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The long, crowded life of
ROBERT WEAVER

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FEATURES


 Reeves Gallery: 2. Photo raconteur John Reeves presents seven new faces from his literary portfolio.

 It's the Niel Thing. An essay by Donald Swainson examines how Louis Riel has become a media industry

REVIEWS

Angelet, by Yves Thériault
The Habit of Being, by Flannery O'Connor
Children of My Heart, by Gabrielle Roy
Good as Gold, by Joseph Heller
The McGregor: A Novel of an Ontario Pioneer Family, by Robert Laflaw
Zoom, by Andrew Boychuk
The Back Room. by Ann Copeland;
The Ecotage: A Question. by Ian Gould
Dragon Spoon and Final Act. by Jack H. Crisp
The Doctor's Sweetheart and Other Stories, by L. M. Montgomery
Somebody Told Me I Look Like Everybody, by Raymond Filp;
Peeling Oranges in the Shade, by Jack Hannon;
Tributaries, An Anthology: Writer to Writer, edited by Barry Dempster
Prairie Symphony, by Wilfrid Eggleston
Peter Lougheed: A Biography, by Alan Hastak
Violence in Canada, edited by Alice Beyer Gammon;
The Prevention of Youthful Crime: The Great Stumble Forward, by James C. Hadler
The Do9 Crisis, by Iris Nowell
Silence is My Homeland, by Gilean

DEPARTMENTS

Douglas: Love in the Dog House, by Molly Douglas; A New Kind of Country, by Dorothy Gilman;
Recreational Farming, by Eric Winter

In Defence of Federalism: The View from Quebec, by Gilles Lalonde;
Canada's Third Option, edited by S.D. Berkowitz and Robert K. Logan

You Cannot Die, by Ian Curtis
Multinationals and the Peaceable Kingdom, by Harry Antonides

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In more grateful and discerning countries, Robert Weaver would be designated a national monument. But in Canada, the best we can say is that

BOB'S OUR UNCLE

by Mark Abley

When James Thurber looked back on the first editor of The New Yorker, Harold Ross, he thought of "the eloquent, large-fingered hands that were never in repose, but kept darting this way and that to emphasize his points or running through the thatch of hair... Ross was, at first, rather disappointing. No one, I think, would have picked him out of a line-up as the editor of The New Yorker. Even in a dinner jacket he looked loosely informal, like a carelessly carried umbrella. ... He was usually dressed in a dark suit, with a plain dark tie, as if for protective coloration." Robert Weaver — once described by Al Purdy as the most important literary figure in Canada — prefers tweeds to dark suits. And his

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hands rove busily over wisps of hair that no one could mistake for a thatch; but in other respects the description is exact. Weaver doesn't look like a broadcaster or editor. He doesn't dine in the chic cafes; he doesn't fly south in March. He looks like an employee of a bank in the days before banks began to strive for glamour. In fact, at the start of the Second World War he was an employee of a bank.

Like most grey eminences, Weaver is uneasy with titles. Rarely if ever does he refer to the honorary D.Litt. conferred on him at York University in 1976. He talks with undisguised nostalgia of the halcyon days at CBC-Radio when he was simply a member of the 'produces' pool. Dozens if not hundreds of writers must have phoned the CBC switchboard and asked to speak to Bob Weaver; it's doubtful if any of his friends, acquaintances or protectors have ever asked for the "Executive Producer, Literary Projects, Radio Drama and Literature." He is perhaps best known for his anthologies of Canadian short stories, four of which have appeared. Yet he's also been an editor of five other books; the creator of the CBC's Anthology and its producer for more than 20 years; an editor of Tamarack Review since its inception in 1956; and a friend in need to writers all across the country, some of whom he was responsible for bringing to light in the first place. "I am," he once confided to Marian Engel, "the still point around which everything moves." Hugh Gamer, in his autobiography One Damn Thing After Another, calls Weaver "a man who has done me so many favors and saved me from so many disasters that I shall always be in his debt." Nor is Gamer alone.

Yet Weaver has a very humility about his work. "What saves my life," he says, "when I think of the past 30 years is that it's all so funny." Other producers speak of the singular respect in which he is held at the CBC; Weaver tells a different story. "I'm tabbed as belonging to the older generation, looked on with benign tolerance but not really taken seriously. The CBC has always thought that the literary world is a little peculiar." Weaver views the CBC with irony and affection. A couple of brief ventures into television left him with no desire to try his luck a third time: "I don't understand some of the radio wars, but I don't understand the TV wars at all." One great gift, however, is his profound understanding of writers, and his willingness to put up with them even at their most bull-headed. Harold Ross, according to Thurber, regarded writers as temperamental mechanisms, capable of strange behavior; and artists were just as bad, or even worse, Complexes, fixations, psychological blocks, and other aberrations of the creative mind bad him always on the alert. Weaver is no less aware of such aberrations, but he's a charitable man. Gamer, Al Purdy, Mordecai Richler, Austin Clarke, Hugh Hood, and John Robert Colombo would scarcely have dedicated books to someone who regarded writers as men mechanisms.

He has," says Ivan Owen, an editor who has known him since 1943, "changed very little over the years. He's just gone doggedly on, doing the things he wants to do." Kay MacIver, a CBC colleague for 30 years, says: "He's always had the same rather quiet manner, always the sense of humour and the tremendous interest in writers. In fact he was astonishingly the same as he is now, except much thinner." Weaver's tastes and recreations are about what you might expect of a middle-class boy born in Niagara Falls in 1921. He likes movies and football; he knows the subtleties of a martini as intimately as the subtleties of prose. He likes to watch Lou Grant and The Rockford Files; he's keen on TV golf. In the second issue of Tamarack Review, he inserted into an affectionate article called "John Sutherland and Northern Review" one of his personal regrets: "Rankest herey in the literary world - he occasionally played golf. (We never had the game we said we must play together.)" Ivan Owen recalls confessing to Northrop Frye one day that Weaver was out on the golf course. Frye, surprised and severe, replied, "I didn't know that Robert went in for the executive sports."

The joker in this homely pack is Weaver's imagination. Without it he would never have been more than a competent editor, and he
Certainly would never have developed the eye for fresh talent that has over the years, distinguished him so highly. Like many artists Weaver lost his father when he was young, and grew up amid the company of women (an Aunt Emily was a writer of sorts). His father, a doctor, had gambled on gold mines and left little money, and at the age of 18, living by now in Toronto, Weaver began to work in the Dominion Bank. Initially he was earning $8.50 a week—"More than I would have made in a small town. Anyhow I rather liked it. I liked meeting the people." He was reading widely: Wolfe, Norris, Dreiser, Orwell, but very few Canadians. Then came war.

Weaver first joined the RCAF, "but I flunked a course that required scientific ability so I ended up in the army." They were not the best of days for him. A misfit private, he acquired the nick-name of Muscles. In 1944 he was thankfully discharged and sent to the University of Toronto on Veterans' Aid. Weaver has a long memory: every year he gives money to the Salvation Army, whom he found to be the most helpful of all the wartime charities. (He is not a religious man.) At the U of T. "Overwhelmed by marching feet," he blossomed and he wrote. Besides doing reviews and editing a college magazine, he produced some poems, a few stories, even part of a novel. Also, they weren't much good.

"James Reaney said to me one day, 'You don't have any creative talent but you're a very good organizer.' I was irritated at the time, but it seemed rational enough. He spotted me." Nowadays Weaver claims to have no regrets about the writing: "I long ago lost the attitude, 'Yes, but I would have done it differently.' I don't think I've made any very good writer."

Nonetheless, his prose style is a delight: crisp, clear, clean, muscular, end never showy. Its lucidity could serve as a model for most journalists and not a few novelists. "If there's anyone I'd like to write like," Weaver says, "it would be Orwell." The style, like the character, was formed when he was young: while still at university, he had a piece accepted by The Nation in New York—a success that was partly responsible for his entry into the CBC in 1949 as a program organizer in the Department of Talks and Public Affairs. Weaver by this time had acquired a B.A. and experience as a shipping clerk, doing assorted jobs and reading Canadian literature on the side. He soon became responsible for the program Canadian Short Stories, along with one or two other shows; and in 1952, together with the producer Helen James, he edited an anthology of stories that had been broadcast between 1946 and 1951. His career was well established on a path he has never left. The anthology, published by Oxford University Press, was the original Canadian Short Stories. Two of its 24 entries (including the celebrated "One, Two, Three Little Indians") were by Hugh Garner, who had phoned Weaver one day, having had a few beers beforehand, and chewed him out steadily for 20 minutes. In a brief pause Weaver quietly announced that he wasn't rejecting Garner's submission at all. Garner, astonished, inquired, "Are you going to publish me after all I've said about you?" "I'm an editor," Weaver replied. "We don't have any feelings."

Not all the volume's contents stand up as literature. And Weaver recognized as much in his preface. "It seemed to us that the stories had not been chosen merely to satisfy a rigid editorial policy, but to reflect some of the variety of life in Canada today... We realize that the stories broadcast by the CBC have varied a good deal in quality." Some of the authors are not less familiar today then Garner, James Reaney, Sinclair Ross. Joyce Marshall. ("I've known Joyce for more than 25 years," Weaver happily confides. "And it's still difficult.") But others, equally promising in 1952, have faded into the night. Where is William S. Annett, born in Alberta in 1928, once employed on Wall Street? Where are Rigmor Adamson, a lady editor born in Norway, and Ernesto Cuevas, an erstwhile legal stenographer from Newark, New Jersey? The pieces by Douglas Spedding and a trio of other writers were their first published stories.

The 1950s were busy years at the CBC and happy once for Weaver: "My favorite decade, it was a fairly civilized time, even though everyone says it was dreary. The only political party for which he's felt so good was war, which stood for reform and also for moral rectitude. I suppose my ideal for a Rime Minister would be M. J. Coldwell." (It was, moreover, the time when one of Weaver's favorite films was made—Ingmar Bergman's Wild Strawberries. "It's a great Canadian movie," he remarks dryly. "Isn't it a pain we didn't make it ourselves?!"
The Canadian Short Stories program died, to be replaced by Anthology, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. "It's pretty well unique," Weaver says, "and the CBC deserves some respect for that. There have been no moves, not even covert, to get it onto FM. I've always wanted Anthology to stay on the AU network: the writing community in Canada is small-town as well as big-city."

The audience for Anthology is not only loyal, it is also surprisingly large. Weaver could be contented if 30,000 listened regularly; the best estimate is about 45,000, and one rating recently suggested that 75,000 people tuned in. Whatever the exact figure, more Canadians listen to Anthology than buy all the little magazines put together.

One of the best and most famous of the little magazines is Tamarack Review, which began in 1956 and has been published almost continuously from Robert Weaver's office at the CBC. "The CBC has always been rather amused by this thing operating out of its backyard," he says. Although the idea for the magazine was Weaver's, the name was suggested by Ivan Owen. As Owen tells it. Weaver had said, "I want to have a name that sounds like the Canadian Shield." Owen had been dubious; wouldn't such a name also sound like the Salvation Army? York Review. Hamber Review. Laurentian Review. None was right. Theo Owen, who had been staying in Maskokan and had bought a boat from a hotel May, 1975, Books in Canada 5
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The current profusion of small magazines in Canada is a recent
and welcome phenomenon. Twenty-three years ago, but for two
university quarters and the indomitable Fiddlehead of Frederic-
ton, the field was virtually empty. Now it is large and numerous
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professional magazine with no financial support from academic
and every intention of paying the contributors was a bold venture.
Weaver has threatened to resign from Tamarack if the U of T Press
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Playboy. "Very popular among college students and in some
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editor, has very little pretense; as Robert Fulford wrote in the introduction, "Humour, modesty, and the atmosphere of recent Canadian intellectual life deprived the Tamarack Review of that luxurious self-righteousness which stamps so many little magazines."

The First Five Years was Weaver's fourth anthology, and his third to be published in three years. In 1960, answering a request from the World's Classics division of Oxford University Press, he had produced a new collection with an old title: Canadian Short Stories. (As this anthology later acquired two sequels, it's sometimes known informally as the First Series.) It contains the work of 26 writers, dating back to the 19th century and forward to Alice Munro and Mordecai Richler, neither of whom yet 30. Three translations from Quebec authors were included, making this, as Weaver said in his introduction, "the first comprehensive anthology of Canadian stories to make any attempt to include fiction from both cultures." Again he showed himself acutely conscious of what, for better or worse, Canadian fiction lacked. "What we do not have is much of that sophistication and intellectual intensity that distinguishes a good deal of the contemporary fiction appearing in the older literary societies abroad. It seems that the Canadian writer still feels able to indulge a certain naiveté..."

A year later came Ten For Wednesday Night, published by McClelland & Stewart. Like the 1932 Canadian Short Stories, Ten For Wednesday Night sprang directly from Weaver's work at the CBC. (He has never drawn a sharp distinction between his work in print and on air; both involve the marketing of good literature, the sustenance of writers, and the establishment of a Canadian literary tradition.) Weaver's introduction suggests how the climate was changing: "The stories in this book were broadcast at various times during 1960 on the CBC's Wednesday Night program. They came from an invitation by the CBC to a small group of writers. Many of the contributors to this book belong to the new generation of Canadian writers who began publishing after the Second World War. It is the most diverse, professional, and mature generation of writers we have had, and it is a generation able to write and publish in an improved, even though still inadequate, literary atmosphere."

Earlier this year Books in Canada spoke of a short-story "glut." But when Hugo McPherson wrote the chapter on recent fiction in Literary History of Canada, published late in 1965, he could still call the short story "special, if currently neglected, genre" and a "difficult, exciting, and now declining genre." It still nourishes," he admitted, "in small reviews and student literary magazines, but the majority of young writers abandon it after their apprenticeship years." Thanks in part to Weaver's vigilant nurturing of writers such as Richler and Munro, McPherson's glum deliberations are of purely historical interest. Weaver began to work with Munro while she was still a student at the University of Western Ontario, and continued to do so after she had moved to the West Coast. Yet they didn't meet until Weaver was on a western tour. Not knowing what to expect, he knocked on her door in North Vancouver one day and was startled to be met by a "smashingly beautiful" woman. He was eventually startled when she informed him, "You don't look right—you were supposed to look more fatherly."

These days Weaver is avuncular and portly, an expert raconteur but no one's image of grace. Yet behind the heavy, black-rimmed glasses lurk two very clear eyes. A pipe, always ready to be tamped or fiddled with if not actually smoked, acts as a virtual security blanket. Others may think of him as one of the most established members of our entire literary establishment; Weaver has his doubts. "I hope I have a kind of outsider's feeling about what I do," he says. His domestic life lacks fanfare or glamour. Weaver lives with his second wife Audrey and their two children in a duplex in north-central Toronto, and resolutely refuses to have any truck with the trendy. His habitual lunchtime watering-hole, the Hampton Court, was long ago vacated by the Beautiful People at the CBC; Weaver did not follow them to Fenton's or the Windsor Arms. "He has a peculiar trait," reports Clive Mason, Director of Program Operations at CBC Radio. "He knows more quiet places to stay and to eat across Canada than anyone I've known. I've never known him to stay at the recognized hotels."
Given a quiet couple of hours, he's fond of reading mystery novels, which he has reviewed for the Toronto Star for the past 15 years. “I like writing for the Star,” he explains, “because I don't have any idea who reads me. Anyway I have a catholic temperament.” Yet it's no secret that he prefers a good whodunit to anything avant-garde. Why are there so few good Canadian thrillers? “It helps if the locale is accessible to the mythic, like Paris or California or the south of England. and only recently has it become possible to think about Canada that way. Also thrillers tend to come out of urbanized societies, and we've been slow catching up to that. And they require professionalism and a relaxed feeling that we haven't fought our way through to yet. It's much easier to write about growing up in a small town.”

Weaver's CBC career in the 1960s and 1970s resembles a man being pushed up a mountain he never wanted to climb, and leaping down from the top (just about landing on his feet) because he didn't like the rarefied air. When his bosses decided to “rationalize” radii, he ceased to be a nebulous special programs officer and became Supervisor of Special Programs. Eventually and with some reluctance, he took over as Head of Radio Drama and special programs (that is, arts) and had he wanted, could have become Program Director of CBC-Radio. Weaver was never temperamentally suited to administration, which is not to say he was a poor administrator. Thanks to a further strict definition of roles—an agreement with the Producers' Association that all programs had to be made by recognized producers, not by people classified as management—he relinquished control of Anthology to Howard Engel in 1975. After nearly two more years of dry administration, Weaver resigned as Head of Radio Arts and became once again an executive producer, a grey eminence who would like to be more than merely eminent. He speaks with an amused irony of “what I regard as my somewhat declining career.” Even if he is, as Kay Maciver reports, “tremendously respected at the CBC both for his knowledge and for his dedication to writing,” he may well feel that he's outlived much of his usefulness.

Yet in the last dozen years, in addition to the CBC work, he has edited five more books. One of them, a CBC publication simply entitled Poems For Voices, consists of six long poems he had commissioned for Anthology. Weaver has always been more at ease with prose than verse, and this is the sole occasion on which he edited a book of poetry. More characteristic is the selection he made, together with his wife (“I browbeat her into helping me from time to time”), of the best stories of Mavis Gallant. Published by the New Canadian Library as The End of the World, the volume includes seven stories that had not appeared previously in any of her books, Weaver is one of the few Canadian literary figures whom Gallant, a notoriously difficult lady, trusts. In his introduction he took a sharp swipe at nationalists: “Now that cultural nationalism is turning us in on ourselves. Mavis Gallant's work may have even less chance than before of attracting much attention in her own country. That would be a pity, because she is simply too fine a writer for us to ignore.”

“I'm sorry now,” he says, “that I wasn't more actively anti-nationalist. "Citizenship" can easily mean something that kills people. I always dug my heels in about nationalism. but I've never liked confrontation.” Still, Weaver's attitude has been evident for at least two decades. In November, 1958, he wrote: “Those same years since the Second World War have also been a time of cultural nationalism in Canada (much of it centred in our universities), and the Canadian writer who published abroad for practical reasons may incidentally do something to diffuse and contain that cultural nationalism. Writers in small countries inevitably search for readers abroad. and the situation of the writer in Canada today is neither unique nor especially discouraging.” About 10 years ago Weaver found himself under attack from a few vehement nationalists, notably Dave Godfrey who had once been quoted as saying, “For the young English-Canadian writer, Bob Weaver is probably worth three Canada Councils and a Guggenheim Foundation.” Not only was Weaver philosophically hostile to nationalism, however, he was also fond of America. The irony is that, unlike a clear majority of well-known Canadian writers (14
out of 13. for instance. in his most recent anthology of stories, Weaver has never lived outside Canada.

His Second Series of Canadian Short Stories appeared in 1968, his Third Series late last year. Weaver's prefaces display a justified pride and pleasure in the development of Canadian fiction, a development in which, one is tempted to say, he has been less the enthusiastic bystander than the coach, trainer, and part-time accountant. "I know all of the writers who have stories in this book [the Third Series]," he wrote in 1978, "and in some cases I have known them and worked with them from the very beginning of their careers." While it is doubtless true that there must be writers in Canada who deserve a place in such an anthology but do not know Robert Weaver, it is also true that no better collection of Canadian short fiction has appeared in the 1970s. Nor has Weaver stuck with the old warhorses — Morley Callaghan, Ethel Wilson, W. O. Mitchell, and the like. Only two of the writers in the book are older than Weaver himself. He does not expect to prepare a Fourth Series.

He's a great preserver, always liable to be putting something off; sometimes, as in the case of an anthology he had suggested to the English firm of Faber & Faber, a project is put off for so long that it dies altogether. And yet it seems now and then that Weaver has moved mountains. His longest book is the Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature, co-edited with William Toye and issued in 1973. The editors introduce the book by taking sly issue with Margaret Atwood's trenchant polemic, Survival. After granting the essential rightness of Atwood's argument, Weaver and Toye go on to say that her theme is "are not, of course, uniquely Canadian preoccupations. Indeed, alienation is worldwide: the victim can be discovered everywhere.... The mood is most often sombre — not unlike that of other literatures in the twentieth century." It's typical of Weaver to avoid outright disagreement without exactly fudging any issues. He does not like to make enemies; he may have no enemies. He does like to be liked. When Books in Canada asked him several months ago to name the books or authors he thought would be the most underrated and over-rated in all Canadian literature, he refused to respond. "I'm not fond of these literary games, and anyway I don't dislike anyone enough." In fact he almost certainly does dislike some writers enough to mention them: he just doesn't want it known who they are. His candidates for the most underrated books are characteristically disparate and fascinating: John Buchan's Sick Heart River this last novel, perhaps his best, and one with a northern Canadian setting, and Charles Cochrane's Christianity and Classical Culture (written by a former teacher of Weaver's at University College, Toronto. and almost unread in spite of praise from W. H. Auden and Reinhold Niebuhr).

Weaver's remarks in print about the progress of our literature have been generally so hopeful and pleased that it's a melancholy surprise to find him striking different note in conversation: "I don't feel that the '70s have been a particularly good period in Canadian writing. Putting aside the economics, my feeling is that there was a very short period in the late '20s that was interesting; and 1945-60 was a good period, optimistic and rather free. But beginning in the early '60s, there's been too much emphasis on the politics and economics of the literary world, to the detriment of the literature. The dominant writers are still those from the earlier period." It might also be noted that the 1970s have been an uneasy time for the old guard at CBC-Radio who would like to see the AM network devoted to something more than a stream of magazine shows.

But Weaver lumbers on. His latest venture, the $18,000 CBC literary competition which he organized last year, exceeded all expectations. Having hoped for as many as 1,500 submissions, he found his desk buried under 3,000 manuscripts. At one stage he was reading 50 a day ("That's why I'm so gitted," he says with a chuckle). Many of the entries, especially in the memoir category, were dire, and Weaver began to regret having suggested the contest at all: "So much enthusiasm, so much goodwill, so many terrible manuscripts." He had begun tbc competition after resigning his management post, and, he frankly admits, he was looking for something to do. He began to realize he was doing it right when he received an indignant letter from a well-known writer saying, in effect, "You only wanted unknown people N win; that's why you sent back my manuscript." At much the same time he received an equally indignant letter from an unpublished writer saying, "I would have won it only you hadn't been after somebody famous!" The results, at any rate, are a kind of vindication; Weaver would not have been able to have the kind of writers that he had if only he had been an insurance salesman. The winners: a few of the 10 winners — Helen Weinzeig, Sean Virgo, Gail McKay — are known mainly to adepts in Canadian writing; a few more - James Harrison, Ruth Andrichak, Michael Hennessy (the Registrar of the University of Prince Edward Island) - have published little or nothing. Weaver was especially delighted when he phoned Ruth Andrichak, who lives 25 miles outside Calgary and had won second prize of $2,000 in the short-story competition, and found her to be a part-time waitress who runs a small farm. "Oh wow!" was her first reaction. "Now I can buy some cattle!" The contest will be repeated at least twice.

Weaver is approaching 60, and new projects continue to occupy his mind. "I would love to do an anthology of Stories From the Americas. I toyed with the idea of an Ontario anthology. And I want to do one on immigrant writing — stories, poems, and non-fiction by and about immigrants, and going back at least to the early 19th century. It could be enormous. Yes. It's a couple of years off at least." In the meantime, Weaver will carry on doing what he's done for the past 30 years: helping writers, if necessary by lending or giving them money from his own pocket. "I'm proudest," he concludes. "of being open to writers, and sticking with writers, even in hard periods." He is a humane man, a decent man at a time when decency is a much-maligned virtue. "A tremendously kind man," Ivan Owen says. "You may feel neglected but you never feel slighted. And in an emergency there he is. When Andrew Allen died, it was Bob who went to see him all through the last illness, and it was Bob who first found him in a coma."

Occasionally Weaver resembles a refugee from the 1950s, adrift in a more turbulent age; but without a good deal of will and toughness, no one survives three decades at the CBC. Even his foibles — distinct tendencies, for instance, to be garrulous and didactic — seem to endear him to people. It's a rare writer, not to mention accomplishment to have been able to reduce the formidable Nathan Cohen to sentimentality. "I get sort of chocked up," Cohen once confessed. "When I consider that beautiful man." Weaver has been valuable for so long partly because, though he takes great pride in his role of literary middleman, he has few illusions about it. When Alice Munro is read and remembered, Weaver will be forgotten. As Randall Jarrell advised all critics, "Remember that you can never be more than the staircase to the monument, the guide to the gallery, the telescope through which the children see the stars. At your best you make people see what they might never have seen without you; but they must always forget you in what they see." Unless (to alter the metaphor slightly) emerging dazed and delighted from the gallery, they glance at an inscription on the wall and read. "Gallery built by Robert Weaver."
by John Reeves

Top photographers seldom come away from a portrait session without an insight or two about their subjects that even the best-held camera can't capture. A year ago (May, 1976), 40-year-old photo raconteur John Reeves interrupted his mid-life crisis long enough to meander back through 16 years of files and prepare for us an annotated portfolio of CanLit figures. Now he's one and 40 and here are seven more:

Bert Sheppard (1978)

BERT SHEPPARD is a cowboy. He has lived all his life in the magnificent foothill country around High River, south of Calgary and since 1981 he has been a partner in the famous Rio Alto (O-H) Ranch. Bert writes books and publishes them himself. His first book (now out of print) was a personal memoir called Spitzes Days, published in 1971. His latest book, Just About Nothing, is a sequel to Spitzes Days. Just About Nothing can be bought at the Gift Shop in High River or from a carton under Bert's bed in the Rio Alto bunkhouse. The book contains contributions from Senator Dan Riley and R. M. Pettersen. It is extensively illustrated by such cowboy artists as Gallup. Bert had 1,900 copies of Just About Nothing printed in Calgary and to date he has sold only about one thousand of them at $11 each. Clearly, vanity publishing doesn't have to be unprofitable. A man can buy a lot of rye whiskey with the net from $11,000.

BARBARA AMIEL and SANDRA MARTIN: There was a time when most reviewers were men. They tended to be an unlovely lot inclined either to neurotic pudge or gin-diet gauntness. They said unpleasant things in their columns, and often they looked unpleasant; they were easy to ridicule and to dislike. Times have changed. Consider two of the current crop of book reviewers, freelancer Sand Martin and Barbara Amiel of Maclean's. They are women; they are tall and slender; their eyes are clear and lustrous; their complexities are as burnished alabaster. Soft sweet sounds emanate from the crochid splendour of their lips. During the past year both Martin and Amiel have asked me to take their picture, and somehow, with full knowledge that they have been saying appalling things about books by my best friends, I managed to strangle "yes" to both of them. They were disturbingly pleasant in my studio, unmentionable desires stirred in
my veil... Phrases like “concealing with the enemy” caused me to sneer at my glazed eyes. I am a Tri-X betrayer, Judas with a Hasselblad. The years have made me not only older, but also much less pure.

MORLEY CALLAGHAN: Both his sons are friends. I have passed by his house countless times. But no one ever asked me to produce a portrait of Morley Callaghan until last summer. During the photo session Callaghan reminisced about being photographed by Karsh many years before; he felt the encounter had not been altogether comfortable and Karsh had never released any of the photos. Not long after my visit with Mr. Callaghan, Karsh’s Canadians hit the bookstores and, lo and behold, there in the section for people with surnames beginning with "C" was the never-before-published Callaghan by Karsh.

MOLLY LAMB BOBAK was born in Vancouver, the daughter of the arts critic and collector W. Ewart Lamb. She studied painting at the Vancouver School of Art. In 1942 Molly joined the Woman’s Army Corps, eventually becoming Canada’s only female War Artist. For many years her lush, exuberant landscape paintings have been widely exhibited in Canadian art galleries, both private and public. In 1976 she became the author of a delightful illustrated autobiography called Wildflowers of Canada. I took this photo.

NORTHROP FRYE is at once a very courteous and a very shy man. Courtesy is hard to photograph, so only the shy ness was evident in my photos, and I wasn’t sure how happy my client, Nicholas Steed, Editor of Quest magazine, was going to be with a picture of a great man being shy. However, Judith Finlayson’s text for the Quest story made much of Dr. Frye’s
chymir and Stead ran my picture next to a herding that read "The Fearful Shyness of Northrop Frye," and a sub-heading that said, "The Most Fumbling Kind In Canada: The Man Behind the Mask." An editor can do a photographer a lot of harm, but he can also do you a lot of good.

CECILIA JOWETT: People are seldom at ease with their own portraits. The physical image of themselves they have created with the mental image they have for themselves. There are, however, often exceptions to this rule, and Cecilia Jowett was one of them. Jowett spent the greater part of her life working as a country nurse. She worked first in a pioneer community near Cochrane, Ont. After several years she moved south to Longford Hills, a village nine miles north of Orillia, in Lake Couchiching. While living and working in the Orillia area she became acquainted with Stephen Leacock, who encouraged her to write about herself. Jowett's autobiography, No Thought for Tomorrow, was published by Ryerson Press in 1914. Also Jowett is an old family friend, and when she learned that I had become a photographer, she asked me to produce a portrait of her, which I did in March, 1955. Her poignant response to the pictures I shipped to Longford Hills was unexpected and touching. I quote her letter in part: "The photographs came safely and I do thank you, for the honor you have shown me in granting my wish that they are yours, your work, and much more to me therefore. One pose, quite unconsciously on my part, is like 'What's in the box? I wonder what will come out.' ... The face is really new under the sun. The strain and stress of the past years shows clearly in my face (fades) and they are truly real and characteristic. The large photographs I will hang at some distance, to get the best effect and ask myself often, 'What is it that has happened to you?... The fact of money for good skin cream over the past 35 years didn't help the wrinkles; but then, again, it is myself as I am today and neither Heaven nor — call it love.'

Molly Lamb Bobak (1973)

Northrop Frye (1978)
12 Books in Canada, May 1979

Cecilia Jowett (1985)
THE COMMODORE'S BARGE

Avy Political Lady

A novel by Judy La Marsh

Matt Cohen

"Matt Cohen's novel is a triumph..."

- The Toronto Star. $12.95

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Gabrielle Roy

Translated by Alan Brown

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the novel that the Quebec press, both French
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Jack MacLeod introduces Zinger, and the
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birthday gift to me when I turned seven in
1928. She took me to see a beheading."

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The White Shaman is a tenderly poignant,
highly visual and truly spellbinding story of
contrasting realities, centering around a young
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leaves the transient south to explore the
eternal north, and in doing so necessarily
severs his links with the past. $10.95

From McClelland & Stewart/The Canadian Publishers

AT GOOD BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE
It's the Riel thing

The marketing of Louis Riel as pop history has reached the point of overkill. Hanging him was gentle compared to this

by Donald Swainson

MORE HAS BEEN written about Louis Riel than any other Canadian. Both the men and his rebellions have fascinated readers for more than a century. However, he is finally to be judged as a populthero or fanatic—Riel has become the industry.

The flood of Riel material has become inundation. G. F. G. Stanley published his standard, if somewhat prosaic biography, Louis Riel, in 1963. E. B. Osler's unfortunate The Man Who Had to Hang had been inflicted on English-speaking Canadians in 1961, and was translated into French shortly thereafter. Hartwell Bostfield presented us with a snappy life in 1971. Desmond Morton gave us, in rapid succession, The Last War Drum (1972), Telegrams of the North-West Campaign (1972, jointly with Reginald E. Roy), and The Queen v. Louis Riel (1974). Rudy Wiebe, following John Coulter (Riel: A Play in Two Parts, 1962) and Don Gutteridge (Riel: A Poem for Voices, 1968) has written two novels about Riel and his times: The Temptations of Big Bear (1973) and The Scorched-Wood People (1977). George Woodcock's Gabriel Dumont (1975) follows in the tradition of Strange Empire (1952) by Joseph Kinsey Howard. It goes without saying that the reprint people have cashed in on a good thing. A particularly bizarre example was the publication by Colos of the utterly worthless The Story of Louis Riel: the Rebel Chief (1885, reprinted 1970; no confessed author). These influential books are allegedly works of history, but are informed more by immiscion-oriented imaginations than a meticulous use of evidence.

Among other books, W. L. Morton's Manitoba: The Birth of a Province (1965) includes documentary material that is crucial to any real understanding of Riel's role in 1868-70, and completes his earlier Alexander Beggs' Red River Journal (1956). In addition, Thomas Flanagan began to analyze Riel's religious thought several years ago. He has published several articles on his subject, and has given us two important books: The Diaries of Louis Riel (1976) and now Louis 'David' Riel: 14 Books in Canada. May 1979

"Prophet of the New World" (University of Toronto Press, 216 pages, 515 cloth, ISBN 0 8020 5430 ?).

Meanwhile, the CBC has entered the business in a big way. On April 15 and 17 CBC TV presented a three-hour production of Riel. The budget was more than $2 million. The television show is only part of the enterprise. The sound track of the film is to be released in cassette and long-play record format. "A pop version of the Riel theme and a scored version of Riel's final speech," the publicity blurb tells us, "will also be released as a single." NC Multimedia ensures that our little ones are included by putting out an "audio/visual" kit. The TV show's sponsor is giving us a "full colour poster" and Compass Film Sales will distribute the TV film to movie theatres. Finally, Roy Moore's screenplay has been translated into a novel by Janet Rosenstock and Dennis Adair (Riel, Paperbacks, 202 pages, ISBN 0 7701 0102 x). All in all it should be a good spring for Riel buffs.

Why are Canadians endlessly fascinated by this strange and largely misunderstood man? He must appeal to something deep within us.

Canada has always been a troubled country. This is true of many of the countries with which we share our cultural heritage, but most of our sister societies are reasonably certain that they have a future. We are not: we often fear that our country will disintegrate. We have reason to fear. Canada was created by political and economic managers. No political philosopher, major poet, military genius, or messianic leader had the slightest place in the confederation movement. As a people we were created by the Macdonalds, the Mowats, the Tupper, the Gals, and the Cartiers—all politicians and/or business- men of the line. We cannot study our origins through the kind of greatness exemplified by Paine, Washington, Napoleon, Robespierre, Cromwell, Milton, or Gustavus Adolphus. We cannot turn to documents like The Federalist Papers. Magna Carta, The Communist Manifesto, The Petition of Right or Areopagitica. Rather, we must focus on debt allowance, reparation, tax equalization formulae, Section 92, the federal-provincial interface, and the potash tax.

Canada was created by managers and has been sustained by managers. That which cannot be managed threatens our existence. We do not function within national myths and ideologies. Movements and philosophies that might transform some societies are often seen as menaces to the very existence of this society. Within this context it is not difficult to understand why Louis Riel occupies a huge place in our historical imagination.

The acquisition of the West was our major managerial coup. After appropriate negotiation we simply purchased the Prairie region. We then bound it to central Canada with a railroad that was largely financed by the sale and gift of western lands. If the West symbolizes our managerial syndrome, Riel symbolizes the opposing forces. Depending on time: current issues, philosophical bent, or regional bias, Riel can be seen in an almost infinite number of ways: he threatened national unity; he gave coherence to regional identity; he represented Prairie biculturalism; he was a victim of Anglo-Saxon bigotry; he was the first of a long line of Prairie reformers: he represents a lost opportunity to treat fairly with our
It is not accidental that the bulk of the words mentioned above were written by non-professional historians. The focus is on attempting to understand Riel as an historical figure: the focus tends to be on “singing poor old Riel to advance one’s cause or, as is now clearly evident, to make a lot of money.

In 19th century opinion concerning Riel divided pretty much along linguistic lines. French Canadians supported him; English Canadians regarded him as a devil. As the Winnipeg Free Press put it in 1885: “Riel was fully tried, honestly convicted, lawfully condemned, and justly executed.” This all changed by the 1950s. Riel now is revered by all sorts of people. He is a Prairie reformer who loved the oppressed. He is a regionalist and a victim. Riel makes us feel deliciously guilty, end we “see him to fog his opponents and vaunt our virtue.”

Commenting in any detail on the plethora of recent works concerning Riel is impossible in a short article. However, three recent books illustrate important trends: the scholarly, the mythic, and the commercial.

Thomas Flanagan’s concern is to analyze in a scholarly way Riel’s religious thought. His book is superb, and his Louis “David” Riel is probably the best single item ever written about the rebel leader. Flanagan argues that Riel should be “seen” not as a madman, but as a millenarian leader. The thesis has implausible facets, and Riel can easily be seen as both — that is, as a mad prophet. Nevertheless, we now know what Riel thought, at least after the mid-1860s. He was also most emphatically not an early version of Tommy Douglas or Ed Schreyer. He was an ultra-conservative, whose “ultimate hopes for the reorganization of mankind under clerico-theocratic role were the antithesis of liberalism.” Riel advocated incest, probably because of his unhealthy attitude toward his saintlike sister, Sarah. He wanted polygamy, because of his strong desire that “women should be put back in their proper station of subservience.” His fantasies about the future of the Catholic Church involved the creation of “a new Ireland, Italy, Bavaria, Scandinavia, Poland, even a new Judea for Jews who agree to recognize Jesus Christ as the only Messiah.” In 1885 Riel led his followers to death and defeat because for him rebellion was not a political and military operation, but a “politicoreligious movement.” It could succeed, but only with a miracle. Riel defined himself as “the telephone of God.” If Riel is to continue as our “unorthodox but historical” personage, Flanagan must be ignored.

Rudy Wiebe’s The Scorched-Wood People represents the mythic trend. Wiebe’s Riel is mostly religious, but in a kind of NDP manner. Wiebe has Riel say, “Why don’t we make a heaven here in the North-West, where we can have peace but forbidden all killing.” This is what it is about. Riel and his friends love life, flowers, and children; they laugh a lot. Anglos of course are the reverse. They are cold, calculating persecutors. More people represent the burgeoning West, freedom, life, love. History is routinely distorted. The result is bad history, bad myth, and a singularly unsuccessful novel.

And finally, the commercial option. Rosenstock and Adair, in their Riel, have managed to Harlequinize the West. They have written an unbelievably unfortunate novel. It does not claim to be history; it claims ever more: “What is real is the spirit of the history.” What we have is a fairly straightforward piece of propaganda. Riel is a saintlike leader attempting to save a small and very virtuous nation from the relentless evil that emanates from Ottawa. Louis Riel is part social democrat end part liberation theologian. The result is rewritten to suit the views of the authors. One example will have to suffice. Riel’s crazed pronouncements about the settlement of the West are transformed into liberal policies of the 1970s: “The government, in 1971, also adopted Riel’s suggested multicultural policy within a bilingual framework.” Perhaps the most offensive aspect of this book is some of the dialogue, which might well have been written by William Henry Drummond, A merit, explains the Buffalo Hunt, “We get everything ready — the bows, arrows, and guns. The women. They get their things ready to claim the buffalo, sharpen all the knives good. The Bishop of St. Boniface, he appoints a priest to 8” on the hunt.”

The Riel industry has bee with us for a long time. If anything can slow its growth it is the ponderous overall approach of the CBC. In 1885 we hanged a defeated and deranged man. Must we punish his memory in perpetuity?

Short days journey into night

by George Woodcock


IT IS more than 17 years since Yves Thériault published the novel he is best known by, Agook, in which he narrated the powerful story of an Inuit hunter’s emergence out of the darkness of a primitive and harsh life among the ice and tundra. Agook became and has remained a best seller beyond the dreams of most Canadian writers; up to now it has sold more than 250,000 copies and in sheer financial terms it has certainly been Thériault’s most successful novel.

It may also have been his most successful in terms of fictional art, for though Thériault has been a consistently productive novelist, he has written nothing since that caught the imagination quite so powerfully. His later books took him back to the Quebec marginal farmlands of his earlier novels, into the slums of Montreal, and — in novels such as Ashiki (perhaps the second most important of his works) — into the boreal forest of the northern Indians. Almost always, whether his protagonists were native Canadians, or habitations, or Italian immigrants, he was concerned with the way in which men lived under extreme conditions, and when they were powerful merged into the grotesque, the dream shifted into melodrama.

Thériault “ever lost his interest in the native peoples of the Canadian North. In 1969 he returned to the Inuit way of life with a sequel to his earlier masterpiece, Tayour, fils d’Agook, in which the old hunter is corrupted by the commercialism that emerged during the popularization of Eskimo art in the 1960s, and is eventually killed by his son Tayour, who is appalled when his father sells images in which are secreted the most sacred traditions of the Inuit, Tayour himself, the upholder of the primitive past, is killed by a great white bear.

The same inescapable conflict between the primitive past and the civilized present dominates Thériault’s most recent novel, Agook, in which he returns after another decade to the world of the Inuit. During the time that has elapsed since Tayour, there has been a further shift in the relationship of the Inuit to the modern world. Agook’s grandson of Agook agook so of a full-time stone carver, enters the commercial world of the North and the novel begins seems poised on the verge of a successful career as a computer expert.

The links with the earlier novels are tenuous, though Agook and his wife Tricko their travels in the wilderness are recalled in Agook, the drama of Agook and Tayour is “off the beaten path,” and Agook’s stone-carving father is evidently another son of the old hunter; he has departed so successfully from the ancestral life that Agook, when the novel begins, has almost no knowledge of the hunting techniques that...
As she lay dying

Flannery O'Connor's letters chart a short life in which pain and peacocks are constants and the Church is everywhere

by Douglas Hill


Flannery O'Connor died in 1964 at 39, after a 14-year struggle with lupus erythematosus, the wasting metabolic disease that killed her father. With the exception of two years at the University of Iowa for a Master of Fine Arts in writing, a year at the Yaddo colony, and another in New York City and Connecticut, ha life was spent in Georgia, in Savannah then, during her illness, with ha mother on the family farm at Milledgeville. Her published work comprises two short novels, Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away, two books of stories, and a posthumous volume of critical writing. And now this monumental collection of letters.

O'Connor's talent, by any account, is unique: thus the temptation to the commentator (there have been more than a dozen books and scores of articles on her work since her death) to classify and label. There are a few points of agreement among her readers. However, which letters support: that her faith is enormously strong, informing — is Roman Catholic; and hex 16 Books in Canada. May 1979.

world is a Protestant South spiritually blasted by the Civil War, fallen from grace to the further refinement of fanaticism, that her characters are grotesques, deformed, maimed in body and spirit, Christ-haunted; that ha vision sustains irony and compassion, outrage and love. So saying one has not captured her, one is still not prepared for the fusion of humour and horror or the bizarre expressions of mutated faith (what she calls "do-it-yourself" religion). None of it seems random or gratuitous.

The letters date from 1948 to 1964, from the diffidence of the young artist expanding her acquaintance, free to talk — needing to talk — about her work, to the calm bravery of her final year, to the requests for prayers. always ha own prayers. For troubled friends, the composition of one of her best stories and what was literally ha death. The editing here is firm but unexceptionable: personalities develop, Friendships form, continuities of character, situation, and argument are established. The range: diligence, responsiveness. And sheer volume of ha correspondence are astonishing.

Habit counted much for O'Connor. "Vocation implies limitation" is her refrain; acceptance of that imperative implies routine. She tried to write for three hours every morning; she tended her ducks and swans and peafowl; she received visitors, made numerous hogs For readings and "literary" conferences, and wrote letters. All this against the uncertainties of diets, drugs, crutches, a disfigured and disintegrating body. "I don't make no plans."

Patterns emerge — of life, religion, art. The pain and villains are constants, as are relatives. townfolk, tenants — the "good country people" whose behaviour and locations she reveled in. The Church is everywhere: "I write the way I do because (not though) I am a Catholic." More precisely: "There are some of us who have to pay for our faith every step of the way and who have to work out dramatically what it would be like without it and if being without
it would be ultimately possible or not."

Her favorite authors—the "influences"—were Hawthorne, James, Conrad, Faulkner: her closest fiction-writing friends were Caroline Gordon and John Hawkes. The reading described in these letters is timely, various, and immense, the critical opinions tough but appealing ("anybody that admires Thomas Wolfe can be expected to like good fiction only by accident"). There's not a lot about specific matters of craft—O'Connor liked to think of herself as "only a storyteller"—but one sees distinctly that her characters and their difficulties have come alive and remained so in her imagination. There's also virtually no pontification about literature, just some careful effort at defining and clarifying her own part in it.

Limitation: them: short stories, short novels, short life—"What you have to measure out, you come to observe closer, or so I tell myself." For all its size, this collection seems like everything else about O'Connor's work: a distillation, a paring-down—600 pages of essential insight and self-confrontation. (Compare Faulkner, whose recent Selected Letters is for the most part scrupulously arranged.) O'Connor deserves to be read and known in Canada: there is value in her lucid example of how to make cultural and regional uniqueness a source of purity and strength. Begin with the fiction. Begin with the letters: either way you'll be startled, intrigued, caught by this remarkable life in art.

In praise of younger men

Children of My Heart. by Gabrielle Roy. translated from the French by Alan Brown, McClelland & Stewart. 171 pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 7838 2).

"MY PUPILS," says the narrator of Children of My Heart, "with their joy, brought back my own childhood. To complete the circle, I tried to magnify their joy so that it would go with them all through their lives." The narrator is a young woman, scarcely more than a child herself, who teaches her pupils to read and write—"all the while learning with them poignant truths about the world of which they are all part.

The book begins with the young, unnamed narrator facing her first class: "the very smallest," while at the end she bids farewell to a tender initiation in the world of childhood regained and innocence lost as she leaves behind a country school and with it, Madelle, the child-man barely younger than she, with whom she has discovered the first hints of a less innocent kind of love.

I must digress here to express some irritation at the form that has been given to this English version of Ces enfants de ma vie (for which Roy won her third Governor General's Award). The original book was presented as a series of stories, each with its title, linked simply by setting and narrator, and opening eloquently to take in her ever-developing experience of joy and pain; of wisdom too. The contents are unchanged, but the collection of stories has been presented so as to suggest a novel—which the book most assuredly is not. Surely English Canadians, of all the readers in the world, are accustomed to reading collections of short stories and needn't be tempted, like so many children facing some nasty-tasting medicine, with the disguising sugar of another literary form.

Aside from that criticism, for which neither the author nor the translator is to be blamed, I can only say that Children of My Heart is a jewel: one of the finest examples of the great art of Gabrielle Roy. She who has written with such grace and understanding of the dying bank clerk Alexandre Chenever, of the indomitable Rose-Anna Lacsas, of the Inuit woman and her half-American child, here returns to her own Prairie beginnings, where she too was a country teacher.

Like Michel Tremblay, who seems to be the writer most likely to inherit her literary mantle, Roy obviously loves her characters, and she writes of them always with generous-
ity and compassion. The sometimes naive narrator is presented with an affection; she and perhaps her world model would already have magnified her pupils' joy so that "it would go with them all through their lives."
The range of characters is vast, from the loutish series of Demetriou to the frightened, angelic Italian child to Nil, the Ukrainian boy who sings like a lark. almost able through the power of his song to heal.

The women — mothers, small sisters. colleagues - might seem to play secondary parts, but each is essential and fully realized through only a few words or gestures. Finally, though, it is Médric — who rides to school on his white stallion and shams with his teacher - the first frightened glimpses of a nascent sexuality — who most impresses the reader and perhaps his creator too.

Roy's writing is limpid, controlled, elegant, and sparse, and Alan Brown has recreated it here with such dillfent skill that reading him is like reading the original French. Never is a false note struck, never is there any doubt whose voice the reader is hearing. And although the translator is, quite properly, invisible -indeed, because of this - the book is as much Alan Brown's as it is Madame Roy's.

Annals of the wondering Jew
by Dennis Duffy


BRUCE GOLD is a Jewish American trying to find out what it means to be a Jew in America. In view of the impressive Jewish presence in the American cultural fabric, the quest may appear trifling unnecessary. Any cultural grouping that includes both Louis B. Mayer and Judy Garland, Sabin Bellow and Helen Frankenthaler, Leonardi Bernstein and Richard Sarnoff, may well have left a rather distinctive impression upon the ingots of the Republic. And certainly decades of the Jewish-American literature and drama of the family, from Henry Roth to Philip Roth, have made Jewish mora and intonations as widely available pieces of Americana as Irish cops and Italian hoods. Of course, the passing into mythology scarcely guarantees cultural survival. Instead, it often indicates the opposite, while being fed into the omnivorous digestive system of American, pop culture can distort not only outsider's perceptions of a group, but the group's own sense of self.

Generations of American novelists have assumed us to find one's life in America is to lore it: here's of individualists in flight from their family, culture, and biphilace crowd and the classics of American literature. Instead of following this tradition of alienation through an examination of a single figure examined in depth, Heller takes a satirically conceived non-person, a mark for his subject, seeking to give him the status of a tribal representative.

The sense of America as a closed system of tribal discourse marks Heller's previous work. Everybody in Catch-22 except Yossarian suffered from severe military-industrial complexes. The author's skill in making the Second World War an instant-foray of the Cold War not only influenced (to their detriment) ant negro generation of American radicals, but telegraphed to its audience the conviction that their lives had become part of an endless, absurd, impersonal power bip that patentl revealed itself in the total corruption of language. Since the most corrupt portion of this maf lay in its rhetoric of duty, responsibility, and personal sacrifice for social goods, Heller's hem-in-flight repudiated the public world. What seemed to his audience, however, as a novel and rebellious gesture was in fact no more than a classic lift-off from a scene forever troublesome to American heroes.

The Huck Finn world of bizarre cross-talk caught by C.m-h-22 yielded less entertaining vignettes of mendacity in Something Happened. Still a most useful text for anyone seeking to understand the habits of thought that produced the Nixon White House. As this supportgroup's to the too-lengthy novel, Something becomes what it beholds, and thus merely reflects rather than renders the boring evasions it deals with.

The corruptions in Good as Gold include both the personal and the public domains. Using the writer-writing gimmick that has become a staple of modernist fiction, Heller shows a careerist cynically attempting to fabricate a book on the Jewish experience in America. Part of that book lies in the one we are reading. At the same time, Gold lies under consideration for a White House appointment to a regime whose chief passes most of his time in pretending to write decent memoirs of a do-nothing administration. Two kinds of evasive discourse prevail: the familial one cloaks sibling and generational rivalries beneath a pseudo-faith and pseudo-aggression in speech that produces the paranoid. "You've got to be kidding to say anything that awful" response that releases hearers from the burden of taking the talk seriously. Larded with Yiddishisms and always spoken around a table covered with fatty food, the chatter turns expressions of hatred and contempt into buzz-words. It is King Lear played at a bagel joint by a man in checked trousers and plastoid white loafers that match his belt.

The Wasp talk of the White House doesn't bother to conceal its emptiness: the antecedents of any pronoun are never clear, the passive voice always fogs the agent for any action. Nobody writes his own speeches or even thinks his own thoughts. As an emblem of this world, Heller chooses Kissinger. Master of doubletalk, ass-kisser to any regime willing to serve as his patron, wire-tapper of his friends, surrounded by enemies indistinguishable from his friends and, as Israel at the time of the Yom Kippur War could testify, surrounded by friends who have him for an enemy: Heller holds up Kissinger to ridicule in terms that have become familiar ever since the years. To the indignation, he adds one new charge: Kissinger is a Jew. How, then, can Judaism mean anything, stand for anything that is decent in American life?

Here, after a series of very minor plot complications, we stop. The public world is awful, and Gold is finally turned down for the job anyway. The family world is awful, and its most decent member dies. Gold is awful, as a husband, teacher, and cultural commentator. Oh yes, America is pretty awful too. Lots of its old urban neighborhoods are decaying and changing as new folks move in.

Such a message neither dazzles nor depresses nor exalts me, but only makes me wonder as to why it took 447 loosely plotted, repetitiously written pages to tell me that. While I would not want to bear Kissinger's baby, I see no more reason for Jews feeling ashamed for him than me. Irish-American by birth, to have felt ashamed because Cardinal Spellman was so horrible about the war. If one senses a certain split now happening in Jewish life on this continent, and wants to know more about the latest, Mordecai Richler's St. Leger's Horseman is still the place to look. Richler remains under the delusion that believable characters, interesting events, and stylistic economy form narrative necessities, and I hope he stays that way. The fact that Good as Gold was hailed as a "bestseller before publication" might convince him otherwise.

On the whole, the novel reminded me of Animal House. One can make films, good films, that deny the possibility of the ethical enterprise, that sneer at 'the' hope of decency. The Marx Brothers, the Marx Brothers all. But their style, energy, and inventive ness scarcely marks Animal House a cry of boorish despair from a group of people who
Homer Watson's book is a deeply instructive book. It teaches us how to live in a world where the social history is complex and induced by the harsh frontier of pioneer's lives. It is about the Scottish atmosphere, their descendants, and their footsteps in the land. It's selling well.

The novel is the life story of Black Jim McGregor from his arrival with his parents at the age of six to his death 70 years later. It's not end doesn't set an end for the reader.

The McGregors: A Novel of an Ontario Pioneer Family, by Robert Laidlaw

McGill, 176 pages. $512.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88924 079 1).

By I.M. OWEN

THE PART of Ontario that stretches westward from the Niagara Escarpment to the shore of Lake Huron is a land of comfortable-looking farms and little towns beside placidly flowing rivers. Their streets lined with heavy Homer Watson trees and gracious houses that look as if they have been, and will be, forever. This is the setting for most of Alice Munro's stories: stories of lives whose apparent rural simplicity conceals undercurrents and dark complexities that, like the houses and the trees, but in a different way, suggest a community whose roots in the land are deep and ancient.

Now comes a posthumous novel by Alice Munro's father, Robert Laidlaw, to remind us how very lately this green and pleasant land was harsh, challenging frontier country. The McGregors of the title are Highland Scats who don't belong to the very first wave of pioneers: they arrive in Bruce County in 1853, buying their farm from the original settler. But the land is still unclaimed and the life is primitive.

The novel is the life story of Black Jim McGregor from his arrival with his parents at the age of six to his death 70 years later. It's not end doesn't set an end for the reader.
men: the anonymous narrator, a young and aspiring press photographer: Robert Wolf, his cynical and world-wary mentor. and Father Gerber, a Catholic priest who sacrificed his life in the concentration camp for Adam Gil, a railwayman.

Gil has been sent on a world propaganda tour by the Church as a token survivor and a kind of stand-in for the martyred Gerber. He returns, seemingly unchanged. to his job tapping the rails of the Moscow-Rome express. In the mornings he walks first in the dilltion of Moscow, then in the direction of Rome: before sunset things are the other way around. After the dubious experiment of the Lublin Poles and the failure of Polish nationalism to win along Soviet lines, there is no third dillion for modern Poland. Gil, philosophizing with a hammer, is owned by a state to which he does not belong. and the Church lays claim to his soul. Something, according to Wolf, has got to give, and something does -violently.

Wolf sets the narrator to spy on Gil, with a zoom lens and a tape recorder. Wolf lives vicariously; he is a voyeur with a mission. "As soon as I hear the word intellectual," he declares, echoing Herman Goering, "I slip the safety-catch off my camera." The camera may not kill, but Wolf does like to have his photos composed. On location in Africa, he interrupts an execution to get the perfect shot. (The method is head-bashing by an iron club swung personally by a dictator called Scorpion.) "Well, what really hap petted?" he asks the bemused narrator.

"They lived a minute longer."

Voyeurism of another sort lies behind one of the extremely sad and funny scenes in this book. A priest, using local kids to play the prisoners, has written a morality play out of the Gerber-Gilstory, featuring an "Angel" who hauls Father Gerber's corporeal spirit up a ladder to heaven, and a "Devil" as a concentration-camp guard. The priest explains to the narrator: "As the author and. I would admit in confidence, sometimes as a human being — I consider that evil exists immanently, just as good does. But since good stems from God and evil from the Devil there's no room for futile debate. The whole thing's perfectly straightforward. That's how it's shown in the play." Indeed it is.

Three quarters of the way through this short novel, Brycht kills off his most interesting character when the Rome-Moscow express jumps the rails. The narrator is on the scene to record Gil's revenge and Wolf's death, becoming, like his mentor, a thanatographer. Zoom closes as it opens with the narrator in hospital after he has crashed his Porsche Carrera — a contrived "full-circle" ending. No doubt the black lens-like motifs that crown the text are meant to make this more arresting. (The production job was absolutely hideous: the book looks as if it's been set by the square inch. blotch 'n' fade printing with lines uneven enough to detail the eye.) A pity all this. I suspect a restructured book, and it throws Zoom out of focus, blurring its moral and metaphysical resolution so that the background of the death camp falls away, a faded image in a long lens. It was surely more than that. □

Tidy endings, plain wrappers


By MICHAEL SMITH

The Chief Virtue of Ann Copeland's first collection of short stories. At Peace — published just last fall — was her portrayal of the "manipulative nuisance, the religious masks of power" that exist behind a convent's walls. Perhaps her fluency inside the cloister is partly to blame for her perception of the outside world. The eight stories in her new collection. The Book Room. are seldom divorced from Catholicism (several feature priests), and tend to share a notion of tidiness that only survives inside a closed community. Too often,
In the title story, for instance, a fitting-mom attendant in an exclusive shop is describing her favourite customer — an elegant, heavily made-up matron who tries on dozens of dresses, but never buys. The narrator, a widow, is worried about her teenage daughter, who’s getting serious with Hubert, some hard-luck boy who lives with his aunt. On her way to meet him for the first time, the narrator witnesses an accident in which the victim is the cherished customer. She soon discovers the customer was Hubert’s guardian. An impoverished dishwasher whose shopping trips were nothing but wishful fantasy. Similarly, in “My Father’s House,” austere Great Aunt Anna reveals to her niece that she once had a suitor who died in battle overseas. When the aunt has a seizure during a sermon by a new young priest, the girl discovers that the priest and the suitor share the same last name. 

These are the two most obvious plot twists — the kind of easy wrapup you expect at the end of a TV show (which is, of course, another closed world). Other stories are marred by their neatness, such as the glib fates of three spinster sisters in “A Woman’s Touch.” Copeland deals in “character” stories but, like television, the characters are frequently packaged into stereotypes — Great Aunt Anna, for example, or the selfish priest in “Mis-carriage,” or a mild-mannered father in “Cassie.” They are well-made stories once the ideal in story writing — but, as such, they flirt with the pitfalls of cliché. By contrast, though both have flaws, “Beginning” (in which a divorced mother goes to university) and “Return” (about the train trip home from visiting a first grandchild) are more interesting, because their conclusions aren’t foregone.

John Gould’s The Boathouse Question is a first collection of plainly written stories about the people who live on one of the gulf islands off the coast of British Columbia. Though their subjects are somewhat similar, there’s none of the narrative flash of a Jack Hodgim here. Gould’s stories owe more to the workmanlike tradition of Hugh Garner, and W. D. Valuation’s Manitoba stories, mostly because they’re plotted things happen to the characters, and that’s what makes them characters. All of the stories are competent, and some, while something holds them back from being brilliant, still, none of the eight comes up hopelessly lame.

Several are set-pieces. In “An Early Morning Message” a snobbish small-town nurse doesn’t recognize the worth of a young fisherman until she’s bound to lose him. In “The Graces of Greece” a womanizing farmer kills his brother and the brother’s wife because he was the only woman he didn’t manage to charm. In “Oh, That Virgin Hair!” a girl must choose between her future on the island and the proposal of her first lover. Only once, in “The Latest Island News,” does Gould stock things too much in ha own favour — by melodramatically giving a drunken, rednecked motel owner, in addition to lots of other reasons for hating long-haired, dope-smoking kids, a brother who died from an overdose.

This is the first book of fiction to come from Grey’s Publishing Ltd. Printed on newsprint, it’s nothing fancy. But it is a good choice to start with.

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**Stalking stuffers**

Dragon Spoor (ISBN 0 88924 076 0) and Final Act (ISBN 0 88924 077 9), by Jack H. Crisp, Simon & Pi, each 218 pages and $10.95 cloth.

**By PHIL SURGUY**

**Stalking stuffers**

There are two first books in what is planned as an open-ended series of spy-adventure thrillers. Each one is labelled “A Special Operations Executive Novel.” The SOE was an actual British espionage outfit that carried out dangerous operations in occupied Europe during the Second World War. The general premise of the series is that the SOE is still in existence and empowered to shanghai its former members back into active service whenever it needs them. Thus each novel will have a different hero and supporting cast.

*Dragon Spoor* is a dismal effort, reminiscent of the glut of grade-C spoofs of the James Bond and Michael Caine movies that came out in the 1960s. It was never clear whether the writers and producers of those pointlessly violent, innately plotted secret-agent flicks were totally ignorant of what a good thriller is, greedily contemptuous of the form, or impelled by a ghastly combination of both attitudes.

*Final Act* is a much better book, though not anywhere near being the first rank. It’s about a middle-aged Canadian playwright who gets mixed up in a war between two British criminal organizations and turns to his old SOE commander for help. The violent physical action is generally a lot less random than in *Dragon Spoor* and the author does a good job of keeping hero and reader guessing for a long time about what’s really going on. But there is a distressing lack of sophistication about the story and the people in it. There are also too many annoyingly illogical and silly details. Sure signs the author hasn’t yet completely thought out. hasn’t thoroughly imagined. The fictional world he is trying to create; and that is something he must do if he and his publisher have any ambitions beyond scooping out a little niche in the cheap paperback market. Two more SOE novels have already been written and a fifth, *Dateline Rio*, is at the outline stage.

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New tales for the Maud squad

The Doctor's Sweetheart and other stories, by L. M. Montgomery, selected by Catherine McLay, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 190 pages, $7.95 cloth (ISBN 0 0 0 7 8 2 7 9 0 7).

By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY called herself an indefatigable scribbler. Born in 1874 in Prince Edward Island, she began writing as a young child, and had her first poetry and stories published at 16. Before she turned to longer fiction and hit the jackpot in 1908 with her first novel, Anne of Green Gables, she was already an established writer, selling both juvenile and adult pieces to the leading journals of her day. Even after the success of Anne, she continued to produce short stories as well as 19 more novels before her death in 1942. The Doctor's Sweetheart contains 14 of these stories, published between 1899 and 1935, selected out and collected by Catherine McLay of the University of Calgary.

McLay says in her introduction that Montgomery's notebooks record the sale of more than 500 stories. Fewer than 50 have previously appeared in book form and McLay has a double purpose in presenting this new collection. First, she wants to make more stories available for the enjoyment of Montgomery readers; secondly, she suggests that as the stories are arranged chronologically, spanning most of Montgomery's career, they show her development as a craftsman and as a writer concerned with a wide range of themes and issues.

The first of these aims presents no problem. Sentimental and dated as they may seem today, Montgomery's writings still matter in a great deal to a great many people who can think of Prince Edward Island only in terms of her fictional creations. She was a talented story-teller who could create a wonderfully strong sense of place and time: The Doctor's Sweetheart provides another glimpse of this secure world. True Montgomery fans will recognize that characters and events from some of these stories are used again in later novels.

But if for the second purpose — to show that Montgomery had a greater depth to her writing than has previously been suspected — McLay asks far too much of these stories. Montgomery herself cynically admitted a difference between writing something good enough to please herself and writing to please editors and make money. Obviously many of these stories were written to conform to the conventions of the time, and, as such, are hardly more than historical curiosities. They are romances with stock characters in melodramatic situations. For example, in "Emily's Husband," a young, married couple have lived apart for five years following a quarrel. Emily hears that her husband is dying of typhoid: she struggles through a severe storm to his bedside; he recovers, and they are reunited. In the title story, a country doctor waits faithfully for the return of his young sweetheart whose rich guardians, disapproving of her rural attachments, have taken her off to the city. She does return to marry her doctor, again after a five-year separation. In fact, all but three of the 14 stories end with conjugal union or reuniting.

Some stories do provide a change of pace. In "By Grace of Julius Caesar," two mid-aged women canvassing for the church climb a ladder to a rooftop to escape a vicious-looking dog. The dog's owner, a lonely widower, removes the ladder end refuses to let them down until one agrees to marry him. Stories like this, which break from melodramatic patterns and arc intentionally humorous, are the best of the collection.

But essentially, all the stories are — as Montgomery intended them to be — women's magazine fiction. To treat them as anything more significant is inappropriate and, for this reason, McLay's introduction jars. She discusses theme, character, plot structure, setting, point of view, humour — laying it all out like the introduction to a high-school English textbook. Sometimes this serious treatment borders on the ridiculous, as when McLay tries to justify Montgomery's outrageous use of coincidence in some of her plots.

The book also provides a concise chronology of the events of Montgomery's life and a list of books by end about her. Annoyingly, a couple of the facts in the chronology are inconsistent with the information in the bibliography.

Montgomery admitted that her strength was in writing for young girls and these stories — presumably for adult readers — are not as good as her best juvenile fiction. If these represent the best of her hundreds of still uncollected stories, Montgomery fans probably won't have to make much room on their bookshelves for future volumes.
Restless alien, ceaseless flux


By A. F. MORITZ

THE DISAFFECTION and pain of the wounded outsider in a technical society that defies the “normal”—this is what strikes us in a turbulent eruption of language from Raymond Filip’s first full-scale collection of poems. Somebody Told Me Looked Like Everyman. The style is tumultuous, packed. laden with parodies of jargon and officialese and with pseudo-intellectual Slang, studded with puns and word games. often leading from one point to another as much by sound pattern as by thought. Filip’s signature is the bitter, hyper-active, truly restless wit of this style. Though he is capable of lyricism, even in it his words are nervously active, as in this passage:

Upstroke, tap her life, my mother,
Milk and honey wine maiden from the Old World;
A sky thing in her wooden-shoed youth.
Working benevolently within singing distance
Of blue jasmines beside round-shape shrines
Of her native land.

His subject, roughly speaking, is defined by a single line he utters in the person of the Canadian Immigrant: “I am the inalienable tight N alienation.” Wip lives in a human world crushed and pushed aside by the technical, marginal, and industrial procedures for which the human is simply material.

Hi social criticism develops organically from an uncompromising engagement with autobiography and the concrete situation around him. The book starts with Filip’s own physical deformity, accepting it as a sign of honourable alienation from (and opposition to) a society that is truly “deformed.” It progresses through vignettes of family breakdown, and moves into broader consideration of Canadian society. Always Filip sticks close to real sights, sounds, experiences, and speech. He re-

This writing is far from perfect, and slips of tone and even grammar indicate that Filip is an “unschooled” poet. But with a certain abandon he attempts to take on the whole of contemporary confusion. The result is withering chunks of freestyle and agrieved wit such as “Snow White and the Group of Seven,” “Message parlor Tricks,” and “Auditions Before a Mirror.”

Jack Hannan’s Peeling Oranges in the Shade introduces a poetry altogether different: calm, intimate, meditative, visionary. Although this is a first book, it is distinguished for the perfect finish of its rich and unique language.

Working in the Mallarmé tradition of style, Hannan attempts to mirror and explore the ceaseless flux of experience, conceived mainly as the individual’s inner sensory, emotional, and intellectual dialectic. But the work rejects symbolist aestheticism, and also avoids revelation, dogma, chance, miracle, surrealism: “Dreams and happenstance,” Hannan says, “are not prime value.” Instead, the poetry is muted firmly in common realities—or rather, in our subjective experience of them.

For the contemporary human being, adrift in complete relativism, Hannan’s
New tune, same old steppes


By WAYNE GRADY

"MUCH OF the range land of Alberta and Saskatchewan," wrote Wilfrid Eggleston in The Frontier and Canadian Letters (1957), "especially that part within 'Palliser's Triangle,' is similar in general character to the steppes of eastern Russia and western Siberia, and destined forever to be sparsely settled either by ranchers or large-scale farmers. Such areas have not elsewhere in the world ever been the home of vigorous cultural manifestations of a literary type..." Eggleston argued that "native letters in any new areas must await the growth and development of adequate educational facilities. publications...stimulating associations of artists," and the like. Twenty-two years later Eggleston is singing the same song: Prairie Symphony masquerades as a novel, but it is really a clumsy novelization of the frontier thesis of Canadian literature.

Christopher Niles is a young man who, in the mid-1920s, finds himself ill-suited to life on a dill farm in Palliser's Triangle, that area of bald-headed prairie in southeast Alberta between Medicine Hat and Lethbridge known during the Depression as Next Year Country, Stunned by a vision one day while hoeing Russian thistle in his truck garden, Christopher decides to devote the rest of his life to poetry. He promptly leaves the farm to take a job in Web You's Cafe in Judith River. But his 'fastidious stomach' soon finds "the odours of the place repulsive" and un conduc tive to proper study of "the English classics," and he manages "by happy coincidence" to land a job as a teacher only foot miles from where he started out on page one. A year later he becomes a hermit in a shack on his cousin's farm, where he denies himself the temptations of the flesh and waits for "the circumstances to conspire so that great poetry could spring almost spontaneously into being." After a suitable period of inspired but unprofitable creativity—four years—he moves to Calgary, where he manages to write an epic poem which brings "to pulsating vivid reality the magnificent pageant of evolving life and drama" of the Prairies, "from the exotic and fabulous em of the dinosaurs to the Red River carts and the echoing whistle of the locomotive and the covered wagon of the optimistic homesteader" before being mercifully hit by a train and, presumably, knocked to his senses.

Part two takes Christopher back into society. He wakes up in the arms of Stephen Heller, editor of The Prairie Farm and the publication of the United Farmers' Association. Christopher is caught up in the association, the Wheat Pool, agrarian reform movements, reconstruction, socialism, the CCF and other popular diversions of Prairie life in the Dirty Thirties. Only after this social rehabilitation, you see, can a true artist settle down with a good woman and get on with the business of writing poems that capture "the tragedy and comedy of life." The novel ends with Christopher driving madly to Clover Hill to meet up with Gail, the beautiful exponent of educational reform, reciting lines from the poetry of Thomas Hardy and "watching out for sharp rocks."

Like the earlier book, Prairie Symphony tries to show that true native art cannot simply springout of the soil, but must be nurtured by a sophisticated, cultural community freed from the frontier struggle for existence and having plenty of leisure and education to appreciate Art. It's a thesis novel, and the thesis is painstakingly spelled out again and again. "Had anyone," Christopher wonders at one point, "ever lived solely from his singing? Yes, in a happier age, in a much more appreciative society. But did it happen any longer? Certainly not on the frontier." The trouble is that Eggleston himself knows less about art and the inner life of the artist than he does about the steppes of eastern Russia and western Siberia. A competent journalist, he charts Christopher's progress from embryonic Bynn to triumphant master of verslifre, but what it is that compels Christopher to make that journey is not even hinted at. There is much talk of "visions" and "inspiration," but little evidence that these have anything to do with genius. Christopher somehow exudes poetry as neighbours exude odours of the barn. We are told he is a voracious ruder, but not one of the books he devours is named (except for a passing

poetry implies at least a temporary resolution. Though the fears and despair are not ducessive, Hananbasically portrays a mind that takes flux not as a threat but adventure, and derives from some mysterious depths a silent faith:

The light goes off in a glance of fire, only in one view toward distraction, the same way the first and each hot brightness fomed out to allow for other additions to life, other duties and desires.

You dress for a stroll in the rain whenever it's warm, whenever the rain is warm you put on comfortable clothes and take a walk, say's time for thoughtfulness as one who was once a boleter and who now chews his food like a manic tiny bites, fast and digested fully before saying o, she leaves all up to providence.

Hanan's work, full of silences, infinitely suggestive, startlingly original and accomplished, feels like a classic of the 1970s. It is interesting that both Hanan and Filip are young Montreal-based poets, as is August Kleinzahler. The work of all three has been coming to attention over the last two years, yet all three were excluded, whether by decision or oversight, from the Vehicule Press's highly publicized 1978 anthology of recent poetry in Montreal. Their work is clearly superior to that of all but two of the three of the anthology poets.

Tributaries is an anthology whose theme is poets willing to die about other poets. This makes for a rather thin, easy-reading stuff that is often mildly entertaining and sometimes a bit cloying. Editor Barry Dempster has managed to corral a good proportion of the most widely known Canadian poets, who address each other and also oyein on various literary luminaries including Rillie, Pound, and Cavafy. A few of the poems achieve memorable quality, such as Al Purdy's ramble and M. Travis Lane's tribute to Derek Walcott.
I mention this annoying lack of guides because it typifies the book itself. Although the work succeeds in painting a picture of Lougheed, it lacks an adequate explanation of the political, social, and economic conditions that enabled Lougheed to take over a party for which he had done nothing before he became leader. This is a pity because, if the author's reportage is accurate, Lougheed is indeed remarkable, though not admirable, political leader.

Here is a man who never attended a political meeting before deciding to seek the leadership of the Alberta Conservative Party. Nowhere in the book is there a suggestion that at the time he had any political ideas or aims other than winning, first the leadership, then the government. Indeed, according to the author, Lougheed might just as easily have become a Liberal. "It could have gone either way," he is alleged to have admitted.

If the facts the book describes are accurate—I must emphasize this because I do not myself know the Alberta Premier—Lougheed knew nothing about party programs or about the organization he set out to lead. This may well have been an advantage, since he could build everything in his own image and this he did. His image is drawn by the information that "a select group of Conservative businessmen in both Calgary and Edmonton... considered Peter an ideal representative of their class." These are the elements in the province who went after him, and he has not disappointed them.

What astounds a person with my political background is not only that a man so lacking in elementary political commitment should think of becoming a party leader, but that those in control of the party should seek him out. Lougheed had been a smart corporate executive with the Manxco Corporation, was a reliable corporate lawyer, and his grandfather had been a Tory senator. Apparently this was enough for the brass. And they have every reason to be proud of their judgement, for their choice learned fast not only how to win but also how to govern.

The book shows Lougheed to be authoritarian and ruthless. "Peter is the government like a corporation," we are told. He holds the reins of power exclusively in his hands and exercises tight control over his cabinet and the civil service. This may explain why so many of his former ministers did not run in the recent election despite the fact that there was no doubt about the result.

The Premier apparently intimidates media people to such an extent that the author, a veteran reporter himself, is moved to write. "Conscientious political reporting is rare in Alberta," and to add: "Any critical repoting of Lougheed in Alberta is seen by the Premier as Eastern Canadian propaganda." We are told that when television was introduced into the Legislature, Lougheed insisted on a physical arrangement that results in the camera always facing the government benches, so that opposition speakers "appear on the screen as disembodied voices." This is more than partisan; it is ruthless.

Finally, the author expresses the view

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that “Longhead’s administration reflects the hopes, prejudices and ambitions of the upper-middle class to the exclusion of all others.” Thus, the book is not sycophantic. The events are described in a straightforward fashion, but there is a lack of depth in the analysis of the man and of the developments in which he has played a key role.

Boning up on hard knocks

VIOLENCE AND DELINQUENCY are on the upswing these days... and if these recent sociological works are any indication, we can’t expect much improvement. In Violence in Canada the editor’s stated purpose is to examine violence from different perspectives in order to identify areas requiring further research. Fifteen contributors from several disciplines approach the topic in strikingly different ways. and the curious thing here is that all the interesting articles were written by non-sociologists.
The book is divided into four parts, dealing respectively with an “overview of the origins of violence,” “domestic violence,” “violence and the administration of justice,” and “violence and the media.” Since this volume purports to be about Canada, a more effective first section (and one that might have lent this study some cohesiveness) would have included specifically, an “overview” of violence within the Canadian context, viz. Kenneth McNaught’s “Violence in Canadian History.” Since Gammon is acquainted with this article, I find its exclusion surprising. Domestic violence is discussed in terms of wife-beating and child abuse. Though of interest for Dr. James Wilkes’s brief but comprehensive article (one of the more intelligent statements in the book), this section adds little to our present knowledge.
The topic of rape is inevitable in such a trendy collection, and Maureen McFie has contributed a useful essay that clearly illustrates why existing Canadian legislation is inadequate. Also included in part three are some fascinating figures on Canadian murder, courtesy of Statistics Canada. No discussion of violence these days would be complete without a look at the media. And so included in part four are a touch of McLuhanism, an unbelievably silly article on youth hockey, and a rather suggestive article by the Queen’s Printer on the roles played by the media, the police, and the participants in public demonstrations.
That violence is inherent in mankind is clear from even a cursory reading of the Old Testament. That it assumes different forms and values in varying circumstances should be obvious. Yet a number of contributors to this pretentious study labour these points at tiresome length, couching them in sociological terminology that strikes this reader as little more than common sense dressed up in contemporary jargon.
James Hackler’s honest and meticulously researched volume is a refreshing change. Hackler states at the outset that his purpose is to discuss not the causality of juvenile delinquency, but what to do about it. The problem, he argues convincingly, is enormously complex and must be approached with a sense of adventure tempered by reason and moderation.
Hackler believes that Canada should avoid mistakes made in the U.S. in the past, and he discusses a number of these. In considerable detail, Study after study is quoted, leading to the conclusion that few advances have been made in the field of delinquency. Inevitably, it is known to be expensive and is widely regarded as inhumane. Prevention and treatment programs, it seems, don’t work in most cases and may exacerbate the problem. Uncontrolled control groups and a variety of vested interests make accurate evaluation virtually impossible: even the most promising data, cautions the author, should be viewed with skepticism, “Experts” are too often expert, and in any case, social policy is formulated, not by experts, but by politicians who are not always governed by the rationale of scientific findings.
What then of the future? Hackler wonders whether juvenile delinquency is one of the many factors that may affect the prices we pay for individualism and whether sometimes doing nothing might in fact be the wisest course. Alternatively, he suggests pot-pourri of possible programs ranging from modified censure and punishment to diversion, vocational training, and transactional analysis. Such measures, he points out, have some intrinsic value: they are cheaper than incarceration, and may prove to be some impact on delinquency in the long run. At any rate, they don’t appear to do any harm.
Hackler would like future research to reveal how social problems come to be defined, and why people so often insist that something has to be done. That the public will continue to demand programs to prevent and control delinquency is an underlying premise of this book. Perhaps the editor is mistaken. Given the current public mood, I suspect that a widespread knowledge of the statistical data so scrupulously presented by Mr. Hackler might be more likely to raise a demand for the return of the lash.
**Out, damned Spot**

By W. A. MARSHANO

A COUPLE of interesting things happened in Toronto in 1977. (Yes, that many.) One was: during the summer, an 11-year-old sunshine boy was killed by a sexual assault and then murdered — drowned in a sink — resulting in an inflamed public outcry. It was one of those few times one could honestly say "the people took to the streets." There were angry anti-homosexual rallies that came dangerously close to mob violence. There were instances of homosexuals being beaten on the streets. Toronto's police and municipal government came down on the "sin strip" of lower Yonge Street like a bully club, and its message parlors were shuttered down in almost no time at all.

Another was this: there was a small rash — two or three cases of small children being horribly savaged by vicious pet dogs, resulting in no civic outcry whatsoever. Two of the beasts were Nazi Shepherds; they got off with little more than a "Bad doggie!" The third, a Doberman, was gassed at the pound while rallying Doberman owners paraded without trying to save the brute's life.

I don't want to be suspected of approving the harassment of homosexuals. I do want to point out the callousness of people who remain indifferent to crimes caused by man's best friend. I admit that the dogs' victims did not, at least, lose their lives — but they will live to fear another day. A three- or five-year-old child who has been facially disfigured by a savage animal — to the extent of requiring more than 140 stitches — will live in unavoidable terror for the rest of its life. And I will admit to prejudice. I do not share the prevailing Disney-colored view of the animal kingdom. Nevertheless, I can clap with only one hand for Iris Nowell.

Nowell has tackled an emotional subject with mere reason, and the result is an informative but ineffective tract that preaches to the converted and misses the sinners by a mile (1.6 kilometers).

She tries to be fair. She bemoans against the honest dog, or the intelligent owner who keeps his pet from fouling lawns and menacing children, who keeps it leashed and keeps it quiet. But, heavy-handed and moralistic in the wrong Normanique way, she can't resist disapproving of the huge quantities of food that pets eat (some of which would do mom good. dinnedly, in the protein-starved Third

World): of the billions of dollars spent in pet boutiques; of stupid fads like dog psychiatry. Dumb? Yes. But none of our business. If a man wants to send his dog to summer camp and later bury it in Paw Print Gardens, it's his money, not ours. And it never pays to be humiliated, the fact that Queen Elizabeth II's pet promenade has a New York City fire hydrant for American dogs and an Edwardian lampost for British ones suggests satire, not insensitive extravagance.

But the intelligent dog owner can learn something here. Nowell reports that many "pedigreed" dogs are frauds sold by breeders who are amateurs at best and crooks at worst, and that lack of control of pedigree papers may make them as reliable as a purchased diploma. She covers the pet-food industry well. making it clear that some manufacturers encourage unhealthy feeding through their advertising and that, as of the book's publication, only one Canadian packer's pet foods have passed the nutritional tests of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, even though adoption of CMVA standards would cost only four cents a case, or one sixth of a cent a can. This is a detailed chapter on dog-borne diseases, most of them revolt:ing, that are dangerous to human beings. But this too, is flawed by an apparent urge to indict: the worst disease covered (typhloplasmia, which affects pregnant women and results in crippling birth defects) is spread by cats.

Those who don't like dogs, their ceaseless barking and the old familiar faces that foul the streets and lawns, will also learn a lot about the apparent ineffectiveness of free spaying and neutering clinics (which is how dog lovers make us pay for their pet care): about the millions of stray dogs that are rounded up, killed (by injection, gassing, or "high-altitude decompression") and later incinerated (much to the dismay of that odd breed of dog lover whose interest in animals is expressed only when the animals are about to be killed); and about the very small chance of getting elected officials to do anything about the problem.

But the irresponsible dog owner will be untouched by all of this — unless he is moved to irrational hostility of the kind that resulted in the leader of the Children Before Dogs organization being attacked by dog lows, who pelted her with dogshit. (Pardon the vulgarity, but, as Nowell points out, that is what it is.)

The plain fact is that such people care more for their dogs theee for their fellow man. They don't believe that their dogs bark, bite or defecate — or that anyone has a right to complain about them. For now, the only response to this smug, uncaring denial is lunatic rage — but it has gone beyond that in the past. In the 1830s, in New York, small boys with clubs killed dogs in the streets, and were paid bounty of 50 cents a head. Is something like that a possibility? Maybe. Nowell says North America's dog population will double by...
unleashed dog heading toward es, about 50 feet away. I began angling my little group away to the right. But we couldn't get far enough away, and es we drew abreast, the dog charged my daughter, barking terribly. Emily, seated, is about 20 inches high; the dog, a huge, malevolent thing, towered over her, tensed end threatening. I was frightened stiff and Emily was screaming. Fortunately, two of the other children interposed themselves and I turned to the dog's owner, trying to say not what I felt, which was fear and hatred, but something intelligent, like "Call off your dog." The women understood the deer, in her limited way. She flashed a criminally stupid smile at me and said brightly, "Don't worry — she's only playing."

By SUSAN LESLIE

Canadian Settlers' Guide by suggesting that all would-be Canadian homesteaders pose themselves the sobering question, "Have I sufficient energy of character to enable me to conform to the changes that await me in my new mode of life?" A century later, life in the Canadian backwoods still requires energy of character, end all those embarking on it — and certainly those attempting to write about it — should take measure of their moral resources. Mrs. Trail was, of course, a tough customer, and did not recommend homesteading for "idle sensualists" or otherwise self-indulgent persons. I suspect that, faced with these four books on country life in Canada, she would find three of the four authors unsuitable material.

Mrs. Trail was, of course, a tough customer, and did not recommend homesteading for "idle sensualists" or otherwise self-indulgent persons. I suspect that, faced with these four books on country life in Canada, she would find three of the four authors unsuitable material.


By SUSAN LESLIE

Recreational Farming begins with a detailed discussion of how to find a suitable piece of land. The details are all practical: how to read plant hardiness-zone maps, the significance of degree days, and the important attributes of barns. Mr. Winter goes on to deal with soil survey maps and the merits of hedges. While he has not attempted a complete compendium for part-time farmers, Mr. Winter does write enough about different modes of small-scale farming — raising pigs, bee-keeping, turf-farming, grazing beef cattle, breeding rabbits and growing hay — that one can begin to think seriously about them. He sensibly finishes his book with a list of free government publications that might be useful to his readers.

While this is all very business-like stuff, Recreational Farming is no dry essay manual. Mr. Winter confesses in his preface that he set out to write this book because he wanted to "write something long after five years with nothing more to show than office notes and smell papers." Well, the year spent writing Recreational Farming was a productive one, and he ought to feel content that he has written something that is not only long and loose, but also useful and consistently readable. Looseness, I assume, means warmth, humour, and occasional expressiveness, and Recreational Farming certainly possesses these qualities.

And now for the also-rans, though in fairness to Dorothy Gilman. Molly Douglas, and Gilman Douglas, it should be mentioned that they were not necessarily in the same place as Mr. Winter.

If Gileon Douglas sees herself in a backwoods literary tradition, it is one established by Henry Thoreau, and not by Mrs. Trail. Her Silence Is My Homeland is a collection of wilderness musings, not a guide to anything. A former newspaper writer (among other things), she discovered an abandoned cabin somewhere in southwestern British Columbia, and decided on first sight that this cabin would be home. She is obviously a sturdy woman. She has managed to be self-sufficient, living off what her small garden provides, and what she can forage or fish for in her surroundings. She is also quite knowledgeable about the woods. Like Mrs. Trail before her, she is fascinated by wildflowers, and makes frequent reference to them. She is also a birder, and unashamedly writes about the doings of Mrs. Barrow's Goldeneye Duck and Guise the Grebe. "Eve" this coy nonsense, however, does not disguise her genuine love of the bush.

But affectionate field notes just aren't enough. Nature willing is extremely difficult to do well. Many of us are deluded into believing that our encounters with scenic grandeur are profound. unique moments. Well, the greatness of the great outdoors ain't news. And since it doesn't have novelty going for it, nature, as subject matter, has to be worked by a special sensibility before it can be presented in a fresh, unsentimental way. Douglas recognizes the problem:

It is so difficult to describe the happiness of simplicity, the joy of little things. Perhaps I sound sentimental and unfeeling when I write of what the trees, the mountains, the rivers and my little cabin meant to "he.

I'm afraid I think she does.

A New Kind of Country by Dorothy Gilman resembles Silence Is My Homeland in certain trivial ways; older women writer moves to the country, thinks about her life.
and proceeds to record and publish her reflections. But while Gilian Douglas is engaged in serious subsistence agriculture, Gilian Douglas, whom I think of occasionally as raising her sheep, is not attempting to survive done in the bush; her country home is a house in a Nova Scotian fishing village. With the proceeds described on the jacket a ‘the widely read Mrs. Polifax novel’ — she has settled into a life of solitude and contemplation. Her book is subtitled “an exploration into our essential loneliness and the wonderful country of the inner self.” Gilian Douglas is hardly breaking new virgin territory; she refers frequently to such predecessors as Thoreau, Maurice Nicoll, and Abraham Maslow. That he is not responding to crops or livestock or the raw elements dceo’ does not diminish the scale of Gilian’s adventure. She’s set out determined to find rebirth.

Limited on bring. On mattering, at least.

Lighting out for these territories of the spirit requires some courage, though I’m sure. Ms. Truill would dismiss it as trivial.

It’s clear that Gilian is a practiced writer. She knows the value of anecdote and writes a strong, efficient prose. But while A New Kind of Country has large ambition, it is a modest book. It is thin and not very taxing and I left it feeling I’d had a mildly stimulating conversation with a therapist.

Molly Douglas, author of Love In The DogHouse, doe’ not have the same high aspirations as Dorothy Gilian or GIllean Douglas. I assume her aim is to be a brisk and amusing “story-teller.” Her book is definitely chatty, and this, I gather, is the intended effect. Molly Douglas, her husband Christopher, and their sons moved to a dairy farm in Manitoba some years ago. (This adventure is chronicled in a previous Douglas work, Going West with Amabelle). Because the dairy business was rather uncertain, they fell into dog breeding to supplement the family income. The dogs — mostly long-coat chihuahuas — are introduced about page 20. And from there on in, they are the ‘tory. There are tragic dog death and heroic dog rescue; there is dog romance and sniggering dog sex. But then, right at the beginning. Ms. Douglas does give the reader fair warning. She describes Christopher and I love English and we love dog” I’m sure that other people who ‘hare these traits will find Love In The DogHouse delightful.

The enduring mythology, a. Eric Winter puts it of “the goodness of the country and the badness of the town’ ‘has resulted in many books. Some, one feels, have more to do with producing a cash income for country dweller’, than they do with literature or love of the outdoors. About such books there is always the sense that the authors have entered on wilderness or country life for it’ own sake, and then decided to make literary hay from their experience. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with that motive — except that it seems frequently to lead to self-indulgent books. Maybe such authors would be better advised to turn their efforts to some more fruitful enterprise. Macramé, perhaps, or bee-keeping? I

\[\begin{align*} & \text{In Defence of Federalism: The View from Quebec, by Gilles Lalonde, translated from the French by JoLaPierre, McClelland \& Stewart, 128 pages, $5.95 cloth (ISBN 0.57104563 8).} \\
& \text{Canada’s Third Option, edited by S. D. Berkowitz and Robert K. Logan, Macmillan, 282 pages, $8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7705 1589 4).} \\
& \text{By JOHN GREGORY} \\
& \text{MOST BOOKS ON THE national unity question in recent year’ have asked, “What does Quebec want?” or, “What can the rest of Canada do for Quebec?” Professors Lalonde, Berkowitz, and Logan now have published works that go beyond these often plaintive questions and add new voices to the debate.} \\
& \text{Lalonde’s In Defence of Federalism addresses the pertinent question, “What does Quebec have now?” Published in French in 1972, and well translated by JoLaPierre, the book remains remarkably up to date. It opens with a useful review of the main theories of federalism as political and social organization. It then builds on this foundation to argue against the most common challenges heard in Quebec against Canadian federalism, many of which, say Lalonde, spring from a narrow legalism to which the French Canadian élite, traditionally (and conservatively) educated in the law, are particularly susceptible.} \\
& \text{Lalonde goes on to attack the contention that Quebec must always be a minority within Confederation. This point, always more psychological than political, results from the trauma of the Conquest. Lalonde calls it an excuse for inaction in the same vein as the “colonial” theory and other political programs based on cultural insecurity. Even where he is less convincing, such as in his criticism of Quebec’s right to self-determination, he does raise many difficulties still ignored in popular rhetoric on the subject. While Lalonde does not pretend that all has been, or is, perfect for Quebec in Confederation, he will not condemn federalism on the basis of it’ history. A political and social system that allows the progress and assertiveness of Quebeckers on the last 15 years simply does not deserve summary dismissal. Had Wande revised his work for translation noted that the} \\
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O tempora, o mores


BY RICHARD LUBBOCK

This is the original bad-news book. There were, pudding along among the ice and wreckage of the late-20th century, happy and confident that we would soon pass through the gates of all-merciful Death, and succumb to the obliterative psychotherapy of acute moris (as it is known to the readers of medical dictionaries), when along comes Ian Currie and assures us, cool as custard, that it cannot happen. You Cannot Die, he insists. I do not wish to know that.

Fortunately for the sceptical reader, note single idea of this work is credible despite, or perhaps because of, repeated incantations in the name of Science. Science is said to prove this, and to prove that. Irrefutable scientific tests litter Currie's pages as far as the eye can see. It's enough to make a fellow believe in the curative powers of Neo-Citan, but not in survival after death. To be more precise, metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, is the ultimate target toward which Mr. Currie relentlessly drives.

"I change but I cannot die," sang the poet Shelley, but neither Shelley nor his vision now in these wooden pages. The Augustan poet Ovid devoted the entire 15th book of his Metamorphoses to a charming and seductive interpretation of the metempsychosis conjecture, as originally held by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras during the sixth century B.C. But neither Pythagoras nor Ovid is mentioned by Currie, and there's nothing poetic or charming in his manner. Perhaps Currie is ashamed that his subject matter has such an ancient history. Fearful lest it appear old-hat, he makes his speculation "scientific" and hot-diggity-dog up to date. After all, science is what drags the crowds in. In this day and age of Star Wars and hand calculators. Although, to be fair, he does toss in an occasional epigraphic chapter reading from Keats, Heraclitus, or the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Argumentum ad hominem seems to be the chief persuasive strategy of this tract, and doctors of philosophy and medicine and university departments are referred to repeatedly by title; as though the mere incantations of the syllables of their names provided the slightest guarantee for logical thought or rational understanding. On the contrary. To judge from You Cannot Die, exposure to university training even the lowest level leads to irreversible rotting of the little gray cells. On page 173, for example, the author brandishes a cluster of four American Ph.D.s at the reader, followed in short order by the naming of a Brazilian psychiatrist and a Chicago physician. Such a fusillade of degredence may stun the critical powers of the naive reader, but I feel impelled to interpret thereferences as evidence of the neurotoxic properties of "higher" education and, to think it a matter to lay before Ralph Nader of the Senator Club.

The book consists largely of a pollution of experiences reported by people who have hovered at or near the point of death. I suppose you could call them "periomortal" experiences by analogy with periodontal disease (or pyorrhoea), I cannot doubt the reality of the experiences any more than I doubt that some people see stars when they are punched in the eye. In fact, I have met people with periomortal experiences to recount, and they seem to me to be completely sane and sincere. But that does not ensure that these people actually "died" in the strictest sense of the word (meaning rigor mortis, cooling of the body, clouding of the corneas, and so forth) and even at that it would not entail that their visions must necessarily be interpreted as evidence of an afterlife. There are other possibilities, such as the action of stress on the nervous system, to be disposed of before we fall back with despair upon the immortality hypothesis.

Currie has accumulated dozens of periomortal and related "psychic" anecdotes in his book, apparently lambouring under the delusion that a mere collection of evidence produces, by some sheet mess-effect, the result of scientific Proof. That simply isn't so. Science, es is well known, proceeds by the method of conjecture and refutation: conjectures, such as a theory of gravitation, are plucked out of the air, and then attempts are made to test them to destruction, Solon 9 as a conjecture remains unfuted it is tentatively held to be true, but no scientific theory is ever expected to survive forever. Science can disprove things, but has never proven anything.
The man upstairs is not amused

Multinationals and the Peaceable Kingdom, by Harry Antonides, Clarke Irwin. 248 pages. $13.95 cloth (ISBN 7720 11966).

By DAN HILTS

In the 18th and 19th centuries it wasn't uncommon for those with the time, the money, and the proselytizing zeal to publish at their own expense their version of how the world worked, what was wrong with it, and what could be done to fix it. The author would mail copies to his friends, pass them out at parties, and try to get booksellers to stock them. Sometimes important or interesting works gained attention this way. Multinationals and the Peaceable Kingdom is in that tradition, except that it was not printed privately, it is not an important work, and it is interesting only to those with a penchant for arcane dogma.

Harry Antonides is a follower of the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea, formulated in the Netherlands in the 19th century, refined in the 1920s, and nurtured at the Free University of Amsterdam and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. This group has "developed a new philosophy taking its starting point in biblical revelation and concentrating on the themes of creation, sin and redemption." The book is divided into three parts. The first deals with the origins, growth, size, and influence of the multinationals. The author takes a deep breath, a firm grip on the reader's lapel, and after 67 pages of facts and figures, statistics and tables, concludes that the multinationals are large, wealthy, and powerful. Part Two deals with responses to the multinationals, and Part Three looks at the roots of the Problem. Each part ends with a two-page summary end at the back of the book are the conclusions end 34 pages of notes.

Antonides believes that the multinationals are the most visible and worrisome result of modem business end technology, which have diverted man from his innate spirituality to a destructive materialism. That's why things haven't been going so well lately. The beleaguered multinationals not only have to worry about fluctuating exchange rates, class-action law suits, nationalism, taxes, and bribing politicians but now they must also look nervously to the heavens — God is not amused.

Antonides is well-read and not afraid to show it. Each chapter begins with two, usually three, long quotations, and throughout the text there are long quotations from a wide variety of sources. The book isn't so much written as assembled. It covers so much economic, political, and philosophical ground that a detailed discussion of the ideas is not possible here. But how does the author manage to go from global economic problems, some of which are caused by multinational corporations, through modem men's social, political and political quandaries, including Canada's relations with the United States, to some possible solutions? He does it with God instead of a good editor. The book should have been reduced to the preface, the three summaries, and the conclusions — which would have been fewer than 20 pages published as a long article in a small magazine.

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May, 1979, Books in Canada 31
A surfeit of bodies: French skeletons, Miller's anatomy, and the plague years

THE LAST TIME I reviewed Raymond Souster—in the Globe and Mail six or seven years ago—I suggested that he was a somewhat overrated poet. I was particularly troubled by his didacticism, an inability to restrain himself from adding trite punch lines to some of his best poems. Souster responded to my criticism in his next collection with a two-line poem titled “Thanks to Morris Wolfe”: “It’s finally out,” he wrote, “I’ve been over-rated—now I’ll be more loved and far less hated.”

I don’t know whether it’s because I’ve been immortalized by Souster, or because my critical faculties have matured (or degenerated), but reading Souster’s latest collection, Ranging In (141 pages, Oberon. 86.95), I found myself much less troubled by what 1 complained about earlier. Oh, there are still poems that are two or three lines too long—“What to Do With the Robin,” for instance, or “Fallen Apple Blossoms.” And then there are still poems that are a bit too cute—the one about the cat, for example, who’s “always calico-spotted when I go by in the morning (no doubt dog-tired from a hard night’s mousing).”

But these seem rather less funny than a poet whose quiet perceptions are an almost constant delight. “Souster, you bastard,” he writes. “Admit now your first reaction/on hearing of his death by heart-failure/has a lousy New York cab funciona most unfeeling. callous thought/just think, from tomorrow/on the prices of my Lowell firsts/could easily double!”

As always and many of his best poems deal with the past, sometimes nostalgically, sometimes ironically; the Maple Leafs’ Busher Jackson and Charlie Conacher playing street hockey on a Christmas morning; Bobby Hackett blowing “that sweet right horn” of his on his final visit to Toronto; Souster’s father digging a gunpit at Vimy Ridge *and* finding the skeletons of two French pubs, shreds of uniform I still clinging to their bones, who’d died there attacking me in a not-so-good year of war supposed to end what was started. “Maybe the time has come for a collected Souster.”

MANY OF us know the wonderfully eclectic Dr. Jonathan Miller through such work as his satirical revue Beyond the Fringe; his film version of Alice in Wonderland: his New Yorker land other essays on a variety of subjects; his perceptive little book, McLuhan, in the Fontana Modern Masters series. (Reading McLuhan, says Miller, altered the way he looked at the world. The irony is, he writes, “I can’t remember a single observation [by McLuhan] which I now hold, to be true, nor indeed a single theory which ever ‘begins to hold water.’”)

Now Miller has made a major contribution in his “own” field—medicine. The Body in Question (352 pages, Clarke Irwin, $21.50) based on his 13-part, BBC television series, is a compelling history of our perception of our own bodies. Particularly surprising (to me, anyway) is Miller’s suggestion that it’s only in the past quarter century or so that we’ve come to understand how the body works and protects itself as its own “private hospital.”

This growth in understanding has come largely, says Miller, from machines that in oneway or another replicate the functions of the body. We didn’t really understand how the heart worked until we’d invented the pump (in the 17th century); the invention of automatic gun-turrets has given us an understanding of voluntary muscular movement; and so on.

Miller delights in raising questions that seem simple-minded: “What is life? What is blood? He’s the” proceeds, in beautifully cleat prose, to demonstrate that the answer isn’t nearly as simple as we might believe. Even when he’s telling us things that we have some knowledge of, he does so in a way that’s fresh and that pushes our understanding. “We have retained in the bloods & s,” he writes, “active representatives of our original one-celled ancestors, white blood cells, and these roll freely through the circulation, ready to make themselves available when the inflammatory call is raised.” There’s a similar freshness about Miller’s choice of illustrations. At first glance they seem curiously idiosyncratic, at times even grotesque. But they almost always force the reader to see things at least slightly differently. In that sense, The Body in Question reminds me of John Berger’s Ways of Seeing. I hope an inexpensive edition of the book becomes available soon.

THE TORONTO STAR devoted a full page to Margaret Trudeau the day before her televised autobiography began. Two thirds consisted of an advertisement urging people to read the scatidline that would unfold in the Star over the next five days. The rest was an article headed “Maggie’s antics have ‘shattered’ her parents”; it offered us what purported to be inside gossip “bout just how humiliated the Sinclairs are.

If I ran a bookstore, I would have pinned that page into a collection of Christopher Lasch’s new book, The Culture of Narcissism (268 pages, Masson, $15.95). The juxtaposition would have been just right. For according to social critic Lasch, capitalism is on its last legs. The symptoms are to be found everywhere—in our private lives we’ve all become voyeurs and hypochondriacs, on the one hand eager to have the goods on one another and on the other ever searching for ways to assuage our own battered egos. Meanwhile, the institutions that have been the focus of our public lives—church, school, and government—are in decline all around us. “Even Canada,” writes the gloomy Lasch, “lost a bastion of solid bourgeois dependability when the separatist movement in Quebec threatened its very existence as a nation.”

Obviously, there’s some truth in what Lasch has to say. But there’s much that’s irritating about his book. His style is ponderous. And he tells us nothing that the best American social critics—me such as Paul Goodman and Edgar Z. Friedenberg—haven’t told us before and better. Nevertheless, this book should do very well. The word “narcissism” in the title guarantees that it’ll make voyeurs think that they’re getting the goods and hypochondriacs that they’re getting the cure.

I HOPE LASCH takes the time to read Barbara Tuchman’s brilliant new book. A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century (677 pages. Knopf, $21.00). Because, as Tuchman (pronounced Tuck-man) points out, “If our last decade or two of collapsing assumptions had no other virtue than that of unusual discomfort, it is reassuring to know that the human species has lived through worse before.” Despair, she implies, is folly.

Tuchman set out to discover the effects on society of the worst disaster in recorded history—the Black Death—which killed one third of the population of India and Iceland in the years 1348-1350. But she found it difficult to isolate the effects of pestilence from the effects of all other travails of the period, it was a “chronically long, plague-ridden time. Feudalism was breaking down. The knighthood failed to protect: the Church failed to lead. No government was able to maintain order. Bands of unemployed mercenaries ravaged the countryside. “People,” says Tuchman in her exquisite prose, “felt subject to events beyond their control, swept, like fossans at sea, hitter and you in a universe without reason or purpose. They lived through a period which suffered and struggled without visible advance. They longed for a remedy, for a renewal of faith, for stability and order that ‘ever came.”

I’m not competent to judge medievalist Geoffrey Barraclough’s criticisms of Tuchman’s historical scholarship. He argues that she ought to have stayed clear of a period in which she is not a specialist. But much of the appeal of A Distant Mirror is that an intelligent generalist has provided us with something that all the specialists with all their knowledge have filled to do—a fascinating overview of a period about which most of us are almost totally ignorant. ☮
Here comes the Master Gatherer, wasting trees to make himself a target once again

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO is a self-made target. There's such a glut of his trivial books that they practically beg to be criticized; and of course, since his main concern seems to be self-promotion, any publicity is good publicity. He trips from publisher to publisher as if the entire industry were his own private vanity press. I mean, trees have given their lives for such books as Colombo's Names (NC Press, 212 pages), stupendously overpriced at $1.95 cloth. After all, this self-styled "checklist" is barely half a book, since it's printed double-spaced end to end in every other column twice, like an English-French, French-English dictionary. Thus a reader may look up Judy LaMarsh and make the astonishing discovery that her nickname is Judy. Then look up Judy and discover Judy LaMarsh. Naturally, the names that interested me most were writers' pseudonyms (for example, John Glassco, a.k.a. Nordy We Sproule and Hideki Okada, among others). But many more are lost to obscurity because there aren't any explanatory notes. I'm sure, for one thing, that nobody except Colombo really thinks of Alexei Kosygin as Chief Golden Eagle. But there's an entry to that effect. He also confuses Barry Broadfoot, the author, with Dave Broadfoot, the comedian, and there are cryptic double entries for football players' Normie Kwong (Lim Kwong Yew) and Normie Kwong (the China Clipper). Since these aren't cross-referenced, presumably they played for different teams. Old football fans will be curious, too, about William Lougheed (the Blue-eyed Sheikh), reportedly Premier of Alberta. (Does Peter know?) Colombo's self-gratifying entry for himself is Master Gatherer. I lose the interests of increasing his collection. allow me to suggest another: Schlock Absorbist.

Earle Birney's Big Bird in the Bosh (Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, 95 pages, $4.95 paper and $10.00 cloth) is another book that probably wouldn't have been published if its author weren't so well known. It includes Birney's short stories "Waiting for Queen Emma" (which I recognized from public-school days as "Enigma in Ebony") and "Mickey Was a Swell Guy," and an excerpt from his Depression novel, Down the Long Table. Much of the rest is literary marginalia, such as a guest column for Eric Nicoll from the Vancouver Province, a little piece on university students' illiteracies from Saturday Night, and an interesting discourse on duelling. The title story is about a dumb East Kootenay bush rancher who discovers a phoenix (he calls it a "feenick") on his property. Written in dialect, it was wisely rejected by Canadian magazines for two years before Mademoiselle bought it (for about five times what any Toronto editor would have paid." Birney later smug about this.

Then there's a handful of genuine vanity books. Mahony's Minute Mn by Chris Stewart and Lynn Hudson (Stewart & Hudson Books, Box 157, Riverhurst, Sask. S.O.H 3PO, 121 pages, $4.95 paper) is a history of the Saskatchewan Provincial Police, a force that existed under Commissioner Charles Augustus Mahony from 1917 to 1928. One of their cases so interested the w-authors that they expanded it into a separate 35-page pamphlet. Murder in Uniform— the story of a Royal North West Mounted Police officer, John Wilson, who murdered his pregnant wife in 1918, then married another woman only 48 hours later. Around the same time a half-pound container of opium could be made for $4.50 (the price of a soporific paperback today) in Stanley, B.C., according to And So . . . That's How It Happened by W. M. Hong (Box 229, Wells, B.C. V0K 2R0, 255 pages. $9.95 paper). A retired corporal, Hong, 77, has included a lot of technical information, maps and photos, in his recollections of the Stanley-Barker area.

The title story is a very little fable and a semi-fictional memoir, Colombo's Names. The publisher's note says that the entire collection of love stories from various Canadian publishers has been cross-referenced. Presumably this is true of the entire collection of poetry in Colombo's Names. I'm sure. for one thing, that the entire collection of poetry in Colombo's Names is very little fable and a semi-fictional memoir. William "Tiger" Dunlop can find them in profusion elsewhere, rather than read them in snippets here. Besides, Dunlop, Susanne Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill, et al. do it better than the semi-fictional entries interspersed among the documentary items by Cline in her guise as Louisa Clark. Evidently Cline is dedicating her life to the production of these books. Somebody should tell her to stop.

Doing splits between man and God and bridging schisms with a found brassiere

THE MOST DELIGHTFUL book of poetry in this column's crop is Marty Gervais' The Believable Body (Picklehead, 47 pages, $3.50), a versatile collection of love lyrics, portraits, and meditations on friends and man-woman relations. Gervais shows himself to be a virtuoso of free verse. long poems, anecdotes, pieces, found poems, and imagistic poems—all handled equally well. The poetry is informed by a generosity for its subject. Gervais has a point of view, but he admits that the world he lives in is the oil "believable" one, and he isn't out to change it. It's perhaps for this reason that he can provide some hilarious poems on women's liberation, male sexuality, and the media manipulation of our schisms. The title poem is a found poem from a Weekend Magazine brassiere advertisement: "When I give it, it gives. Wherever you touch, it touches back. And against your body it feels like your body." Gervais' book subtly argues for the organic and the split between mind and body, sexuality and emotion, form and content. The poems themselves have no such imbalance. Meanwhile, here's a book of poems that doesn't leave the concern with sexual politics to the "matriarchy" of Canadian writers. The "mountain man" school of poets should follow suit.

Patrick white's poetry (The God in the Rafters, Borealis, 72 pages, $3.95) is more concerned with the tension between the split between man and God, heaven and earth, the wished-for world and the world as is.

May, 1979. 0 ocke in Canada 33
These are important themes, but the danger is that the reader may feel left out of these Herculean dialogues. As in the poetry of Irving Layton, one might identify with the human stance and be persuaded to hear a spokesperson on behalf of the human condition.

In the lesser poems, pomposity overcomes boldness but where the poems succeed, as in White’s “An Attempt at Prayer,” the reader is grateful to have left the mundane world for those debates for which the mundane is only a disguise. One doesn’t want to argue with such an opening line as “Lord, I am in love with your planet.” If the thesis is artistically tenable, then the poem becomes a welcome addition to that rarest of Canadian genres, the celebrative; if the poem fails, it is accused of the ridiculous or the maudlin. Short of either extreme one should recognize that the reach has exceeded the grasp. White’s sense of rhythm is impressive. It never fails him, though the poems occasionally do.

Mike Ziris’s Intrigues in the House of Mirrors. Absolute 0 Kelvin Ink, 42 pages, $4.95 gives us an apprenticeship volume, exploring his Italian roots, but more fundamentally exploring language. As the title suggests, the exploration is fragmented and tentative. The problem is not one of roots, but of methodology. Ziris is trying to forge a voice out of influences as disparate as Tom Marshall and Diane Wakoski. This leads him into open-field composition, prose poems or free verse in stanzas even when the tone doesn’t require these mode changes. The book is poignant if seen as a quest, a painful progress report from the house of language.

M. C. Warrior (Quitting Time, Macleod Books, 350 W. Pender St., Vancouver, 28 pages, unpriced) is a Weal Coast poet writing out of his experience in British Columbia logging camps. Warrior has a definite voice, unclouded. undistracted by either the metaphysical or the existential: “After a certain point all rational/thought ceases.” In fact Warrior’s poems forestall intellectualization. He reacts immediately to his physical environment, to corrupt politics, to the hazards of class oppression. This is the poetry of revolt, necessary, urgent, spontaneous, and unmindful of the other side of the argument. If Warrior is regional, he is regional in the bat sense. Like Wayman, he is rooted in the West Coast landscape and writes of global injustices in Chile, in Ottawa, or anywhere else. A commendable first book.

Borealis Press has released its second in a series of Ottawa anthologies entitled Poets of the Capital II (136 pages, $5.95). It provides a generous sampling of the work of Brenda Fleet, George Johnston, Joy Kogawa, Christopher Levenson, Robin Mathews, Seymour Mayne, and Carol Shields. These are fairly good choices, but one hears little of the work of newer poets in the capital. Brenda Fleet publishes so rarely that it is at least good to see another selection of her poems. Kogawa is at her consistent best. She is an underrated craftsman eclipsed by her more topical contemporaries. Johnston’s selection, on the other hand, suffers from topicality and references to Ottawa. Levenson’s selection is representative and includes her outstanding long poem, “The Journey Back.” Carol Shields’s talents lie in the area of fiction, and naturally her more notable poems are character portraits. And then there is Robin Mathews who, if not a poet, is at least in the capital, lamenting the foreign influence of Pablo Neruda on young Canadian poets.

The quarterly magazine Ottawa Review (Box 4789, Station B, Ottawa) has changed its name to Author to avoid confusion with the Ottawa Review. Since the colourful death of The Canadian Review, it is now one of only two magazines devoted to publishing poetry regularly in Ottawa. The format of Anthors is attractive, the editing judicious, and its scope international. The winter 1978 issue boasts good contributions from Seymour Mayne and Mike Doyle as well as translations of Nordic Poetry by George Johnston and translations of Eugenio Montale by Antonino Mazza. Ottawa’s other poetry magazine is Arc (Department of English, Carleton University, $4.00 for two issues). Its first issue includes poems by Don Coles, Claude Liman, and Robert Gibbs among others as well as provocative essays by D. G. Jones and Doug Barbour.

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and the winners are!

Lost Toronto (William Davy) City of Toronto Book Award 1979

$19.50

Patrick Lane Poems New & Selected

1978

$4.95

Governor-General’s Literary Award for Poetry

1978

34 Books In Canada. May 1979
Why does CanLit say okay to John McCrae but insist that Frank Prewett blew it?

CanLit, what is it? The responses to January’s Books in Canada survey, “Balancing the Books,” prompted me to ask this question yet again, following as it did upon a virtuous experience arising from an article of mine. The questionnaire inevitably provided some instances of the issue in its crudest form. Among the so-called Canadian novels dubbed “underrated” were works by two English writers, Malcolm Lowry and Wyndham Lewis, both of whom happened to live and write in Canada for a while. Neither, however, made even the formal gesture that strangely enrols Brian Moore in the CanLit regiment of taking citizenship, then taking off for Hollywood and a confirmed reversion to non-Canadian preoccupation, but should citizenship be the criterion? After all, Lowry at least felt a strong spiritual affinity for that part of the West Coast where he lived. He even took pride in the thought that in Under the Volcano he had written “the great Canadian novel.” But in what sense it could have been that I cannot see, since not only was his author utterly English in birth, upbringing, education, and mental outlook, but also the novel is set entirely outside Canada (recalled from a hot distance as Firmin’s “genteel Siberia”). I suppose Lowry was influenced by his possessive Canadian supporters and felt, gratefully, Canadian.

The preposterous acquisition of Lowry has by now become 3 mere reflex; casual allusions such as this, from W. J. Keith’s introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Ruby Wiece’s The Blue Mountains of China, are frequent: “Whenever I am asked to name the Canadian novels that I consider worthy to stand with the best from other countries and cultures, The Blue Mountains of China (along with Malcolm Lowry’s Under the Volcano) is invariably the first to spring to mind.” Under the Volcano a product of Canadian culture? Surely so precise a critic as Keith knows better.

As for Wyndham Lewis, it The Self-Condemned is a Canadian novel — as George Woodcock, for one, persists in asserting — then Kangaroo is Australian. Aaron’s Rod Italian, and The Plumed Serpent Mexican; but I am not aware that any of those countries feels the need to strengthen its culture by appropriating D. H. Lawrence as a national author. Why should Canadians go on making these anomalous attributions? Is CanLit so impoverished, still, in its native tight? I don’t think so. So far, it may seem I am pleading that nationality should determine what is Canadian. Since several admired writers long resident in Canada remain technically American citizens, I can see why that criterion might appear uncomfortably rigid. Yet it is the only one that makes sense in international practice. The French didn’t claim Henry Miller or Vladimir Nabokov (Samuel Beckett belongs to French literature because he has written in French, but only in the same sense as all writers in English belong to that universal entity, English literature): the Americans will not attempt to enrol Sokhenitsyn. Let’s try to beclear who’s who, without making anyone suffer for it.

This brings me to the more personal experience I referred to, which recently sharpened my sense of the absurdity of the situation. It arose from a critical essay I wrote on an overlooked Canadian poet. Rank Prewett (1893-1962). Prewett grew up in his native Ontario, won a place at Oxford before the First World War, but quickly joined up. During the war he met Robert Graves and Sigried Sassoon, both of whom encouraged his poetic efforts. He was also noticed by Eddie Marsh, who included him in his Georgian Poetry anthologies. After the war and Oxford, Prewett returned briefly to Canada, then went back to England where, apart from a few more years spent here in the 1920s, he published his poetry. He did so continually for at least his last 30 years. His Collected Poems, selected and introduced by Graves, was posthumously published by Cassell in 1954. My article was declined by two journals specializing in CanLit. Their refusals were polite: one could not give the space to an (admittedly) minor figure; the other, while complimentary about the article’s style, turned it down on the grounds that Prewett was not really Canadian except “by birth” and that his poetry lacked Canadian content. It was suggested, perhaps because I have published studies of two English war poets, that I might be interested in attempting an assessment of John McCrae.

Here, then, were three considerations worth pondering. While evidently an Englishman who chooses to live in Canada for some years may be adopted as a Canadian writer, a Canadian who does the reverse is not Canadian enough. Not, I suspect, unless he earns a considerable reputation; the nationalist critics come running then (for example, to Mavis Gallant). Secondly, what is Canadian content? In poetry of all things? Mention of Canadian places, manners, social and political issues, perhaps. But what of the universals that move a poet such
as Prevette (and countless others, Canadian or not) — love and loss, solitude, belief and doubt, moral choice. The “placeless” experiences of the human condition? This was not the point of, of course. Prevette’s Canadianianness was too little evident in his poetry or his life. (The article was, at the thii attempt, accepted by a Canadian journal that takes a broad view of the supranational quality of modern poetry in English.)

My third cause for reflection stems from the lind suggestion that I might try my hand at assessing McCrae. Now, if Prevette won’t do, why will McCrae? Well, he went to McGill (not Oxford) where he was righty or lefty admired as both man and surgeon, and it was with a McGill unit he joined the British Expeditionary Force. Of course, it was McCrae, we all know, who made the famous Canadian contribution to First World War poetry, “In Flanders Fields.” Is that a Canadian poem? No, it’s a poem. And what of the 30 fugitive pieces posthumously collected and published under that poem’s title by the Ryerson Press in 1920? There is a romantic-historical fragment on Quebec — “Helen, guardian of the strong” — but the rest could have been written anywhere at any time by any poet, whether saturated in the English Romantic tradition. As were McCrae and most of his 19th-century Canadian forerunners. Prevette is a more individual poet, with a more complex sensibility, and in this against the limitations of conventional form: McCrae’s is naïve verse that gives no promise of greatness having had his life. The notion that the author of “In Flanders Fields” merits Canadian interest and identity, while Prevette does not, has no grounds in logic or critical consistency — only in muddled nationalistic sentiment.

On the strength of one poem’s popular reputation, McCrae’s Guelph home has become a place of pilgrimage. Imagine similar reverence being accorded by the English to the birthplace of Laurence Binyon, the author of a comparable piece of popular sentiment, “For the Fallen!” But then the English have Wilfred Owen, Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg. Does McCrae’s slight achievement really deserve so much fuss? When will this kind of thing be brought nothing so “passionately” as a regret for the loss of Europe and its cultural centres. “Vital Canadian talent” indeed!

A piquant further irony is that both particular Grove books is one of his worst, its language anything but vital. Its romantic fabrication of his early life the stuff of novellists. This is not to deny that, from the publication of “War Prayers,” Grove entered Canadian literature. What seems absurd is the anxiety stress on hi Canadianness, especially in such a book. Grove’s place in Canadian literature may be compared to Conrad’s in English Conrad’s novels belong there, but no one ever will puff them as those of “a vital English talent.” Now that we do have a Canadiana figure among us, the Oook novelists in an exile, Skvorecky, it will surely not be long before an eager critic presses him into the Canadian regiment.

The ramifications of this issue are seemingly endless. I am taken aback when I find included among Oberon’s 77: Best Canadian Stories one by an American writer living here, set in Nashville, Tennessee. Or another in the 1978 volume, a story set in 19th-century Massachusetts. By Joyce Carol Oates, who just happens to live in Canada. What both stories share is publication in Canadian journals, and their authors happen to live here. Are these sufficient criteria? Not in any other country, I know of!

I doubt that American readers will take the Oates story for one of the best Canadian stories of 1977.

I do not suggest that all whose opinion — in criticism, reviewing, teaching — is influential in formings canon of Canadian literature contribute to the kinds of confusion I’ve illustrated. The chief culprit is the pushing publisher, but there are quite enough opinion-formers prepared to sid and abet him. Too many who may deplore the situation let things go by default. Too rarely one meets so cheering an example as Mordecai Richler’s acknowledging as Canadian in “Balancing the Books” so a poet as David Weydt, who has now been resident in England almost as long as Prevette. Richler, of course, knows there’s another London.

We are far from establishing a canon of Canadian literature, but surely we can agree that the work of a native Canadian belongs to it whether he has limited himself to the parish pump or spent most of his writing life in Timbuktu. Equally we can surely agree with W. H. New (in The Literary History of Canada) in regarding a Joyce Carol Oates as “the distinguished American novelist ... resident in Windsor since 1967” who did not turn her attention to Canadian life at all.” Would that she, and Lowry, and Wyndham Lewis, were Canadian writers: the two Englishmen we should surely notice as writers who make some creative use of Canada and whose Canadian work must interest us without becoming ours. Similarly, the West Indian immigrant writers, the late Harold “Sonny” Laddo and Austin C. Clarke belong to Caribbean literature. Readers will, I hope, supply further examples for themselves. If we begin to look at this critically, clearer lines will surely emerge. Let’s have more common sense, less special pleading: the canon will take shape and the Canadian identity become, in time, less of a hodgepodge and more of a genuine mosaic.

**first impressions**

by Douglas Hill

Biological thrills, Labrador chills, and teachers’ rites in rural Alberta

**Biological thrillers of the biological sort** — “One of our gums is missing, General!” — have become commonplace in recent years, stimulated by the horrific technological advances of Vietnam and the more lunatic endeavours of the North American defence and security establishments. Much of this fiction, some of it Canadian, is so bad, so contrived and formulistic, that I gave it up for a while. *Hambrmbo’s Itch* by Howard Robens and Jack Wasserman (Doubleday, 301 pages, $9.95 cloth), though hardly perfect, is the real thing again.

*I’m not sure about the novel’s qualifications for this column. Though the action begins in Vancouver (where both authors live) and ends in the high Arctic, the book is pitched to a U.S. readership: check out the casual description of Canadian money (“one purplish bill, one gray green”), the predominantly American geography and context (San Francisco and Washington, D.C.), the presumption of audience familiarity with the interrelated structures, official and underground, of American governmental power. But since it has two other ingredients: a full measure of topicality of subject and playability of gimmick — why not claim it?*  

*Hambrmbo’s Itch* works the convention of the naive observer (here a newspaperman) drawn (by the mysterious death of his fiancée) to attempt to unravel a just—imaginable conspiracy of apocalyptic implications (the germ thing). The plot is intricate, carefully placed together for suspense and full of surprises, though a few minor strategic improbabilities intrude. The authors package their central issue-world, overpopulation, neatly. The requisite technical information is worked in con-
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(Please print)
Eureka! How William French discovered the First Law of Reviewing in his bath

William French was born in London, Ont., in 1926 and in 1948 was a member of the first class ever to graduate in journalism from the University of Western Ontario. Apart from a year at Harvard on a Nieman Fellowship, he has spent his career with the Toronto Globe and Mail. Since 1960, when he succeeded the venerable William Arthur Deacon, he has been the Globe's literary editor. Until 1971 he was responsible for producing the Saturday book page and contributing a book review and a book column. The 'administrative side of the page was handed over to people and French assumed his current responsibility for three columns a week, usually two book reviews and either an author interview or commentary on developments in the publishing industry. He has won several awards, including, this year, his second consecutive National Newspaper Award for critical writing. Many book people regard him as the most influential literary critic in Canada.

French does most of his work at home. His office is the main sitting-room at the Globe and other rear rooms are just large enough to contain a desk, two chairs, a filing cabinet and a large wooden cabinet crammed with and buried under books. When Phil Surgy visited him there on a Saturday afternoon there were 12 new books: "(Today's mail)" on the desk.

**Books In Canada: What are the most apparent differences between the Canadian literary and publishing climates now and when you began nearly 20 years ago?**

**French:** I guess it breaks down into two distinct periods: before 1967 and after. Things happened as a result of Expo and the Centennial, and the rise of all the new publishers, Anansi and so on. But before '67 there were Canadian books being published. There wasn't a traumatic watershed in '67 as far as authors go. I think as far as publishers go there may have been, because it was in the euphoria of post-Centennial that the new publishers came along. I suppose the significant thing that happened as a result of Expo and the new publishers was the rise of cultural nationalism, which resulted in the split in the Canadian Book Publishers' Council. The Canadian-owned publishers split off and formed their own group and there was a lot of tension there for a while, and that still isn't resolved. Of course. But I can't remember thinking, "My God, this has been a terrible year for Canadian literature." There's always been something interesting going on, some years more than others, but it's been a steady growth, I think.

**BIC:** Does that mean things are better today than they were yesterday, at least in terms of publishers and publishing?

**French:** We have to separate the two things: the health of publishing and the quality of what is published. Publishers say they are in trouble, but they always say they are in trouble. The decline of *textbooks* as a source of revenue certainly hurts some publishers, and those that relied on *income from text books* to support their *trade market* obviously are feeling the pinch. McClelland & Stewart? God. I don't know. Are they in trouble?

**BIC:** You keep hearing fantastic stories about their huge debt.

**French:** Yeah, sure. But year N year they publish more and more books, so I don't know. I've learned to take publishers' pronostications with some cynicism. Most of them are still publishing. There are more Canadian books published now than there were when I first started. Whether it's better quality. I guess in some ways it is. If only because there are more people publishing, the chances of getting better quality are greater. We have not yet, I think, reached a literature of world stature, but we're getting there. More and more Canadian authors are published routinely in the United States and Britain, because what they write is of such quality that it doesn't matter that their subject is somewhat exotic for the average American or British reader.

**BIC:** How many books come through here?

**French:** It varies with the season. September to Christmas is chaos, then it falls off dramatically and we have to relies on a lot of the American and British things that we hadn't had time w look at. Canadian publishing seems w be more cyclical than most other countries. Hardly anything is published in January and February and

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38 Books in Canada, May, 1979
nothing in June and July. I remember Jim Lorimer complaining about the low number of Canadian books that were being reviewed by the Globe and Mail, and he had taken a break period when nothing was being published. We couldn’t review any Canadian books because there weren’t any.

BiC: You are regarded by many people as the most influential literary critic in this country. How heavy is that mantle?

French: I try not to be conscious of it. First of all, the Globe and Mail book section, it’s whole, just my contribution, the whole section, does attract attention, and it’s generally pretty good. But part of the claim it gets is because there isn’t all that much competition. What else is there? I don’t know what Maclean’s is doing these days with its book section. It’s hard to find any pattern to controlling philosophy. It’s a hodgepodge. Saturday Night, well it’s once a month. It’s nice to get a reflective view, but if you want to keep really up to date you have to be more frequent. Books in Canada: Readers have to go to find the magazine. It’s got dumped on their doors like the Globe is. The Toronto Star. It goes up cod down. The Star doesn’t seem to have the been interest and respect for books that the Globe does.

BiC: How aware are you of your personal position? Do you ever find publishers or authors criticizing you?

French: Not as much as you might think. Publishing is really a very civilized occupation. Publishers will expect publicity, of course, but there’s no strong-arming, there are no heavies. One of the hazards of this business, of course, is that the literary community is really very small. And you can’t help but encounter authors and imagine them like you or dislike them on a personal basis. But say you like someboday, then become friendly with them even, then they write a book and you have to review it. It’s a lousy book.

BiC: Have you done that often?

French: Not that often, but I’ve done it.

BiC: Has it ever cost you a friend?

French: There’s been a certain coolness. I think they respect my right to say what I think, whether they agree with me or not. They usually don’t if it’s negative. Ideally, the reviewer should be a monk, live in a cave, ride down for the mail once a week, but I’m not monistic. So you just have to take the risk of offending people. And I do. Of course. I’m in a privileged position because, unlike the movie reviewer or the dramatic critic, I don’t have to review all the books. If I don’t want to review one, I can give it to someone else.

BiC: It’s been said that authors get very angry when they’re not reviewed at all.

French: Yeah. I get more calls from authors wanting to know why we didn’t review their book than from authors whose books have been criticized. It seems to be a kbd of

unwritten rule in the business that an author doesn’t respond to a review. The only incident I can think of recently when an author did respond was T. M. Kelly on a radio program the other morning. He wrote a book called I, Do Remember the Fall, a first novel, which I didn’t like - and said so. He didn’t identify the reviewer or the paper, but he said it was the first review of the novel that appeared and I guess mine was first. He said he wanted to firebomb my office and take a baseball bat to my kidneys, which I thought was rather over-reacting.

BiC: Is it much effort to continue reading a book when you’re going to have to give it a bad review? When you dislike it?

French: I tend to fall asleep easily when I’m reading a boring book and I have to keep jabbing myself to stay awake. I’ve never reviewed a book I haven’t completely read. But, my God, sometimes it’s so effort and I wish that I’d made a different choice. But by that time I’ve invested too much time in it and, with an imminent deadline the next day, I can’t ruin my steps. I’ve got to stick with it. But there are other books that, while they may get negative reviews, are bad in interesting ways and there’s no problem with them. Over the years I’ve developed one method of determining the value of a book. During the winter when it’s really cold outside I read a lot in the bathtub. It’s warm and cozy and, instictively, if I like the book, I try to keep it dty; if I don’t like the book instinctively it gets wet and splashed off, I don’t give a damn because, who cares, it’s not a good book anyway. So that’s French’s First Law of Reviewing!

BiC: Do you give priority to Canadian books over American and British books?

French: Between September and Christmas. I think without checking back, that 90 per cent of my reviews are of Canadian books. And it’s not from any sense of obligation or nationalism, I’m not a nationalist. But we’re published in Canada, in Toronto, so our audience is Canadian and these are the books that we should give priority to. But if I have to choose between a middle-level Canadian author and a middle-level American author, I’ll choose the Canadian. Now, if I have to choose between a middle-level Canadian and an Updike or a new Graham Greene, the problem gets more complex. Well, it doesn’t really; I choose the Greene. Then again, somebody else will do the Canadian one I have decided not to do.

BiC: With reference to the Stout Maple versus the Tender Trillium schools, have you ever been conscious of coddling or giving the benefit of the doubt to Canadian workers?

French: I’ve never been conscious of it and I hope I’ve never been guilty of it. I don’t think the double standard goes any good to anybody.

BiC: Can you see any specific direction that CanLit is taking at the moment? Are you
Letters to the Editor

COMPACT WAS THE DEVIL

Sir: Long after reading your March issue, I wonder why you bothered to publish Daniel Francis’ article on William LeSuer’s Mackenzie biography.

I am not sure why Jack McClelland was willing to publish books. The forces of the market have to come in there somewhere. But there has to yet been a system devised that can solve both problems. From the consumer’s point of view, the lower the price the better. But there comes a point when it starts undermining the industry and you have to say “Whoa!” But as far as the writing goes, new authors seem to be coming along, there doesn’t seem to be any shortage of authors, and I’m optimistic about that part of the future.

With further ado...

S II

Mark Abby’s article “‘Without Further Ado...’” (December 1978) begs a response from one who has been on the other side of the poet’s podium. Judging from the tone Mr. Abby affects, it seems he confines poetry readings to much the same reason others go on The Gong Show.

I question the assumptions Mr. Abby makes in asking: “Why 1,200 poetry readings in Canada last year?” Contrary to some, it seems we need poetry readings to “keep the oral tradition alive,” “the exact opposite is true, and always has been. Poetry is first a spoken art, which in its purest form springs from the rhythms of speech” (evidence Wordsworth and W. C. Williams).

In his aesthetic-industrial analysis, he overlooks the pragmatic argument for poetry readings. After all, they are the prime source of income for the poet. I do not think that Mr. Abby means to be so ungenerous as to deny our poets their pay days. Few, if any, are as well-off as the poet when he arrives in Toronto with a $50,000 advance for a first collection of poems, blight the thought!

Mr. Abby holds the ill-bred notion that a writer indulges in public readings “to bask in the safe glow of his own artistry,” as unstrenuously illustrated by the case of Dylan Thomas, the acknowledged master of the art in our time, poetry readings are far from a “safe” activity for the poet.

I concede to Mr. Abby that there is a poetry reading syndrome. I even sympathize with his discomfort at failing to “fit in” or move by most readings. For one, I agree with what one writer (I think it was Conrad) described as the purpose of all writing: “to entertain.” However, I suggest that it is hard to entertain an audience if they are flabbergasted by a most daunting dose of it. If they have ulterior motives, such as currying points on their freshman English exams, I have long felt that poets (worth their salt) should extricate themselves from the academical, claustraphobic lecture theatres, public libraries, art galleries, and coffee houses. They should attempt to take their poetry to people who rarely have the chance to experience modern verse first-hand, cod have no vested interest in accepting what they have to offer.

Two poet friends, Greg Cook and Sharon Lake, and two musicians of our extended family, Richard Knott and Carter Lake, set out in a van along the byways of Nova Scotia this past summer, to do just that. None of the towns we visited had a population equal to many Canadian universities. We carried the tongue-in-cheek name The Drirg Poets & Their Merry Men, a handicap that should convince the cyclers they got an even shake.

I don’t recommend the path we chose to the fandomed, the pampered, or the unprofes-
slowl. Along the way, we had to synchronize our rhythms with the gearboxes of semis and Harleys; at the agricultural exhibition, we followed the ventriloquist's partitive performance, and had to compete with the shouting man's ballad and publicist screams from the midway; in the fisherman's hell, we bed to talk down a belligerent character (tattos bristling on his bare arms) who, for reasons of his own, thought of our poems was actually written about him.

But there were compensations. To mention a few: the hush that came over the children whenever Sharon began to read; the bustle of elderly ladies from a senior citizens' home who set through the hour program and thanked us after, despite the off-color language that cropped up in the occasional piece; the wondrous class Cape Bretoner who openly "confessed" his life-long love for poetry as asked, in a sincere tone, my interpretation of a vaude broad by Robert Service.

I recount these experiences in the hope that Mr. Abbey will reject his view that poetry readings must performe a melancholy or mournful task. Our experiment has failed to rest the popular theory that only English majors and professors, literary and critics, poets themselves, and "sordy-dodgers" (accordine to Dylan Thomas, an obsolete word stumming a short, flat, any "dumpy person") have interested in the state of poetry in the seventh decade of these 1900s.

I can confidently assert that poetry readings need not be a "Dirge." Our Mary Men will vouch for that.

Harry Thurstom
Riverhebeit, N.S.

QCO CLARIFIES

Sir;
Can Quilt & Quire have a little space in your lively letters page to set the record straight? In reference to your reply to Douglas Mass in the March issue of Books in Canada, we'd like to note that our review pages are still devoted solely to reviews of Canadian books. Our policy of reviewing all Canadian titles received was in no way altered by the decision to publish a page of selected foreign titles reviewed in brief. The Foreign Affairs column, compiled by Peul Smmes, does not detract from space for reviews of Canadian books. In fact, the number of Canadian titles reviewed in Quilt & Quire is expected to increase this year. The intent of Foreign Affairs is not to note those best-selling titles simply reviewed in the American, British, and Canadian press but to bring to the attention of librarians and bookstore owners that receive little reviews space anywhere.

Although necessarily selective, and shorter than our regular reviews, these reviews represent an expansion of our editorial coverage, one which we hope will add to the magazine's use as an ordering tool and a source of information on new titles.

Susan Walker
Editor, Quilt & Quire
Toronto

THE GUESS WHO PRESS

Sir;
Regarding the [advertised] centerfold in your March issue.

This is all well and good, but wouldn't it be appropriate for the publisher to identify him/herself? You may know someone somewhere who might want to order one of his/her books. Maybe even a good book store.

M. F. McEwen
University of Saskatchewan Bookstore
Saskatoon

Editor's note: We understand the ad is being claimed by McClarren & Newsipder.

CanWit No. 43

MANY OF OUR proverbs and axioms suffer from out-moded metaphor. "The Pen is mightier than the sword" may have had punch in Shakespeare's time, but today's child - and this is the International Year of the Child I would probably grasp the moral more quickly if we Preached, "The IBM is heavier than the ICBM." We'll pay $25 for the best updated or reprinted selection of proverbs and $25 goes to Grant Buckler of Wolfville, N.S., for this idea. Address: CanWit, No. 43, Books in Canada. 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A1N4. The deadline is July 1.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 41

OUR REQUEST FOR POSSIBLE back-to-back book titles brought enough good entries to sink the accountability profession. Inevitably, there were a number of duplications. Our favourite: George Radwanski's Trudeau back-to-back with A Man to Marry, A Man to Bury, by Susan Musgrave. The winner is Jonathan Williams of Ottawa, who receives $25 for these choice combinations:


Honourable mentions:


- Victor Coleman's Speech Sucks / Exit Muttering, by Donald Jack.

- Graeme Gibbon's Five Legs / The Mysterious Naked Man, by Aken Nowlan.

- Mary MacPherson, Toronto

- Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Manifold Times, by Charles Dickens.

- Don Barker, Calgary

- Reds Lavoisier's My Quebec / Me Among the Ruins, by Donald Jack.

- Helen & Michael Vodker, Agincourt, Ont.

- Henry Miller's Sexes, Nexus, and Plea / Sin, by Vladimir Nabokov (four books in one).

- Linda Pyke, Toronto

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A McGraw-Hill Ryerson Book

May, 1979, Books in Canada 41
Books received

The following Canadian books have been reviewed in the previous issue of *Books in Canada*. Our recommendations don't necessarily reflect the reviews:

**FICTION**

*The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone* by Matt Cohen. McClelland & Stewart. An uneven 10-book apprenticeship, Cohen seems to have got his literary act together with a fine memoir tale about an Ontario Gothic romance.

*Ludza's Tombs*, by Marion Rippon, Doubleday. The fourth novel from a Canadian mystery writer who adds a touch of Simenon and a pinch of Ross Macdonald to brew her own excellent plots.

**NON-FICTION**

*Men for the Mountains*, by Si Marty, McClelland & Stewart. A survey, a vanity, a life of scenic park work in the Canadian Rockies.

*Voice of the Pioneer*, by Bill McNeil. Macmillan. One of the better oral histories to unwind this year, mainly because the 73 persons taped — famous and unknown — are undeniably authentic even if they are not all pioneers.

**POETRY**

*Anniversaries*, by Don Cola, Macmillan. An impressive second collection from a poet who speaks in a supple and urban voice about the realities of our time — from TV wrestlers to cancer victors.

**Great Canadian Poetry Weekend**

Blue Mountain

Friday, June 1 to Sunday, June 3, 1979

The Great Canadian Poetry Weekend is an annual festival dedicated to the celebration of Canadian poetry. It features a variety of events, including readings, workshops, and discussions, all focused on highlighting the richness and diversity of Canadian poetry. The weekend is a wonderful opportunity for poetry enthusiasts to engage with poets, explore new works, and deepen their appreciation of this art form.
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A spring preview

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**Bright Glass of Memory**
by Douglas LePan
twice Governor General's Award winner

These memoirs are deft portraits of people and events written by a keen observer of his times. Here is General Andrew McNaughton, whom LePan calls "the most remarkable Canadian of my generation." His is a story of John Maynard Keynes, the famous economist, and of the poet and philosopher. Also his recollections as one of the principal Canadian officials at the meetings that drew up the Colombo Plan. $15.95

**Canadian Competition Law: A Business Guide**
by C.J. Michael Frank

This timely, authoritative guide to Canada's competition law provides a detailed picture of the rules and regulations governing daily business operations. As well as clarifying the requirements of the laws - and the penalties for infringements - it gives a comprehensive account of antitrust laws and its present status. $39.95

**The Doctor's Sweetheart and other stories**
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by Jehane Benoit
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**The Delaney Report on RRSP's, 1979**
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