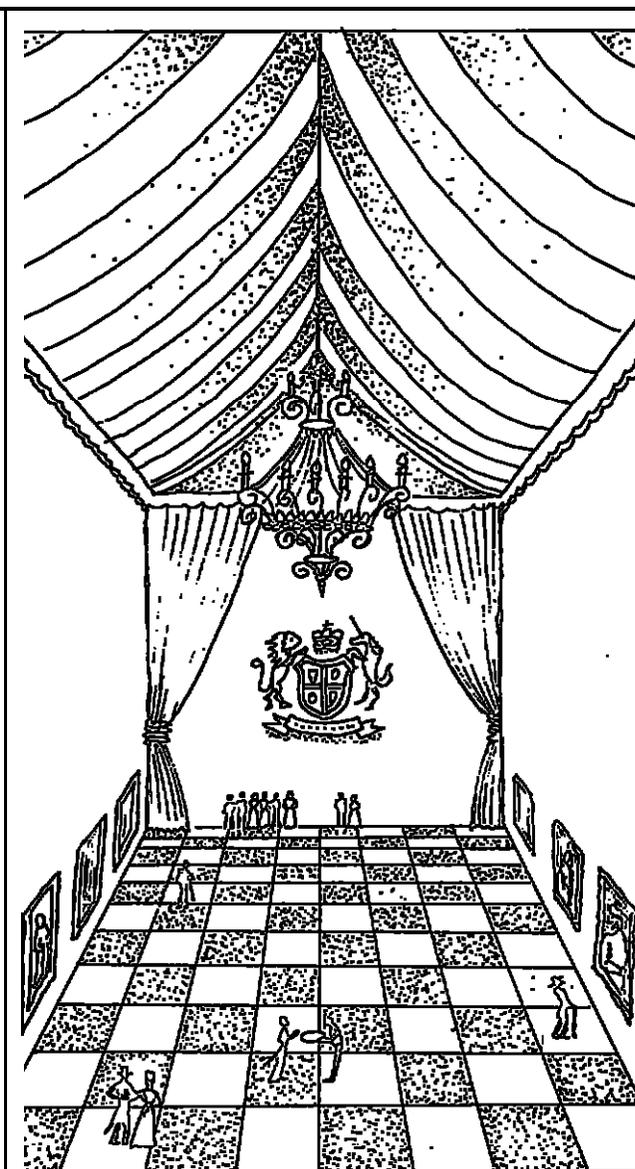
Some fairly unexciting things happened this year when Their Excellencies were obliged to honour literature at Rideau Hall

by David Macfarlane

**ALOFT. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4.** On my way to witness the presentation of the Governor General's Literary Awards, I fall victim to an attack of poignancy. Staring from my window at the blue flatness of Ontario, I am reminded by the impossibly straight roads of an Alice Munro story, "The Beggar Maid." "A line is a concession road. In the township," says one fictitious character to another, and here, sitting in a real plane, on my way to the capital of a real country, I glimpse the importance of literature as if it were stretched out below me. It is real. I tell myself. It is, as Wallace Stevens said, "a tone beyond us, yet ourselves." and, following the network of concession roads from a jet's window, I am visited with a strange sensation of relevance. It seems somehow apt that I am flying to Ottawa for a ceremony celebrating the art of writing, and that Alice Munro, this year's winner of the G.G. award for English fiction (*Who Do You Think You Are?*, Macmillan), should figure so prominently in the landscape over which I pass. Things, I decide, are beginning to look meaningful. Alas, so dramatic a sense of moment proves to be short-lived.

**RIDEAU HALL IS** a vest hulk of brick that, like Ottawa itself, sits in the middle of the woods a good distance away from anywhere else. When I arrived, ushered through the main door by a red-coated attendant, I attached myself to a cluster of people gathered in a small anteroom to the right of the staircase. So this is it. I thought, and then, after a quick glance around the room, began to wonder if, in fact, this was it after all. The crowd, well-dressed and possessed of a certain collective discomfort, was not the exuberant gathering of literati that I had expected. The mood was less than festive. Laughter was minimal. Hue and there, conversations sputtered on the brink of extinction. Not a celebrity, not a dust-jacket face was anywhere to be seen and, in a spasm of journalistic anxiety, it occurred to me that perhaps I was covering the wrong reception. I wondered if more than one function could take place at the same time in the labyrinth of Rideau Hall, if possibly Their Excellencies scurried through back corridors from reception to reception, arriving at each one composed, smiling, hands extended.

Made uneasy by the possibility of being in the wrong wing of a huge residence, I circled in silent despair through the crowd, ending up at the entrance to an empty and cavernous room. Its walls were covered with red-and-white-striped canvas, over which were hung the gold-framed portraits of a dozen Governors General. Holes had been cut in the canvas for several small doors. Wondering what the canvas was for, I stepped into the room. At once I realized my mistake. People in the anteroom, apparently thinking that I knew where I was going, followed me. I stood helplessly as the crowd gushed into a room which, so far as I could tell, Mr. Schreyer would have preferred us not to have seen until the painters were finished.



As it turned out, this was where the reception was supposed to be. Waiters appeared with trays of hors-d'œuvres. A bar was opened and immediately surrounded. I caught sight of an enklited Farley Mowat across the room—a dust-jacket Face at last—and so realized that I was indeed in the right place. So this is it. I said to myself once again. The mystery of the walls remained. I was beginning to feel depressed.

Of course, I should not have expected much. No one, it seems, has anything very good to say about the presentation of the Gov-

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**No one, it seems, has anything very good to say about the presentation of the Governor General's Awards. "I never go," says Robert Fulford. "I never go," says William French.**

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ernor General's Awards. "I never go," says Robert Fulford. "I never go," says William French. And now, having gone myself, I wonder just who does.

There have, it is true, been a few notable incidents in the past. A very few. In 1969, Milton Acorn was presented with a medal by his fellow poets at a ceremony in a Toronto bar because, they believed, he had been shamefully overlooked for a G.G. that year. When Peter Newman failed to win an award for *The Canadian Establishment* there was some concern that politics had been his undoing: could someone who knocks Trudeau as much as Newman does ever receive an award that, after all, is chosen by the Canada Council?

And there was the time that Roland Michener, presenting Mordecai Richler with the award for *Cocksure*, chatted in French with the puzzled author, leaving Richler in a profound state of bicultural confusion. But, on the whole, nothing has ever happened at the Governor General's Awards. No hoopla, no publicity, no controversy. Nothing to spark the public's interest in books or whets. Nothing. For instance, to compare with the celebrated 1967 National Book Awards in New York, when members of the audience walked out on guest-speaker Hubert Humphrey in protest against the war in Vietnam. At Rideau Hall there is no guest speaker to walk out on. And now that the Canada Council has ditched the dinner it used to throw after the awards, it seems unlikely that anything exciting—or even interesting—will ever happen at the presentation of what remains, in spite of itself, the highest literary honour in the country. No wonder publishers complain that a G.G. makes no great impact on a book's sales.

Certainly nothing exciting was happening at Rideau Hall the night I was there. There were no chairs, nor was there any sort of stage or platform, and so, with no focal point other than the bar, the crowd shifted itself aimlessly over the black-and-white-checked floor, eating nameless little things held together with toothpicks and sipping Scotch-and-sodas. (Admittedly, a few television cameras and a handful of earnest-looking reporters added a sense of occasion to the affair, but TV cameras and reporters are supposed to attend events, not create them.) When, at length, the winners of the awards, the Governor General, Ma. Schreyer, and various Canada Council Functionaries appeared, they emerged through a hole in the inexplicable circus-tent canvas and lined themselves up against the wall. Greatly relieved to have something to do, we gathered round them in a semicircle the way kids gather round an interesting fight on a playground. The speeches were, for the most part, perfunctory. The Governor General, looking like an elegant football coach in his dark-blue suit, handed the authors leather-bound copies of their winning books. He spoke briefly with each recipient. We applauded politely at appropriate moments.

We applauded politely at inappropriate moments. Case in point: when Gilbert Langevin accepted the French fiction award for his novel, *Mon refuge est un volcan*, he read a brief and impassioned speech. A slight, gaunt figure in brown leather, long hair falling across his dark and sunken eyes, he explained that he intended to give part of his prize money to an organization dedicated to the

defence of political prisoners in Quebec. He named Pierre-Paul Geoffroy and Paul Rose, describing them as Quebec patriots who (translated loosely) "have fought, in a different way than I have chosen, for a cause I believe in." The Governor General looked on sternly, his arms crossed, and his slightly uncomprehending expression seemed a symbol of the way English Canada looks at Quebec. Langevin concluded his remarks by saying that he has never disassociated social commitment and culture, or national conscience and literature. I was reminded of concession roads.

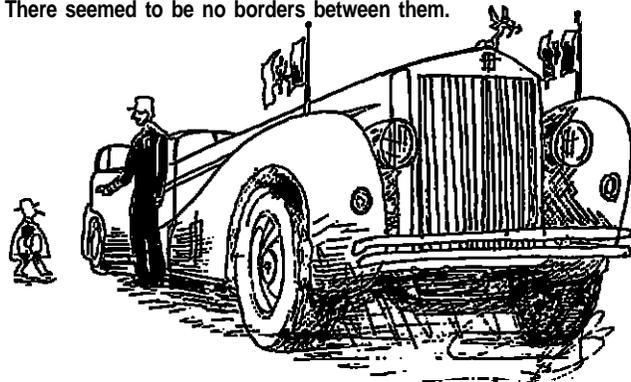
But here was an opinion, a belief, a Faith stated openly and bluntly. Someone had actually said something. It was an aggressive statement, demanding either partisan cheers or a chorus of boos from the audience. He was, after all, talking about Canada, among other things, but no one seemed to know quite what to do. Langevin folded his speech back into his pocket, smiled soddenly and engagingly. And we clapped, dammit, politely. I thought of a scene in Simon's *Lack* by Alice Munro: "The mood of sociability, sympathy, expectation of goodwill was not easy to halt; it tolled on in spite of signs that there was plenty here it wasn't going to be able to absorb. Almost everyone was still smiling...."

And so; I suppose, the evening rolled on much as it was intended to. The crowd meandered slowly over itself. The Governor General and his wife circulated efficiently. Pat Lane, winner of the English Poetry award for *Poem New and Selected* (Oxford), pulled a Rower from a vase on the bar and offered it to Alice Munro. She wore it like a corsage as she smiled graciously, almost girlishly, at the stream of well-wishers. Roger Caron, winner of the English non-fiction award for *Go Boy!* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson), beamed with excitement. "How does it feel?" I asked him.

"Well, you can imagine. I did not sleep last night. I needed a couple of drinks before I got here. I almost came drunk and I don't drink:

Pat Lane was not so carried away: "The award means a lot, especially for a Westerner. But I despair of the whole thing—this country, what's left of it. Why don't we all make speeches, read from our works, make this an important event? Why, why, why Canada?"

Why indeed. And yet the evening ended in a curiously moving and hopeful way. The crowd had been thinning out for some time and Alice Munro, edging across the room, continually waylaid by congratulations, was trying to make her escape. Almost at the door, she suddenly turned as if she had forgotten something and crossed the room back to the bar where Gilbert Langevin was standing beside me. Walking directly up to Langevin, she took his hand in both of hers and said, quite simply, "Good night." He looked mildly surprised. Beneath the portrait of Viscount Byog of Vimy they smiled at one another for the briefest of moments. There seemed to be no borders between them.



TORONTO, THURSDAY, APRIL 5. Attending a book-signing party at the Park Plaza hotel, one of the events of the National Book Festival. I run into a friend who is effervescent with Free champagne. "Everyone is here," she says, and, looking around, I see that most everyone is. Writers, publishers, television personalities are thick as locusts. The place is ablaze with klieg lights and flashbulbs, abuzz with conversation. It makes the gathering at Rideau Hall seem funereal. "Is Alice Munro here?" I ask. "No," my friend replies. "She couldn't make it. She's in Ottawa or something." *Ecco, I say to myself. My point exactly.* □

# Sharpening his act

Like a knife-thrower, Michael Ondaatje hazards great risks with his art as his confidence builds

by Sam Solecki

There's a **Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do**, by Michael Ondaatje, McClelland & Stewart. 107 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 6882 4).

**CHOOSING A TITLE** for a collection of poems is an art, like everything else connected with writing, and it's one at which Michael Ondaatje excels. All of his titles, from *The Dainty Monsters* through *Rat Jelly* and *Coming Through Slaughter* to the latest one, *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do*, are teasers that catch your interest and pull you toward the book. But they also do more; like his epigraphs they always help to create a mood or an anticipation of a mood and define in an often disturbing way the particular geography about to be explored.

End of academic discourse on titles, which has already taken up one-sixth of the review. But it is important because it points to how little excess or waste there is in Ondaatje's work. This volume of selected and new poems is no exception: despite its length of more than 100 pages, it is a spare, taut book that collects the best from *The Dainty Monsters* (1967) and *Rat Jelly* (1973) and adds 19 new poems from the past six years.

To read the poems in sequence — they're arranged in a roughly chronological order — is to realize how early Ondaatje found his own poetic voice and defined the physical and psychological geography that would be the focus of his work. Some of the line early lyrics like "Birds for Janet - The Heron," "Dragon," and "The Time Around Scars" now can be seen as clearly pointing to the later, more ambitious and greater works such as "Letters and Other Worlds," "We're at the graveyard," and "White Dwarfs."

But if there is continuity there is also development. As the body of his work grows he becomes progressively more self-conscious and more confident; he becomes willing to hazard greater risks with his art and more problematically, with himself. Those lyrics of his that count, that can be confidently placed side by side with the best poems of his generation, examine simultaneously the central concerns of his art and, what is often the same thing, his

and Other Worlds." is a case in point; ostensibly an attempt to remember and celebrate the difficult memory of a complex and tormented man, it's also about the writing of that poem. As Ondaatje grows surer in his art, the poems in *Rat Jelly* become more explicitly concerned with the nature of the creative process itself. That sounds more portentous than it should; it misses, for example, the off-handed light note that is often there in these poems — the banana in "King Kong meets Wallace Stevens," the opening salutation in "Pig Glass."

The new poems show Ondaatje freed of this obsessive concern with poems about poetry. It's as if having written *Rat Jelly* and *Coming Through Slaughter* he has said everything he needed to say on that subject and can now turn to poems that simply incorporate and enact these notions in their action and linguistic texture. The finest of the new poems are "Pig Glee" and "Light," both of which deal with the retrieval of the past: long buried pieces of glass in the first, Ondaatje's memories of his family in the second.

One of the particularly impressive stylistic aspects of these poems is Ondaatje's ability to make the transition from a loose, prosaic style to a tighter, traditionally more poetic one that depends upon metaphor.

internal rhyme, assonance, and so on. He does it effortlessly, and the metaphors, though often striking, are never forced or dissonant. The ending of "Pig Glass" is a good example of Ondaatje at his best:

*A bottle thrown  
by loggers out of a wagon  
past midnight  
explodes against rock.  
This green fragment has behind it  
the booom when glass  
tears free of its smoothness  
now once more smooth as knuckle  
a tooth on my tongue.  
Comfort that bites through skin  
hides in the dark afternoon of my pocket.  
Snake shade.  
Determined histories of glass.*

The texture becomes more intense and complex in the closing lines: sound echoes sense, one metaphor reinforces the other, and the two simple sentences, both metaphorical, cap the whole.

Metaphor is in disrepute with most of the poets of this prosaic age, as is the idea that a poem should contain lines that linger in the mind. But when you read the work of the period's major poets it is this very ability to move from a minor to a major key by way of metaphor that distinguishes them and makes them worth reading and rereading. □



Michael Ondaatje

The brilliant elegy for his father, "Letters

# Phallus in Wonderland

Tweedles Dum and Dee are reunited as John Wain peers through the looking-glass and Kingsley Amis goes limp

by M. B. Thompson

**Jake's Thing.** by Kingsley Amis. Nelson, Foster & Scott. 285 pages. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 09 134390 0).

**The Pardoner's Tale.** by John Wain. Gage. 314 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 333 18111 51).

YET AGAIN, by chance or choice, come Wain and Amis coupled. A quarter of a century ago (yes, really) they were yoked mutinously into the "Angry Young Man" team with others such as Braine and Osborne, Murdoch and Colin Wilson and, as both are still apt to note in vicious *en passant*, certain readers and critics persist in regarding them as a son of Chesterbelloc composite: Wainis and Amis. Ain and Wainis.

They "ever had anything in common as novelists, poets, English professors, critics, or, for a brief space, Personalities. As it happens they both like jazz, went to the same Oxford college (St John's), are male, have two legs, live in England, and write novels. And now that most of us have got the message that they are as distinct and separate as could possibly be, they start somewhat to drift together.



Coupled is not by any means a "inappropriate adjective at this juncture. As each ploughs bravely through the sees of middle-age (Amis is 57, Wain 54) the horizon nears or recedes, the harbour beckons or vanishes, 'tis or 'tis not too late to seek a newer world. In any case the old men's fancies heavily turn to thoughts of love. Neither novelist disdained sex in the past, needlers to say, but Amis has never been solemnly monomaniacal about it

and Wain has not hived a plot quite so comprehensively on the *faeda et brevis voluptas*.

Jake's thing is both his penis and his acceptance of the fact that he can get it up all tight but doesn't really want to any more. Jake is 60, an Early Mediterranean History don at Oxford, married to fat Brenda and a drab life in suburban London relieved only by drab excursions to his less-than-onerous duties under Oxford's nightmarish spires. Off he goes to his doctor who refers him, as Amisian professionals are wont, to another professional, the midget Dubliner sex therapist Proinsias Rosenberg. Amis has thus deftly set up the "top" of his novel: an extended indictment of modern life in general, trendy shrinkery in particular.

Amis enthusiasts will not need to be told that he does this very well: group-encounter sessions, jargon, ignorant quackery, the America "facilitator" Ed ("Funny," says Amis, wrapping Waugh's discarded mantle round him, "how everything horrible or foolish was worse if it was also America"), all are targets for Amis's bile-green loathing of the way things (sometimes human) almost always behave rottenly, not for some mighty malignant reason but ... because.

Among the thrusts, becoming nastier with time, about Asians, the poor, the fat, the losers, are indeed the *aperçus* that only too sorrily find the quick: "To modern students, the failure of things like knowledge to win their interest constituted a grave if not fatal defect in the thing itself." Amis's barbs, however, sometimes now appear in fuddled syntax: "Not so many years ago the place would have been alive with undergraduates ... wrecking the rooms of Jews or pinioning them to the lawns with croquet-hoops," end the old Amisian trick of blasting modern life without suggesting a preferable set of values (remember the marvellous "Merrie England" lecture in *Lucky Jim*?) has grown tedious if not embarrassing.

But nastier than the increasing dense in Amis of corrosive hatred of life — or perhaps its most salient symptom — is his attitude to women. Given Amis's burgeoning preoccupation with genitalia over the last three or four novels (his last novel, *The Alteration*, was about castration), his

view of the female kind and their owners is a bother. Kingsley's thing, Early on, Jake, at Rosenberg's behest, buys ski" books to take home and masturbate over. The skin books, by the way, ain't what they used to be, though they're a good deal more explicit: "In itself it had an exotic appearance, like the inside of a giraffe's ear or tropical fruit not much prized by the locals." This has something of that old sourish but laugh-aloud ring of Amis's best phrasing, but *au fond*, so to speak, it's ugly.



In fact the whole thrust, again so to speak, of the book is this ugliness writ large to 300 pages. After the plot has run its uncomplex course and Jake has walked out on the shrinks and Brenda has walked out on Jake, it is discovered that Jake's thing is not after all psychological but physical. His doctor offers to arrange the appropriate treatment and Jake runs through the subject of giraffes in his mind: "Their use of misunderstanding and misrepresentation as weapons of debate, their selective sensitivity to tone of voice, their unawareness of the difference in themselves between sincerity and insincerity, their interest in importance (together with noticeable inability to discriminate in that sphere)." Jake's answer is "quite easy. 'No thanks,' he said." Everything Joke expresses in his catalogue, longer than I have quoted above, is unarguable, but there isn't much point in whining about it. Or maybe there is at 60.

Wain was never the novelist Amis was and he still isn't, though *The Pardoner's Tale* (nothing faintly to do with Chaucer that I can see) is a nicer book to read. Wain has rather reversed himself in this first novel

since the ponderous *A Winter in the Hills* (1970) in that he works basically drab material in a mildly adventurous form. Giles Hermitage, a 50-year-old Famous Novelist, is writing the book that forms the alternate chapters of the *Tale*. Harriet, his giraffe of seven years, has walked out on him and the latest novel (Wain makes it absurdly bud. I hope on purpose) is his way (all artists' way?) of holding himself together. A chance letter from a dying old woman brings Giles into contact with her household and especially her daughter Dinah, Giles's love for whom bodes fair to restore him from the loss of Harriet.

The interrelationship between Wain's novel and Hermitage's is cleverly done, and the *Tale* is meaty and solid as cue rightly expects from this conscious Midland heir of George Eliot and Arnold Bennett. Ultimately Wain is and always has been a moral novelist in precisely the way that Amis isn't. The latter's sterile finding that wisdom does not come with age, that women are for kicking around, that sex, repressed as it was, was better in the old days, is tougher and cleverer but rottener than Wain's likeably lumbering attempts to establish consolations for the basic bloodiness of life. There is indeed love, giraffe's-ear kind and all, and it is "shelter against the bitter winds of life."

Despite everything Giles — and the rest of us — has a chance to know "what life is, how sacred and how frail, this rich, precarious gift for which we do not know whom to

thank, this flame lit by we do not know whom, so easy to tread out that the first of all commandments must always be 'Thou shalt not kill.'" As Margaret Drabble last year so tellingly chronicled, it is the Ice Age. The choice is, more or less, lake's thing or Giles's thing. You can't have the options much better put than Ame and Wainis do it here. □

## Rouse him at the name of Crispin

The *Glimpses of the Moon*, by Edmund Crispin, Beaverbooks (Walker). 287 pages, \$12.25 cloth (ISBN 0 8027 53914).

By DOUGLAS MARSHALL

CONNOISSEURS OF THE donnish British detective novel, the cozy sort La Michael Innes dashes off on the 9:05 from Paddington, have been waiting 25 years for a new book from Edmund Crispin. It was worth the wait. *The Glimpses of the Moon* is a masterpiece of deductive entertainment; the Perfectly fair solution to one of the multiple

mysteries — a locked-mcm puzzle involving an amputated arm — will be talked about with awe until the last syllable of recorded crime. But the novel is a good deal more than a classic whodunit. It is also literate, hilarious, macabre, and self-mocking in proportions that confirm Crispin as a genius and the prolific and uneven Innes as a mere dilettante of the genre.

There is a curious connection between the two authors. Innes in real life is J. I. M. Stewart, a distinguished lecturer in English at Oxford. That is to say he might be a model in part for Crispin's engaging amateur detective, Gervase Fen, professor of English at (and now dean of) St. Christopher's College, Oxford. The opening of this novel, published in Britain two years ago and evidently set 10 years ago, finds Fen on sabbatical in a South Devon cottage working grumpily on a book about the post-war British novel (" 'Edna O'Brien,' he muttered, 'is the Cassandra of female eroticism' "). How has he fared since we last saw him?

He paused by the mirror, from which, not unexpectedly, his own face looked out at him. In the fifteen years since his last appearance, he seemed to have changed very little. He saw the same tall lean body, the same ruddy, scrubbed-looking, clean-shaven face, the same blue eyes, the same brown hair ineffectually plastered down with water, so that it stood up at a spike at the crown of his head. Somewhere or other he still had his extraordinary hat.



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Good. At this rate, he felt, he might live to see the day when novelists described their characters by some other device than that of manoeuvring them into examining themselves in mirrors.

Fortunately Fen is soon distracted from these sour sessions of literary thought by his suspicions about a local murder and dismemberment in recent times past. The plot is a dilly. Its ingredients include a galloping major who hates horses, a neurotically anti-Papist rector, the obligatory garden fête, a defective hydro pylon known to wary passersby as "The Pisser," a severed head, a deceptively grunted pig farmer and his Teutonic sow of a wife, various competent and incompetent policemen, and sundry village idiots. A glorious climax choreographs a cast of hundreds in a rural comic open as Hitchcock might have directed it. And might yet.

Given all this, it is sad to record that Gervase Fen will never again pause before an introspective mirror and will go no more a-hunting murderers beneath the visiting moon. Edmund Crispin, whose real name was Bruce Montgomery, died last fall. He had studied and taught high-church music at Oxford, moved on to become a film composer (*Curry on Nurse*) and landlord of a pub, and most recently established himself as one of Britain's most respected reviewers of crime fiction.

Crispin fans, aware of the author's penchant for finding titles in Alexander Pope (*Frequent Hearses*, *The Moving Toyshop*),

may be bemused by the title of this his last novel. It's from *Hamlet* (Act I, Sc. iv): "What may this mean, / That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel / Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon." However, literary sleuths will recognize that the next phrase — "Making night hideous" — was appropriated in a slightly modified form by Pope in *The Dunciad*. A nice Crispin touch. □

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## First round at the inn

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At The Mermaid Inn: **Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott** in *The Globe 1892-3*, with an introduction by **Barrie Davies**, University of Toronto Press, 353 pages, \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2299 5) and \$7.50 paper (ISBN 0 8020 6333 0).

By IAN YOUNG

WHEN THE *Toronto Globe* and *Mail* revived "the famous literary column. The Mermaid Inn" in 1976. Hugh MacLennan, beginning the new series, misleadingly referred to the earlier piece as suggesting "a homeland where the paddlewheelers still plied the St. John River without anyone dreaming that a time was coming when a concrete dam would keep the salmon out of it. Happy men they seem to have been. . ."

The original columns by poets Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, and Duncan Campbell Scott, which appeared in *The Globe* every week for 17 months during 1892-3, now have been collected, and far from reflecting any Arcadian colonial innocence, they deal engagingly, though sometimes bitterly, with a complex of cultural and political issues (including the despoiling of the landscape). "If Campbell, Lampman, or Scott were indeed living at this hour," writes Barrie Davies in his superb introduction, "they would have little trouble following contemporary news and conversation. More likely, they would have a strong sense of *déjà vu*."

Begun quite simply in order to make some money for the poets (Lampman was toiling away in the Post Office; Campbell was a temporary clerk in the Department of Railways and Canals at \$1.50 a day), the column ranged in subject matter from the machinations of the political leaders of the day, to the existence of sea serpents: from the antics of house cats to "the false religious prejudice which is hampering modern society." (Campbell, a renegade clergyman, caused a great ruckus by suggesting the Bible tales were myths and connecting the story of the crucifixion to phallic worship.)

It is amusing to read Scott's well-taken if

somewhat prissily expressed critique of Kipling's jaunty little verses about eating sawn-off human em and filling old ladies with kerosene. And here is Lampman on the emancipation of women:

Women, no longer weak and dependent, no longer kept in an emotional atmosphere of frivolity and sentimental irresponsibility, but strong, active and self-reliant as men, will not be subject or exposed to the same temptations. and above all they will not be at the mercy of men. When the moral and intellectual emancipation of women is fully effected many a cloud will be lifted from human life, and no sensible man will believe that the sex will have sacrificed one whit of that grace and beauty which we think to be its chiefest charm; rather there will be added to these a power, a beneficence, a dignity which are only the exception now.

A great many of the concerns he rings familiar bells today, sometimes serving to put things in perspective. Campbell, commenting on the death of Whitman, writes that "a new conservatism is coming in that Whitman could not have dreamed of nor have understood."

For contemporary readers, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the column is the concern of the writers (by no means cut off from literary developments in Britain or the U.S.) with the emerging Canadian literature, criticism, and book trade. Both Lampman and Scott inveighed against the tax on books and pointed out its harmful effect on the national culture and standard of education. Scott expressed his disgust with the art of Canadian book production, describing a "copy of somebody or other's speeches bound in that peculiar cloth that seems to have broken out into goose pimples. The cover . . . warped and fitted like a charity coat, and . . . labelled like a grocer's cannister."

All three writers were troubled — and frustrated — by the difficulty (almost the impossibility) of anyone earning more than "a prudish income" by writing in Canada. At a time when such Canadian writers as Edward Blake, Bliss Carman, Grant Allen, and Gilbert Parker had left the country to find their fortunes elsewhere, Lampman wrote:

It is quite natural that those who seek the widest field for their abilities should wander abroad. Let us find no fault with them on that account. They probably bring more honour to their country than they would if they had remained at home. Here their energies might have withered away in petty and fruitless occupations, and their talent have evaporated in the thin sluggishness of a colonial atmosphere.

Campbell described the Canadian literature of 1893 as "a bundle of cliques, each determined to get what it calls its right and caring little for matters outside its own interests, a fraternal system of back-scratching among themselves and back-biting of outsiders who refuse to accept their disgusting overtures." *Plus ça change. . . The Mermaid Inn is not only an impor-*

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tant document in the history of Canadian literature, but an engaging read as well. It is a pity, though, that the index is far from complete. The intriguing glimpses given in Barrie Davies' introduction and in the columns themselves, of the relations of the three poets to one another, tinged as they were with jealousy and mutual suspicion, suggest a new study of the trio would not be amiss. Perhaps Davies is the man to write it. □

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## A little oil, more vinegar

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**Fiddlehead Greens: Stories from The Fiddlehead, selected by Roger Ploude and Michael Taylor, Oberon Press, 211 pages, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 303 9) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 304 7).**

By MICHAEL SMITH

EVER SINCE IT began publishing fiction in 1959, *The Fiddlehead* has been a showcase both for established writers and promising neophytes — a policy that's immediately clear in this anthology of 15 stories. Just such disparity must have been on the editors' minds when they noted in their introduction that "many which deserved to be included were omitted for a variety of reasons." Some, they say, had already been reprinted too often, though that didn't stop them from including "Rape Fantasies," one of Margaret Atwood's best-known stories. The result — however noble their intentions — underscores the gulf between the pros and the merely prosaic.

Among contributions from the lesser-known writers, one of the best is Patience Wheatley's "Mr. Mackenzie King" — a brisk, sardonic, first-person account of life and death in the Canadian Women's Army Corps under the sanctimonious influence of the crystal-gazing wartime prime minister. By contrast, "Roland Fogg" by Fred Bonnie (the gardening editor of *Southern Living* magazine in Alabama) is overstated, and William Bauer's "What is Interred with their Bonus" — about two old women, one Anna, one Annie, who die in a musing home — is, because of its tedious exposition, a nuisance to read.

Bauer's story is one of several that deal with old age and dying. "A Sunny Day in Canada" by David Waltner-Toews (an Alberta veterinarian) is also set in an old folks' home, this time from the point of view of a 90-year-old man as he prepares to speak at a friend's funeral. But it's upstaged by Hugh Hood's portrait of 86-year-old Mr. Page Calverly as he attends a nephew's funeral in "The Chess Match" (his "implacable opponent" at the chess board is, of course, Death). Add to this W. D.

Valgardson's "A Business Relationship" in which a man and his wife, who met by way of a classified ad, now prepare for the husband's approaching death in an equally businesslike manner.

*The Fiddlehead* was initially a poetry magazine, so it's fitting that a number of the stories are by poets — notably Alden Nowlan, who was the author of the first piece of fiction the magazine published. He's represented here by "Hainesville is Not the World," an adept confrontation between a country girl and a slick young carnival worker, and "Life and Times," a portrait of the narrator's millworker father. George Bowring contributes "Flycatcher," about a local character who "had to do what no man wants to do: stand out in a crowd all the time." I also liked Joan Finnigan's "A Flight to Montreal," which describes a young woman's plight as secretary to a bullying, alcoholic power broker.

Two writers who are especially known for their short stories are John Metcalf ("The Practice of the Craft") and Alistair MacLeod, whose "The Closing Down of Summer" — a lament for a special breed of miner, native to Nova Scotia — is a mostly overwritten, though evocative, monologue that's essentially stylized reportage. It's a sort of literary curiosity, like Cyril Dabydeen's "Bitter Blood," which is written in West Indian pidgin. Dabydeen's was one of more than 200 stories considered for *Fiddlehead Greens*, but appears to have been included more because of all the caveats the editors heaped upon themselves than for merit of its own. □

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## How poetry went from said to verse

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The Praise Singer, by Mary Renault, Longman, 300 pages, \$15.75 cloth (ISBN 0 7195 3614 6).

By I. M. OWEN

FOR MANY YEARS publishers' blurb-writers have been proclaiming each new historical novelist as "another Mary Renault," though the original Mary Renault's two most popular books, *The King Must Die* and *The Bull from the Sea*, are not historical fiction but rationalized myth, a related but surely different form. Her actual historical novels, all dealing with classical Greece, started rather badly in my (minority) opinion with *The Last of the Wine*, but got better and better. And *The Praise Singer*, written in her middle 70s, is superb. It purports to be the first half of an autobiography by Simonides of Ceos, the most versatile poet



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of his day, and spans the years from about 550 to 514 B.C. — a rich period for an imaginative novelist, because it was the beginning of classical Greece, when so much that we take for granted today was new and strange.

Athens was living for the first time under the rule of law, given it by its earliest poet, Solon. An innovator named Thespis had made drama inevitable by introducing solo parts into choric odes. Pythagoras was busy in Samos, and later in Italy, inventing arithmetic, harmonics, the transmigration of souls, and the square on the hypotenuse. And poetry was becoming for the first time, literally, literature.

Writing had hitherto been useful for keeping accounts, recording laws, sending messages — dull purposes like that. Now Pisistratus, the benign tyrant of Athens, had the inspiration of establishing a written text of the Homeric poems, which, like all poetry, had existed only in the minds of poets and professional reciters. The book was born.

Only a really muscular imagination like Mary Renault's could take us so convincingly inside a poet of the time. Her Simonides can hardly get his mind round the notion that poetry can be written down at all; however, he soon recognizes that now it has started men's memories will begin to go rotten and it will become absolutely necessary. But when he catches his nephew and pupil Bacchylides actually composing a poem on a writing-tablet the leap is too great for him. The act seems both impossible and disgraceful.

The main part of the book deals with the last years of the Pisistratid tyranny, ending with the assassination of Pisistratus's son Hipparchus. I find it a wholly convincing and satisfying picture of Athens at the beginning of its greatness. And perhaps other readers will be as relieved as I was to find that Mary Renault's rather puzzling fascination with male homosexuality seems to have moderated.

That love affairs between men and youths were fashionable in Athens, and carried no stigma, is undeniable. But if they were as universal and all-important as Renault's earlier books make them, somebody must explain to me how Aristophanes could have written his *Lysistrata*, in which the women of Athens and Sparta bring an end to the Peloponnesian War by going on strike; and how those cultivated and expensive courtesans the *hetairai* could have occupied the high place in society that they evidently did.

In this book Renault invents a thoroughly charming *hetaira* named Lyra, with whom Simonides falls in love. Simonides himself is interesting and engaging, though perhaps too consistently nice to be the same Simonides whom G.E. Lessing called the Greek Voltaire, and who said in one of his poems that to be a good man was not merely difficult but impossible. Alfred Duggan, the greatest of historical novelists, would have given him a keener curling edge. But then,

16 Books in Canada, June-July, 1979

to be fair, Duggan probably couldn't have crested the graceful and witty dialogue between Lyra and Simonides at their first meeting.

One of the major events of the period was the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. The implied sequel to *The Praise Singer* will have to deal with the disastrous attempts of his successors, Darius and Xerxes, to add Greece to the empire. I hope Mary Renault is in good health and hard at work. □

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## Love's labour's glossed

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**Prelude to a Marriage: Letters and Diaries of John Coulter and Olive Clare Primrose**, edited by John Coulter. Oberon Press, 145 pages. \$15.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 293 8) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 294 6).

By DuBARRY CAMPAU

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THIS BOOK IS woven from the memories, letters, and diaries of John Coulter and Olive Clare Primrose. The result is a moving and delicate recapitulation of what it was like to be young, sensitive, gifted, in love, and poor in the 1930s.

Coulter was an Irishman, his Primmy a Canadian, and they met in London where both of them were trying to find themselves and be discovered by others in the literary milieu. They lived austere and their favourite entertainment was taking long midnight strolls through the city.

Totally in love and tacitly engaged, they had no real idea when they could be married, yet they remained chaste in their relationship. This self-restraint gives an almost Jane Austen quality to this story — to us it could have taken place 140 years ago, rather than only 40.

Not only had they no money to set themselves up in a properly domestic situation, they also had difficult family and emotional involvements. He had responsibilities to his widowed mother and his sister, but his deepest entanglement was with a male friend, an artist, whose friendship he had valued and enjoyed without, evidently, realizing that the artist loved him in a way to which he could not respond.

Primmy had been brought up in a prosperous Toronto family, had summered in Muskoka and attended Havergal College. She was wearing the green scarf of her school uniform when they first met. She was fragile; her ill health at one point kept her from rejoining Coulter in England after she had returned for what she had supposed was only a visit to Canada. But her affection for her family, her identification with her own country, and her timidity about committing herself to a man whom she loved but wasn't

sure she understood, also frustrated her longing to be with him even in a strange land.

The story has the happiest of endings — Coulter came to Canada to claim his bride, they married and lived happily ever after, and became the parents of two children. Clare Coulter, the actress, is one of them. Both John and Primmy distinguished themselves in literature, he as a playwright and the author of *The Trial of Louis Riel*, she as a poet.

Because of the grace with which Coulter has brought together these fragments of 40 years ago, we are spared feeling that we are intruding in a deeply personal relationship. There was the kind of romance that everyone used to hope for, and it is delightful to discover that for at least one couple who attained it, honour, restraint, and a deep sense of responsibility not only to each other but also to friends and families, embellished and enriched all of the years of their marriage.

Today, *Prelude to a Marriage* is a period piece, and much of it may seem inexplicable to the products of the permissive '60s and '70s. Between them and the Coulters there is not a generation gap, but a chasm. But even they might be delighted by the strength and charm of John and Primmy's personalities. They are the warp and woof of the fabric of this book. □

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## IN BRIEF

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My Québec, by René Lévesque, with Jean-Robert Leselbaun, translated from the French by Gaynor Fitzpatrick, Methuen, 191 pages, \$11.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 93980 3). I ended my review of René Lévesque's *La Passion du Québec* (February) on a speculative note: Would it be considered wise to give English Canada the same unexpurgated, unembellished version as Quebec's? With Methuen's translated edition, we have the answer.

The text rests essentially the same, except for the addition of live more appendices: a chart showing the distribution of the Francophone population in Canada (whose relevance to Lévesque's arguments is not explained); excerpts (dangerously short) from the French Language Charter; extracts from the White Paper on Cultural Development (whose controversial status is not mentioned); then, as counter-balance, an extract from *Federalism for the Future*, the 1968 statement of policy by the Government of Canada, here curiously titled "Federal Evangelism" (its message did not touch the editors, who failed to include it in the table of contents with the other appendices); finally, a road and rail map of Canada (why?).

More important is that Peter Meekison, a highly respected political scientist who is currently Deputy Minister for Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs for the Province of Alberta, has prepared 10 additional

questions for this edition. Based on a more profound knowledge of Canadian federalism than the original interviewer's questions, they are a useful addition to the dialogue, but some of Premier Lévesque's replies beg for follow-ups. One is left with the impression that this part of the interview was done by correspondence.

The translation is faithful and deserves compliments, but somehow René Lévesque just isn't the same in English.

—MARGARET BEATTIE

## Nature red in fur and jaw

Season of the Seal. by Calvin Coish. Breakwater Books, 260 pages. \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 919948 62 6).

Killer Whale: The Saga of "Miracle", by Paul Jeune, McClelland & Stewart. 190 pages. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 07710 4416 x).

By ANN BIRCH

A LONDON CORRESPONDENT has noted that the Canadian complaint that the British press takes no interest in Canada has gone by the boards recently — thanks to René Lévesque, Margaret Trudeau, and baby seals. Perhaps we should be thankful that publicity about the seals at least tends to be seasonal, culminating in a frenzy of emotionalism during the March hunt. Calvin Coish's *Season of the Seal* may do something towards damping the fires of bigotry that rage on both sides of the controversy.

Beginning with a history of the industry in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Coish shows that both the seals and the sealers were exploited by rich merchants who controlled business and government, and spent their winters in Jamaica. A St. John's newspaper wrote an epitaph to 78 sealers who, in 1914, perished needlessly on a drifting ice floe after their captain refused to let them take refuge on the ship during a storm: "Sacred to those brave and hardy soldiers of the Industrial Army who struggled, suffered and died on the Frozen Battlefield for their Captains of Industry, and their loved ones at home. R.I.P." During these early days of unfettered capitalism, the average plunder between 1871 and 1914 was 200,000 seals a year.

As Coish brings his account of the hunt up to the present day, he explains the growth of legislation and unions to help the sealers, and increased government regulation and observation to benefit the seals. Since 1971, quotas on the number of seals taken have been set at well below earlier kills. True, a 1975 survey by David Lavigne who has often been called the Greenpeace biologist, showed that the number of pups born had

declined to fewer than one fifth of the 1952 estimate. But by 1978 Lavigne had rejected the Greenpeace contention that the seals were in danger of extinction and criticized the media for their "extreme gullibility" in reporting the seal-hunt issue. While recognizing isolated instances of cruelty to seals, Coish proves that the infamous skinning alive of a baby seal in the widely publicized 1964 Artek film was done by a man hired by some of the photographers who made the film.

Coish's account exhibits a nice grasp of irony. He notes the entry into the fray of London's Playboy Club, which sent a letter, delivered by two partly clad Bunnies, to the Canadian High Commission pmlsling the exploitation of baby seals. He also recounts Newfoundland Premier Moores's unfortunate choice of words when he announced his decision to wage a pm-scaling campaign: "We'll get all the bloody exposure we want!" The sense of humour and balance which Coish brings to his history of the hunt is a refreshing antidote for the bitterness of the scaling dispute.

In the furor over the killing of seals, Canadians may have forgotten that a decade ago, off the coast of British Columbia, a similar war was being fought over killer whales. In the last chapter of his book *Killer Whale*, Paul Jeune briefly outlines the "bloody history" of the early 1960s when the federal Fisheries Department purchased an army-surplus machine-gun with the

intention of exterminating whales off Vancouver Island's east coast. By the 1970s the killing of whales had been outlawed, and the narrow channel near the site proposed for the machine-gun post became the spot where a dying baby whale was found and rescued in 1977. It is the story of this whale, named *Miracle*, that forms the substance of Jeune's book.

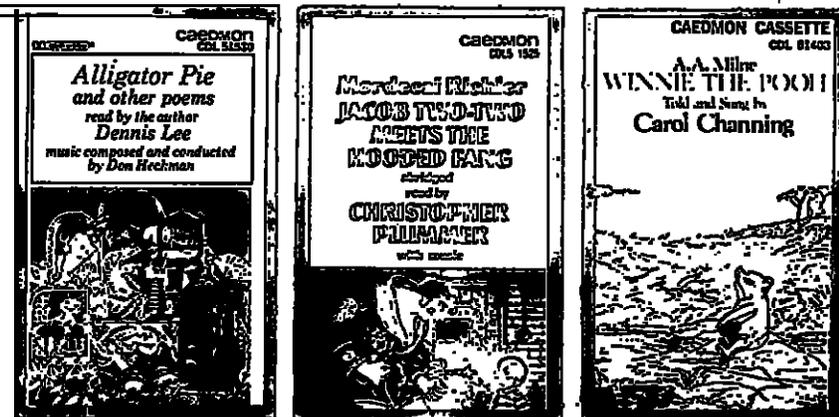
Leslie Stephen, writing about Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," said that it was "a lot of pother about a bird." Some readers of *Killer Whale* may be tempted to dismiss Jeune's story for a similar reason, but in doing so, they will, like Stephen, overlook much that is worthwhile in the tale.

The most engaging aspect of Jeune's story is its wealth of solid detail about the rescue of *Miracle*. The account of the hoisting of an 800-pound dying calf out of the water of Menzies Bay, in transportation in a sling on the back of a truck 200 miles to Victoria, and its deposit in the swimming pool of the staid hotel in Oak Bay makes for good reading — especially when Jeune relates the reaction of a service-station attendant asked to provide buckets of water to wet down a dried-out killer whale.

Jeune's writing style is uneven. He has a tendency to over-use some words ("gutsy," for example) and to misuse others (the most annoying lapse being "lay" for "lie"). The latter fault sometimes produces strange results as, for in-

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stance, when we are told that the whale's resuscitation from death may be nothing more than "a respite from a final death that lays minutes or months into the future."

Jeune can, however, write well. His first two chapters especially, where he uses his considerable knowledge of whales to re-create the life of the calf and its early days before human help arrives, are reminiscent of the nature tales of Ernest Thompson Seton. Perhaps in time Jeune may do for West Coast marine life what Seton did for the creatures of the Don Valley area of Toronto. □

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## A man whose interest rate compounds

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The *Shadow of Keynes*, by Elizabeth S. Johnson and Harry G. Johnson, University of Chicago Press, 253 pages, \$18 cloth (ISBN 0 226 40148 0).

By KEVIN BURLEY

INTEREST IN THE "Keynesian Revolution," the "counter-revolution," the evolution of Keynesian ideas, and in the impact of John Maynard Keynes on developing economic theory is amply attested in contemporary literature. A good illustration is the mammoth undertaking of the Royal Economic Society in publishing the writings of Keynes, including much of his correspondence. The essays in *The Shadow of Keynes* are part of this re-awakening.

The book is in no sense a biography, although no future biographer could afford to ignore it. Indeed, on one point — Keynes's attitude to military service — the authors convincingly challenge Roy F. Harrod, author of the standard biography. They don't seek to interpret Keynes's writings or thought. Instead, the authors tell us, the essays were "written largely in the process of trying to understand Keynes, as a historical personality and as an economist whose work remains influential in both academic economics and popular economic ideas, and particularly to understand him in relation to his habitat of Cambridge and the post-Victorian British society in which he lived."

Five of the 18 essays were written by Mrs. Johnson, editor of a number of the volumes for the Royal Economic Society. One was a collaborative venture with her late husband, Harry, who single-handedly contributed the remaining dozen — part of his Herculean output of books and articles known throughout the world. All but three have appeared in journals, periodicals, or other collections. Two appeared in 1960,

and the rest were published in the 1970s. Essentially, the essays are non-technical in nature and the general reader need not shrink from them.

Many readers will probably find the two on Cambridge in the 1930s and '50s the most absorbing. Both stem from Johnson's personal experiences. In 1945 he visited Cambridge while serving with the Canadian army. He returned several years later and became a fellow of King's College, where Keynes had held court. His comments on British economists he met — penetrating, tongue-in-cheek, sometimes mocking, always irreverent — will amuse, irritate, or beguile the reader. But they also contain a severe indictment of Cambridge economic debate and should be read together with the essay on the lingering dominance of Keynes.

The essays all reflect Harry Johnson's vivid, precise style. Taken as a whole they are of considerable interest; it seems ungracious to ask for more. However, it would have been valuable to include some assessment of the impact of Keynes in the 1930s on the Committee of Economic Information and the influence it exerted in turn on the Treasury mandarins.

It is also unfortunate that we won't benefit from Harry Johnson's reactions to an alternative explanation nor being offered for Britain's unemployment during the 1920s. This problem, Johnson argued, stemmed from "perverse monetary policies" and hence gave rise to the Keynesian Revolution, while a very recent view (admittedly still in the speculative stage) dramatically downplays the importance of British monetary policy.

But the saddest part of this review is to record that Harry Johnson died (at the early age of 53) before this volume appeared in print. □

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## Collages, clips, and quirky pics

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*Terrific at Both Ends*, by Victor Coleman, Coach House Press, 96 pages, \$4.00 paper (ISBN 0 88910 044 6).

*Practicing Up to Be Human*, by Lionel Kearns, Coach House Press, 88 pages, \$4.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 101 9).

By BARRY DEMPSTER

VICTOR COLEMAN's poetry is clever: messages and emotions pouncing out of word mazes, a barrel of images with the lid snatched off. He plays the old psychiatric identification game — each fine coming from the previous line rather than flowing from the start, a game of leapfrog. If you're lost at the third line, you've lost the entire race.

The imagery is private. The poem "No Flies" seems to use the various signs you might see while driving down a highway. But what does it all add up to? It's like listening to what you think is Spanish, and finally discovering it's been Italian all along. *Terrific at Both Ends* is language for language's sake.

The meanings of the poems don't glide; they dash here and there like curious dogs



until you're not sure if there's really anything important to see. The best of the book, such pieces as "A Proposal" and "In The Bronx," take this frenzy and form a collage, a film full of short, colourful clips. But a unifying theme is missing. It's as if Coleman isn't sure exactly what he wants to say. The how of it he has down pat.

I think what Coleman suffers from most is a lack of honest communication. He's playing games with his work. The only saving grace is that it has to be by choice, Coleman's choice, which certainly doesn't make *Terrific* great poetry but does give the book a loony integrity — language a little drunk and dizzy. Coleman with no thoughts of sobering up.

*Practicing [sic] Up to Be Human*, Lionel Kearns's first major collection in nine years, offers a concrete philosophy. It's the mind reacting to everyday circumstances. He begins slowly, taking a subject further than one might expect, comparing a hockey player to a Samurai swordsman, while still retaining a sense and a sanity. But his imagination, while appealing, is gravity-bound. He's not what one would call inspired.

He deals with the ironies of life, sex, and language. The poems are like quirky photographs you might try to imagine the story behind. He takes people into moments they might not ordinarily go into, and he lets a light shine on the incidents happening therein. You're not shocked; he doesn't take you somewhere you've never been before — just to a place you didn't think you'd be going to at that particular moment.

*Practicing Up to Be Human* is simple poetry. There are riddles, but they're easily solved. Kearns writes absorbing stuff. His is the sort of book where you're curious to turn the page. When you're finished though, while you have been some fascinating places, you aren't left with a sense of loss. You can go there on your own. *Practicing Up to Be Human* doesn't go far beyond the appreciation of life. Lionel Kearns ends up an interesting man, a bit less interesting poet. □

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## The son also rises in the West

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Son of Sacred. by Stan Persky. New Star Books. 319 pages, 511.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919888 90 9) and \$2.95 paper (ISBN 0 919885 89 5).

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By PHIL SURGUY

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ONE OF THE rules of Canadian journalism is that the author of any account of British Columbia must begin by using the words "wacky," "lotusland," and "bizarre" as soon as possible. I have just done that; only the customary bewilderment and condescension are missing.

It's hard to say why writers from the East generally miss so much when they go out to B.C. Perhaps they suffer from whatever it is that turns the brains of their counterparts in New York to pudding whenever they have to think about California; or maybe it's just that babble about the wacky doings in lotusland is an easy l&d-in to a story. But it's more likely that, coming from Ontario as they usually do, they are simply unequipped to deal with a physically attractive place where the politics happen to be interesting.

The late W. A. C. Bennett ran B.C. for 20 years. He did it flamboyantly, which doesn't mean crazily. (He was many things, but crazy wasn't one of them.) In 1972, he and his Social Credit government were defeated by Dave Barrett and the NDP. Then, in late 1975, Bennett's son, Bill, leading a rebuilt Sowed party under the banner "Let's get B.C. going again," ousted the Barrett government. Last April, after the May 22 federal election had been called, Bennett announced a provincial vote for May 10. That's a variation of one of his old man's tricks: the elder Bennett loved to "go to the people," as he put it, shortly after federal elections, when the NDP would be broke and exhausted.

Stan Persky's *Son of Sacred* is a very good, eminently readable popular history of the first three years of Bill Bennett's government. It is also an enquiry into whether the Socreds have got B.C. going again, as they said they would, or if in fact the province had stopped going while Dave Barrett was premier. As soon as the Socreds got back in they pulled a number of bookkeeping stunts that proved, at least in the newspaper headliner, that the NDP had impoverished the province. Similarly, they immediately - and cruelly-jacked up the rates of the NDP-created provincial automobile insurance, a move that has been interpreted as Bill Bennett's way of punish-

ing the people for daring to let the socialists in.

It is a measure of Persky's talent that, in his telling of these and other tales of how the Socreds have manipulated B.C.'s human and material resources, the fiscal and administrative aspects of the issues are presented as dramatically as his portraits of the people involved. He's wry and often very funny. His main sources are newspaper clippings. Too much Canadian popular history also comes from that source and serves only to demonstrate why newspaper files are called morgues. But *Son of Sacred* is a startling exception, as a result both of Persky's writing skills and the unique role of the media in B.C.

Perhaps it's because B.C. is a relatively young society and its people are still deciding what form it will take. At any rate, the pervasive radio hotline shows, which either bemuse or confuse writers from the East, prime-time TV interview programs, and print journalists who are not shy about explaining the nitty-gritty of who's doing what to whom and why, particularly Alan Fotheringham (whose true worth should not be judged by his exhibitions on the back page of *Maclean's*) and the late Jack Wasserman - all these have contributed to a political climate in which the people know their politicians and what they stand for extremely well. Persky writes from that familiarity.

He also writes from the Left, though there is no suggestion in his work that the Left is in exclusive possession of the world's supply of virtue and common sense. He's quite candid about the NDP's blunders (and it was blundering and indifference to its constituency that sank the NDP, not the huge Sacred war chest, or any notion that Dave Barrett went "too far, too fast," as Stephen Lewis used to be fond of saying when he headed the Ontario NDP). Persky concludes that Bill Bennett and his troupe have not got B.C. going and that, in terms of sheer self-interest, almost everyone in the province who isn't a timber baronet or a mining promoter would be slightly better off with an NDP government. He stresses the slightly.

In the late 1960s, Persky was the most

influential student activist at the University of British Columbia. And, recalling his efforts then to encourage imaginative, alternate politics, one can detect in his current work the odd hint of cynicism, or maybe despair, as he describes a system in which significant alternatives have no currency. Generally, however, the tone of the book suggests that it's the work of a man who, besides instructing and entertaining his readers, is using the form of a popular history to help redefine his own ideas about what the politics of his society really represent. There is a definite impression here that *Son of Sacred* is only a part of a much larger body of thought.

*Son of Sacred* deserves to be received as a book with more than regional interest. It should be enjoyed by anyone interested in politics and indeed by anyone curious about how the westernmost end of the country works. As Persky puts it in his introduction: "Given the relative weakness of federalism in Canada, I'm surprised that, except for books about Quebec, there have been so few which discuss contemporary provincial and regional affairs. [It is to be hoped that] this book will encourage others to similar undertakings. Surely, such archetypal figures as Manitoba's Sterling Lyon or Ontario's Bill Davis are as much in need of scrutiny as B.C.'s Bill Bennett." □

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## How Barnardo ruled the waifs

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Barnardo, by Gillian Wagner, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, illustrated. 344 pages, \$25.95 cloth (ISBN 0 297 775618).

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By DON BAILEY

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THIS BOOK MIGHT well be subtitled "Notes to a Future Historian." The story of Thomas Barnardo is fascinating. He was born in Ireland in 1845 and at 17 joined the Brethren movement, a protestant organization committed to "saving men's souls and bringing them to salvation before it was too late."

Barnardo became active in this group and, after hearing a particularly inspired speaker decided he wanted to go to China as a missionary. The Brethren committee felt he was too young and encouraged him to study medicine so that if he did finally go to China, he would have something concrete to contribute. He took their advice and moved to London in 1866.

Having little money, Barnardo lived in the East End, where he was exposed to poverty in its worst forms; boozing and bruising were the local pastimes. Barnardo was horrified. What especially disturbed him was the state of despair that most people lived in. While continuing his studies, he began to participate in evangelistic rallies. Within a year he became an evangelist



himself and held his own meetings. Although still attracted to foreign missionary work, the Brethren convinced him that London was as rich a pastoral field as China.

From this point on until his death in 1905, the story of Thomas Barnardo switches into high gear. The problem with this book is that readers have to supply their own excitement if they want to make it through to the end. Gillian Wagner is overly concerned with giving us tedious details of the various controversies Barnardo stirred up. For example, his enemies (mostly rival evangelists! claimed he was not entitled to call himself a doctor. They were correct, but while they tried to make political hay out of this situation, Barnardo quietly returned to medical school and completed his degree. Instead of relating the inherent humour of this story, Wagner spends endless pages splitting hairs trying to decide who was right. What the book does have though, which makes its publication worthwhile, is a comprehensive listing of Barnardo's work.

He was a small man — five-foot-three. He had trouble with his sight and wore tinted glasses. Later in his life he went deaf, but Wagner never tells us when. Perhaps because his size made him compensate, the picture that emerges of the young man in London is one of sheer energy in motion. First he preached in the streets. This was not satisfactory so he tented a huge hall and lured people away from the pubs with the offer of free tea after the sermon. When he could no longer afford the hall, he pitched a huge tent across the road from the most notorious pub in the East End and eventually put it out of business. He scored his biggest coup when he was able to convince some wealthy bankers to buy the pub and allow him to convert it into a free coffee house. Since there were no gathering places in the community except for the pubs, the coffee house was a tremendous success and proved to be a model for other religious organizations. In fact much of what Barnardo accomplished during his life provided future social agencies with models that are still being used today.

The work for which Barnardo is best known started early in 1868. After a prayer meeting one night, a boy approached Barnardo and asked if he could sleep on the floor since it was cold and he had no place to go. Barnardo didn't believe him at first but then the boy led him on a tour through the deserted warehouses and back alleys where many other children were forced to sleep. He was astounded at what he found — hundreds of children roaming wild. So Barnardo started up the East End Juvenile Mission, which eventually led to the founding of the famous Barnardo Homes for Children. During the next 30 years, 55,000 children passed through Barnardo's care. The number is even more phenomenal when you consider that he kept his organization going without government support but entirely through private donations. He was a master at raising money.

Unfortunately we are told little about Barnardo the man. What drove him to expand his organization so ruthlessly? Certainly he believed he was doing the work of God and no one else seemed interested in vagabond children at the time. But I can't help feeling that there were other factors that caused Barnardo to push himself to such extremes. He was violently anti-Catholic and this resulted in several court cases where children in his custody were ordered returned to their Catholic homes. He was accused of exploiting the children by selling before-and-after photographs of them. This was a popular and successful way of raising money for the homes and Barnardo defended its use with great vigour. He seems to have believed, justifiably so, that the middle class and the rich preferred to keep the plight of neglected children a secret. He made this impossible.

Besides raising money for his growing empire, which now embraced girls and infants, Barnardo was busy setting up an emigration and placement system for graduates of his training schools. The country chosen was Canada. Headquarters were set up in Peterborough, Ont. A huge farm was purchased in Manitoba. From the early 1890s until 1904, more than 6,000 children emigrated to Canada under Barnardo's sponsorship. Always the careful keeper of records, he was able to report that only two per cent did not fare well.

Gillian Wagner has given us much material to mull over. The writing itself is clear and accessible but she has the annoying habit of moving back and forth in time at such a rapid rate that the story is often difficult to follow. She has documented Barnardo's work well but one hopes that a volume on the human Barnardo, the man who wrote children's stories to support his family, will soon follow. □

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## Two touchy paternities

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**Federalism in Canada and Australia: The Early Years.** edited by Bruce Hodgins, Don Wright, and W. H. Heick, Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 318 pages, \$9.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88920 061 0).

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By DANIEL FRANCIS

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THE LONGER they survive, the more political structures are invested with a sanctity they never possessed at their creation. Take Confederation, for example. A hundred years ago no one held any illusions about the purpose, or the cohesiveness, of the union. "The father of confederation was dead-lock," wrote Goldwin Smith, and out of deadlock came compromise. Confederation was a practical solution to some vexing

political problems. National unity? The new nation was like a bunch of fishing mds, remarked one politician — tied together at only one end.

Over time we have sometimes forgotten that our founding fathers were first of all politicians with personal and sectional interests to promote. Because of our short historical memory we believe that the problems that perplex us are new ones, not as old as the country itself and ingrained in its regional nature. Most of us would be surprised to learn that from the beginning it was Ontario that made the loudest demands for more provincial autonomy from the central power. Or that most Quebecers saw Confederation as a vehicle for preserving their cultural rights, not annihilating them.

These timely, if not exactly revisionist, reminders are contained in this collection of 17 historical essays about the federal system in Canada and Australia. The Canadian essays deal with the early years of Confederation in each of the regions, excluding for some reason British Columbia. We learn that Ontario has always had a strong localist tradition which led it to spearhead the provincial-rights movement that subverted Sir John A.'s centralist view of federation. We learn that Quebecers did not, as the PQ would have us believe, object to the subordinate role assigned to the provinces. We learn that an unenthusiastic group of Maritime colonies were pressured into joining the "botheration scheme" by an insistent imperial government. And we learn that the western provinces entered Confederation as dependencies, not full partners. None of this is new but I suspect it will provide a useful introduction to the prevailing academic wisdom.

What does all this have to do with Australia? Off the top, the comparison would seem to be apt. Both Canada and Australia have a common colonial heritage and on the eve of federation both were loose groupings of separate economic units, isolated by geography and parochial concerns.

However, the comparison never really materializes in this collection. This is a failure of conception rather than one of execution. The book is divided into separate sections on the two countries and, except for the introduction and conclusion, both the work of Trent University historian Bruce Hodgins, analogies are not drawn within the essays themselves. The authors all seem to be riding off in different directions.

Much like the transparent overlays used by cartographers, comparisons are meant to lie one on top of the other, not side by side, so that the reader may look through one society to see how the contours of the other differ. But for the most part these authors proceed completely outside the comparative framework.

The book achieves what unity it has by being organized around a core problem. In Canada the Fathers of Confederation thought they had devised a centralized system of government while in Australia the

system was intended to be decentralized. Set in both cases events quickly contradicted these expectations. In Australia power gravitated to the centre at the expense of the provinces while in Canada the provinces successfully asserted their independence from the central power.

All the essays contribute to a" explanation of the problem. But along the way they glass over other interesting differences between the two countries. To take just one, example, the Australian federation, which took place in 1901, was preceded by referenda in each of the colonies. Yet Confederation in Canada was a pre-democratic achievement: in other words, no one bothered to consult the people. Hodgins suggests that this was because Australia's federation took place a quarter of a century after Canada's when democratic ideals had achieved acceptance. But does not the difference also suggest that the two societies, similar in some ways, had evolved different political cultures? I am surely not the only reader who would have wished one of the authors to discuss this difference.

But perhaps this is the subject of another book. Literary critics have already drawn attention to similarities in the literary imaginations of the two cultures. Perhaps the authors represented in this book will pursue their work beyond political structures to the values they embody. □

## Massey in the dull, dull ground

A Hundred Different Lives, by Raymond Massey, McClelland & Stewart, 447 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 5856 x).

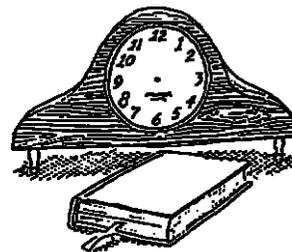
By MORRIS WOLFE

THE SECOND VOLUME of Raymond Massey's autobiography begins with a note of gratitude to one "Lily Poritz Miller, whose gentle but firm editorial guidance has been of the greatest help to me." If I were Ms. Miller, I would have tried to keep that note from appearing in print. So tediously written and badly organized is this book that I wouldn't want anyone to know I'd had anything to do with it. A *Hundred Different Lives* is yet another example of a McClelland & Stewart book that feels not so much edited as thrown at a printing press.

These of us who hoped that the first volume of Massey's autobiography, *When I Was Young*, was merely a dull prologue to his subsequent life in the exciting world of showbusiness, have been sadly, disap-

pointed. If anything, *A Hundred Different Lives* is more boring than its predecessor. Like *When I Was Young*, the new book comes to life only when Raymond offers us a brief glimpse at how he felt about his older brother. It seems Vincent didn't know how to put on his Governor General's garb on the day of his installation and "that after fifty-six years [his] kid brother, Raymond, [was able to] perform a miracle" — that is, tell him how to get into his pants.

The rest of the book consists of a tedious catalogue of people and places visited and performances given. It feels as if it were assembled by doing nothing more than going through voluminous scrapbooks and reading from them into a dictaphone. Instead of reading this book cover-to-cover, one would do just as well to consult the index to see what Massey has to say about the plays or films or actors one is particularly interested in. And even that can be done without, since Massey's comments are almost without exception generous to a fault. □



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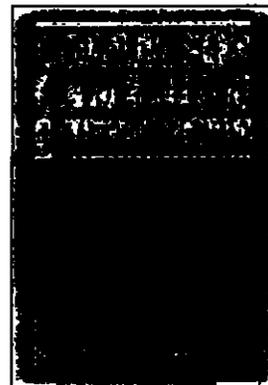
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## For Queen's and country

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Queen's University, Volume I: 1811-1917. by Hilda Neatby, edited by Frederick Gibson and Roger Graham. McGill-Queen's University Press, 346 pages. \$25 cloth (ISBN 0 7735 0336 6).

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By B. W. BOWDEN

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WHEN JOHN WATSON arrived in Kingston in 1872 to commence his duties as professor of moral philosophy at Queen's he was dismayed at the apparent "one-horse college" he found there. Seven years later, Adam Shortt, a Freshman in Arts was likewise so appalled that he intended to switch to the University of Toronto at Christmas. Both stayed.

Queen's was an extraordinary institution for most of its first 75 years — never financially secure, woefully deficient in physical resources, but always blessed with some very able faculty and students. Both Watson and Shortt quickly discovered that though Queen's still only occupied two small buildings 37 years after it had accepted its first class of students in 1842, it already possessed considerable intellectual vitality and college spirit. There was a sense in which the college myth that "once a Queen's man, always a Queen's man" was true.

The same may be true for the historian today. The trustees chose Neatby to write a new-history of the university because she was an outsider who, they thought, might retain a sense of detachment while yet being sympathetic to Queen's Presbyterian beginnings. They ought to be pleased, for this is a warm, affectionate book by an historian who possessed great empathy for the trials and accomplishments of the college from 1842 to 1917.

One of the study's strengths is the manner in which Neatby integrates developments within Queen's with forces outside the institution. The consequences of the divisions within Presbyterianism, the threat posed by U of T's financial difficulties, Queen's response to government policies in the university's building campaigns, the organization of the school of mining — all these are examined lucidly, without excessive detail.

The author explains that from the beginning Queen's was a university, never merely a theological or local college. Its location in Kingston gave it a regional student base; its commitment to the Church of Scotland gave it provincial stature. These constituencies provided most of the funds for the university's development; together they imposed commitments that kept Queen's from joining U of T, and they helped to foster a secular vision of becoming

ing a national university. Even before the opening of Queen's first large academic building in 1880, that national thrust was quite evident.

The most serious weakness of the book is a missed opportunity. Although Neatby gives some sense of campus atmosphere, she does not try to compose an intellectual study. This is regrettable. For, of all our universities, Queen's in the years 1893 to 1917 possibly afforded the best opportunity available to historians to present such a picture.

As a result Neatby has told only part of the process by which Queen's became such a distinctive national university. G.M. Grant's vision, stature, and drive, the pursuit of provincial funding, the annual theological conferences, the extension courses, and the college's Presbyterian roots are central to this development. These Neatby explains well. However, as a national position had already been secured to a considerable extent by 1917, before the university's Department of Political Economy became so influential in Ottawa, she also needed to discuss the rise of social sciences with a Canadian orientation and the work published in *Queen's Quarterly*, especially in its "Current Events" column. For a small institution, Queen's did have a strong faculty by 1900, and Neatby's failure to discuss the professors' own conception of their role in society, as shown by the work of Shortt and the other editors of *Queen's Quarterly*, is an unfortunate flaw in a fine history. □

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## Doctor in the House

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Member of the Legislature. by Morton Shulman. Fitzhenry & Whitson. 226 pages, \$10.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88902 417 0).

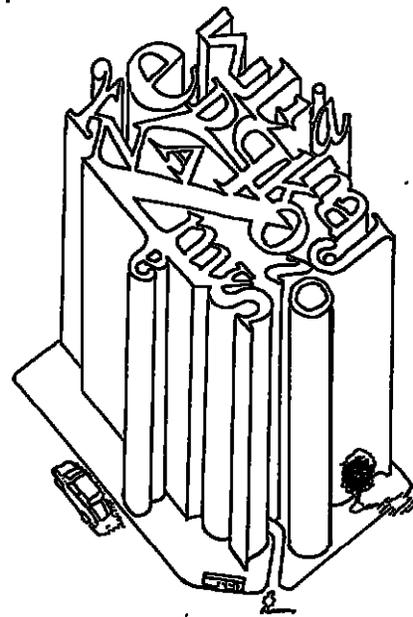
How to Invest Your Money and Profit From Inflation, by Morton Shulman. Hurdig. 160 pages. \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 158 8).

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By JEFF MILLER

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DR. MORTON SHULMAN'S *Member of the Legislature* is a history of his eight years, from 1967 to 1975, as an NDP member in the Ontario Legislature, but it's so bumptious and visceral that we might be reading "Penrod Pretends He's Sir Philip Sidney." A self-made man, millionaire as well as physician, Shulman operates almost exclusively on instinct — which is to say self-preservation and self-promotion. A former Conservative sympathizer, he went NDP not because of a political change of heart, but as an act of vengeance against what has become "the Tory enemy" for that party's complicity in his firing as Toronto's controversial chief coroner (see



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*Coroner, Fitzhenry and Whiteside. 1975).*

There's no question that many of Shulman's political activities (cleaning up corrupt unions, expediting habeas corpus legislation) are remarkable and humane. There's no question that he's brighter and less numbed or stupefied by political Amy Vanderbiltism than are many of his legislative colleagues. But he chinks his own armour by shrugging and mugging all the time. His retrospective here, rendered chronologically where it might better have been thematic, is often inane melodramatic. He (or his editor) tries clumsily for interweaving and cliff-hanging ("Little did I know what a disaster it was later to lead to") and ends with off-the-cuff frayed ends. He tells, to give just one instance, of angrily tabling horror stories about psychiatric hospitals — children in cages, patients sexually abused, beaten. Forced to wear shrunken rags — yet dispatches a health minister who resigns at some of these revelations with: "In a way I was sorry to lose him. He had been such an easy target."

The best parts of the book are anecdotal, outside the half-baked melodramatic structure — still braggartly, but about the kind of self-made men's cockiness we admire and perhaps feel he's earned. When the Toronto morality squad orders *The Happy Hooker* off the shelves, Shulman sells it from his government office, with a 10 per cent discount to fellow MPPs. To dramatize the need for gun control, he smuggles a semi-automatic rifle into the Legislature and waves it around, sending the assembled honourable members under the tables. And when Ma Bell sends in monomaniacal enforcers to deal with equipment Shulman refuses to disconnect from a phone listed in his poodle's name (Ma Bell: "Your dog is accessing the switching network and, unless she removes her dialing machine, we will discontinue her service"). We're reminded of Lily Tomlin's snarky operator. Emu-

time. snidely remarking. "We don't care. We don't have to. We're the phone company." Characteristically, Shulman can't let the anecdote go without waxing glib. "How do they expect a dog to dial?" he concludes. painfully pushing the joke. Look. Me. no hands.

If you have the time, energy, and desire, there's a better than even chance, based on Shulman's own financial success, that you'll find *How to Invest Your Money and Profit from Inflation* useful: if, that is, you can accommodate or ignore such paradoxes as Shulman, friend to the little guy, recommending against investment in South African gold stocks simply because of "the risk to capital" (he calls this a "dispassionate analysis"); regretting ("I weep with embarrassment") for investors' sales his work as a politician to keep phone rates down, eve" though Bell shows "profits of millions ... per year": and criticizing the Canadian government for "forcing the oil companies to sell their oil to Canadians at prices far below the world market price" because "any such artificial ceiling automatically reduces exploration." (Who are the bad guys here, anyhow?)

The book's premise has become a truism in some financial circles: saving for a rainy day was killed by inflation -buy equity on borrowed money. If you're as naive about finance as I am, you may find some of the investment logic and methods confounding. But the writing is lucid enough and there are

plenty of examples, as well as some interesting asides: a chilling (and allegedly instructive, in an almost mythical and apocalyptic manner) history of inflation in Germany, 1914-1923 (by 1923 a dollar was worth one trillion marks!); a documentary lesson on good wine; the case of a man who

herniated himself lifting gold bars into a safely deposit box (fellow paupers take heart), to name a few; if nothing else, *How to Invest* convincingly shows how inflation turns the work ethic topsy-turvy. And it just might (who knows?) make you rich. □

## sentimental journeys

by Joan Haggerty

### Riding herd with Robert Kroetsch over moody northern Manitoba trails

A CALL FROM the Manitoba Art Council. I'm to join Robert Kroetsch on a reading tour of northern Manitoba. I wonder what he's questing now; he must like travelling. He couldn't be going on this milk run for the glamour. He meets me at the Winnipeg airport and drives me to the Arnasons' house to get primed and moneyed. We're each handed a wad of cash for expenses and sent back to the airport to face a two-hour delay, which we spend reading each other's manuscripts, a detoured way of making contact. We peer at each other curiously over the tops of pages.

We fly 500 miles north to The Pas and wander around in the wind. It's bleak. no

trappers' festival now. Bob talks about the rime he came here to research *Gone Indian*. I want to check into the hotel to get ready. Gearing up for a reading for me involves a nap, being alone, an Irish coffee, a special dress. After dinner we drive to the school and find the designated mom on our itinerary. Nobody is there. The lights are on, the seats are arranged, there's even a podium with two glasses of water; we sit in the audience chairs looking at what will be ourselves in the front of the mom reading. Nobody comes. We wait an hour. We leave.

We drink. Both of us have had the experience of reading to the sponsor and his wife and the janitor who'll ask you hundreds

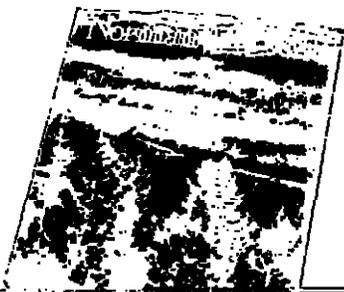
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of questions to compensate for the lack of publicity. But never no one. We're angry. We'll find the sponsor tomorrow to make sure we get paid.

"I used to think you had to be dead to be a writer," Kroetsch says to the high-school class the next day. "You were meant to contract TB et an early age. scribble a Few lyric lines and pass away." He speaks of growing up in a small town in Alberta. looking in the mirror and finding no image to help augment his sense of self and place. So he ret out to create some. How peculiar it is. for instance, and what does it say about Canadians that one of our national symbols is a Mountie? The cop es mythic figure. Kroetsch tells them he's a writer committed to un inventing old mythologies and cresting new ones central to his prairie locale.

We discover es we go along that Canedians often find that notion uncomfortable. People can do whatever they want in literature so long as it happens in faraway or imaginary places. Let them do. the unspeakable. but let them do it in New York so the reader can project his or her den of sin out there. I pick up his theme and remember out loud my own teen-aged search for good books. shopping in the Dunbar library for images of who I might become. I Found little to inspire my womanhood outside of what Betty does in *Double Dare*. and I can't remember one book about a girl growing up on the West Coast. Even *Annie of Green Gables* lived in the mysterious East.

So I read the students a story about a girl

growing up on a place like Bowen Island and how she keeps coming back and back to the dance hall over the yeas. relating to it indifferent ways. I worry that the details, the songs and clothes, won't resonate For them.

"We iron our hair For the first booze cruise dance." Snickers. "Do you iron your hab? Do people still do that?" Embarrassed nods.

"This." says Bob, holding up a copy of his seed catalogue poem, "is a found poem."

"What's a found poem?"

"One lying right in front of you. Printed instructions. for instance." He tells them how he found delight in the language of the seed catalogue. I mention phrasing in a nautical handbook: permission For one ship to chase mother on the high sees is called "the right of hot pursuit." Poems might be waiting in your very inkwell. That's what eyes and ears are For. The poet's mother said if he doesn't wash his ears, cabbages will grow out of them. "What does your mother say?"

"Potatoes."

From The Pas we drive 50 miles to Cranberry Portage, a small lake town with fishing lodges and marina take-off points to the more northern lakes. The school hen is primarily residential: students are brought in from all over the tundra. A, in of fake parkas. and the motel is walled with that ubiquitous plywood panelling; I don't have anything against plywood, but why groove it to look like boards? A velvet matador on

the wall. The waitress brings breakfast:

"Have I Forgotten everything?"

We laugh, she joins us, chain smoking while we eat eggs. Her husband is a Forest ranger. Creeley's lines dash through my mind: "She was the lovely stranger/who married the forest ranger/the duck and the dog/and never was seen again." I eat bacon. The waitress's old man has got the kids eating beaver now. They love it. But theii cat doesn't like moose.

In the afternoon we repeat yesterday's gig. We come alive in the schools. relax in between, reassuring each other we're not bored to hear the same material twice, that we hear more each time. I admire Kroetsch's way with the kids, teasing them, telling them he's going to read them a bear poem and wants some bear stories in return. They must have lots. Again. my Val returns to the dance ball, frames her eyes and the win&w pane with her hands and peers in for a glimpse of her dream-couple waltzing. That summer her girl-friend gets an engagement ring from an older guy. Ha parents make her stop seeing him: they tell her boyfriend if he's still interested he should call back in a year. The chapter ends.

"Does he call back?" asks a boy in the back row.

"I don't know."

The teacher interrupts. "Of course the author knows, George, but she wants you to read the story to find out."

"No," I say. "I really don't. That episode isn't continued."

"YOU see, you see," says George accusingly to his teacher.

"What do you think. George?" I ask. "Do you think he'd cell back?"

"Naaaaaw, he'd go out and look for someone else." He's right.

We're invited to the English teacher's house For dinner before our evening reading. Her bearded husband teaches biology. They're working this far north For the isolation pay, have bought land in the Golf Islands, are coming to the Coast when it's paid for. and want to know what's happening. I tell them about Habitat Forum and. still talking about Habitat. we put on our coats and walk over to the school. Only a few people join us. We're competing with the once-yearly rummage sale and a parents' emergency meeting about some troublesome kids. I bring out a lot of pictures and newspaper columns I wrote as a press officer at Jericho and make that the evening reading. I'm an old-time news bearer travelling from town to town. given Food and lodging in exchange For a story.

In Flin Flon we have lunch in a dining room with no window. Instead, there's a mural of a paddle-wheeler on the Mississippi. It reminds Bob of the manuscripts he keeps receiving that insist on being located in South Carolina with magnolia blossoms and colonial columns. After the first paragraph you know the writer has never been south of the border. We decide our message to the kids will be to write about what they know. No one else has their experience.

The high school is not glad to see us. Bob

# MARVELLOUS SUMMER READING

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COLLINS PUBLISHERS

gave a reading in Winnipeg a few days before to the Manitoba Teachers' Convention and apparently read a bawdy poem. Tut. The word has reached **Flin Flon**. The teacher slaps our wrists by keeping us waiting in the hall until there are only 20 minutes of her class left. When she finally opens the door her averted glance tells me she hopes there won't be time *Corm* to do too much damage. We're mild and mellow; she seems a little disappointed. Ironically, the two librarians in charge of our evening reading, who ought by appearances to be the puritan spinsters, turn out to be a couple of salty old gals; it was the trendy young school teacher who was thin-nostrilled. The librarians are cross about our reception in the high school. "What's wrong with reading about sex anyway? I should think those kids would be better critics than us, don't you. Bunny? They certainly know a lot more about it than I do."

They whisk us home for a Colonel Sanders' dinner. ("I'm a ghastly cook, always was.") They want to make up for the school by entertaining us with the **Flin Flon** gossip. Did we know that **Flin Flon** was half in Saskatchewan, half in Manitoba? We'd noticed, yes. And wasn't it funny, the workmen's compensation was better in Saskatchewan, so if you got butt down the mine you were supposed to crawl as fast as you could across the border. Was there any chance I could go down? They look embarrassed. No woman has ever been down the shaft. Rumour has it that the first man to see a woman in the mine will be killed.

The reading that night goes well: we're even written up the next day in the **Flin Flon Daily Reminder**. (Found poem?) The only contentious moment arises after I've finished my piece, an excerpt from one of my books set in Formentera, Spain. Kroetsch says that while Ms. Haggerty picked a romantic spot to woo us away, he wants to stick with the down-to-earth, the daily reality of a place like **Flin Flon**. The audience smarts. "what d'you mean, **Flin Flon's** not romantic? It's very romantic." They're teasing him but they mean it.

Our last stop is **Snow Lake**. Our hosts tell us they've never had a real author in **Snow Lake** before and that we were spotted immediately because we drove up the main street the wrong way. The horses from *The Studhorse Man* race through the city of Edmonton: Hazard leaves the small town where he was well-known and gets into trouble in the anonymous city. Lots of the kids who go to Winnipeg, the students tell us after, have to come back because it's overwhelming. I pack my briefcase. The girls want to know where to get copies of my book. There hasn't been one book store in any of the towns we've visited. I promise to lend them some when it comes out. Would I come to have a Coke with them? Sure I would. Do I know what they have to read this year? *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. I mean, who's she? What they want, they insist as we slide into the booth -home-made doughnuts today, lucky for me -are books about themselves. □

## on the racks

by Paul Stuewe

### Russian cloaks, French daggers, ocean epics, Toronto gossip, and Irish mist

A BRACE OF excellent-to-enmpetenr thrillers enlivens an otherwise not terribly merry batch of new paperback releases. Philippe Van Rjndt is definitely in the master-craftsman class of the spy genre, as *Blueprint* (Totem, \$2.50) effectively attests. This is an intricately plotted novel of betrayal and revenge set within the upper echelons of Soviet intelligence, and much of its fascination derives from the convincing background of contemporary Russian society against which *Blueprint* unfolds. Unlike most, cloak-and-dagger chroniclers, Van Rjndt never forgets that spies have to be credible human beings before they can be presented as credible spies, and as a consequence his books put most of the proliferating competition to shame.

John Ralston Saul's *The Birds of Frey* (Totem, \$2.50) was hyped as the equal of Frederick Forsyth's *Day of the Jackal* when it appeared in hardcover two years ago. In that both books are mildly diverting thrillers based on a soupçon of recent French political history, they are rather alike. Saul doesn't have Forsyth's capacity for sustaining suspense, but he does write a punchy, staccato prose that keeps things chugging right along, and he's good on the son of procedural detail so essential to the success of the "faction" genre. A solid effort that's more than promising and less than completely accomplished.

Those wondering what Ian Slater might do for an encore after his bestselling *Firespill* will be pleased with *Sea* Gold

(Seal, \$2.50), which like its predecessor makes up in exoticism of situation and general eventfulness whatever it lacks in literary polish. For once I find myself agreeing with Charles Templeton when he dubs Slater "Canada's answer to Alistair Maclean": both are perfect for those times when only whamming and bawling will do, and both will be primary sources for the first structuralist philosopher attempting a definition of the archetypal qualities of the "quick read."

Turning to "serious" fiction, Doris Anderson's *Two Women* (Signet, \$2.25) is of interest for its vivid descriptions of Toronto's social whirl. There's a sense of action and vitality in these passages that more than compensates for a somewhat hackneyed plot where everything that can go wrong does. The result is a novel of moderately engaging characters set against a totally engrossing background. It's soon to tell whether *Two Women* announces anything as significant as "the birth of a major novelist," but the book is certainly much better than several rather churlish reviews had led me to expect.

It's difficult to know what to say about Harry J. Boyle's *The Luck of the Irish* (Signet, \$2.25), except that it seems to be written out of a need to be discovered in *flagrante ethnico*. It's so goldarn cute 'n' folksy, and so quickly crams any character exhibiting indications of individuality into a lovable ethnic stereotype, that after a while you feel that it just wouldn't be right to dislike the book. On the other hand, it

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wouldn't be wrong to imply that conscientious parents will have grave doubts about letting their offspring many any of its *dramatis personae*.

Finally, some unpleasant but necessary words about a book that almost certainly would not have been published if it had been written by John or Jane Doe. Morley Callaghan's *Close to the Sun Again* (Signet, \$2.50) is one of the most ineptly plotted and stylistically graceless novels I've ever read, and it's only made marginally bearable by spurts of physical action that steel one for the next clump of turgid prose. A major reassessment of Callaghan's work is long overdue, although the comments of two contributors to this publication's CanLit survey, "Balancing the Books" (January, 1979), suggest that we may be approaching a more balanced view of a writer who has been absurdly over-praised by many of our literary mandarins. In the meantime, be warned that *Close to the Sun Again* is far removed indeed from any sources of light.

Shorter takes:

### FICTION

*The Bittersweet Tree*. Jane Barrett (PaperJacks, \$2.50) "A pioneer woman's triumphant search for love," says the jacket, and PaperJack's triumphant bid for Harlequin Romance readers, says

here. But I'm just a-guessin'. mind, fer lands sakes.

*Murder Has Your Number*. Hugh Garner (Seal, \$2.25). Tough-talking Inspector McDumont curmudgeons his way through another mystery, and after insulting anyone with minimal sensibilities finally gets his killer. The gratuitous moralizing is annoying, the dialogue is unbelievable, and the amateur sociology is unbearable; and as soon as the novelty of a Toronto detective wears off you can look forward to cracking the Inspector's spines at your local remainder store.

### NON-FICTION

*Canadian Movie Quiz Book*. Michael Walsh (Signet, \$2.25). Question: What's a Canadian Movie Quiz Book? Answer: A lot of fun, and a reminder that Canada's Hollywood is ever so much more significant than Hollywood's Canada.

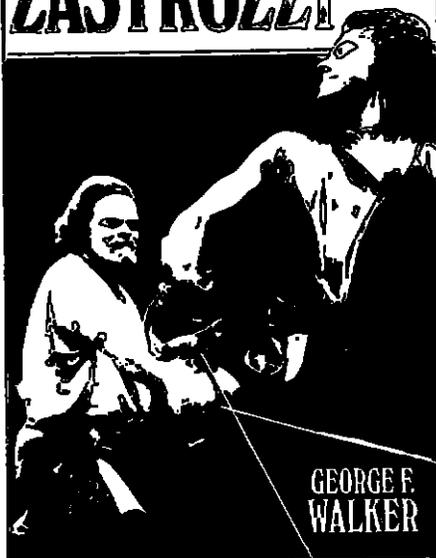
*The Corvette Navy: True Stories From Canada's Atlantic War*. James B. Lamb (Signet, \$2.25). An enjoyable tour of duty on the high seas, and a well-written and thoughtful one to boot. Anchors aweigh for all hands.

*Memoirs of a Great Detective*. John Wilson Murray (Toten, \$2.25). Ripping good yams about late 19th-century cops and criminals from a Canadian dick who usually got his person. □

## first impressions

by Douglas Hill

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Come the millennium peckers will still be up at Chiliastr U. — if not in 1951 Fords

MOST ACADEMIC novels lack substance: not surprising, considering their subject. So the good ones—such as Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* or Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution*—succeed by style, by the shape and texture of their versions of human comedy and pain. Jack MacLeod's *Zinger and Me* (McClelland & Stewart, 240 pages, \$12.95) is not one of the good ones. It's amusing but not funny, interesting but not exciting.

*Zinger and Me* takes the form of letters to and from one J.T. McLauhehlin, a tenure-crazed assistant professor at Chiliastr University in Toronto. His correspondents are old friends, a former teacher, his editor, his parents; the matters taken up include J.T.'s job, his scholarly writing, the teaching profession, politics, fathers and sons, and Zinger. This last is Francis Z. Springer, a rambunctious 40-year-old adolescent, a "reporter for the Prince Albert Northern Light. J.T.'s long-time buddy, and -what else? — "an enigma."

As MacLeod handles the epistolary structure, it develops satisfactorily plausible characters. But the form also works, I think,

to obstruct rather than complement his talent for dialogue, and it certainly lures him into lecturing — delivering formalized and inert speeches — when an attempt to represent life being lived might have succeeded better. The book moves erratically, scattering tone and point of view, stalling at times, then jumping forward: the reader's attention is held only fitfully.

My biggest problem is with the book's attempts to be funny. A lot of the jokes are topical, of limited scope and life; others are old saws, soaped not sharpened. The humour might best be described as graduate-school macho-genteel, keep-your-peeker-up stuff for the lads at the faculty club. I found it self-conscious, puerile, and tedious, inoffensive but not nearly so clever and bawdy as the author seems to think it is.

MacLeod has opinions about a number of personal and professional concerns: he leashes up most of his arguments and takes them out for walks at one time or another. These will all be of interest mainly to urban, middle-class, middle-aged academics — U of T professors and *Canadian Forum*

readers. That's demonstrably a small audience, shrinking fast. I don't think *Zinger and Me* has much to say to a larger.

\* \* \*

**Peckertracks**, by Stan Dragland (Coach House, 140 pages, \$5.50 paper) is an unexpected pleasure, a novel about growing up that manages to be refreshing and bright without being precious, illuminating without being tortured or ponderous. It makes a strong case for the virtues of control and tact.

The book is a chronicle (Dragland's word) of a few unspectacular but inevitable years in the maturing of Percy Lewis, following him from his arrival with his parents and sister to live in Depot, Alta., to his imminent departure for university in Edmonton. All the anticipated subjects are here: family tension, pranks and sports and studies and jobs, sexual misadventures and fantasies. These are presented in several series of sharply focused vignettes, each

catching in a sentence, paragraph, or page, a precise image of a teenager in time and place.

This snapshot-structure is hardly original, but Dragland's care and talent make it alive. At times the patterning of narrative voices seems almost too tidy; one might ask if technique — understatement and ellipsis — cannot overwhelm meaning, stifle emotion. In this case I think it doesn't, but rather sets them free. The book works, much like *The Last Picture Show* worked, to evoke a feeling for the inexplicable lacunae of adolescent understanding. It creates tight frames, scrupulously spare settings and situations; we must fit our memories into them, measure our emotions against them.

If there's nothing really startling, nothing quite unique or earthshaking, in *Peckertracks*, there's considerable truth and remarkable skill. The book asks one large question cleanly: "Where are the good memories?" Its answer is not definitive, merely directive. That's enough. □

## the browser

by Michael Smith

## The ditsy twitch who decided to kiss and yell — with the help of an English ghost

FROM THE DAY his nibs married her, I've thought of Margaret Trudeau as a political kind of *Playboy* bunny. You know the myth: beautiful women with degrees in anthropology or sociology who are supposedly as well-endowed upstairs (in the brain department) as they are somewhat lower down, at the balcony level, where their more obvious assets are put on display. Certainly that's the notion the mass media originally promoted, even though Margaret revealed what a ditsy twitch she really was every time she opened her mouth. Fact is, she's not only the kind that kisses and tells, she also positively broadcasts it, and — however much anybody may pity or despise her with considerable financial success. Unfortunately, in her book *Beyond Reason* (Random House, illustrated, 256 pages, \$12.95 cloth) an awful lot of what she tells concerns her clothes, interior decorating, and breast feeding, instead of scandal in high places.

Not that Margaret actually wrote the book, of course. That chore fell to Caroline Moorehead, a British journalist whose Anglicisms keep popping up without benefit of translation into Canadian. She writes "pavements" when she means sidewalks and radio and television announcers are regularly referred to as "presenters." Worse, *The Vertical Mosaic*, the well-known sociological study, is described as a *thriller* about the Canadian establishment. And, though Margaret continually professes no interest in government, surely her political illiteracy doesn't extend to identifying the NDP as the National Democ-

rat Party. She also reports that her father, James Sinclair, was a minister in the Pearson cabinet (it was St. Laurent's), and sets the 1970 October Crisis in November (during which, by the way, she says she stayed by Pierre's side, in bed, at Sussex Drive some months before they were married).

Readers of the excerpts published in Canadian newspapers — about Margaret's youthful rebellion, the secret courtship, and her fling with the Rolling Stones — missed one good ironic hit: a conversation with then-Rime Minister Ali Bhutto of Pakistan during a visit to Canada while Parliament was debating the abolition of capital punishment. "He was horrified. 'We have 350-400 executions every year in Pakistan,' he told me, almost cheerfully." Gallows humour from a man who later became the victim of perhaps the most notorious political execution of 1979.

Sara Jeannette Duncan was no dumb bunny. During a career that began in the early 1880s, she wrote 18 novels, a travel book, short stories, an autobiography, and several plays, in addition to working as a newspaperwoman in three countries. As T. E. Tausky, the editor of *Selected Journalism* (Tecumseh Press, 120 pages, \$3.95 paper) explains, she followed "the familiar Canadian pattern" by proving herself first in the United States before she was able to land a job with the *Toronto Globe*. Though she had feminist leanings, she still believed in a double standard — noting in one column, for instance, that while there was a place for women in

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journalism. certain aspects of reporting were hampered by "their rather limited and uncertain views of things and their diffusive inclinations in talking about them."

While she regretted the indifference of Canadians toward a national literature ("The Province of Ontario is one great camp of the Philistines"), Duncan clearly sided with the stout-maple school of Can-Lit. She noted that "literary work that is bought and sold at an added consideration because it is 'Canadian' is stamped with meretricious value. . . . Gold is gold all over the world, and the literary standard should be equally unalterable." In fact, she suggests that in the late 1880s some Canadian writers were submitting their stuff to U.S. and British publishers not because they felt undervalued at home, but because they tended to be overrated by literary nationalists in phrases "more candied than candid."

Another pioneer of sorts was the late Ralph Edwards whose *Ralph Edwards of Lonesome Lake* (as told to Ed Gould. Hancock House, illustrated, 296 pages. \$10.95 cloth) recounts his adventures through more than 50 years of homesteading in the wilderness 300 miles north of Vancouver. Edwards was so tough that he once broke his back (either in a fall from a horse or a wrangle with a bull -he's not sure which), and didn't learn about it until years later when a doctor noticed the healed spine during a physical examination. Included are lots of encounters with wolves and grizzlies. Edwards's attempts at ranching and fur farming, and the interesting information that bear grease is useful not just for waterproofing boots, but also for cooking doughnuts and as mosquito repellent. Edwards is probably best known for his work in conserving the trumpeter swan, whose numbers had dwindled to such an endangered level in the early 1900s that about one third of the world's trumpeter population was wintering at Lonesome Lake.

In *Westering* (Antonson Publishing Ltd., Surrey, B.C., 175 pages., \$6.95 paper) Richard Thomas Wright never quite demonstrates the consummate unity with nature that Edwards had to achieve to survive. Wright, a cinematographer and photographer, travels in and out of the bush in a camper van. Though his ideals are admirable enough, his essays and journal entries never seem to get beyond a preachy level that ought to rankle even the converted. He waxes eloquent on the subject of rivers ("It could be said that knowing the Fraser is analogous to knowing God"), which makes him the enemy of, among other things, the hydro-power lobby; but I kept wishing he would do something more than complain. In "Northern Journey," for example, Wright bitches about an inexperienced guide who commits such environmental atrocities as shooting at sitting ducks and leaving fires unattended-but nobody thinks to make him stop, as obviously somebody should. Instead, Wright and a couple of others drop out of the (rip

early, presumably allowing the despoiler to continue on his merry way, unchastised and unrepentant.

Finally, anybody who loves boats (as I do) should take a look at *The Little Boats: Inshore Fishing Craft of Atlantic Canada* by Ray MacKean and Robert Percival

(Brunswick Press, 111 pages, \$12.95 paper). It contains paintings (by Percival) and models (by MacKean) of everything from a Shelburne dory to a Saint John Harbour salmon skiff. In other words, a coffee-table book — and, like all coffee-table books, quite useless, but beautiful. □

## interview

by Geoff Hancock

### Why independent booksellers vent their Rath on chain stores and deep discounts

YOU MAY FIND the atmosphere somewhat strained in your neighbourhood book store these days. The reason is that the stores are front-line outposts in a civil war raging within the retail book industry. The fight is between the independent booksellers, with their tight profit margins, and the chain-store operations, which can offer attractive price discounts because of bulk-buying practices and consequently now command 40 per cent of the retail sales in Canada. Many independents advocate a net price agreement-in effect, a fixed price set by the publisher -but there are some philosophical and legal drawbacks to such a proposal. At the same time the retail industry as a whole is contemplating new merchandising technology in the form of in-store computers hooked into central distribution houses. "This could dramatically simplify ordering and stock-keeping, but perhaps at a cost of wiping out the traditional agency system.

The man in the hot-seat in all this is 29-year-old Bernie Rath, who took over as executive director of the 450-member Canadian Booksellers Association last November. The CBA, which holds its annual meeting in Toronto July 28-31, represents most of the major independent booksellers across Canada. (Two of the three big chains — Classics and Smiths — hold single memberships in the CBA; the third, Coles, does not.) Rath graduated from McMaster University with degrees in physical education and political science (a useful combination for his present post).

joined Doubleday as a sales rep, and later moved over to Macmillan as sales manager. His schedule keeps him pretty busy -he travelled 10,000 miles in one three-week period this spring -but he still finds time for studies toward an M.B.A. at York University. Geoff Hancock managed to snatch an hour with him at the CBA's Toronto office to discuss the challenges facing booksellers:

**Books In Canada: Can the independent book stores survive in Canada?**

**Rath:** I think they can survive, but they are at a distinct disadvantage. One hears constantly that the independent is threatened because 40 per cent of the business is done through the retail book chains, whereas in the United States the comparable percentage, is between 1.5 and 20 per cent. I'd like to change the thinking to the more positive view that independents represent 60 per cent of the business. We provide a service that the chains don't provide, both for publishers and public.

**BIC: Such as?**

**Rath:** There are 340,000 English-language titles in print with about another 40,000 coming out each year. Nobody can stock everything, but it's good to have access to them. You can get special order service with an independent book store. W.H. Smith provides this service, but you can't do that with Coles.

**BIC: What about the problem of book discounts?**

**Rath:** Basically, the independent bookseller has a problem of size. He does not have the resources to allow him to make volume purchases. If an independent buys an assortment of five books right across the publisher's list, in many cases he doesn't get any kind of reinforcement or more discount for stocking the breadth of the list. But if a chain with 100 stores buys live books for each atom, he gets a discount based on 500 books. He has the advantage of purchasing power. In addition, the chains have central distributing facilities, but the



Bernie Rath

independents have to pay for freight out of their own pockets.

**BiC:** *How can the independent bookseller compete with chain stores?*

**Rath:** We need to give the independent access to remainders. Right now the chains effectively have exclusive access to remainders of 2,000 to 3,000 copies. We could form a buying group to take advantage of our own buying power. At the same time we don't want to be a big chain or mini-chain ourselves. Independents want to be independent. We need flexibility so they will continue to have input into what the group buys.

**BiC:** *Should there be a net price agreement between publisher and book store?*

**Rath:** That's not a question that can be answered yes or no. It involves so many things. We live in a free-enterprise society. It happens to think the less government control the better. But when you look at the inequities in the competitive nature of the industry, and at the service the independent bookseller provides in the breadth and scope of title representation, and the threat of the deep-discount merchandising policies of the chains, then you have to look at a net price agreement. Holland, Germany, and Britain have strong bookselling communities basically because their margins are protected by the net price agreement. To allow

them to have full-service, full-line book stores; The publisher sets the price. Everybody buys the book at the discount schedule, and the price is protected for a year from the date of publication so that nobody can sell below cost to convert business. After that year it can be sold at any price or returned to the publisher.

**BiC:** *What's involved in getting a net price agreement?*

**Rath:** It's a co-operative venture among the publishers, the booksellers, and the government. At the moment, retail price maintenance is illegal in this country. We have to take the British test case approach that "Books Are Different," as their study was titled. We have to make it known by educating the public and the government. That books are different from cars or stereos. Retail price maintenance would protect the cultural integrity that books provide. Without retail price maintenance, a number of books in the future might not be published. For example, would Timothy Findley's *The Wars* ever have been published if there had been no independent book stores? *The Wars* was not stocked by Coles, nor was Roger Caron's *Go Boy!* this year's winner of the Governor General's Award for non-fiction.

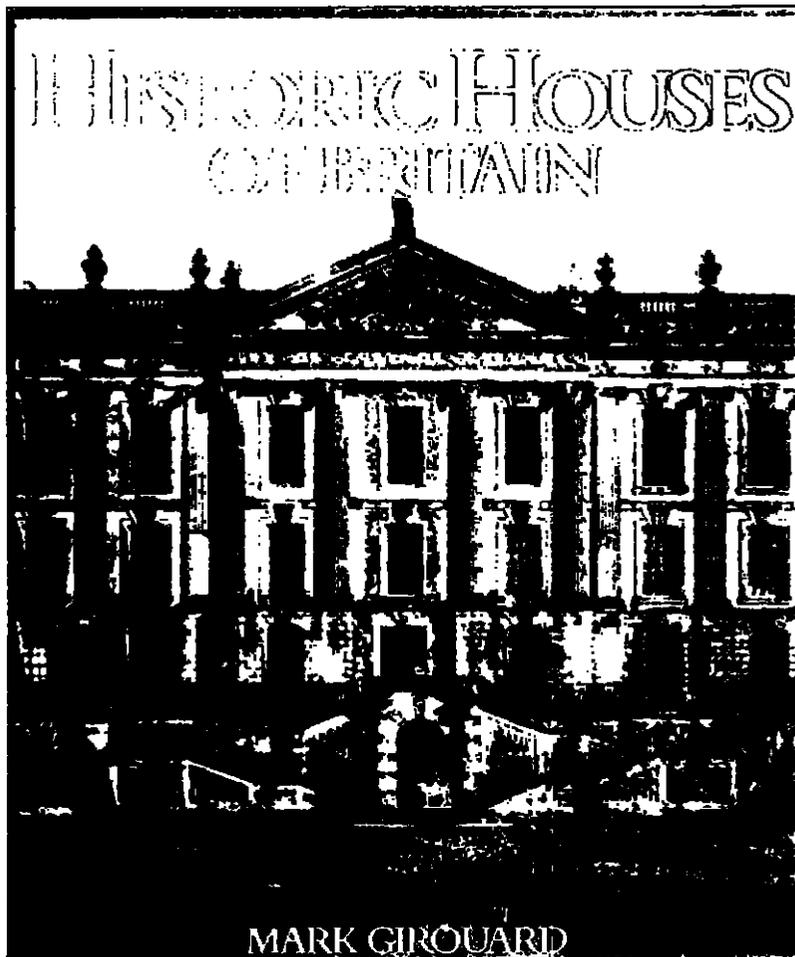
**BiC:** *But the public gets cheaper books in the chains.*

**Rath:** I can understand that in the short run.

But next time you buy a book at a cheaper price, look particularly at the merchandise mix. In a Coles store, it's 75 per cent remainders - high margin items - end 25 per cent new books. These are discounted to get the customer in the store not only to trade dollars, but also to buy something else. This is where the ingredient comes in that everybody seems to be missing. That \$12.95 book on sale for 53.99 looks like a bargain, but that book has probably been bought for 60 to 70 cents as a remainder and priced up to \$3.99. On that one book they're making 300-per-cent margin. On the new books, they're making 10 or 20 per cent. Gee subsidizes the other. In addition, Coles publish their own books and sell them in their stores, often excluding competing titles. The independent book store will also sell remainders, but not to the extent that they dominate the selection. They will have a different merchandise mix.

**BiC:** *How would the demise of the independent bookseller affect the publisher?*

**Rath:** Before he publishes a book, the publisher's marketing people will have to contact the chains and find out if they'll distribute the book. If they say no, and there's no alternative method of distribution, the publishing decision will be negated and the book will not be produced. Now obviously this threat does not exist unless the independent book stores are out of business. And that's a long way off. □



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## Letters to the Editor

### PREELECTION DRAGON

Sir:  
I was afraid, when I read Roch Carrier's recent essay (*Books in Canada*, February, later reprinted in the *Montreal Star*) on the state of Quebec literature after Nov. 15, 1976, following the victory of the Parti Québécois, that English Canadians would use it, as an alibi to stop thinking.

Although I agree completely with Roch Carrier's analysis, I believe he should have kept his feelings and thoughts to himself, or at least to those who could well understand him — the Québécois writers.

Now in April's issue of *Books in Canada*, Wayne Grady proves me right. About *Dragon Island*, recently translated by David Ellis, the critic writes: "One cannot help recalling Roch Carrier's statement that since the victory of the Parti Québécois the mm, strident voices in Quebec have been reduced to preaching to the converted. 'In the pas,' writes Carrier [and pursues Grady], no doubt with *Knife on the Table* [Godbout, 1965] and Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode* [same year] in mind. 'Quebec literature was written in opposition: it, demanded and it denounced.' Recent books, however, 'have made fewer and fewer demands.'"

It so happens that *Dragon Island* was pub-

lished, in French, before the Parti Québécois go into power; I don't, believe it, was instrumental in the election, but I cannot accept it was then "preaching to the convened."

One would hope a critic would take the necessary precautions before disposing of history and books as if they were paper handkerchiefs.

Jacques Godbout  
Outremont, Que.

*Wayne Grady replies:* Insofar as M. Godbout's novel is about what can happen when an individual's (or a nation's) destiny is determined by outside, essentially hostile forces, there is little in *Dragon Island* to stimulate fresh debate. The folksy chorus of warnings that such vanguards of American culture as canned Coke and Jerry Lewis lead inevitably to corporate and corporeal takeovers (what Marcel Rioux calls "socioeconomic imperialism" and Robin Mathews calls "cultural imperialism" which are one hydra) are as old as the Laurentides, older certainly than the installation of the PQ and the publication of *Dragon Island* in 1976. The point of my review was to suggest that his novel was as much a symptom as a voice of unrest, disquietude, and I cited Roch Carrier's lament not to indicate the extent to which I had stopped thinking, but because I felt it was more familiar to my readers than the following equally applicable quotation from Andre d'Allemagne's *Colonialism in Quebec* (1966): "Colonialism reduces the culture of the colonized person to the level of folklore and propaganda."

As for "preaching to the convened," what is one to make of a novelist who advises a fellow novelist to "keep his feelings and thoughts to himself," or to preach only "to those who could well understand him?"

### BROWSER GALLS GATHERER

Sic

Were I a subscriber to *Books in Canada*, I would cancel my subscription with an indignant letter. Since I pick it up each month, free of charge, let me assure you that I would if I did, and indignantly too — in order to protest Michael Smith's Rip, single-paragraph dismissal of *Colombo's Book of Canada* ("The Browser," April).

First, allow me to reassure *BiC* readers that my book is no, full of "recycled" material. Purchasers need not worry that it duplicates material found in my quote and reference books. It is an original anthology and everything in it — well over 200 items — has been freshly researched and given a new context.

Second, the four stories it offers the reader are not "obscure" but (and certainly this is my point in including them) central to the Canadian psyche. An Jules Verne, Nellie McClung, and A.M. Klein "obscure"? I will let the reader judge.

Third, I do not "tout" anything in the book, less, of all the lyrics of "A Place to Stand," I included that song, and also Vigneault's "Mon Pays," because its words are known to millions. Patriotism may not be much fun these days, with regionalism so highly regarded, but it has its place — in the pages of my book, if not in Smith's world-view.

Fourth, allow me to enumerate some components of *Colombo's Book of Canada* that Smith failed to mention: 33 poems on Canadian historical events, complete with prose accounts of the events themselves; 38 documents, reproduced whole or in part, to dramatize the evolution of a national spirit; lyrics of all 11 national songs; a chronology of over 400 important dates, complete to the day of the month; finally, 24 pages of Meek-and-while and colour illustration of our imagery, symbology, ad scenery.

What surprises me the mm, is that Smith does not see... to be aware that *Colombo's Book of Canada*, as a popular compendium of Canadiana meant for the general reader, follows in the wake of such anthologies as Robins' *A Pocketful of Canada* (1946) and Toye's *A Book of Canada* (1962). Every once in a while an editor comes along who wants to "sum up" the country. It would seem to me that worthwhile criticism would focus on how well the country has been caught between covers.

If I possess (in Smith's words) the "maggie instinct," perhaps I am not wrong in suggesting that his is that of the scavenger. I find my instinct corresponds nicely to the mosaic structure of our society, permitting me to create not a "nervy" collection but a "variegated vision" of the country. What Smith's does is not very clear.

John Robert Colombo  
Toronto

### BOO TO THE BELLY-DANCERS

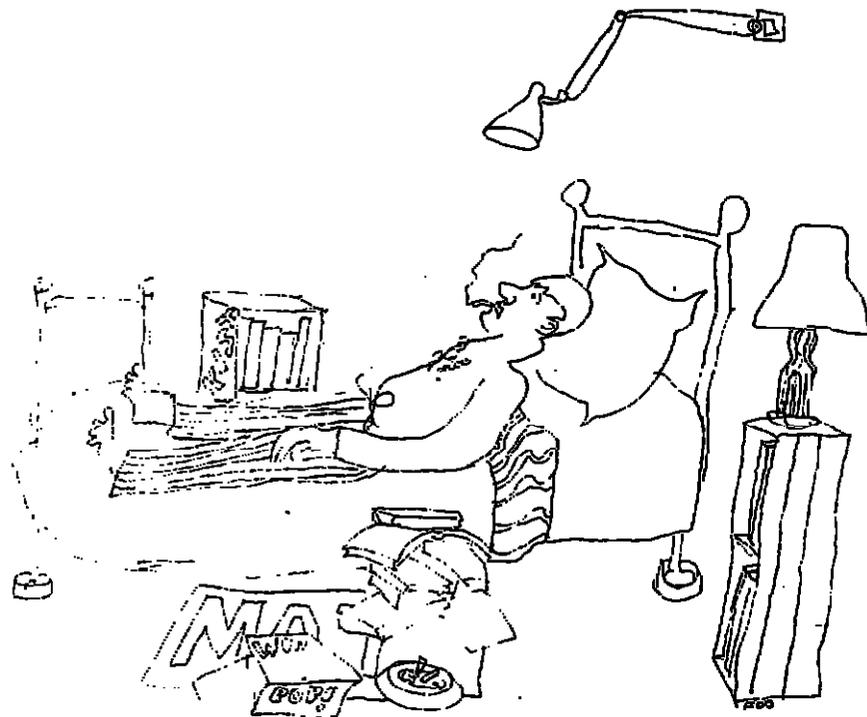
Sir:

The debate on books in schools makes *Books in Canada* much more interesting reading, as does the growing emphasis on books written outside Canada.

Paul Steuwe (October) provoked many letters. He also provoked the article by Timothy Findley (December) which I found to be a case of very poor rhetoric (splenetic and clumsy) arguing in favour of both elitist and inbred pride and, ultimately, totalitarianism. Such outright rejection of parents' wishes as Findley displayed reveals contempt for the role of parents in their children's education and confusion between two entirely different issues.

## men and their libraries: 6

by Foo



First, there is the issue of censorship within the nation, community, or society itself. That is a matter that is complicated up to a certain point, though many anti-censorship people are worried about the rising flood of effluvia from commercial pornographers in the country.

Secondly, there is the question of which books should be set for reading end study in schools. In the first case, the State might impose censorship. In the second, the State (which controls mass-schooling) imposes compulsory attendance at school even when the teaching or influences in those schools may run contrary to those favoured by the parents. Thus, when books that some parents regard as harmful or degrading are in course curricula, we have the opposite of freedom; we have something imposed.

This mires of the basic issue of rights. Do parents, indeed, have primary rights in the education of their children, or can that role be abrogated by the State? Some parents do not want Alice Munro's description of indecent exposure by a ditty old man in *Of Girls and Women*, or Margaret Laurence's detailed account of preparation for extra-marital intercourse (with condoms into the bargain), or Irving Layton's sexual boasting placed before their children for study. By traditional Christian standards (indeed, by Judaeo-Christian standards) such things are regarded as unfit for school reading. It is cant to argue that students would have choice of other text: the pressures are still there. What is the solution?

Well, first, the whole situation brings a burning focus on the nature of schooling. If, when some of these books are pushed into schools' curricula, some parents feel imposed upon, then, clearly, the educational issue is brought to the point where schools should be independent of State compulsion and as varied and prolific in type and number as the religious and philosophical outlooks of parents. More independent schools should flourish. The books-in-schools issue is not one of censorship, but one of freedom versus the planners who introduce books that offend so many people. In my case, people who want to read these books can do so outside schools. Additionally, I detect in the actions and propaganda of the Writers' Union some degree of financial squealing: everyone knows how much they depend on the "captive audience" in schools.

This brings me to the broader (but not deeper) issue of literature generally. At present, "the belly-dancers" of Canadian literature (as Dudek called some poets of the 1960s) are gyrating wildly. Fred Cogswell assures us (in a spirit of determinism almost Calvinist turned Darwinian) that violence and sex must increase more and more as Canadian literature grows. Why? Is it progress? Read *C.V.II* and see the mass of dull, unmusical prose that cut up into beads of bony thought, passes for poetry in that representative journal. See how masterpieces are neglected for minor Canadian books in the schools. Note carefully the deliberate neglect of such fine short-story writers as G. D. Roberts and Duncan Campbell Scott in recent anthologies used in many schools. In *Kaleidoscope* the stories are almost devoid of rich substance. The anthologies used 20 years ago (especially the combined poetry and prose ones) had a judicious blend of Canadian and English and American literature (e.g. *Prose and Poetry for Canadians*, *Argosy to Adventure*, and others). Many students are made to read Alice Memo, Al Purdy, Irving Layton, Margaret Atwood et al. but know nothing of the fine work of Carman, Roberts, Lampman, D. C. Scott, Grove, Callaghan, and Gabrielle Roy. The [work of the] former is simply inferior es literature and also alienated from the compassion

end humanism of the mainstream of European literature.

Above all, students still need the best poetry and prose of the past. We do not have that kind of inspiration in *Canadian writing today*, except in small, relatively neglected pockets. Dorothy Livesay had the gift, and she produced some gems of poetry; but then, as with many later writers, succumbed to the malaise of erotic introversion.

Finally, two things. It's not surprising that, in your January survey, Findley should have listed B. J. Pratt as an overrated poet; by Findley's standards, what else can we expect? George Woodcock recently praised David Dooley's book on Canadian fiction for its emphasis on the moral imagination and its call for fell, comparative estimates of Canadian work. It's a great pity that he did not practice those views in his editing of *Canadian Literature*, which, while it printed some good work, also printed mainly poor stuff. Let us open the windows to the past and to the winds of current, creative debate. Good poets are out there, waiting for a chance! Traditional critical standards must be faced.

Peter Hunt  
Dartmouth, N.S.

### BLAIS EN ANGLAIS

Sir:

One point about your marvelous article on Marie-Claire Blais in the February *Books in Canada*. John Hofess says, near the end of the article: "There is still one novel, *L'Insoumise*, published in 1966, not yet translated into English." Not so. We published it last fall under the title of *The Fugitive*.

Sally Eaton  
Oberon Press  
Ottawa

### HEY-BOB, A-RR-BOB

Sir:

I want to compliment you on Mark Abley's article "Bob's Our Uncle" in the May issue.

It is time someone gave Robert Weaver this kind of public recognition in a national publication. His efforts in the promotion of the short story in this country will become an integral part of our literary history.

Abley's article will be required reading for my Canadian Literature class at Oromocto High School.

Michael O. Nowlan  
Oromocto, N.B.

## CanWit No. 44

*A deoh who was terribly hobble,  
Cast stones that were only cobble,  
And bats that were ding  
From a shot that was sling  
And never hit links that were bobol.*

THIS IS AN example of a backward or reverse limerick. It was one of the favourites of James Thurber, who could create such things by the hour. Or at least that's what we're told by J. T. McLaughlin, one of the characters in *Zinger and Me*, Jack MacLeod's novel-of-correspondence, which is reviewed on page 28. We'll pay \$25 for the wittiest reverse limerick-on

any subject — we receive by Sept. 1. Address: CanWit No. 44. Books in Canada, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto, M5A 1N4.

### RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 42:

READERS WERE ASKED to aid the blurb writers at McClarkan & Newspider by panning a few golden phrases from scurrilous reviewers' otherwise muckraking reviews of *Resurfacing in Sarnia* by Joyce Castor. The winner is Michael P. J. Kennedy of Saskatoon, who receives \$25 for the following examples of the editor's art:

□ "This bwk is truly terrible. If the publishers were smart they would dynamite every book printed. Hopefully it's a fluke, one of a kind, never to be duplicated."

— Dartmouth *Telegram-Post*  
Blurb: "This book is truly dynamite. One of a kind, never to be duplicated."

□ "This novel is easily the best example of literary ineptitude and lack of creativity in Canadian Anion."

— Maniwaki *Courier-Times-Herald*  
Blurb: "This novel is easily the best example of literary creativity in Canadian fiction."

□ "This novel will take its rightful place among Canada's literary achievements: dead lest! Its plot is superb as an example of hollow superficiality. Its characters are barely alive, as only two dimensional stereotypes can be. Its major theme is totally

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**Blurb:** "This novel will take its rightful place among Canada's literary achievements. . . Its plot is superb . . . its characters . . . alive. . . Its major theme . . . superior."

#### Honourable mentions:

- "Mrs. Castor's portrayal of a woman in love with a maple tree moved me to tears of boredom and frustration."  
**Blurb:** "Mrs. Castor's portrayal of a woman in love . . . moved me to tears."  
— Barbara Anne Eddy, Montreal

\* \* \*

- "The theme of 'coming home' (or 'going home,' as the case may be — each equally hackneyed) has reached the ultimate heights of the ridiculous in Joyce Castor's *Resurfacing in Sarnia*, a dismal first novel. One wonders how an unknown writer convinced a reputable publisher such as McClarkan & Newspider to print what can only be referred to as rubbish."

— Sachs Harbour *Herald*

**Blurb:** "The theme of 'coming home' . . . has reached the ultimate heights . . . in Joyce Castor's *Resurfacing in Sarnia*."

— Joan Hennessey, Montreal

\* \* \*

- "I am sure — in fact certain — that I would fire the editors whose choice it was to publish this abomination. This writer has no talent, and has never produced and could never produce a winner."  
**Blurb:** ". . . Sure . . . fire . . . choice. . . This writer has talent . . . and has . . . produced . . . a winner."

— Julian Lewin, Ottawa



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## The editors recommend

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

### FICTION

**Agook**, by Yves Theriault, translated from the French by John David Allan, McGraw-Hill Ryerson. A continuation of the Inuit saga begun 30 years ago with *Agaguk*, this is a bitterly pessimistic tale about retreat into primitive darkness.

**Hambro's Itch**, by Howard Robens and Jack Wasserman, Doubleday. A cool, taut biological thriller about loose germs and overpopulation, although our reviewer was bugged by its slickness.

**Children of My Heart**, by Gabrielle Roy, translated from the French by Alan Brown, McClelland & Stewart. Roy at her finest in a series of linked stories about a young country school-ma'm and the pupils through whom she discovers poignant truths about the world.

### NON-FICTION

**Louis "David" Riel: "Prophet of the New World"**, by Thomas Flanagan, U of T Press. In what is probably the best single analysis of Riel, Flanagan presents the rebel leader not as a madman or an early version of Tommy Douglas but as an ultra-conservative millenarian.

### POETRY

**Somebody Told Me I Look Like Everyman**, by Raymond Filip, Pulp Press. Word-play, parody, passion, and above all wit from a poet who asserts "the inalienable right to alienation."

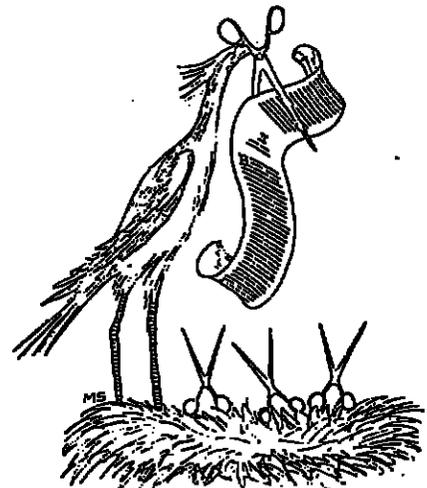
**Hanging In**, by Raymond Souster, Oberon Press. Delightful perceptions, mostly of the past, from a poet who has learned to pull his cute punch lines.

## 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:

Another Wordsandwich, edited by Rick Wilks and Anne Millyard. Books by Kids.  
Approaches to Administrative Analysis, by J. A. Barahill. McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
The Body, edited by David Phillips and Hope Anderson. Tallow House.  
Canada Made Me, by Norman Levine, Deneau & Greenberg.  
Canadian Family Law, by Malcolm C. Kronby, General.  
The Canadian Voter's Guide, edited by Fraser Kelly. M & S.  
Cape Breton, photographs by Owen Fitzgerald. Oxford.  
Caribbean Integration, by W. Andrew Avline. Frances Pinter Ltd.  
A Casual Affair, by Sylvia Fraser. Signet.  
The Children's Picture Atlas. Hayes Publishing Ltd.  
China Hand, by Bruno Skoggaard. M & S.  
Classes et Pouvoir, by Nicole Laurin-Frenette. Les Presses de L'Université de Montréal.  
Conflict over the Columbia, by Neil A. Swainson. McGill-Queen's University Press.  
Crossing Frontiers, edited by Dick Harrison. University of Alberta Press.

Ecology versus Politics in Canada, edited by William Leiss. U of T Press.  
A Family Album, by William Bauer, Oberon.  
Fragile Federation, by L. Marsden and E. Harvey. McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
From Front Street to Queen's Park, by Eric Arthur, M & S.  
Georgina, by Francis Paget Hen, Paget Press.  
Gentlemen, Players and Politicians, by Dalton Camp, Deneau & Greenberg.  
Getting Doctored, by Martin Shapiro. Between the Lines.  
The Good Spy Guide: Disguise and Make-up, by Christopher Rawson et al., Hayes Publishing Ltd.  
Hamlet's Twin, by Robert Aquin, translated by Sheila Fischman, M & S.  
A Heritage of Canadian Art: The McMichael Collection, Clarke Irwin.  
I Set the Fire which Destroyed Our Home, by Arrum Malos, Paget Press.  
Ice Skating for Pleasure, by Howard Boss, Gage.  
Images of Glass, by Sandra Nelson Rempel. Fiddlehead.  
In Touch, by Dr. Beryl Chernick and Dr. Noam Chernick. Signet.  
Joe Clark: A Portrait, by David L. Humphreys, Totem.  
Journeys I and II, by Ian French, M & S.  
Kate Aitken, by Joan Cochrane, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.  
Labour Economies in Canada, third edition, by Sylvia Ostry and Mahmood A. Zaidi, Macmillan.  
Later: Poems 1973-1978, by E. A. Lacey, Catalyst Press.  
Leisure Winemaking, by Desmond Lundy. Detselig Enterprises Ltd.  
Little Jack am' de Tax-Man, by Antoinette Gollant, Elaine Harrison and Associates.  
Lovesongs and Others, by Ralph Cunningham, Fiddlehead.  
Men of Colour, by Gary E. French, Kaste Books.  
The Methodist Point Site, by Sheryl A. Smith, Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation.  
Montreal Poems IV, edited by Keitha MacIntosh. Sunken Forum Press.  
Mouse Woman and the Muddleheads, by Christie Harris. M & S.  
Moving Islands: Poems 1977-1978, by Diana Hayes, Fiddlehead.  
Mr. September, by John Trengrove, General.  
My Parents are Divorced, too, by Bonnie Robson, Dorset.  
The Niagara River, by Walter M. Tovell. Royal Ontario Museum.  
Nights in the Underground, by Marie-Claire Blais, translated by Ray Ellenwood, Musson.  
North Shore, by Dermot McCarthy, Porcupine's Quill.  
Old New Brunswick: A Victorian Portrait, photographs by Richard Vroom, Oxford.  
Peeling Oranges in the Shade, by Jack Hannan, Paget Press.  
The Plains Cree, by David G. Mandelbaum, Canadian Plains Research Centre.  
Plays on a Comic Theme, edited by Cy Groves, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
Pockelmann, by Don Bell, Dorset Publishing.  
A Pyramid of Time, by Abraham Boyarsky, Porcupine's Quill.  
Quebec and the Constitution 1960-1978, by Edward McWhinney, U of T Press.  
Rites of Passage, by Don Guttridge, M & S.  
The Rope-Dancer, by Wilfrid Lemoine, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon.  
Schoolboy Scrambling, by Ralph Venables, Gage.  
Short Stories about Saskatchewan, by Leslie A. Dybwig, published by the author.  
A Snowman, Headless, by George Swede, Fiddlehead.  
Soli, by Paul Robinson, Lester & Orpen.  
The Speaker's Book, by Walter Kanitz, M & S.  
Studies on Regulation in Canada, edited by M. T. Stanbury, Institute for Research on Public Policy.  
Taking Off, by Nancy-Gay Rotstein, Longman.  
Timber, by O. W. Taylor, Douglas & McIntyre.  
Tom Cuds, Kids and Confederation, by Tom Moore, Jespersen Press.  
Tommy Douglas Speaks, edited by L. D. Lovick, Oolichan Books.  
Toronto, by Bruce West, Doubleday.  
Vapour and Blue: Souster Selects Campbell, Paget Press.  
The Visitors Have All Returned, by Marilyn Bowring, Press Porcupine.  
The Welland Canals, by Michelle Greenwald et al., Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation.  
Wheeler, by Esther Fraser, Sommerthorpe Ltd.  
Woodsedge and Other Tales, by Michael Bedard, Garden-shore Press.  
Your Baby Needs Music, by Barbara Cava-Beggs, Douglas & McIntyre.  
Youth Hotline, edited by Graham Cotter, Musson.



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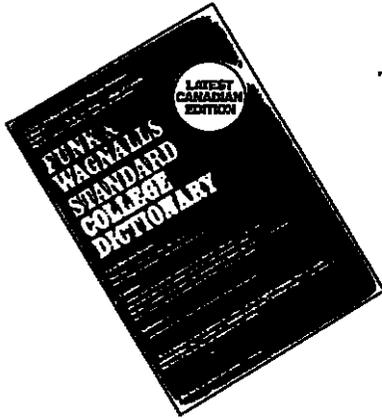
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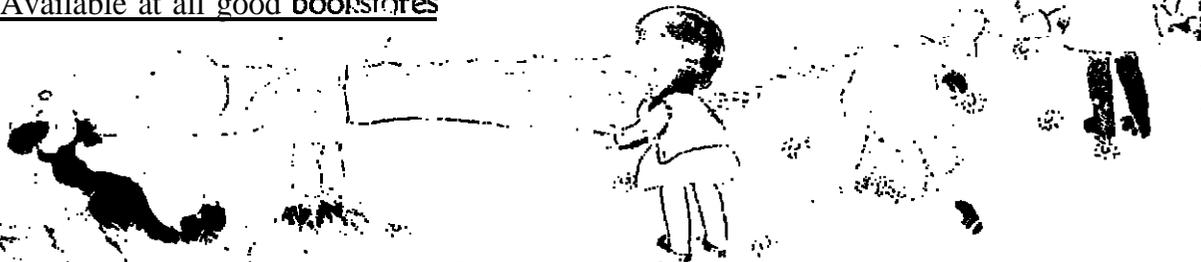
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