JOSEF SKVORECKY
WRITER IN EXILE

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CONTRIBUTORS

Bob Blackburn writes frequently about English usage in these pages. Douglas Chambers teaches English at Trinity College, Toronto. With this issue Anne Collins assumes duties as our paperback columnist. Howard Engel's new novel, The Reason Game, is to be published this fall by Clarke Irwin. Erling Flett-Raustad is a freelance writer in Mission, B.C. Douglass Hill combines fishing and writing in Port Kirwan, Nfld. Jocelyn Hillman is production editor of Contact Publishing, Toronto. Michel Horn teaches history at Glendon College, York University. Kenneth McGoogan is literary editor at the Calgary Herald. Albert Moritz is a Toronto poet. D. W. Nichol teaches English at the University of Edinburgh. I. M. Owen is a Toronto editor and critic. Frank Rudy is a Toronto freelance writer. John Reeves's photographs of literary figures appear often in these pages. Rupert Schiedel recently returned from Europe, where he lectured on Jack Hodgins's fiction. Stephen Scoble recently joined the English Department at the University of Victoria. Mary Ainslie Smith is the curator of the St. Mary's (Ont.) District Museum. With this issue Paul Stuewe introduces a new column, In Translation. Phil Surpuy is an editor at Today magazine. Audrey Thomas's most recent novel is Latahia (Talonbooks, 1979).

Drawing throughout the issue by Bill Russell.

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THE MARK OF THE EXILE

Hailed by Graham Greene as 'a master of the sadness in comedy,' Josef Skvorecky fires arrows from Canada that still strike the heart of Czechoslovakia

By PAUL STUEWE

THE SHORT, MILD-MANNERED MAN relaxing in the backyard of his downtown Toronto home certainly seems innocuous, but he is in fact a dangerous international fugitive: a subversive. His citizenship has been revoked by the country of his birth, and his name has been expunged from its official literary history, a field in which he once occupied positions of trust and power. He nonetheless continues to produce books so dangerous to the national welfare that their mere possession is grounds for arrest and imprisonment. His books are legally proscribed and illegally treasured within the border of a Czechoslovakian state that uneasily rides herd upon its restless citizens.

Josef Skvorecky is no flaming reactionary. His experience of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia during the Second World War did not exactly enamour him of National Socialism. In "Red Music," the foreword to the two novellas collected in The Busk Saxophone, Skvorecky cites Hitler, Brezhnev, and Joseph McCarthy as examples of how "totalitarian ideologists don't like real life (other people's). Because it cannot be totally controlled: they loathe the art, the product of a yearning for life, because that, too, eludes control— if controlled and legislated, it perishes." As a chronicle of the kind of real life that goes on regardless of changes in political regimes, Skvorecky's work has earned him the enmity of all those who expect reality to conform instantly to every alteration in ideological fashion: his characters are as familiar as that quizzical face in our mirror, which we know masks a self made up of anxieties, appetites, and the odd ideal or two. And those who would turn away from their own reflections may fear the revealing probes of this writer's pen.

Skvorecky's own story is an unlikely amalgam of the mundane and the bizarre. As if his fiction would be totally unbelievable if located anywhere other than the crazy-quilt canvas of contemporary eastern Europe. He was born in 1924 in the Bohemian tow of Nichod; his father was a bank clerk and chairman of the local patriotic organization. Skvorecky's early years were distinguished by precocious interests in both literature and music. At the age of 10 he undertook his first serious writing project with a continuation of an unfinished trilogy by the Canadian author James Oliver Curwood, and his fascination with jazz was sparked by the recordings of such top swing bands as the Jimmy Lunceford, Chick Webb, and Andy Kirk aggregations. By 1939 a number of Czech groups were playing creditable jazz, and in Nichod an ensemble of enthusiasts would shortly be augmented by the unpolished but intense tones of the young Josef's tenor saxophone.

The coming of the Second World War and the German occupation of Czechoslovakia put an abrupt end to all this. Skvorecky's formal education was interrupted by assignments to a factory, trench-digging, and cotton mill work, and jazz music was officially suppressed because of its "decadent Negro origins." A underground jazz culture continued to exist, however, and many of the less ideologically brainwashed participated as either listeners or players. Some day Skvorecky hopes to write a musical comedy that will capture the spirit of these topsy-turvy days. With a shot-down Allied airman joining an already polyglot Czech-German band; it will be no stranger to the reality he experienced during the war years.

After the war a consuming interest in literature and a lung problem that curtailed his saxophone playing steered him into Prague literary circles, where he found congenial anti-authoritarian company as well as interest in his personal writing and translating. During the 20 years between the Communist coup in 1948 and the Russian invasion of 1968, Skvorecky's career was a kind of one-man thermometer of the political climate: during periods of liberalization he was able to publish his work with relatively little difficulty. But when the hard-liners were in control his books were banned, confiscated, or even destroyed. And the transition from one official orthodoxy to the next could be rather sudden: his novel The Cowards precipitated a major purge of Czech intellectuals when it was published — after being passed by the state censorship— in 1958. And Skvorecky was fired from his job as editor of World Literature. He published several books, he says, "under a friend's name." His collection Silver Past was denied publication in 1966. But published under the Dubcek regime in 1968. The first printing sold 40,000 copies: the second printing of 90,000 copies was confiscated and destroyed in 1970.

In 1968 Skvorecky and his wife, Zdena Salivarová, a singer, actress, and novelist, emigrated to Canada and were stripped of their Czechoslovakian citizenship. Which one might think would have ended that government's interest in his past literary efforts. Hi name, of course, has been eradicated from all official histories of Czech literature, but recently an academic critic quoted from...
Sixty-Eight receives no government subsidies of any kind, a circumstance
Skvorccky finds ironic in view of Canada's commitment to multiculturalism

Czech spoken in the Sudeten region. This was accurate enough as far as it went, but overlooked the historical fact that many Czechs associate this accent with pro-Nazi attitudes, and would therefore find M. Poirot a less than sympathetic protagonist.

Skvorccky is currently on leave from his post as professor of English at the University of Toronto's Erindale College, where he teaches courses in American literature, but he is closely involved with the operations of Sixty-Eight, a Czech-language publishing house to which his wife devotes all her time and he whatever he can spare of his. In its nine years of existence, Sixty-Eight has issued more than 100 titles, which are purchased by members of the substantial Czech exile communities in Canada, the U.S., Germany and Switzerland, although the two subscribers in Nepal and the one in Harare are also Faithful readers. "Since we're happy when we break even, you couldn't describe it as a business," Skvorccky comments, "although it is very important to us as a means of keeping Czechs in much with one another." This also includes those who remain in Czechoslovakia, who receive Sixty-Eight publications by means of cars specially constructed to smuggle about 5000 paperbacks across the border. One of these courier vehicles was recently taken apart by suspicious frontier guards; the books were discovered, cod several people were interrogated.

Sixty-Eight receives no government subsidy of any kind. a circumstance Skvorccky finds ironic in view of Canada's official commitment to multiculturalism. "The government will give you money to dress up in your native costume," he observes, "but they won't give you anything to publish books in your native language. This is despite the fan that those who perform the ethnic dances here are young people who have to be taught how to do them - they died out at home long ago."

Skvorccky is a fan of the works of Stephen Leacock and considers Morley Callaghan's That Summer in Paris an excellent literary memoir, and he has been favourably impressed by Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel, and Mordoch Richler. His interest in jazz led him to read Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter, and he greatly enjoyed this imaginative evocation of cornetist Buddy Bolden's milieu. "But I don't have enough time for recreational reading," Skvorccky confesses, "and when I do have a free moment I tend to choose something as totally non-contemporary as one of Henry James's novels.

The exceptional accomplishments of this writer have not yet been widely recognized in his adopted country, but as his writing begins to reflect his experiences in Canada and to be published here, his domestic reputation will undoubtedly grow to match his international stature. One can even hope that some enterprising publisher will commission English-language editions of such novels as Tankovy propoj (The Tank Corp). Prime sezona (A Fine Season) and Miralk (Miracle in Bohemia). In the meantime, it is possible to sample the fascinating and affecting world of Josef Skvorccky in the books that are available. They commit us to a recognizably human future by enlisting us in the service of a recognizably human past.
The process of their craft is by nature such a lonely one that most writers are delighted to discuss their work when approached by a sympathetic listener. And when writers gather together — especially with fellow members of the Writers' Union of Canada — the talk usually turns quickly from books to bookkeeping: the frequent frustrations and occasional financial successes they encounter in a generally unrewarding literary marketplace.

Frank Rasky recently surveyed a sampling of Canadian writers, among other places, at a party for more than 100 writers' union members at Pierre Berton's $800,000 nine-acre hideaway at Kleinburg, Ont. Here is what they have in store for the fall season and the coming year:

Pierre Berton rewrote 20 times the first three stages of his new book, *Flames Across the Border: 1813-1814.* "Writing doesn't come easier with age," says Berton, who is 60. "The older I get, the slower, more cautious, and — I hope — more innovative I get." The earlier companion volume of his present book, *The Invasion of Canada: 1812-1813,* required an unprecedented four drafts before publication. "I wrote it in the present tense, which gives the narrative more immediacy, but is very tough to do with history. That sort of experimenting is slowing me down in my old age," Berton is one of the few writers anywhere to become a millionaire (with $100,000 invested in Toronto real estate, $60,000 in stocks, $340,000 in pension funds, and $500,000 in gold). McClelland & Stewart published 100,000 copies of *The Invasion of Canada,* and close to 80,000 have been sold. Meanwhile, he is "floundering" through the preliminary research for his 29th non-fiction book, the story of the one million pioneers — Clifford Sihon’s so-called men in sheepskin coats — who opened the Canadian West from 1896 until 1914.

Margaret Atwood, 41, new chairman of the writers’ union, estimates that her 19 books have sold more than 2 million copies around the world. She also figures that her last novel, *Life Before Man,* set a record when it sold 126,000 hardcover copies in Canada alone. However, she is coy about disclosing details concerning her new novel, *Bodily Harm* (McClelland & Stewart). "I don’t want to spill too many of the beans. People expect your new novel to be like your last one. Some were disappointed that *Life Before Man* wasn’t as satirical as *Lucky Ordeal.*"

Doris Anderson, 55, former editor of *Chatelaine,* knows that most readers will regard her new novel, *Rough Layon,* (McClelland & Stewart) as a roman à clef in which she figures as the heroine. It deals with an ambitious, outspoken woman who is managing editor of a Canadian magazine. The sister publication to a national magazine, the novel is written in the voice of a young woman, and published by a giant periodical organization not unlike Maclean-Hunter. "I must admit some elements of me can be detected in the heroine," says Anderson. "But since I portray a publisher who is crazy, I must state he bears no resemblance, of course, to anybody living or dead."

June Callwood, 57, author of *Portrait of Canada,* is completing the 10th book that she has worked on as a ghost writer. *A Full Life (Doublet)*, the autobiography of Helen Galagan Douglas, was left unfinished when the actress, political activist, and former California congresswoman died at the age of 79. Actor Melvyn Douglas, her 80-year-old husband, was able to contribute many personal details before his death in August. "I think this will be the best of the books I've ghosted," says Callwood. What was the most difficult to write? Probably, she thinks, the non-book—she spoofed for Barbara Walters. *How to Talk to Anyone About Practically Anything.*

William Deverell, 44, the Vancouver lawyer who won the $50,000 Bantam-Seal first novel award two years ago for *Needles,* has a new crime novel, *High Crimes,* scheduled for publication by McClelland & Stewart this month. "It has all the wild, rauytyang ingredients that make it a natural for a movie thriller," he says. *Needles* earned Deverell $200,000, mostly from movie rights. That income enabled him to do research in South America and Newfoundland for High Crimes and to pay for forthcoming trips to Cuba, Saudi Arabia, and Siberia to work on a new novel about a terrorist organization with headquarters in Montreal.

Sylvia Fraser, 46, says she made "quite a large amount of money" from her best-selling historical novel, *The Emperor’s Virgin.* McClelland & Stewart. set in Rome in 195, a. She spent part of the proceeds on a trip to Germany so that she could soak up the atmosphere for her next novel, about a Toronto couple who visit Nazi Germany shortly before the Second World War. She expects it will be published in 1982 and regards it as "the most commercially valuable book I’ve written, a penetrating look at the corruption and fanaticism of the period." Fraser says she has always been intrigued by her grandfather’s Bavarian background and the Germanic influence on her own personality. "I’ve been poring through books that examine the causes of the last war in terms of German traditions of rationality. Absorbing stuff — and frightening."

Ian McLachlan, 43, whose *The Seventh Hexagram* (Macmillan, 1976) sold 100,000 copies in the U.S. and Canada, is working on another bizarre novel. Titled *The Revirginization of Samuel de Champlain,* it’s set in the future, after a nuclear war has destroyed North American civilization. One of the few survivors is a scholarly mystic who, believing he is Champlain reborn, tries to build a new community in the wilderness with guidance from an Ojibway Indian woman. "I’ve been taking courses in oral Ojibway so I can make the characters sound more real," says McLachlan, a professor of cultural studies at Trent University. "If I get the dique tight, I’ll expect to finish the book by the fall of next year."

Richard Rohmer, 57, is hoping that readers will note a change in style in his 12th book, a futuristic political novel titled *Trials* (General Publishing). Like his others, this one delivers a political message — the need for the major powers to agree to eliminate all nuclear weapons — but Rohmer says it is different in several...
ways. Instead of dictating to his secretary, as he usually does, he has spent a year writing it out in longhand. He has taken greater pains with plot structure. And he thinks his characterization is clearly denounced by critics for being wooden, has improved. For example, his hem. U.S. President John Hansen (who was also featured in Bull, and Periscope Red) is presented here as a three-dimensional person, he believes, "I've made him a very human guy, a young Ronald Reagan type. But then, I'm prejudiced. I think Reagan is a great president. He's strong, intelligent, knows where he's going." And Rohmer believes he has portrayed his Canadian prime minister Louis Turcotte as a "believable, honest power broker-I think you'll recognize him."

Jim Christy, 36, the Philadelphia-born journalist who wrote a jaunty travel book about his adventures on the Alaska Highway, Rough Road to the North (Doubleday), has written his first novel, to be published by Simon & Pierre. When pressed on the matter, Christy, who was born Christinio, admits wryly that, yes, there are more than a few similarities between himself and Cine Casteliano, the chief character in Streethearts. His alter ego is a street-smart kid who leads a gang of juvenile hustlers through the back alleys of South Philadelphia as they wheel and deal and scuffle with bandits, bordello girls, and strippers. "In Canadian fiction, little of it deals with other than bourgeois morality-and a lot of it is boring," says Christy. "The least you can say about my novel is that it doesn't deal with the petty love affairs of neurotic professors and frustrated trade magazine editors. And you clearly can't say that it's like most other first novels, which deal with the loss of the young hero's innocence. My guy has been hustling since he was six and never had innocence to lose."

Lyn Hancock. 45, then's a Seal in my Sleeping Bag. Then's a Raccoon in my Parka, faces a dilemma The British Columbia author, who recently acquired her M.A. from Simon Fraser University, wants to be taken seriously as a naturalist. At the same time, as an author of whimsical animal books, she'd like to exploit the 10 magazine articles she has written about her adventures with cougars. "I've done for the cougar what Farley Mowat has done for the wolf." So she has submitted to University of Toronto Press a scholarly work tentatively titled The History of Changing Attitudes to the Genus Felis Concolor. Meanwhile, she hopes a publisher in the U.S. will accept "my Harlequin romance version," tentatively titled Car of Many Names and Faces. Edna Staebler, in her 60s, the celebrated "schmeck lady" of Ontario's Mennonite country, faces a similar identity problem. Publishers seem to think that all she can do is cook as a result of the success of her two cookbooks — Food That Really Schmecks (which has sold well over 100,000 copies in hardcover since 1968) and its 1979 sequel. More Food That Really Schmecks (more than 50,000 sold). Recently, she managed to persuade McClelland & Stewart to publish a book of folklore. It will be a collection of articles she wrote for Maclean's and Chatelaine in the 1950s and '60s dealing with groups — fishermen, miners, Iroquois on a reserve, islanders on St. Pierre and Miquelon, "Nor a schmeck in the lot of them," she says.

Maggie Siggins, 39, is a former reporter for the now defunct Toronto Telegram who wrote a biography of her former publisher titled simply Basset (James Lorimer, 1979). It sold a mere 3,000 copies. She anticipates a much bigger audience for her next book, due to be completed next year. Titled Gang Rape, it's an account of six men in their 20s convicted and sentenced to six to 12 years in Kingston Penitentiary for the rape of two women. Over the past
Yes, it's no longer a secret-like any good children's book, the "Canadian Children's Annual" is for adults, too! And this applies to the sensational new edition - the eighth of this Canadian bestseller (more than 300,000 sold)! After all, how could anyone of any age resist a book which begins like this in the early days: the good folk of Manitoba had a strange winter hobby - ear-collecting.

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Topic of cancer
Margaret Atwood's Caribbean adventure violently affirms that 'terminal' can mean more than the end of a life

By AUDREY THOMAS

By Lily Harms, by Margaret Atwood, McClelland & Stewart, 304 pages, 916.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 0813 0).

In the shreds of my husband and I and our two children spent two years in West Africa and were witness to a military coup, an almost bloodless one compared to what was to come later in some of the other African states. "They" waited until the president (who called himself Osegaro, "the Saviour") was out of the country, on his way to China as I recall. And "they" even let his wife and children leave a few days later. I suppose we were never in any real danger, for we lived in a section of the country that had always been hostile to the president, and where the coup had reportedly been planned. Nevertheless, when two young soldiers, carrying guns with bayonets at the ready, flagged down my husband on his way home to the university, he dutifully pulled over, stopped, and let them hop in. They asked him to take them to the capital. More than 150 miles away, and he said he was sorry but he was only going a few miles up the road to the university gates. They looked at one another and shrugged good-naturedly, hopped out, and flagged down a passing taxi. As they sped away, my husband realized they had left their guns and bayonets behind on the back seat, so he in turn sped after the taxi, caught up with it, handed over the weapons, and came home to lunch.

We laugh about this story now, and he says it's all gone unreal. (Our university had been named after the president, and people driving university vans and official cars had been stopped and handed cans of paint and told to paint out the president's name before continuing — "Like something out of Alice in Wonderland," we said. "How funny.") But the day after the incident with the two young soldiers who heard about a woman in a nearby village who didn't open up her hoch bar fast enough and had her head blown off. Two drunken soldiers, they said. I promptly burst into tears, "You fool," I said to my husband, "you could have been killed." Suddenly it was real, it was no laughing matter.

I tell this story here because the plot of Margaret Atwood's new novel depends for a lot of its momentum on the political power struggles going on in a small Caribbean country that soon is to hold its first real election since independence from Britain. And although I've been told I was asked to do this review because I specialize in "mutilated women" (perhaps mutilated women in the tropics?), what struck me first was how accurate and chilling a portrait it is of a small, third-world country that has suddenly had power, if not greatness, thrust upon it. Rennie, the heroine, can't take any of it very seriously ("The signs and banners are going up everywhere now: ELLIS IS KING, THE FISH LIVES. Everything looks homemade: it's like college, like student elections, it's hard to believe.") I don't want to reveal the ending by telling you how Rennie is finally forced to take it all seriously, but she learns what a lot of innocent people have been learning these days: just because something's homemade doesn't always mean it can't blow up or hurt you in some deep and fundamental way.

Rennie is a refinement on Annette of Atwood's story. "A Travel Ken." Like Annette, Rennie is a journalist, although her specialty is "lifestyles" and "trends," not "fun in the sun." Annette has begun to feel she's not alive, that her constant journeys to countries where (as Rennie will put it) she is supposed to "look but not see." ("People, she found. did not want any hint of danger in the kind of articles it was her business to write. Even the ones who never go to the places she described who could."

Once, it seemed a long time ago, staying home meant safety... and going to the places that were her specialty the Caribbean. the northern half of South America, Mexico — meant adventure, threat, pirates, brigands, lawlessness. Now it was the reverse, home was the dangerous place and people went on vacation to snatch a few weeks of uneventfulness.) Annette is exhausted and near collapse from the effort she is making not to know, not to "see" what's really going on. Rennie, too, doesn't want to see, doesn't want to get "involved." has come down here to recover, to get away from "it all"—from her recent operation for breast cancer and her subsequent fear and self-loathing, from her break-up with her boyfriend Jake, and from the mysterious stranger who has entered her apartment through the kitchen window, taken no money or valuable but instead made himself a cup of Ovaltine and left a thick coil of rope on her bed. (The police are guzzled by this and imply that somehow it's Rennie's fault, and it's up to her to figure it out.

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out, a woman living alone and all that. They think she's been having gentlemen callers. To prove that she hasn't, couldn't that no one would want her. She undoes her blouse and shows them her stigmata. Atwood uses the jargon words of Rennie's illness—"terminal," "massive involvement," "malignant" — to good effect. The one thing La Rennie wants to avoid is "massive involvement." She is not cured of her cancer, but her doctor thinks she has "got it all," and this carries over into her attitude toward life. She has no illusions (except that she still believes in "falling in love"). And when Dr. Minnow, the Caribbean politician she meets on the plane & tries to get her to write about all the corruption, the displacement and misuse of foreign aid funds sent down by the Americans and the "sweet Canadians," she keeps telling him politely that she doesn't "do" that kind of thing, she's not that kind of journalist, she just does lifestyles.

"Lifestyle," says Dr. Minnow. He's puzzled.

"You know what people wear, what they eat, where they go for their vacations, what they've got in their living-rooms, things like that," says Rennie as light as she can.

Dr. Minnow considers this for a moment. Then he gives her an angelic smirk. "You might say I am also concerned with life," he says. "It is our duty. What the people eat, what they wear, this is what I want you to write about."

She says she'll think about it.

Dr. Minnow is the only truly good man in the book. A close second is Daniel. Rennie's doctor, with whom she falls in love— it's interesting to me that both these men are doctors and truly dedicated men. Dr. Minnow is a "shrew doctor" who trained in Canada but returned to help his country. Dr. Luoma a surgeon who specializes in mastectomies. There are no good women unless we count Elva, an old black woman who is the grandmother of Prince another political candidate. The women— Rennie, her friend Jocstas who runs a local chic Toronto second-hand boutique called Ripped-Off, and Lora, the life- and travel-buttered woman she meets in St. Antoine and with whom she eventually shares a jail cell—are all rough and cynical and full of snappy one-liners (although we are to believe, at least about Rennie and Lora, that they are soft and vulnerable underneath).

The flip side bothered me: all three round 1 too much like David in Surfacing, and sometimes, when they engage in dialogue with one another (or when Rennie, particularly, engages in dialogue with Jake or Jocstas, you wonder who's been writing their routines). I thought of early radio shows—George and Gracie, Fibber McGee and Molly, Jack Benny and Rochester. (Also of the heroines in stories in The Saturday Evening Post, cr MET with dirty words thrown in.) They are very funny and a lot of their apothegms are true: "Look before you leap my mother used to say," says Lora. "When they're right behind you, you don't look, you only leap." Or Rennie tells us that what was mandatory in Griswold, On... where she grew up, was "more often than not ludicrous in the real world. Griswold. for instance, was an early convert to avoid the British."

That is in a place like Griswold you got what you deserved and what you deserved was invariably bad. Yet I got a little tired of the relentlessness of that kind of talk, its bitter tone, its cynicism. (Rennie is not above writing the same article For Visor, a "mole-oriented" Tommo mag, as she is For Portraits its Female counterpart. In the women's magazine she gives hints on what to do if you're bored while listening to your companion; for Visor she gives advice on how to tell if you are boring the lady you are with. She also writes about non-existent "trends" and then is cynically amused when they catch on.)

Even if it is a façade, it gets very wearing. And according to this book, there are no honest people in the journalism world, at least not in Tommo. It's absurd to be "decent" like Daniel Luoma. It's obsele. It's dangerous to be, like Dr. Minnow, a good man in politics. (Never mind, he gets his shot in the back.)

A couple of other things bothered me. Paul, who is "the connection," a man who runs guns and dope and appears to be a man For all seasons, is almost a hunk out of a Harlequin Romance (or maybe out of their new, sexy series, Harlequin Presents). I found him utterly unbelievable, not because of what he does but the way in which he is presented — his "too-blue" eyes, his charisma, his world-weariness. At one point he sounds like a Hemingway hem: when he advises Rennie to take the plane back home before the election trouble breaks and she asks him if he is trying to get rid of her, he says "No—. Maybe I'm just being noble—. Maybe I want there to be something good I've done." (They have become lovers: he has given her back her body.)

The other thing is Rennie's initial involvement with Lora and Paul, her willingness to go to the airport and pick up a package, even if it is supposed to be heart medicine, even if it is for Lora's boyfriend's grandma. It is necessary. In terms of the plot, for Rennie to do something that makes her really suspicious in other people's eyes. But I found it hard to believe that the same woman who carefully picks out the lettuce from her roast beef sandwich on the plane (she's been around, she knows about disease and unwashed salad) would let herself be duped so easily. I began to wonder if she'd had a partial lobotomy instead of a mastectomy. And when the parcel turns out to be so huge that it has to be dropped?

But it's a strong book, and Rennie's...
journey down into herself, the circumstances that force her to show compassion for someone other than herself, that force her to reach out and touch someone else who is suffering — that part is beautifully done, (I could write a whole essay on how Atwood uses hands — and the laying on of hands — in this book). The metaphors and images are, as usual, brilliant, although perhaps much more violent. A coiled rope on a bed (which reminds Rennie of the game Clue), a videotape of a ret coming out of a woman’s vagina, the winter faces of a Toronto crowd "not flat and open like the faces here, but narrow and pallid and pushed into long snouts, like the snouts of rats." This book is about violence, about the spread of violence and despair, whether inward, cancer of the individual body, or outward, cancer of the body politic. The word "corruption" can be used in more than one way. This is the bleakest of Atwood’s novels to date. When we last see Rennie she is on the plane to Toronto and, like Coleridge’s wedding-guest, a sadder but wiser person. She has learned that terminal can mean not only the end of the line but also a connecting point. She is finally "real" and she vows to write about it. She feels that she is now a "reporter." "She was not one once, but now she is. A reporter. She will pick up time: then she will report. For the first time in her life she can’t think of a title."

But will she? And even if she does, who will want to hear about it? Where is she going to find her audience?}

**FEATURE REVIEW**

## Dons and rebels

Robertson Davies’s scholarly renegades, like the fallen angels; enjoy curious excesses among the daughters of men

By I.M. OWEN

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**Dons and rebels**

Robertson Davies’s scholarly renegades, like the fallen angels; enjoy curious excesses among the daughters of men

Robertson Davies is celebrating the opening of his new career as former Master of Massey College in the University of Toronto with the publication of an exuberant novel about the scholarly life. He seems to have enjoyed himself hugely in writing it, as have I in reading it.

The Rebel Angels of the title aren’t who you think they are: not Lucifer and that crowd. They come from the Apocrypha. The heroine of the novel, Maria Magdalena Theotoky, a scholar of 23, explains them thus to one of her would-be lovers. Professor the Reverend Simon Darcourt:

> They were real angels. Samariai and Azazel, and they betrayed the secrets of Heaven to King Solomon, and God threw them out of Heaven. And did they moan and plot vengeance? Not they. They weren’t one-headed egotists like Lucifer. Instead they gave mankind another run up the ladder. They came to earth and taught tongues, and healing and laws — and hygiene — taught everything — and they were often special successes with the daughters of men. It’s a marvellous piece of apocrypha, and I would have expected you to know it, because surely it is the explanation of the origin of universities! God doesn’t come out of these stories in a very good light. Does He? Job had to tell him a few home truths about His injustice and cupidity; the Rebel Angels showed Him that hiding all knowledge and wisdom and

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The book consists largely of good talk like that; which especially delights me because of my long and lonely devotion to the works of T.L. Peacock. Whether consciously or not, Davies has revived the form introduced by Peacock in 1816, used by him in five of his seven novels, and never as far as I know adopted by anyone else till now.

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By the comparison with Peacock I don’t mean to suggest that the book is uneventful...
the action includes the theft of a valuable manuscript, murder, suicide, and a love plot (made from toasted apples and Maria's menstrual blood, obtained from a tampon crushed in a garlic squeezer) that gets into the wrong cup of coffee.

Principal characters other than those I have mentioned are John Parlabane, a renegade monk who is not one of the true Rebel Angels but quite possibly a minor devil; ad-testable Renaissance scholar named Urquhart McVarish, whose sexual toilets are very curious indeed: Clement Hollier, a medievalist turned "paleo- psychologist" and an authority on the Fifth Therapy of the Middle Ages: Ozias Frots, known as the Turd-Skinner, who is found to have won a Nobel Prize for his exhaustive study of human excrement; Maria's mother, a Hungarian gypsy who professionally reconditions stringed instruments by pecking them in dung bought at great ease from a racing stable; and the mother's brother Yerko, a successful crook who after being taken to a medieval inn plays music that devotes the devotion to the Bobby Jesus, and builds a creche showing the Three Kings bringing their gifts of Gold, Frank, and Mor, and then asks the reader to turn to the first-person narrator. Their book then in the well-turned periods of the sometime Master of Massey, which comes rather oddly from the 23-year-old Maria. But it doesn't matter in the least.

I can't resist noting that the Latin of these two scholars seems to be even ruder than mine. Paracelsus wrote: "Alitera non sit namouse potus." This is the first Latin sentence I've seen in years that I can read without help: it means "Let him who can best his own man not be another's: Parlabane takes, from it the title of his

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**REVIEW**

**New guy on the block**

_By D.W. Nichol_

The King's Evil, by David Helwig, Oberon Press. 130 pages, $15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 392 6) and 57.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 393 4).

The last bit of recorded dialogue in the life of Charles I was, naturally enough, with his executioner. Under other circumstances it might have read like a Python script:

- EXT. LONDON GYRE (Foppishly dithering): Take heed of the axe. **pray** take heed of the axe. I shall say but very short prayers, and when I thrust the axe...

Does my hair trouble you? Wincing as if to make out cutends? I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be. No disturbance in the world.

**CHAS:** Is my hair well? (Kicking the block) You must set it fast. (Tears it again)

**EXEC:** (Making a token adjustment: It is fast, Sir.

**CHAS:** (Obviously miffed:) It might have been a little higher.

**EXEC:** It can go no higher, Sir.

**CHAS:** (Resigned:) When I put my hands out this way them... 15 minutes later. Executioner snaps him on the shoulder: Charles is ignignant)

STAY FOR THE SIGN!

David Helwig mixes it a different way in The King's Evil: Substitute one heavily perked monarch for some poor, besotted royal look-alike shortly before execution. Then whisk Charles off to the American colonies and let him die in shrouded secrecy, royal head intact. Add one abysmally depressed CRC producer on an extended leave of absence. Shake until ready.

But the main ingredients — historical truth and personal myth-never quite seem to blend. Nor are they meant to. Helwig's hero and his history-upheaving idea for a CBC-Radio slot (which leads him from

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**HUDDLING UP**

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_by Jeffrey Goodman_

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by GINETTE BUREAU

FRAGILE FREEDOMS:  
HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
DISSENT IN CANADA  
by JUSTICE THOMAS BERGER

THE POPE'S DIVISIONS  
by PETER NICHOLS

THE GHOST OF  
LUNENBURG MANOR  
by ERIC WILSON

CLARKE IRWIN
Niagara to Virginia, then to England). Form on uneasy co-existence, slated for separation. Failure of both truth and myth is the ineluctable conclusion. The secret (if ever there were any secret) of Charles's escape dies on the withered lips of an English lord.

In this way, the true (or at least accepted) image of the beheaded monarch is much more suited to The King's Evil than that of an escaped Charles: Helwig's hem is basically running around with his head temporarily and figuratively lopped off. Helwig deliberately unplugs certain vital nerve functions of his main character, who's not exactly endeared to his readers by 'the unapproachable epithet of Dross. Dross drunkuriously reflects maiduly, reacts tangentially, as though remote historical figures and confrontable human beings were the samestock of alien.

The narration suffers accordingly, its narrator suspended in an emotional limbo. The driving force of the novel, then, if not the downplayed personality of Dross, must be the vague manifestation of the Protestant work ethic. What is the best remedy for an uncalculable tragedy? Dross instinctively knows it: work. He throws himself into it no matter how: baring the labour (he buries himself in archives presumably left undusted since the 18th century), no matter how profitless the result. Erosion it might be called — the slow sloughing off of an old skin.

A more engaging aspect of The King's Evil is its exploration of fakes within fakes — a refreshing digression from myths within truths. Dross imagines setting up an interview for a documentary on forger with an impecunious of Tom Keating who, incidentally, found Krieghoff to be a prolific source for his "Sexton Blakes.

The development of Dross's sensationalist theory on Charles I and its transatlantic follow-up is essentially a false activity masking a highly idiosyncratic form of self-pyschotherapy. But delusion itself is part of the cure.

Helwig's latest limps as a compelling read, more than a bit much in too many places: "You performed a slow asphyxiation of my soul, transplanted toy heart out of me and left a hole." (Is the CBC filled with rock-song-writers' magnific?) or, "I see your body shaved from head to toe and out of place and spined like a dentist's drill in a rotten tooth as you grind the rot from my soul." To cite the dross without highlighting the more redeeming elements would be unfair: there are a couple of superbly developed, macabre episodes. When Helwig sends Doss down a darkened and doleful passage until he squeezes himself into immobility the effect is stunningly spine-tapping.

Early on in The King's Evil Dross is warned from high: "We're not here to broadcast private obsessions." What fails as a radio document (because it fails as an idea) becomes the obsessive stuff of a novel. Too brief to permit much development, too contained by its protagonist's self-pity, yet too diffuse in its intent, The King's Evil reads like itself: something to be got out of its own system.

**REVIEW**

Red and white and bleak all over

By ERLING FRIIS-BAASTAD

**Making Up.** By Don Bailey, Oberon Press, 119 pages. $15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 372 1) and $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 374 8).

**Born Indian.** By W. P. Kinsella, Oberon Press, 163 pages, $15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 379 9) and $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 381 0).

After reading 'Making Up,' I was disturbed by the thought that the author of these stories may have recently endured a tragedy similar to the ones his protagonists undergo. I was momentarily dissuaded from writing what most be written about this book. However, when the words inspired by a real life tragedy are published as fiction, they cease to be private exercises in therapy, and we are asked to accept them as art. In this case, the awesome emotional force Don Bailey attempts to portray overwhelm the art.

Wayne, Bailey's principal protagonist, is the only character in these stories who comes close to being a fully realized human being. He is a bright, sensitive, and often unemployed working man who suffers from an inability to let his feelings show. He seems to understand them well enough and is often the genius of his own heart. Sometimes this is moving; usually, it is ponderous. With only two exceptions. The stories in 'Making Up' follow Wayne's attempt to cope with the fact that his wife is dying of cancer and his need to create a new life for his son and himself. In the two exceptions a man similar to Wayne, though without his grit, suffers through the aftermath of his wife's departure to the West and a career.

Wayne's wife, Wanda, never becomes more than a vehicle for the misery to arrive on. Wayne's mother is a demented old vodka addict. His little boy is the moral...
imperative to keep striving, and toddles off and on the stage like a small Greek chorus with bad timing.

Bailey’s choppy prose often has his people talking like private detectives alone in cold water flats with only one shot left in the bottle and a price on their heads. Sometimes it’s worse. Passages like, “She laughed again. It is not a pleasant sound. This is not the women who sewed me quiet Sunday dinners of roast beef and creamy mashed potatoes. Her voice is like cold, lumpy gravy.” And, “I hope you’re happy. All those years in the munition plant and never an accident. If you weren’t around, would I be making meatloaf?” Well, they give me indigestion.

By the final story, we find that everything is working out. Wanda’s suffering has ended. Wayne has thrown her ashes into Niagara Falls. He has started up his own company, one apparently designed as a racket, though it succeeds legitimately. His mother cheers up and is able to resume her kitchen chores. Wayne falls in love with a woman he met at the office: “The music played on and they continued to dance. Wayne found himself beginning to make up a new dream. One he could say out loud.” Sigh.

It was a relief to turn to the story-telling prowess of W. P. Kinsella.

In his previous short-story collections, Dance Me Outside and Scars, Kinsella introduced his narrator, Silas Ermineskin, and the Indians of reserve near Hobbema. Alla. In Bog Indian he continues to chronicle their misadventures. The cover blurb calls our attention to the great sense of humour that runs through these stories. The publisher certainly isn’t putting us on, though it is an oversimplification: as deftly handled as it is, there’s humour only one tone on this canvas.

In a review of 77: Best Canadian Short Stories (in the Winter, 1978, issue of The Fiddlehead) John Mills accused Kinsella of taking a typically middle-class liberal’s approach to the lives of his characters, and even went so far as to wonder if Kinsella had ever met an Indian. Such a sour pronouncement has more in common with a middle-class liberal attitude than does anything Kinsella writes. Perhaps Mills came to his conclusion because he was dealing with a single story. One would expect a typical white liberal to get bogged down in one mood, just as his extreme opposite number would. Taken together in one volume, Kinsella’s stories leap. plunge, and twist through a range of emotions.

Events in the title story leave the reader as saddened and numbed as they do the characters themselves. The story is about an old man who tries to maintain custody of his grandson & spite bureaucratic ignorance and sanctimoniousness. In “Indian Stuck” Silas suffers a bitter revelation as to why some white women throw themselves at Indian men.

“Buffalo Jump” presents a dynamic young Tlingit from Alaska who moves to Alberta where he is severely crippled in a shooting incident. This story is a beautiful study of bravery. A very special kind of dillinity rides the tension right through to the story’s surprising conclusion.

Kinsella works with several levels of humour. Occasionally he treats us to hilarious slapstick. In “The Killing of Colin Moosefeathers” and “I Remember Horses.” At times, Silas is reduced to a wise-cracking acceptance of fate. Most of the stories are imbued with sardonic political wit. This reaches its ultimate expression with “Weasels and Ermines” in which the medicine woman, Mad Rita, spine, dark magic to battle two veneful rednecks and a meddling constable.

I am certain that W. P. Kinsella was Fully aware of the target he would become after daring to publish his stories about Indians. I am glad that didn’t stop him... Unless you approach Born Indian with hardened preconceptions about the proper way to present minorities in fiction, these stories will move you as only the best products of the art of story-telling can.

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**The One-Room School in Canada**

An affectionate look at a vanished era in Canadian life.

by Jean Cochrane

The White Hotel. by D.M. Thomas, Victor Gollancz (Clarke Irwin), 240 pages. $17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 575 02889 0). This third and most recent offering of English novelist D.M. Thomas is an exciting and highly disturbing look at a such perennial philosophical dilemmas as good vs. evil and the existence of life after death. cleverly wrestled with through the recounting of Lisa Erdman’s patient/doctor relationship with Sigmund Freud. Casually moving from fantasy to fact and back again. Thomas leads us through the seemingly successful unravelling, by therapy, of Lisa’s painful psychosomatic illness. We share through case-history, narrative, poetry, and correspondence, her thoughts, guilts, and fantasies. She is a half-Russian singer whose love affairs, marriage, and career are all aborted by her alienating illness. Freud is the superior, inquisitive, end innovative man he was in life, but who, like his patient, cannot in the end escape from the realities of life and the course of history. Almost to the last page we are led to believe that Lisa’s problems (not to mention the world’s) are solvable only that the man-
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The first book club
for smart people
who aren’t rich.
moth strides of medicine and science are our undoubted salvation. In the end, the reader is left with little confidence in the omnipotence of science. Instead there is only a renewed reverence for the universe and its many enigmas. We are shocked into realizing that Lisa Erdrich's pain is not an end result, but an alarming prophecy. Her gift of second sight is too accurate. The novel does not deny the benefits of psychoanalysis, nor

that it works, but it does say that there is so much more, and that man is a foundling: we are, in fact, just another of life's mysteries. A work of fierce symbolism, humour, and pathos.

—OCELYN HILLMAN

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**FEATURE REVIEW**

The other Canada

Mavis Gallant's Canadian stories reveal a lost country of the mind, seen by a writer in whose unwavering vision we all are refugees

By WAYNE GRADY


"I often have the feeling with Canadian readers that I am on trial," Mavis Gallant writes in her introduction to this collection, an introduction she uses as a kind of defense plea against a long-standing charge of being "unCanadian." Of "using language to screen deep and disobliging meaning, or to perpetrate a fraud." That this feeling is as strong now as it was when Gallant (and Richler, and Levine) left Canada more than 30 years ago says as much about writing as it says about Canadians: when later on she repeats Cocteau's phrase — "Je suis un mensonge qui dit la vérité" — she acknowledges that her writing is a lie that contains a deep and not necessarily pleasant (else why the screen?) truth. As for the trial image, Gallant's genius is to turn the table, to put us as human beings (sometimes as Canadian human beings) in the dock. We become witnesses for our own prosecution, and as an examiner Gallant is fierce and relentless: as she also says. "no writer calls a truce."

The 17 stories in the collection are arranged chronologically and in three sections. The first group, all published in the New Yorker in the 1950s and 60s, are about children and Families. "Thank You for the Lovely Tea," published in 1956 but written much earlier, in the 1940s when Gallant was 18, is about a sullen, rebellious child in a Montreal convent. Ruth Cook is an early version of Linnet Muir, whom we meet in the ibi section: the story has no particular edge to it — the teasing of a schoolmate while at tea with Father's new girlfriend — and the point seems to be to delineate the effects of boarding schools on young girls. But as that is devastating. "Jorinda and Jorinde!" is also about a displaced child in strange surroundings not of her choice. Irmgard, in her aunt's summer house For a vacation, observes the drunken antics of another guest. Mrs. Bloodworth, and treats her orphaned cousin Freddy like a stuffed doll. Her only friend is the maid, Germaine, who speaks no English and who dislikes her employers. Irmgard's future seems no less bleak than the present, an endless succession of unhappiness in someone else's home. "She will never be given anything even approaching Germaine's unmeasured love again."

Perhaps the most interesting story in this first group is "Wing's Chips," for here we have another early portrait of Linnet Muir (though still unnamed) and her Father, who are renting a summer place in a small French village on the St. Lawrence. The Father is a painter, the mother is in a nursing home in Montreal, and the daughter is on vacation from the Pensionnat Saint-Louis de Gonzague — a familiar setting: separated Family, rented house, a remote but kindly father whose life is totally foreign not only to his
neighbour but even to his own daughter, who seems to wish he were a bank clerk like everyone else. Not until he paints a sign for the local fish-and-chips shop does she feel proud of him, and even then she won’t admit anyone that he did it for nothing.

The middle section consists of four stories — “In the Tunnel,” “The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street,” “Bonaventure,” and “Virus X” — published between 1965 and 1971. These are longer stories, more grown-up, and “In the Tunnel” is perhaps the best known. It is about Sarah Holmes, a young Canadian girl who, while in a kind of exile from Canada in the south of France (Gallant’s favourite fictional territory), meets another of Gallant’s palely loitering knights-at-arms, Roy Cooper. Cooper has been drifting about the colonies as a prison inspector, and now lives in a part of a villa known as the Tunnel — a long, narrow, windowless room with a vaulted, white-washed ceiling where he and Sarah act out their inevitable tragi-comedy. In “The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street” there is another version of Roy Cooper, this time called Peter Frazier. Peter and Shellah Frazier are the only “happyly married” couple in the book, and their happiness depends upon a shared delusion regarding lost opportunities, friends, money, and pride. Frazier is what Gallant will later, in the Linnet Muir stories, refer to as an RM, a remittance-man who wanders about in self-inflicted exile, working as a government clerk in Geneva, as a valet or something in Ceylon, “where they should have made their fortune,” and finally turns up in Canada at his sister’s apartment, where they squat for 17 weeks. In their bright-blue kitchen they think of themselves as peasants, and as Frazier himself observes toward the end of the story, gazing at the peasants in Geneva’s Palais de Nations, “those proud but useless bils love no one. They wander about the parked cars, looking elderly, bad-tempered, mournful, and lost.”

The last six stories are the Linnet Muir stories that have been appearing in the New Yorker (and one in the Canadian Fiction Magazine) since the mid-1970s. In the introduction, Gallant recalls that the impetus to write a series of interconnected stories about the Montreal she knew in the 1940s came while she was at work on her book about Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish officer who was falsely convicted of treason in 1894. As she restored in her mind the lost Paris of Dreyfus, “there began to be re-storied in some underground river of the mind a lost Montreal. An image of Sherbrooke Street, at night, with the soft gaslight and leaf shadows on the sidewalk.“ This image worked on Gallant much as the famous madeleine worked on Marcel Proust. “The image appears in the first Linnet Muir story, "In Youth Is Pleasure," in which Sherbrooke Street was lined with gigantic spreading trees through which light fell like a rain of coins. One day, standing at a corner, waiting for the light to change, I understood that the Sherbrooke Street of my exile — Mecca, my Jerusalem — was this.”

Linnet Muir, IS. returns to Montreal from New York in order to escape the confinement of living near her vapourish mother, to be independent, to find out who she is, and incidentally to discover how her father died when she was seven years old. This last quest is never quite completed: he either died of tuberculosis of the spine or he shot himself, either in Montreal, Quebec City, or in a ship going back to England. Linnet dips that particular quest and concentrates on herself. She gets a job in a government wartime agency, where she is the only woman in an office full of veterans and remittance men, full of Peter Fraziers and Roy Cooper, refugees from life who have come to most whoghave accepted their lot and are in the process of disappearing: "A refugee eating crumflakes was of no further interest." In “With a Capital T” the wartime agency is replaced by a newspaper called The Lantern (a parody of a version of the old Montreal Standard, when Gallant worked before leaving for Europe in 1950).

The six stories take Linnet backward and forward in search of lost time, back to memories of her parents and their friends, forward to men she meets on commuter trains who will soon be killed in the war. Gallant’s handling of rime is brilliant and unobtrusive. In the first story Linnet arrives at the door of her old nurse, Olivia, and we know how her first three interviews with her father's former friends will go before she even sets down her suitcase. Yet we do not feel jerked back: and fopoh as though being dragged through an over-furnished room, but rather as if being taken carefully by the hand and led through a vast, complicated, but perfectly orderly mansion.

The idea of gathering nearly all of Gallant’s Canadian stories together is a good one. Not merely because they all take place in Canada (a Canada that is, at any rate, extremely personal and probably obsolete), but because they are all linked by Gallant’s unswerving vision. The young orphan in the early stories grows into the adolescent misfits of the middle ones, and these turn into the female Ulysses that is Linnet Muir. The early deduced and mirage-like emotions become the ineffectual lovers, and then return again to being rough sketches of Angus Muir, Linnet’s complex and shadowy father, who was himself one of Linnet’s hated and ridiculed remittance men. In the end it is not a vision of Canada that emerges from these stories, but a vision of the world. Of life: it is in that nameless country of the mind inhabited by all real writers, regardless of nativity, that Mavis Gallant lives. We are her privileged intruders.
Sisters of virtue

His stories are less grotesque than his novels, but Jack Hodgins continues to shake our notions of reality.

By RUPERT SCHIEDER

The Barclay Family Theatre, by Jack Hodgins, Macmillan. 272 Pages. $15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9597 2).

The Barclay Family Theatre, the fourth in six years would soon appear, was bound to cause some speculation, even anxiety, for those devoted to his work, particularly since he has recently done so much travelling and has become a sought-after writer in residence. For the virtues and the values that Hodgins has displayed — the enthusiasm, what he calls his "eagerness," his "passion to write"; the modesty, directness, and lack of pretension in speaking about his work (at a time when the national literary atmosphere is heavy with conferences and statements): the sharpness of the locale, the idiosyncratically realized characters produced by his "antennae," his hypersensitivity to other people; the freshness of his language, and the willingness to take chances, acknowledged by his saying, "I push language and reality as far as I can be believable"—these, among other qualities, have attracted an enthusiastic following that might well be concerned that the new work might disappoint. I read it, on the wrong side of the Atlantic, in galleys, not finally corrected, with a combination of relief and admiration.

There is nothing in this book that I'd rather he hadn't included, unlike one or two of the collected stories in Spit Delaney's Island (1976). It attests, with The Invention of the World (1971) and The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne (1979), to the fundamental consistency of Hodgins's willing. Yet, precocious as too much travel and guest teaching might have been for some writers, there are signs of additional interests. partly perhaps the result of Hodgins's time in other parts of the country, such as Ottawa, and other pans of the world, including Japan, Ireland and Bantry Bay are here again and of course Vancouver Island. There are a number of immediate reminiscences: Jamb Weins, a minor figure in the last novel, has grown prodigiously here, and in "More Than Conquerors" there is a failed resurrection counterbalanced by a "rising."

Although there is some broadening, the centre of the stories, the home base from which some of the characters stray or have strayed, is Waterville, that part of the island that serves as what Hodgins calls his "metaphor." In "the valley," surrounded by logging and farming, Waterville is a "collection of hobby farms, along a four-mile stretch of highway." The cast of characters of the eight stories provides a unity that was absent in Spit Delaney's Island, a more conventional collection. This unity is indicated by the général title The Barclay Family Theatre, the prefatory quotation from J.C. Barclay, and the theatrical announcement of the last story, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Fabulous Barclay Sisters." (I wonder whether Barclay Sound had anything to do with the selection of the family name.)

The cast includes the seven sisters, their husbands, lovers, children, neighbours, and wider connections. and most of the stories are told from the point of view of one of them. Only "The Plague Children," marked by its impersonal, relentlessly driving prose, gives the general view of the people of Waterville. Three present the point of view of Barclay Philip Desmond, like Hodgins a fifth-generation Vancouver Islander. descended from Irish immigrants.

In the first and the last, he records in the first person early stages of his life, whereas in "The Lepers' Squint" Desmond, an academic and striving novelist, is observed through the third-person. limited point of view in Bantry Bay, trying to cope with or to "handle" — a recurrent word in these stories — his problems, some literary. At least, like Hodgins himself, he has come to be able to say, speaking about an Irish writer of short stories: "I have my own place. . . I don't need to borrow his."

There are a number of explicit statements on art that are quite relevant since half of the stories involve academics, writers, and painters. Hodgins, however, does not take the so-called easy way out, like Aldous Huxley or Gide. of registering the chief themes by means of a self-aware critical commentator. These concerns are most forcefully embodied in quite non-artistic individuals. They are often isolated figures, unable to communicate. The groping realization of the horrors of "invasion," one of the key words in the Prefatory quotation, comes to a self-satisfied North Vancouver mother, who on a visit to diplomatic Ottawa to rescue her son becomes a failed Strether, an ambassador in small. Counterpointed with an expected physical resurrection and the pronouncements of a self-assured painter are a vulgar couple, Cad and Gladdy Root, who "rise" to sense the "possibilities." a faith in being "on the side of life." Gladdy has some of the qualities of Jenny, the ex-stripper in The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne. From that novel comes Jacob Weins, ex-mayor of Port Annie, his occupation gone. Is it to this former buffoon, given to fantastic costumes, that "The Sumo Revisions" now come; having learned compassion. he now has a sense of direction. In both The Invention of the World and The Resurrection of the Joseph Bourne, I thought that Hodgins was risking too much in pulling the heavy weight of direct "philosophic" statement on Lily. Sraho Becker, and Joseph Bourne. The problem is solved here by his separation of statement, on the one hand, by writers and artists, and embodiment, on the other, in these ordinary, coarse, slightly eccentric figures.

In "The Sumo Revisions" Weins's thoughts about costumes. Kabuki plays, and the Sumo wrestling form part of the most inclusive images and metaphors of the book. announced in the title, the prefatory quotation ("Now let's close down this show"), and the titles of the first and last stories, present in the numerous discussions...
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MACMILLAN OF CANADA
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October, 1981 Books in Canada
of art, and continually woven in the texture
of the prose by such words as “show,”
“real life,” “fiction,” “imagination,” and
“disguises,” which occur in different
forms on almost every page.

This unifying factor is just one of those
that make this fourth book of Hodgins’
fiction so satisfying. The energy and the
bouge of The Invention of the World
have been combined with the tightness, the
control of The Resurrection of Joseph
Bourne. Without employing grotesque
characters, touched by the legendary, the
allegorical, and the supernatural, that
marked those two novels, Hodgins is con-
tinuing “to uncover mysteries in human
beings,” and to embody his interest in
people when their idea of reality is
shaken. “I’ve read the book through twice,
and I believe that I will find more things to
admire on my next reading. I hope that
Hodgins has, as Barclay Philip Desmond
says, a “novel . . . running around his head
all summer and much longer, looking for a
chance to get out.”

From bed
to verse

By ALBERT MORITZ

Breaking and Entering, by Len Gasparini,
Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, 96
pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 889262 120 9)
and $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 899262 119 5).

Waiting for the Stones, by Sid Stephen,
Oben Press, 72 pages, $11.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 88750 398 6) and $5.95 paper
(ISBN 0 88750 391 8).

“HEAVEN DELIVER US, what a poet!
Something that can’t go to bed without
making a song about it,” said Dorothy
Sayers. By this definition, Len Gasparini
and Sid Stephen are true poets, as they
themselves strenuously proclaim in these
collections bearing witness to Rich Inner
Lives. Waiting for the Stones is Stephen’s
second book, and Breaking and Entering is
Gasparini’s “new and selected.”

On almost every page, the two tell us
what it’s like to be a poet, strongly
emphasizing the soul-searing and badly under-
paid agony of the job. Without invading a
privacy neither cares to preserve, it can be
said that they are poets of the sort Sayers
had in mind: they can’t go to bed (or hope to go
to bed, or remember going to bed) without
talking about it.

Gasparini’s Muse must have a chronic
headache, but he still finds her to his taste:
“You are a sweet mushroom . . . and soft as
the dew on a rabbit’s nose.” Both are often
alone and reflect on love’s absence, as in
these anatomical observations by Stephen:
“In the way/my teeth fill my mouth/,how
once again/ uncontrollably/ I seem to
possess/ ten fingers, ten toes/, and there is no
evidence of our having been together.”

Doubtless an instinct of self-preservation
prevents Stephen and Gasparini from asking
themselves if anything in these collections of
Things Often Thought and Usually
Better Expressed is fresh and well put. Such
a question might induce writer’s block, so
let us not, gentle reader, provoke it. Why
add to these poets’ already long list of
afflictions?

Gasparini is particularly heart-rending on
the subject of the poet’s lot: the broken
relationships, the bad pay, the loneliness,
the rejection. “I can’t even afford a used
car/. And since I recently abandoned the
idea/ Of spending the rest of my wretched
nights/ Sleeping in laundromats and
subways/ I rented a cold-water flat.”

From “Davenport Road” he utters this
evil cry: “my ex-wife/ . . . threatened to
snatch me for nonsupport/ if I continued to
live as I did/. Well, I lived as I did/ in order
to write poems. . . .” Even his mom and
dad (for whom, of course, his own feelings
are very fine and proper) can’t appreciate “a
poet’s rage.”

Stephen fares less at society’s in-
gratitude, but he is continually being laid
low by epiphanies that pierce through his
most ordinary experiences. Taking the kids
to Niagara Falls, he must endure “the
visceral knowledge of kick” (that’s right),
which plunges his mind, and a stone, into
the “bottoms of things green and unreachable.”

He could be driving to the airport, or just
casually helping some friends stone an owl
to death, and suddenly he is transfixed: “the
owl still warm/ I picked it up and in the
distance/ watched the others turn their eyes/
to me. I waited for the stones, I am waiting/
even now. . . .” Kinda makes your fingers
itch to join in, doesn’t it?

One wonders why they put themselves
through so much suffering. Perhaps it is
because they value the poetic struggle to
merge such high thoughts with the best
language, a struggle Stephen celebrates in
“Revenge of the Words”: “We take them,
beat/ their syllables/ with image,
metaphor/ pump them full/ of meaning/ in
these goddamned poems.”

Though the depth of feeling to which
these poets descend for our sake submerges
them in bad grammar and wearisome clichés,
they surface sometimes with compressed
statements weighed, among the moderns,
only by such masters as Barry Mandlow.
Compare Stephen: “This is no news report,
this is happening” with Xerox: “Not just
data, but reality." Or again, Stephen: "You open your eyes and step out into the rest of your life" with various cards and posters: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

Yet Stephen himself is surpassed in this respect by Gasparini, among whose recraftings of the idiom are "we knew it was curtains/and tried to accept it like men," and my personal favourite, "he suddenly fell herplunk/into that bowl of sowellow slime." 

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**REVIEW**

**High in the sky**

**By PHIL SURGUY**

Air Glow Red, by Ian Slater, Doubleday, 346 pages, $17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 171863)


IAN SLATER will always have a little niche in the history of Canadian publishing. His first novel, Firefill, was the first Bantam-Seed publication. It came out in 1977 and marked the beginning of the first likely effort to put meaningful numbers of Canadian books on the mass-market paperback racks. Half a million copies were printed for distribution in Canada and the United States, and there was talk that Bantam was investing heavily in Slater giving him an embossed cover and everything, with expectations that his third or fourth book would be a blockbuster.

When Firefill came out Slater was, I believe, a graduate student in political science at the University of British Columbia. He now teaches there, and Air Glow Red is his third novel. It is not a blockbuster. It is a rather average example of that species of "best seller" in which the hero uncovers and puts a stop to a dastardly, catastrophic threat to mankind. In this case we have a huge solar power satellite that also appears capable of turning a large part of the earth into a microwave oven. The hero is an environmentalist and single parent who works as a White House adviser.

The book should do pretty well on the racks (there's a big, apparently uncritical market for paranoid, apocalyptic glimpses into the workings of the White House and other high places), but there is nothing here for even a moderately demanding thriller reader. The only twist in the tired plot is right out of The Ipcress File, and there is not one interesting person in the entire book. About as far as Slater gets by way of characterization is to give one of his villains bad breath; two more speak with Cockney accents; another is fat. And the hero and narrator is a colourless, irritating chatterbox who overexplains everything, almost as if the book was intended for people who have never read a thriller or seen a movie. Some 50 pages of chatter could have easily been cut from Air Glow Red. Pruning wouldn't have improved the story, but it would have made for a slicker, not the least nothing for a slicker read.

High Crimes is an enjoyable thriller and a very slick read. It is William Deverell's second novel. Two years ago he won the $50,000 Bantam Seal first novel award for Needles, a murderous tale of Vancouver's heroin industry.

Deverell is a trial lawyer in Vancouver, and over the last 20 years he has handled many drug cases. Needles was a good reflection of his insider's knowledge of the industry and also showed a solid-talent for strong characterization and deft, true-sounding scenes. It was marked only by a rather comic-bookish ending of the sort that seems mandatory in all North American thrillers.

High Crimes is about an effort by the RCMP to nail one Pete Kerrivan, an outrageous, devil-may-care dope smuggler, the descendant of a legendary Newfoundland outlaw. They sneaky put him in the way of an enormous load of marijuana, the score of a lifetime, and it seems to him that all he has to do is put it on a boat and transport it from Colombia to Newfoundland. In real life, Deverell was one of the defence attorneys for the Tofto Five, who were caught off Vancouver Island in 1979 at the end of a similar adventure.

The overall plotting, which resembles the actual case only in very broad outline, rarely rises above the frothy level of a Donald E. Westlake caper, and much of the action appears to have been written with a movie deal in mind. But any mechanical flaws are easily transcended by Deverell's ability to set dramatic scenes and create believable, interesting people. Even his female characters (notably Jessica Fialkuty, an American narc, the sole liberal in a mostly, Reaganean bureaucracy) have their own energy and ambitions. In most thrillers the women are simply there to be rescued or laid or both. The only character who doesn't quite achieve his full potential is Kerrivan, largely because the plot requires him to spend a lot of time at sea, transporting the dope. However, this hole in the story is admirably filled by the lurid Miami adventures of Sergeant O'Doul, a naive RCMP electronics expert who fascinates himself a super-coy.

At one point in High Crimes the federal government and the RCMP fix a trial. Now, in most North American thrillers descriptions of how things are arranged in high places are not much more than comy, paranoid fantasies. Deverell's fix, on the other hand, comes off as just an extraordinary bit of everyday plea bargaining written by a man who knows exactly how such things could be done in real life. Indeed, for all its derring-do and melodrama, this novel, like Needles, has a hard, realistic foundation. In his depictions of evil, and in his descriptions of the frequently corrupt interplay between cops, lawyers, dealers, thieves, politicians, judges, and junkies, Deverell consistently indicates a deep knowledge of how this shadowy side of our society works. But in neither of his novels, as good and as entertaining as they are, has there been any indication that he has yet got close to the nuts and guts of what he knows.

All we have any right to ask him to do is to continue to write enjoyable books. Yet, given his talent and privileged insights, it is not unreasonable to hope that, as he does so, he will become a much more ambitious novelist.

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**REVIEW**

**Mute tones and the clash of symbols**

**By STEPHEN SCOBIE**

Land of the Peace, by Leona Gom, Thistledown Press, 90 pages, $14.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920066 38 0) and $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 37 2).

Humans and Other Beasts, by Lorna Uher, Turnstone Press, 80 pages, $7.00 paper (ISBN 0 88801 040 0).

LEONA GOM and Lorna Uher have a good deal in common. Both are women writing poetry out of the prairie experience; both are gifted young writers who have moved beyond the first stage of their careers and now are publishing their third books; both have established their individual voices and styles, and deserve to be taken seriously, no longer dismissed as merely "promising."

Yet there are also vast differences between them: Gom's work is realist, anecdotal, and deliberately restrained in its language, while Uher's poetry is more violent, symbolic, and linguistically extravagant. Each in her own way explores the limits and the possibilities of their chosen styles.
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Leona Gom’s *Land of the Peace* is, as its title suggests, very much a poetry of place: the Peace River country of northern Alberta, where the writer was born and raised. It’s a country of vast open spaces, of overwhelming sky, of that whole sense and beauty of scale which the Edmonton artist Norman Yates defines as ‘‘landscape’’ rather than ‘‘landscape.’’ It’s also a country where history is close to the surface, in the remains of the farm buildings of the first immigrants, in the sparsely filled graveyards, in people’s memories.

Gom’s poems are about memories, and the production by Thistledown nicely illustrates this with a series of family snapshots printed in faded sepia tones and defined by the harsh black edges of old-fashioned photo-corners. The poems are straightforward, anecdotal, vividly recalling (at their best) the scenes and images of childhood: a child’s incompletion of adult ways, of death, of the complexities of human relationships and the simpler facts of bad days and hard times. A poem like ‘‘Chop’’ illustrates the virtues of the book: Gom recalls how her father, covered with ‘‘the thick flour of grain,’’ would need to have his clothes cleaned by being beaten, like a carpet, with a broom. ‘‘But I never struck him hard enough … the dust merely stirred under my apologetic blows,’’ until her mother comes out from the house to beat him more vigorously:

And me standing back,
a child, inarticulate,
watching the blows fall
and his body absorb them,
in that fine tension
of their understanding,
that easy balance
of their practical love.

A large part of the book’s purpose is, clearly, to render articulate such ‘‘inarticulate’’ moments of memory.

Gom’s style accords with the general movement of prairie realist poetry with which Thistledown Press is now most closely associated. She has the virtues of the style: clear, direct observation, a nicely muted and understood tone, a willingness to let the strength of the material emerge without relying on showy ‘‘poetic’’ effects. Yet there are also weaknesses: a flatness of tone, a lack of variety in the rhythms, the feeling that much of what is being said would be just as effective in a short story or prose sketch, the whole question of what the language is doing in this kind of poetry. At her best, Gom holds a fine balance between these weaknesses and these strengths, which are so intertwined with each other; she shows a fine tact and discipline in her command of words, and a control of tone that insists these are poems, not merely random reminiscences.

But where can she go from here? Childhood memory is a limited subject, and though Gom, writing in Vancouver, humorously portrays her own poems as ‘‘homesick … crawling out from under my pen/and running back/to the north,’’ she also admits in the closing lines of the book that her memories provide her with nothing to tell you finally
where you are from,
why you changed,
what you have become.

That’s a pretty devastating conclusion for such a book, and it clearly indicates the need Gom feels to find new directions for her writing.

Lorna Uher is a poet who has never been afraid of new directions. Her willingness to take chances has always been one of the most attractive aspects of her writing, and even if she occasionally comes a cropper, that is still to be preferred to more conventional safeties. Her stories are not realistic reminiscences, but wild symbolic fantasies of animals, magicians, mythological creatures, circus acts, people who carry inside their skulls the pulse of wings or the scuttle of rats.

Her book is divided into four sections.
The first, "Humans and Other Beasts," is constructed around a series of four poems on the animals in the four seasons. The animal theme is modulated between natural and mythological portrayals, from fallen birds to betrayed unicorns, and juxtaposed to modern reworkings of the medieval legends of Merlin and Morgan le Fay. It's a fascinating sequence, the richest and most complex in the book, though I find the "geek" poems at the end less interesting than the legends — among which I like particularly one of the "many versions" of "Nimue and Merlin," of the enchanter's entrapment:

I have shrunk him
Carry him in my pocket
He is not unhappy
But dances in my palm
Right as an eyelash
A wizened man
No bigger than a raisin.

The second section, "She Makes Me Beautiful," is an attempt to speak in the persona of an abused, drunken, urban Indian woman: the material is powerful, but the tone of voice is uncomfortable, as if Uher had never fully decided what her own stance was. The device of the persona invites irony, but the character discourages it. The third and fourth sections both deal with male-female relations, "Returning" being an especially impressive sequence about revisiting an old lover. Too often here, though, the original situation gets lost in the rhetoric.

Rhetoric, indeed, is Uher's temptation and major weakness. In her desire to avoid the flatness of tone that sometimes dulls prairie poetry, Uher occasionally goes too far the other way, piling on adjectives and bizarre images for their own sake, posing in the linguistic trappings of profundity without always convincing us that she has earned the right to all these images of skulls and claws and dying children. A poem like "Letter":

Our first daughter
With picking shears cut out
Her mouth, stuck it on the mirror,
A lipstick drawing, then spoke
Her death in blood

— seems almost mechanical in its assemblage of fashionable items: daughters, mutilation, mirrors, blood. Here Uher becomes a prisoner of the mode of her own excess.

Nevertheless, these are the flaws of ambition, of daring, of trying for something more. If Lorna Uher can gain full control of what is clearly a powerful and disturbing imagination, she could become a poet to be reckoned with.


The popular image of civil servants is not good. They are the butt of many jokes; they are too easily seen as self-serving parasites or sloths. Their guiding principle seems to be Parkinson's First Law: "Work expands to fill the time available."

To those who believe the image to be undeserved it may be reassuring to read J.L. Granatstein's solid study of Norman A. Robertson. He was "the model civil servant," tendering calm and well-informed advice to his political masters. A precocious native of Vancouver, he studied at UBC, Cambridge (as a Rhodes Scholar) and the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C., before joining the small Department of External Affairs in 1929. Twelve years later, at the age of 37, he succeeded O.D. Skelton as Undersecretary of State for External Affairs. During the war years he was unquestionably one of the most influential men in Ottawa and in Canada.

His professional life was full and varied, as Granatstein amply demonstrates. Tariff negotiations with the United States and Great Britain loomed large. He was at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 at which the United Nations took shape; he served as high commissioner in London and Ambassador in Washington. Throughout he sought to enlarge Canada's freedom of international action, but he had no exaggerated notions as to how far that freedom might extend. Good relations with our nearest neighbour were important to him, as they were to the governments he advised.

He was for a time Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary of the Cabinet, and he found himself on the stage of international politics, moving from London to Moscow, and often playing important roles in discussions of peace and war. He died in 1983, leaving behind a rich legacy in the field of international relations.

For King and country

By MICHEL HORN

In the last years of his life — a chain-smoker, he lost a lung to cancer in 1964 and died four years later — he was the first head of the Paterson School of International
Rhyme without reason

By DOUGLAS CHAMBERS

IT IS ALWAYS a pleasure to find Canadian poets who write as if craft mattered, whose concept of poetry goes beyond the fluctuation of alcohol and sexual yawn. Both Robert Finch and Darryl Hine are craftsmen; their poems reflect the same respect for order that they plainly admire in their predecessors. Finch’s “Stay Lovely Rose” is an invocation of the 17th-century poet, Edmund Waller; the stanza form of Hine’s “The Nap” is that of Spenser’s Faerie Queene. Finch’s Belloe-ese falls him in “Miranda Sings,” but his invocation of a ‘90s song is effective in “The Proxy.”

Both poets, too, are fond of Horatian sermocinatio, the poem of familiar conversation or discussion. This form, though, needs to be handled with Horace’s wit and tone. Too easily the ordinary becomes merely the banal. The newsboy “in every doorway thrusting lettered sheets” in Finch’s “Deliverer” has more of Edgar A. Guest than H.D., although it is of the latter that we are frequently reminded in Finch’s work. Similarly, both poets use inversion in a way that seems merely tortured. “But our old age nor even rates disdain,” in Finch’s “Antiques” is Spenserian syntax without the life. “And white as salt, for waves of salt consist,” in Hine’s “Tristan” is syntax tortured to fit rhyme.

Rhyme often in Hine seems less an echo to the sense than its stern taskmaster. It is difficult to read “Under the Hill” without feeling that the lines have been prettily tormented to find rhymes for the recurrent words “found” and “sound.” In another commendable poem, “The Trout,” the Yeatsian echoes do not redeem the confusion of image or the lameness of rhythm in the sixth stanza:

As I was laid upon the deep sea floor,
Part of the faded pattern of the carpet,
Or split like the sperma the kissing fish ignore
Held in each others’ scales as in a net.

Finch has similar lapses, not so much of sense as of good sense. “How like an
upward dote this waterfall,” just won’t do, not simply because (like “the thought of you is like the smell of roses”) the initial image is greeting-card stuff, but because its subsequent development makes no sense.

Some of Hine’s mythologies sound like anemic Wallace Stevens, some of his reflections like the more vapid bits of Ashberry, but he is saved from both by a tough wrestle with tradition. To compare his “Raleigh’s Last Voyage” with Finch’s poem on David Hume and Phyllis Wheatley is to see at once that Hine avoids sentimentality by metaphor and syntax:

In our dreams the mine shrank to a quarry
Like affection which becomes indifference
in a friend
Or seeking hiding. There the tale should end
But I must prove the example in love’s story.

Raleigh’s line is the measure of Hine’s.

Each line is both a unit of consideration and an enjambment part of a large argument, as the mine becomes the mind.

One of the problems that the work of both poets has in common is the elusive “I” and “we.” In Finch’s poems sometimes the latter are lovers, sometimes merely humanity; it is not always easy to tell from the context. In Hine’s case the “I” is often so elegantly elusive that the poems become almost anonymous. In “My Optics,” however, he uses his own glasses as a literal focusing device, wittily making the connection between the optical and the poetic:

metrical device
With corrective lenses
Bring the phrase in focus.

It is a nice turn, and the nicer for being without the sort of rhetorical flourish that mars some of his longer poems. The poet’s business, as Hine says of Psyche, is “sorting out the letters of the infatuated alphabet.” His finest sortings are pleasure to behold.

IN TRANSLATION

Exploring a labyrinth of tongues:
from the folklore of Quebec to a trenchant analysis of Soviet society

By PAUL STUEWE

THE DEBUT of a new column is typically heralded by a flourish of reasons, rationalizations, and high hopes, and thus even an enterprise as self-explanatory as “In Translation” probably requires some words of introduction. The reasons consist of the large number of translated titles now available in Canada, the rationalizations assert that such books usually pass unnoticed by our excessively parochial reviewing media, and the high hopes come from a conviction that there is a tremendous amount of good reading awaiting these periodic expeditions off the beaten track of anglophonic (rhymes with “monophonic”) literature. As to modus operandi, we’d adroitly sidestep questions of whether the translations themselves are accurate, idiomatic, or what have you, and simply treat them as literary artifacts existing in a language we do have some competence in assessing. This will both exempt us from a lot of tiresome work and give us the illusion of having some kind of meaningful relationship with such diverse tongues as the French, Spanish, Hebrew, and Russian languages in which the books reviewed below were originally written.

“In Translation” will be particularly interested in spotlighting translations from Quebecois and hyphenated-Canadian sources, not least because I expect to discover many books as unfamiliar and yet thoroughly worth knowing as Lucien Francœur’s Neons in the Night (translated by Suzanne de Lothinière-Harwood, Véhicule Press, $4.00 paper). Since this is the author’s 10th book, he is obviously no stranger to francophone readers. But since it is also the first to appear in English, I can confidently predict a much larger audience for this selection than for his previously published verse. Francœur’s funky syntheses of advertising slogans, pop music lyrics, and surreal word associations are as fresh and compelling as the classic Jean-Luc Godard films they often evoke, as demonstrated by this excerpt from Les Grands Spectacles (1974):

cellular instinct
back-peddalling pupils tilted
everyone for himself
emergency music
music for lovers
bab-a-blah rock & death by joy
with fleshly girls
my brain has a built-in stereo
in the whole wide world i am the most
COCO CHANEL kisses my feet right up to
my teeth
A SENSATIONAL
SEASON

THE ACQUISTORS
THE CANADIAN
ESTABLISHMENT VOLUME TWO
Peter C. Newman

FLAMES ACROSS
THE BORDER
THE INVASION OF
CANADA 1815-1814
Pierre Berton

BODILY HARM
Margaret Abwood

HIGH CRIMES
William Deverell

THE BEST OF
CANADA COOKBOOK
A CELEBRATION
OF CANADIAN CUISINE
Tony Roldan and Jim White

THE MARMALADE MAN
Charlotte Vale Allen

ETIQUETTE
Ben Bucks

LIGHT PROBE
Clive Cussler

BOYS, BOMBS AND
BRUSSELS SPROUTS
A KNEES-UP WHEELS-UP
CHRONICLE OF WORLD WAR II
Douglas Harvey

ODYSSEY
MIRROR OF THE
MEDITERRANEAN
Rolf Beny

ALWAYS TIP THE DEALER
Gary Ross

CONN SMYTHE
IF YOU CAN'T BEAT
THEM IN THE ALLEY
with Scott Young

LONG CLAWS:
AN ARCTIC ADVENTURE
Written and Illustrated
by James Houston

THE DARK BROAD SEAS
WITH MANY VOICES
—VOLUME I
Jeffry V. Brock

VINCENT VAN GOGH
AND THE BIRTH OF
CLOISONISM
Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov

AFRICAN MAJESTY
FROM GRASSLAND
AND FOREST
William Fagg

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF
F.R. SCOTT
Edited by John Newlove

HAMMER THE GOLDEN DAY
VOLUME I / THE MEMORIES OF
HUGH L. KEENLYSIDE
Hugh L. Keenleyside

A READER'S GUIDE TO THE
CANADIAN NOVEL
John Moss

SUNDAY'S CHILD
Edward Phillips

CONFLICTS OF SPRING
Poetry by Ralph Gustafson

ALBERTA
Sherman Hines, Photographer

MY BODY WAS
EATEN BY DOGS
Poems by
David McFadden

HERITAGE CANADA
Philip Graham

FIRST LADY,
LAST LADY
Sondra Gottlieb

CONSEQUENCES
Margaret Trudeau

ROUGH LAYOUT
Doris Anderson

ACTIONS AND ART
Jack Shadbolt

QUEBEC
Mia and Klaus

LADDERS TO HEAVEN
Edited by
Oscar White Muscarella

THE GAME OF OUR LIVES
Peter Gwoski

TERRY FOX / HIS STORY
Leslie Sirovenger

THE GROUP OF SEVEN
Peter Meilen

ALBERTA THE BADLANDS
A Reidmore Pocoll Book

EDMONTON
PORTRAIT OF A CITY
A Reidmore Pocoll Book

THE ART OF LEN GIBBS
A Reidmore Pocoll Book

ALBERTA
PROVINCE OF PROMISE
A Reidmore Pocoll Book

FOR A BETTER LIFE:
A HISTORY OF THE
CROATIANS IN CANADA
Anthony W. Rasporich

STRUGGLE AND HOPE:
The Hungarian-Canadian
Experience
N.F. Drezgizer
with M.L. Kovacs, Paul
Body & Bennett Kovlig

A SENSATIONAL
LIST

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25 Hollinger Road, Toronto, Ontario M4B 3G2
There are moments when the drive to combine the banality ridiculous and the metaphorically sublime seems more willful than felt, but for the most part this is a delightful collection that whets one's appetite for further examples of the author's work.

Denys Chabot's novel Eldorado on Ice (translated by David Lohboll, Oberon Press, $17.95 cloth and $8.95 paper) is also going to impress a lot of English-Canadian readers. The book is solidly grounded in the rugged folk and rich folklore of Quebec's Abitibi region, which it uses as the raw material for a sophisticated post-modern conception of interpreting identities and multiple points of view. Again, there are times when the author's evident delight in intellectual gamesmanship soars far beyond the possibilities actually generated by his text, but such occasional excesses of enthusiasm do not seriously mar a very powerful and accomplished book.

The more familiar name of Marie-Claire Blais offers us Dead to the City (translated by Carol Dunlop, Lester & Orpen Denny, $13.95 cloth), which won the 1980 Governor General's Award for fiction in French. The novel is set in the aging Montreal neighbourhoods that Blais has made her particular fictional turf, where a well-realized group of characters lives out the kinds of mundane but emblematic existences that make up her distinctive view of reality. The technical skills exhibited in interweaving these disparate voices without losing a forward narrative-impulse are simply stunning to observe in action, and make Dead to the City a noteworthy addition to the work of one of our very finest authors.

Russian dissident Alexander Zinoviev's The Yawning Heights was one of last year's publishing sensations, although its complex allegorical structure probably baffled many readers expecting something more along the lines of a Solzhenitsyn exposé. The Radiant Future (translated by Gordon Clough, Clarke Irwin, $17.95 cloth) is a somewhat more accessible novel, which combines a trenchant analysis of Soviet society with a moderately intriguing cast of disaffected intellectuals. The effect is to humanize what is essentially a proscriptive and at times rather abstruse philosophical treatise. It's doubtful that a similar book dealing with, say, the fundamental nature of life in Switzerland would ever be published here, but because of its subject matter The Radiant Future will appeal to readers who might otherwise be put off by its sometimes clumsy transitions between drama and didacticism.

Vladmir Volkoft's The Turn-Around (translated by Alan Sheridan, Clarke Irwin, $25.95 cloth) was likewise a surprise 1980 success in France, where it was lauded as the domestic answer to foreign thriller competition. The light, bantering tone of

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the initial scene-setting suggests that a romp
of the Fleming-Delighton variety is in store,
but an unexpected transition into matters of
personal identity and religious faith brings us
up to the hermitage of Greene-Le Core
land with an exhilarating shock. The com-
peting but in some respects coinciding
attractions of Christianity and communism
are given brilliant fictional life, and only an
unsettling disparity in intellectual calibre
between the flyweight protagonist and his
heavyweight opponent renders the psycholog-
ical aspects of the story somewhat
less convincing than its metaphysical
tones.

Israeli author Benjamin Tammuz’s
Minorour (translated by Kim Parfitt and
Mildred Budny, New American Library,
$12.95 cloth) also attempts to combine
secret-agency with more intellectually chal-
enging material, but in this case the
banality of the characters and the monotony
of the writing render it an unsuccessful
effort. Nothing in the novel resonates, and
as a consequence the frequent shifts in
location and temporal sequence seem like a
last-ditch attempt at arousing interest, rather
than an integral part of the author’s con-
ception. Despite the title, there’s nothing
the least bit labyrinthine about this
Minorour, although it’s impossible to resist
the temptation to describe it as more
crystalline than Cretan.

Speaking of labyrinths, that old master of
the teasing fable Jorge Luis Borges and his
friend Adolfo Bioy-Casares show how puzzles
should be constructed in Six Problems
for Don Isidro Parodi (translated by Nor-
man Thomas di Giovanni, Clarke Irwin,
$14.95 cloth). These 40-year-old spoofs of
the classic detective story go one step
further than the locked-room type of mys-
tery by featuring a locked-up eleventh who has
to rely upon hearsay for his evidence, and
his problems aren’t made any easier by the
fiendishly complicated plots his creators
have invented for him. But Parodi always
muddles through to a solution no matter
how bizarre or baroque the case, and both
fans of the literate detective story and those
engaged in the detective literature will have
a good time trying to keep up with his
thought processes. For example, Watson,
take the case of the Muslim leader killed to
death during an arcane cult ritual in a
darkened villa...

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Ethnic fiction: the dispossessed Japanese,
a reactionary Transylvanian, and
a clever but tedious run at the Royal Family

By DOUGLAS HILL

JOY KOGAWA, born in Vancouver, is a
Japanese-Canadian poet and teacher. In
Obasan (Lester & Open Dynens, 250
pages, $13.95 cloth) she tells the story of
the evacuation of her people from the
British Columbia coast during the Second
World War, and of their internment and
subsequent dispersal. It’s a painful and
moving personal narrative and a quietly
savage indictment of Wasp-Canadian rac-
ism.

Most who underwent the experience,
Kogawa suggests, have attempted to bury
the memory of it. Assimilation and
economic security have counted more than
poetry: “It is better to forget.” Not so.
Obasan uncovers the emotional scars that
resulted from such suppression. Grand-
parents were bereft and bewildered; parents
were driven frantic or sullen; children (of
whom Kogawa was one), witnesses to
anxiety, grief, and dispossession, they
couldn’t comprehend, were most deeply
and subtly damaged.

The novel has a sophisticated but not
obtrusive structure. As a young girl in 1942,
Naomi Nakane, the narrator, was taken in
by her uncle and aunt. Her father, a doctor
in Vancouver, died soon after her mother,
on one of her periodic trips to Japan, simply
disappeared. In 1972—the present-time of
the novel—a daughter, a doughty civil-rights
activist, arrives for the uncle’s
burial (in a small town in Alberta) and
examines with Naomi and her brother a
package of documents—letters, journals,
briefs, newspaper clippings—that contains
the concealed or lost pages of their family
chronicle.

Kogawa demonstrates a good poet’s care
with language. Rarely does the delicacy of
feeling and image she records lose touch
with the ground and start to float away from
her. When she reaches for generalizations
her grasp is sure. The style of Obasan is
usually natural, direct, and deliberately
simple; there’s little straining for effects.
The precise control of detail produces
paragraphs and scenes like poems. They
light with bitter intensity a cruel chapter in
our history of expediency and cowardice in
high places.

GEORGE JONAS’S Final Decree (Macmillan,
224 pages, $14.95 cloth) similarly addresses
the problems of Canada’s minorities by
fictionalizing an actual event. Instead of a
lyric memoir, he’s written a hard-hitting,
suspenseful thriller, based on a Toronto
homicide of a few years ago. It’s the portrait
of a strong-willed immigrant in conflict
with customs, laws, and values he is
unprepared for and cannot cope with,
hounded by the agents of the system into an
act of violence against it.

Kazmer Harcsa arrives in New York from
Transylvania in 1957 and comes to Canada
with his American-born, Polish-Hungarian
wife Petrona. He establishes himself as a
carpenter, they buy a house and have two
children, she leaves him—basically
because he oppresses her—taking the kids,
the colour TV, a lamp, the sofa, and $600.
Kazmer survives, more or less, though
baffled and hurt, until Petrona begins
divorce proceedings. From then until the
novel’s end he lives in a nightmare of
lawyers and judges, legal paper, and court
orders.

As the product of a nearly feudal village
culture, Kazmer is locked into rigid, male-
dominant assumptions about honour, jus-
tice, marriage, sexuality. His failure to
adjust to contemporary attitudes, his fear of
the new technological order behind them,
is disintegration as he senses his power-
lessness—Jonas creates this character and
sets out his reactions and motives with
imagination and skill. His prose is strong
and stylish, even if its ironies are often
ponderous and its rhythms occasionally
convoluted. He plays the sonorities of folk
aphorism and metaphor insistently but well.

The novel is richer in psychological than
philosophical or social insight. Jonas makes
Kazmer himself—the inner man—convincing; his treatment of the hostile
world that menaces him will raise some
readersly hackles. The author has a reputa-
tion (at least in Toronto) as a peevish
opponent of the left-liberal point of view on
nearly everything. He’s got a surfeit of
moral certitude, and nothing sets him off—
here or elsewhere—like a bit of well-
meaning government or interest-group in-
trusion into the processes of social change
(which he thinks are a mistake anyway). In Final Decree he’s got an array of targets:
Ontario's attempts to reform its marriage
and divorce code, the Women’s Movement,
community workers, the Gospel according
to Johnny Carson.

The trouble is, Jonas’s spleen regularly
infames him to exceed the context he needs
to develop Kazmer; when this occurs he
comes across as no more than a writer trying
to give the legitimacy of social comment to

October, 1981 Books In Canada 31
Encyclopedia of Music in Canada
Edited by HELMUT KALLMANN, GILLES POTVIN, KENNETH WINTERS
This monumental record is the first to document the historical and current development of Canada’s music in all its breadth and variety — popular, folk, and religious music; concert and dramatic music; jazz and rock; in fact all genres in every form in which they have been presented and enjoyed from the early days of settlement to the present. More than 3100 entries include biographies complete with bibliographies, discographies, lists of compositions, and writings. With more than 500 pictures of people and places, reproductions of scores, programs, and sheet music, the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada provides 1100 pages of information and entertainment. $65.00
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The Politics of Racism
ANN GOMER SUNAHARA
This isn’t the first book to examine the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II.
But it is the first to reveal the federal government policy and backroom politicking that made sure it would happen.
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I was curious and took the time to read it. I found it to be a well-written and informative book. The author provided a lot of research and evidence to support their arguments. The book was also easy to read and understand, with clear explanations and examples. Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of Japanese Canadians during World War II.

The novel purports to describe a series of brief discussions and encounters involving one or more of: the Queen (Victoria), Mrs. Jameson (1794-1860), the Queen’s sister and mother, the Consort, Sir Francis Bond Head, and other members of the Household. There are also a few fragments from Mrs. Jameson’s journal. The subjects of all these vignettes — women’s roles and rights, colonialism and empire, the monarchy — are treated in a mannered prose style that blends Jamesian analytic elegance with Barthesian elliptical mystification. Hamilton’s control of ironic nuance is admirable.

"Some things, not many, really happen. Most don’t." Mrs. Jameson observes to the Queen, and the words express the tone and effect of the novel. Sagacity, clever, obscure and difficult, ultimately (for me) tedious and soporific, still deserves to challenge a wider audience than it will probably find. It’s an experiment, with uncertain results, but the project’s been managed with discrimination and restraint.

IN THE BEGINNING

Balancing the books: a grown-up look at children’s literature as the children see it
By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

A FEW YEARS AGO an Ottawa-based group of parents became disturbed about the lack of consumer information on Canadian children’s books. Acting on this concern, in 1979 the Citizens’ Committee on Children published Children’s Choices of Canadian Books, Volume 1 (90 pages, $3.50 paper), a report that rates about 200 Canadian children’s titles according to how they appeal to children. To arrive at the rating the committee recruited about 800 children to read and assess the books. Then the adults collated the results and placed each book in one of six groups according to the percentage of readers that had rated it highly. The result is a useful catalogue of Canadian children’s books, complete with bibliographical information, a brief plot summary, and a synopsis of the reactions of the children who read it.

Response and support for this project was so encouraging that the same group now has published Children’s Choices of Canadian Books, Volume 2 (118 pages, $5.00 paper). Using the same methods, this book rates nearly 200 more children’s titles, obviously a very ambitious project for a group of volunteers. There are some limitations — the child readers are all from the National Capital area, and so there would seem at least to be geographical predispositions, if not also economic and social ones. Nevertheless, the two volumes are important if only as a means of presenting these 400 titles to our attention, and librarians, book sellers, teachers, families — anyone selecting book for children should find the rating system helpful. Both volumes are available by mail from the Citizens’ Committee on Children, P.O. Box 6133, Station J, Ottawa K2A 1T2.

As an adult leafing through the ratings, I have mixed feelings. I feel tremendously vindicated when the children have agreed with my opinion on a book and very defensive when one of my favourites has impressed a low percentage of readers. It is interesting that the adult volunteers who compiled the results decided to include a special notation in each volume, a marginal symbol to mark certain books as adult favourites, quite independent of the

32 Books in Canada, October, 1981
children's opinions. Age, it seems, is just one of many factors that makes preference books in a highly individual manner.

One of my favourite Canadian children's authors is Robert N. Munsch. His books are fun to read, although I suspect that at least part of his humour has more meaning for adults than for children. Jonathan Cleaned Up — Then He Heard a Sound (Annick, 33 pages, $10.95 cloth, $4.95 paper) is his fourth book for young children. Munsch's heroes in previous stories, the Paper Bag Princess and Julie Ann in The Dark and Mud Piddle, exhibited a cheerful self-reliance and a practical approach to their problems. Jonathan in this new story carries on that tradition. When a mistake at City Hall turns his nice clean apartment into a subway station, he tracks down the source of the problem and finds a solution. The art by Michael Martchenko is very entertaining, particularly the pictures of the honest that leave the subway train, move through the wall of Jonathan's apartment and leave incredible chaos in their wake.

From an adult's point of view, Frank Ethington's The Spaghetti Word Race published by Annick in the same 32-page format (also $10.95 cloth, $4.95 paper) is less successful. Its intriguing title is explained in the plot. A little boy decides that words squeeze through the holes in the telephone mouthpiece in spaghetti shapes and travel along the wires. He tries to race the words as they travel between his house and his friend's. Although all this is believable enough, the plot seems more contrived and awkward than Munsch's fantasy. Children, however, find the resolution very satisfactory. The warm colours of Gina Callie's illustrations are a big asset and all in all it is a cheerful little book.

Douglas & McIntyre announced their recent book Petranella (28 pages, $9.95 cloth) as "another magical book for children from the creators of A Salmon for Simon." The publisher's enthusiasm in this case seems to be justified. Betty Waterton's story is simple enough for a young child to understand, but it has a satisfying depth. With her parents Petranella leaves her country far away for a new homestead in Manitoba. During the tedious and difficult journey, the little girl carries with her a gift from her grandmother who was too old to come with them — a small bag of flower seeds to plant a garden in her new home. Readers share Petranella's desolation when a few miles from the end of the trip she loses the seeds. But Waterton provides a happy ending with hope not only for Petranella and her family but for all settlers to that new land. Ann Blades's watercolours, most of them focusing on the changing expressions of Petranella's face, seem just right for the story.

Tales the Elders Told is a collection of nine Ojibway legends by Basil H. Johnston, illustrated with paintings and drawings by Cree artist Shirley Cheechoo (Royal Ontario Museum, 64 pages, $8.95 cloth). Johnston, who is a lecturer in the ROM's Department of Ethnology and a specialist in Ojibway culture, has produced an attractive book whose purpose, he says in an introduction, is to "give some idea of the scope of the Ojibway imagination, and perhaps bring a smile." Although it is more properly classified as ethnology rather than children's literature, young readers will enjoy learning, for example, why birds go south in winter and how dogs came to be.

Children's Choices of Canadian Books suggests its ratings that Indian and Inuit stories tend to appeal mainly to readers with highly specialized interests in that area. The ever-increasing number of such books indicates either that those readers must be very supportive, or that there is a growth of appreciation of stories about Canada's native peoples. One great popularizer is, of course, James Houston. His recent book Long Claw: An Arctic Adventure
ON THE RACKS

Five gloriously strong, infectious, and omnivorous female writers are available again after 50 years of neglect

By ANNE COLLINS

FOR AN ADDICT there is no finer fix than the forgotten novelist, the lost and found great novel. Added to the guilty compulsion to devour print is the sanctimonious thrill of discovery - the sense that an injustice has been rectified. A perfect rationale for overindulgence. But after spending every spare moment of almost two weeks floating with only nostrils above water in the first releases of Lester & Orpen Dennys' Virago Modern Classics series, even I, enter of novels for breakfast, am satiated.

Here are eight forgotten novels, (by five women writers) to explore, picked out from England's Virago Press list, purchased for Canada, and published as elegant black-bordered and affordable ($6.95 each) trade paperbacks. Antonia White is the least profuse of writers, so in its first year the series has been able to release her whole life's work: four novels following a young girl from her days at school in the Convent of the Five Wounds to the annulment of her first marriage and her slow dissolve into the world "beyond the glass" - madness.

In an interview just before her death last year at 70, White said that of course the books were "all true because I have no imagination, though in Frost in May [1933] I did slightly run two runs into one." But hers is autobiographical fiction without a trace of excorium or egotism; she has had the imagination to stand back from her own self - the manipulations of an overly strong and fond father, the barbarisms and boredom of the mental asylum - and turn that self into an independently realized character. Frost in May, which she began at 16 but was unable to finish until after the death of her father, is the best of the four, narrowed down and told simply through the eyes of Nanda Grey. Swimming in the overpowering element of the Catholic faith, the convent girls race to outdo each other in displays of godliness - the most devout lay their two black stockings out in the form of a cross before praying themselves to sleep each night. Nanda, a convert, has to work at such faith but, being a good Daddy's girl, masters the outer forms quickly and wins ribbons for proper behaviour.

Inside her, however, is a stubborn conviction that what she thinks of as art - certain moments of secret illumination connected to mood and light and other people - is more important than religion. It is this weltgeist of worldliness that the nuns try to break in her, only possible through the collusion of her beloved father and her expulsion from the convent. The young woman's emotional wreckage that results is steered through young womanhood and love in The Lost Traveller (1950), The Sugar House (1952), and Beyond the Glass (1954).

These are all brilliant novels, but there is a sense of loss in reading Antonia White. The nuns and her father did win a victory over art, in that her output was small and she was never able to consider as an artist events outside her own unhappy life.

Voracious fatherhood is Antonia White's territory; voracious motherhood is that of Rebecca West in The Judge (1922) and of Radclyffe Hall in The Unlit Lamp (1924). West's early novels were written off by her critics and her own self in her own fill-in for journalism, literary criticism, history, philosophy, and her later novels of ideas. The Judge, with its passionate and defensive exploration of unwed motherhood, perhaps reminds Dame Rebecca too much of her painful 10-year affair with H.G. Wells and the birth in 1914 of her own illegitimate son, Anthony. "Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father," is the harsh pronouncement of Marion Yaverland, mother of the obsessively loved illegitimate Richard and the unloved lawful child Roger. When Richard tries to make room in his heart for the vivid little suffragette Ellen Melville, the spark is set that ignites the tinder of the Yaverland family. The explosion has the combined impact of the Amores, Thomas Hardy, the Greeks, and the story of Cain and Abel; only Ellen Melville survives, the "new woman" and second-generation unwed mother, the strongest female character I've encountered among the walking wounded of 20th-century fiction.

Joan Ogden is not so lucky, for her mother is a fragile-seeming succubus who fastens on to Joan for her strength, having been leached out by her own demanding husband. The weak and the selfish inherit the earth in Radclyffe Hall's first novel, The Unlit Lamp: the strong and the talented are food to be preyed on. Though also formed around issues - the unjust fate of the spinster daughter - The Unlit Lamp is a better novel than the book that brought Hall notoriety with its single-minded plea for sexual tolerance, The Well of Loneliness.

And the passionate friendship between Joan and her would-be rescuer and teacher, Elizabeth Rodney, is a slightly more even-handed examination of women in love. Love should not be a territorial invasion, says Hall, but a glorious partnership of equals. Hard to do between men and women, even harder between mother and daughter.

My Brilliant Career (1901) by Stella "Miles" Franklin, reveals the kind of exuberant, hectored novel its 16-year-old heroine Sybylla must have been writing, stoming about in her heavy farm-girl boots, in the alternating drought and flood of the Australian bush. The prose is sometimes a victim of the adolescence of its author, with its flurry of underlining techniques.

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ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Being all shaken up about grammar is different to being superstitious, but it can still make you a rose between thorns

By BOB BLACKBURN

COMEDIAN JERRY LEWIS was appearing on Phil Donahue’s TV talk show to promote a charity. He admitted that there were other charities that were “equally as important.” “Equally as important,” echoed his host.

A senior TV newscaster told us of an accident in which “a passenger was shooed up.”

A newspaper critic, earnestly attempting to praise a performance, called it “stultifying.”

“We’re in trouble. We learn by example, and these are examples of the examples we learn by.” Donahue, I’m sure, would say “equally important” or “as important,” but he slavishly repeated Lewis’s mistake, thereby reinforcing it.

The TV newscaster, I’m sure, grew up listening to Elvis Presley singing about being “all shook up.”

“Stultify” is not a word in everyday use. The recommended procedure when one encounters such a word is to look it up in the dictionary, but most readers don’t. Instead of discovering that it means to cause to appear foolish or worthless, many will simply adopt it as a term of praise and spread the error. I have no idea what the critic thought it meant, but I do know that such misuse stultifies words.

The amount of bad writing professional communicators expose us to is horrifying, but we can’t blame them for all our problems. Some of those problems come straight from the schoolroom. A number of readers of this column have indicated that they should say “between two” and “among three or more.” I would be happy to oblige, but it just isn’t that simple.

This is one of those rules-of-thumb, so beloved by minor pedagogues, that Fowler calls “superstitions” or “fetishes.” I was taught it in school, and I dare say you were, too. But it doesn’t serve. (I was taught also never to start a sentence with “but.”)

The OED goes on and on about it, making it one of those subjects I wish I hadn’t looked up. If you and a group of your friends wish to discuss the matter between yourselves, that’s okay with the OED. At election time, you may have a choice between three candidates, not among them. Among suggests belonging. If you fall among thieves, you become one of them. If three thieves surround you and knock you down, you fall between them. It is not correct to speak of “a rose among thorns” and it is not poetic to speak of “a rose between thorns.” That’s your problem. No doubt the best thing to do is keep in mind that the rule-of-thumb is generally but not invariably applicable.

And (there goes another “superstition”) a bit of common sense would help. English, for all its problems, its awkwardness, ambiguities, and general cuteness, frequently responds much more gracefully to the application of common sense than to the application of classroom fetishes. A couple of my pet hates (previously discussed in this space) are “to try and do” and “different than,” both of which offend me chiefly because they don’t make sense. I was telling a friend that I could die happy—or even happily—if I...
could convince the English-speaking people to say "try to," and never, under any circumstances, to say "try and." Said he: "You'll try and fail.")

Fowler says it's okay (well, okay, he wouldn't say "okay") to say "different to," and that its prohibition is another "superstition." That's okay with me, although I don't know why anyone would want to say that, but anyone who repeatedly says "different than" is not welcome in my bar, and that includes the Right Honourable Prime Minister. I don't give a hoot for all the excited precedents quoted in the OED; "different than" is illogical. It is never a waste of time to apply the test of logic to language problems, and I'd be delighted to hear from you if you suggest an example (I'm sure there are some) of good usage that does not somehow meet that test.

For instance, there is an aspect of the style of punctuation followed by this magazine (and virtually every other publication in the English language) that is illogical and so, I maintain, dead wrong. Fowler agrees, but deems it a lost cause. It'll be the subject of a future column. Meanwhile, let me know if you've perceived what it is.

FOR SEVERAL REASONS, all of which indicate

a certain shoddiness in my character, letters to this department do not get answered. They come in. All are read with care; most with enjoyment. Suggestions are appreciated and often acted on. This is a note of apology and an expression of appreciation (albeit shamefaced) to everyone who has taken the trouble to write, and to assure all that their letters do not fall into some mysterious void.

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**INTERVIEW**

W.P. Kinsella on the $10,000 trade that took him from the Indians to the Chicago Cubs

By KENNETH McGOOGAN

BORN IN EDMONTON in 1935, William Patrick Kinsella lived on a farm in the Alberta bush until he was 10. He went to high school in Edmonton, and later attended the universities of Victoria and Iowa. Kinsella has published four collections of short stories: Dance Me Outside (1977), Scars (1978), Shoefless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa (1980) and Born Indian (see page 15). He recently won a $10,000 Houghton-Mifflin Fellowship for his first novel, The Oldest Living Chicago Cub, which will be brought out in the spring of 1982 and he currently teaches creative writing at the University of Calgary, where he talked with Kenneth McGoogan.

Books in Canada: What is a Houghton-Mifflin Fellowship?

Kinsella: It's a $6,000 prize and a $4,000

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advance, or the other way around, I'm not quite sure. And a big push for the book. I'm in the company of people like Philip Roth, whose first book was published on a Houghton-Mifflin Fellowship. They tell me that you're sure to get covered in the New York Times Book Review and places like that, because people know Houghton-Mifflin only gives this out occasionally, it's not an annual thing.

BIC: How did you come to write The Oldest Living Chicago Cub?

Kinsella: Larry Kessenich, an editor at Houghton-Mifflin, sort of discovered me by reading a two-line review of the Shoeless Joe Jackson story in Publisher's Weekly. He wrote to me and said, If it's part of a novel, we'd like to see it; if it isn't, it should be. I wrote him back and said I had never written anything successful longer than 25 pages, and if I'm going to write a novel I will need a lot of help. This usually produces an ominous silence, judging from other editors who have written to me wanting a novel. But he wrote back and said, What the hell, I'm in love with this idea, why don't we try it? So I wrote 25 pages continuing on and treating the short story as a first chapter, though at that point I thought it should be about the third chapter. You see, I didn't believe I could maintain the intensity of the Shoeless Joe Jackson story for 250 or 300 pages, and I kept saying this can't be done. So the first 25 pages were a kind of relaxed, rambling introduction to the story, and I sent it to Larry and he said no no no no, this is not what you want to do, you're trying to confuse the reader. He gave me a couple of paragraphs about how he would start it, and it just clicked. I went right into it from there and really didn't need any further help from him.

Kinsella: No, pretty well as is. And in the second section the narrator, Ray Kinsella, goes off to New Hampshire and kidnaps J.D. Salinger, because he finds out that Salinger has used him as a character. Salinger wrote a story that I discovered in the archives at Iowa. It's in a 1947 issue of Mademoiselle, a story called "A Young Girl In 1941 With No Waist At All." It's one of Salinger's quite bad uncollected stories, but the character's name is Ray Kinsella. And then of course in The Catcher in the Rye there's a character named Richard Kinsella, so the narrator develops a twin brother named Richard who doesn't come in until later on in the story. Anyway, Ray goes off and kidnaps Salinger and takes him to a baseball game at Fenway Park.


Kinsella: It didn't win the contest. They decided not to give out the prize. The story they gave out is that my novel had no appeal to their British publishers, who said no. And Seal said they were not going to take a second choice, so they didn't award the prize. McClelland & Stewart say they want the Canadian rights, and it would be a big help to have them publish it in Canada, with Houghton-Mifflin bringing it out in the U.S. and Japan. Richard Brautigan sells millions of books in Japan, and my work is not that different from his.

BIC: Has Brautigan influenced your work?

Kinsella: I think he has, a good deal, yes. Ray Bradbury is a big influence, too, the

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Who controls the broadcast media in Canada? This study of the radio, television and cable television industries examines ownership structures, including their effect on program content, diversity and quality; and economic issues such as production efficiency, pricing and profitability. Canadian Broadcasting: Market Structure and Performance, Stuart McCaig, Colin Hoskins and David Gillen, pp. 283, $15.95

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38 Books in Canada, October, 1991
postic prose of his language especially.

BIC: What other contemporary writers do
you admire?

Klasella: Anne Tyler very much. I don’t
know if she influences my writing, but I
admire her a great deal. And André Dubus.
He’s an American who went to Iowa also.
His work is devastating short stories.

BIC: What about the South Americans?

Klasella: For example?

BIC: I’ve not read the South Americans
at all. I can’t even get into them in the short
story collections. They’re too far out for me.

BIC: You were at the creative writing
school in Iowa in 1976. Was that a good
experience?

Klasella: Oh, yes. Though I’m not thrilled
with what they do there. I got virtually no
help. The undergraduate program at Victo-
ria is much better than the graduate
program at Iowa. I mean, they make you
work. In Iowa, they just turn you loose.
Their theory is that if you’re going to write,
you’ll write, and if you’re not going to
write, you won’t, and nothing can change
that. My feeling is that you should work the
ass of graduate students. I expected them to
demand that I submit a story every second
week or something, which would make me
work. Fortunately, I was disciplined
enough to write two books while I was there
— Scars and a novel that hadn’t been
published, and which I think I’m going to
rewrite this summer.

BIC: With this latest collection of stories,
Born Indian, we’re back on the reserve
again. Where do these stories come from?

Klasella: I think this may be the last Indian
book. I have nine or 10 stories, and I may
do enough to make another collection. I don’t
know. I haven’t written any Indian stories
recently. I’m not very excited about Silas
anymore. I think I may have run him down,
although I know I could do stories like this
for a long time to come. But I like to do
audacious things, and the audacity is gone
out of Silas.

I like to write stories like “Shoeshoe Joe
Jackson,” which shouldn’t work, but does.
The Jans story is the same thing. My novel
shouldn’t work, and I’m usually not that
confident about what I write, but I think this
novel is one belluva fine book, and I think
it’s going to go places. It’s really wonderful,
I’m kind of in awe when I read it. I think,
God, did I really do this? Because it has
some wonderful stuff in it, and I’m
wondering what I can do for an encore.

BIC: What are you going to do?

Klasella: My agent and my editor tell me
that I can make a living writing novels. And
and you can’t make a living writing short
stories. I would really rather write short
stories. I enjoy writing them. I enjoy the
idea that I’m only looking two weeks ahead
when I start one. For a novel you’re
committing eight or nine months of your
life. I wrote The Oldest Living Chicago Cub
in nine months and I can’t see committing
any more time than that to it.

I think what I’m going to work on next is
that Grecian Urn story again, trying to make
it into a novel. I can write another sellable

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David Lavison
Montreal

 LETTERS

The right stuff

Sir:

There is at last a disconcerting half-truth about the modus operandi of Glenn Witmer's Personal Library Publishers as described by Linda M. Leitch (June-July). "We publish authors, not books." Witmer is quoted as saying, and he admits to having been influenced by Jack McClelland, from whom he learned to "get the right authors, sell them, treat them right. They're the stars. Feature them. The books will follow."

Though an intriguing, even perhaps clever business practice — one resembling more than anything else a Hollywood film producer and his start-up — such a method is destined to give rise to a cult of personality if not necessarily to an official literary culture. In such a procedure, the most outstanding talents may prove unencapable, hence go unnoticed. Whence comes a publisher's omniscience to determine the "right" authors? And may not treating them "right" be the surest means of guaranteeing their dissolution as artists with a private vision?

I fear not so much for the reading public, which might in any event get by going to the public libraries for first-rate books produced before the cult of literary personality evolved. My chief concern is for the author suddenly bewitched into a fairy prince or princess. If there has been some genuine incipient talent, its dilution by the twin expectations of publisher and public is a very real threat.

It is said of Igor Stravinsky that his compositions, as they successively appeared, puzzled musical scholars for the reason that each seemed quite unlike the last. Stravinsky's creative personality was evidently responding to the unique demands of each new situation, and he was not the hatching of any particular publishing house.

H. R. Martin, then his own intense originality might thereby have been dampened.

It is suggested that Canadian publishers who thus begin to patronize certain talents may not be doing them any special favour — let alone the public. Mr. Witmer is described as a former teacher, and his slogan, "We publish authors, not books," echoes the educational progressive's "We teach students, not subjects." Needless to say, the latter has at this juncture become a dated catch-phrase, one perhaps as slipshod as Mr. Witmer's own jargon.

Shame!

Sir:

It is now more than two weeks since I read I.M. Owen's review of Elspeth Cameron's biography of Hugh MacLennan (June-July). In the interim, my initial discontent has grown into indignation, until I feel compelled to vent my spleen.

It is disgraceful that Books in Canada found it necessary to assign this book to someone who was apparently reading MacLennan's fiction for the first time. It is inexcusable that Mr. Owen did not see it as part of his task to evaluate Cameron's success or failure as a biographer, or even to analyze (except in the most superficial way) the strategies she adopted in treating her subject. Mr. Owen's review is basically a resume of Cameron's book — a plot summary. Shame!

I strongly recommend that Mr. Owen be barred from reviewing any future literary biographies in your pages.

T.D. McEachrach
Assistant Professor
Department of English
University of Victoria

L.M. Owen replies: Since nobody who had actually read my review could suppose that I was reading MacLennan's fiction for the first time, or think that I hadn't evaluated the success of Elspeth Cameron's book, I conclude that T.D. McEachrach reads as fuzzily as he writes.

Results of CanWit No. 66

Either most of our readers really were charmed by "the wedding of the century" (doesn't anyone remember Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio?), or else the postal strike forced them to restrain their feelings. At any rate, our request for verse to commemorate the royal event raised few replies and little nastiness. The winning entry, by Dave Martin of Ottawa, fittingly evokes the labour strife that darkened the summer:

To Chuck

We can't take you out to the ball game,
We can't watch you on CBC,
We wanted to send you a present,
But the posties won't send guard for thee,
So forgive us, dear Chuck, if we're absent,
It's just that we can't guarantee
That our airplanes will even fly,
Or that our ships will be sailing the seas.

You know if we could that we'd make it
With 80-cent dollars at that,
'Cause we're suckers for pubescent weddings,
'Parch, I'm sure, told you of that.
But the nation is under the weather,
We're not feeling quite up to snuff,
We're taking a labour vacation,
The country has had quite enough.

Now these may sound like hollow excuses,
But we'll try to make some restitution.

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Assailed by Margaritas on both sides,
I beg, please step this bother.
Please seek it to those gentlemen
Who meet with She at Number 10.
Best wishes to your mother.

— Pierre

— D. Eyre, Saskatchewan

A sportive young heir to the throne
Was quite frequently supine or prone.
If this bedmate should purr
“Shall we marry, kid sir?”
He’d emit a garnassian grin.
The monarch caped and cuffed
As her offspring this wedlock refused.
When he’d wail, just in jest,
“Old Bar what a mess,” cried.
She’d reply, “We are less than amused.”

This state of affairs could not last;
His thirtieth birthday was past.
He thought with a sigh
“Is it or is it Di?”

“Queen Doreen? ‘Queen Diana’? Oh blast!”
So did the nod as we see.
She’d dangle new kings on her breast.
She’s fine strapping lass.
From the right sort of class.
All England took to her heart.
And Charlie?—Well, he knows the score.
His gap bachelor days are no more.
He’s joined the royal squad
To pass on the blood
An Englishman right to the core!

— Odysseus Vingo, Toronto

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