

US IN CANADA

THE SWEET SANITY OF MIRIAM WADDINGTON



The other Canadian: Naim Kattan,
a stranger in his own land
Antonine Maillet's Acadian odyssey
And an intimate biography of W.H. Auden

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$11.95 A YEAR
Volume 11 Number 5
MAY 1982

BOOKS IN CANADA



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Books in Canada is published 10 times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 366 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. Available to the public free in subscribing book stores, schools, and libraries. Individual subscription rate: \$11.95 a year (\$14.95 U.S. and overseas). Back issues available on microfilm from: McLaren Micropublishing, P.O. Box 972, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2N9. Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, Member of the CPPA. Member of the Bulk Distribution Audit Division of CCAB. Material is commissioned on the understanding that both parties are bound by the terms of the standard PWAC contract. The editors cannot be held responsible for unsolicited material. Second Class Mail — Registration No. 2593. Contents © 1982. Typesetting by Jay Tee Graphics Ltd.

ISSN 0045-2564

Two films put the private lives of two writers into a public context

Aquin again

LAST AUGUST, five years after Hubert Aquin's suicide in 1977, *Deux épisodes dans la vie d'Hubert Aquin*, directed by Jacques Godbout, was shown on Radio-Canada's *Les Beaux Dimanches* series. The film now is available from the National Film Board as *Two Episodes in the Life of Hubert Aquin*, and is a welcome introduction to the complex personality and career of one of Quebec's most enigmatic writers.

The film covers roughly the last 13 years of Aquin's life, tracing his development from political to literary activism, from his involvement in the early '60s with Quebec's separatist *Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale*, through his arrest in 1964 for car theft, his subsequent imprisonment, the publication of his first novel, *Prochain épisode*, in 1965, to his sudden suicide in March, 1977. There is as well a photo-montage section that deals with Aquin's life before 1964 — the early days of the RIN, the founding of the literary review *Liberté*, and Aquin's work as a film director at the NFB and CBC. This section, with its accompanying narrative, puts Aquin's later private vagaries into a more public context.

In June, 1964, Aquin stole the automobile of Adrien Pinard, a priest who shared political sympathies with Aquin and so did not press charges. Aquin was arrested and tried anyway, and the significance of the theft to Aquin's subsequent career is brought out in several interviews, including those with Pinard, with Pierre Lefebvre, a psychiatrist and co-founder of *Liberté*, and with Claude Wagner, who was the judge at Aquin's trial. Other interviews, including the substantial account given by Aquin's widow, Andrée Yanocopoulo, trace Aquin's increasing estrangement from being politically engaged. The distinguishing features of *Two Episodes*, however, rest in the two long interviews with the writer himself, and in the series of excerpts from Aquin's television drama, *Faux Bond*, about a double agent who was played by Aquin himself.

Excerpts from *Faux Bond*, in black and white, contrast neatly with the nar-

ative and interviews, which are in colour, and provide a kind of parallel to Aquin's own life. In their fictional essence they authenticate, curiously, Aquin's escape from the public eye just after he resigned from the RIN in order to "fight clandestinely" for Quebec's independence. In *Prochain épisode*, in which he traces the exploits of an errant writer in search of a spy who may or may not exist, Aquin depicts himself as "the fragmented symbol of the Quebec revolution, its fractured reflection and its suicidal incarnation." The novel was written while Aquin was confined to a clinic awaiting trial, although it was published after his release: the film does not mention that in 1966-67 Aquin's stay in Switzerland was terminated by the Swiss authorities when they learned of his criminal record, an account of which is given in Aquin's short autobiographical work, *Pointe de fuite*.

The second half of *Two Episodes* is devoted to the events leading up to Aquin's death. The excerpts from *Faux Bond* cease, and Yanocopoulo's account takes over the narration. Her delivery is detailed and remarkably unemotional as it demonstrates her complicity in the actions of her husband: indeed, underlying her account of the incident is the right of the individual to suicide. "What I invent," says Aquin in *Prochain épisode*, "I have lived; what I kill is already dead." In fact, *Two Episodes* is not so much a complete biography as a sort of docu-drama that nevertheless becomes the *image* of Aquin as writer.

The voice of the later Aquin is in many ways the literary correlative to his earlier political despondency. In the novels one notes an increasing sense of resignation, a growing belief in the impossibility of "originality." In *Prochain épisode*, for example, he states: "I sense that my improvisation is plunging into an atavistic mould, and that my river of spontaneity is banked with an ancient alluvium. I am not writing, I am written." His second novel, *Blackout*, through the development of the fictional editorial intervention that provides a substantial subtext to the main text, undermines the author's primacy in a similar fashion. The third novel, *L'Antiphonaire* (*The Antiphonary*), is Aquin's

atavistic novel *par excellence*. Here the main character, Christine Forestier, during a series of personal tragedies, writes the novel while simultaneously commenting on a medieval text on which she is trying to write a Ph.D. thesis. The relationship of her reading to her writing is that of direct parallel, although situations and characters are sometimes reversed, just as the excerpts from *Faux Bond* are clearly paralleled by the narration.

In "The Cultural Fatigue of Canada," an essay included in *Contemporary Quebec Criticism*, edited and translated by Larry Shouldice, Aquin says that the "French Canadian is, in the proper and figural sense, a double agent." In 1972, Jacques Godbout, who joined the Film Board in the late 1950s, made a spy film called *IXE-13* that was based on a serial novel of the same name. In a review of the film in the *Montreal Gazette*, Godbout is quoted as saying, "Many people had read *IXE-13* years before. For them the movie was half-way between nostalgia and put-on. *Two Episodes* begins in a similar vein, but it quickly moves beyond a put-on. Aquin seems to have worked hard at creating an image of himself, which Godbout recreates so well that one suspects Aquin of having predicted the rough outline of the film.

— PAUL GIBSON

Livesay's life

STRONG STATEMENTS are Dorothy Livesay's trademark. The capitalistic system that caused the Depression, the arms race, and the "men-only" cast to society have all drawn her outspoken criticism; her poetry forges through the unruly character of her times. But, besides developing what Mrs. E.J. Pratt calls a "crisp, harmonious way of writing," Dorothy Livesay has also developed a greater understanding of life. In an interview recently broadcast on CBC-TV she said, "It's quite marvellous, you know, to grow older and to have perspective. Suddenly, I begin to

feel I understand." The world has finally caught up with this fiercely independent woman, and David Tucker's profile, *The Woman I Am*, pays her a tribute that is long overdue.

Narrated by Harry J. Boyle, the film begins with a list of Livesay's achievements and then trips back in time to her socialist start in Winnipeg. Born in 1909 to J.F.B. Livesay, founder of the Canadian Press wire service, and Florence Livesay, a writer and feminist who "struck out on her own," Dorothy was a delicate and painfully shy child. "The world tossed me off," she wrote, and when she moved to the "tight Victorian Toronto" of 1920, she found the experience traumatic. Nevertheless, her writing blossomed. With encouragement from E.J. Pratt, she published *Green Pitcher* before she was 19.

During the Depression, after studies at the University of Toronto and the Sorbonne, Livesay's poetry became propagandistic. It was not until she discovered W.H. Auden that her writing became lyrical again. Disillusioned with Communism, she married in the late 1930s and raised a family. During the '40s and '50s she published poetry that focused on the human individual and the woman in society. She hadn't really

wanted to marry ("I saw the women chained to men"), and when her husband died in the late '50s she took a teaching contract in Zambia through UNESCO. She returned to Canada



Dorothy Livesay

refreshed, her poetry freer, to teach and to contribute support to humanist concerns.

What Livesay has given to the world is increasingly being returned to her.

Where previously she had published a book every five years, the poet (who will be writer-in-residence at Massey College next year) has for the past decade published a book nearly every year. The woman's movement has helped, yet she still is not widely known outside her literary circle. "I felt this was a neglected area," says Tucker. "Here was a woman who had been writing for 60 years, and she was not exactly a household word." Between the interviews and comments from such figures as John Robert Colombo, Patrick Lane, and David Arnason, Tucker has managed to plant as many poems as possible. "The temptation is to want to run all of the poetry . . . it's so good.

"The reason writers are neglected as television subjects," says Tucker, "is obviously because, on film, the easiest thing to do is a visual artist. Poetry is a challenge." Poetry is not easy to translate onto the constricted plane of television, but it seems apt somehow that the face of the woman who cries the banality of life by writing "I need never walk to the store again . . . video games are here" should appear on a TV screen to throw grappling hooks with poetry, luring the "commoner" back to the real world. —SUSAN GRIMBLY

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FROM A FAR STAR

'I don't have the place in Canadian literature that I think I deserve,' says Miriam Waddington. 'I'm a Jew, a woman, and I hate all this about blood and knives'

By ALBERT MORITZ

A FEW HUNDRED YARDS from Metropolitan Toronto's Don Mills Road, roaring with mid-afternoon traffic, Miriam Waddington's small piece of ground is quiet. There are early finches in a neighbour's ornamental birch tree, which thrusts up through the piled snow into the year's first warm sun. At her door, Waddington is part of the brightness of winter on the verge of spring. At 64 she is markedly vigorous in gaze and movement. Her self-deprecating geniality and wit, her spontaneous overflow of talk, express a lively play of ideas and pointed ironies. "I always wonder how I can make my work sound more fascinating," she says, launching obliquely into a favourite topic, the thematic and stylistic preoccupations of contemporary writing. "Some writers make great theoretical pronouncements. Or they talk about their image, the function of the image in their work. What kind of image can you have when you're sane — sanity is a great disadvantage — and you work and you're not a poor waf. At least not outwardly."

In life as in her work, Waddington is wonderstruck by the great middle range of human experience. Her poetry has always celebrated the depths within common things, depths beyond mysticism and pain. Like her poetry, her talk ranges freely and often touches realms of death, poverty, and loss, but is never tempted to define life in such terms. Waddington knows that such an outlook makes her an outsider, an anomaly, in present-day literature. At the same time she is the grateful heir of a strong tradition, and is far from conceiving herself as being alone.

"My work has a certain sweetness of idea and language," she says, giving the syllable "sweet" an inflection that removes all its tracle and leaves it meaning "fresh and free of bitterness." "This comes largely from my familiarity with another literature and other traditions. I'm really a European writer. Often when people like my poetry, I still think they don't really know what I'm writing from. The tradition I was brought up in is a very civilized tradition, not a cruel, not a violent tradition. There wasn't suppression in the society of my childhood. You didn't have to take your passions outside. You didn't have to hide your feelings or hate secretly. You could hate openly, and love. I was also lucky because it was a society very permissive to children."

Born Miriam Dworkin in Winnipeg in 1917, she was brought up speaking, reading, and writing Yiddish as well as English. Her father, a White Russian, was a socialist and activist who emigrated about 1910; her mother was also a Russian Jew, and had gone to Moose Jaw to work as a nurse. The two met and married in Winnipeg, where Waddington's father opened a one-man meat curing factory. The family was deeply involved in the vivid intellectual life of Winnipeg's Russian Jewish community. "Our home," Waddington recalls, "was always being visited by Jewish and Yiddish writers and lecturers. Some of them were Zionists, socialists, anarchists, but there were poets and musicians and actors as well. The community valued these people very highly, and they'd often come to our house when they were in Winnipeg to lecture. There were no class distinctions among those people. Everyone would gather around a table for a party in the old Russian way, nothing like Canadian parties. They would all sit around the table for the entire evening, and everything you could ever want would be on that table: food, wine, whisky, cakes. The party," she adds reflectively, "was three basic things: singing, reciting, and impassioned talk."

It was a climate of political rather than literary ideas. The people were not primarily concerned with their new Canadian situation. Their thoughts harked back to Europe, to the problems of a Jewish homeland and of justice and political representation for the poor. In 1931 the family moved to Ottawa. Miriam at 13 began to be more personally involved in the Jewish intellectual life that was centred in the capital and in Montreal, and which included many writers. The poetry she had begun to write in sixth grade came to the attention of Ida Massey, "a Yiddish poet and a very bohemian hostess of a salon" in Montreal.

"She wasn't rich," Waddington recalls. "She lived on the Esplanade, and she would entertain every travelling Yiddish artist with endless cups of tea, bread, jam, cakes, whatever she had." For the young Waddington, the parade of nomadic and resident Depression-era Jewish writers, artists, and intellectuals that visited Ida Massey's home was the introduction to a life lived for art. It was there that she first heard of Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller, and it was there that a Yiddish woman poet



PHOTOGRAPHS, INCLUDING COVER, BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

suggested to her a project she still contemplates — an episodic epic about women from all walks and ranks of life.

Waddington soon began to form her own literary opinions and to read such writers as Yeats, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sara Teasdale, Jacob Wasserman, Romain Roland, and Jean Christophe. By 1936 she was an undergraduate at the University of Toronto and her reading broadened to include Henry Miller, Auden and Spender, Rilke, Hart Crane (still a favourite) and even Céline, little known at that time. The university was packed with undergraduates eagerly involving themselves in the social and cultural concerns of the 1930s. Those with a literary bent found one another, and it was during this period that Waddington first formed many of her enduring friendships and associations, such as those with Anne Marriott and Raymond Souster; she remembers with special respect the intellectual sharpness and intensity of the young Margaret Avison. These writers became key members of the literary group that Montreal publisher and poet John Sutherland defined as belonging to the 1940s: Souster, Waddington, P.K. Page, Louis Dudek, Patrick Anderson, Irving Layton, and others.

The social concern and socialist fervour of the period were also a natural and rooted part of Waddington, owing to her Jewish socialist background and Prairie immigrant experience. At the same time she was more skeptical of ideologies, so it seemed to her, than were some of the young writers for whom socialism was a late-blooming enthusiasm. She was also more concerned to build a private and professional life apart from literature. In 1939 she married Patrick Waddington, a journalist with the *Ottawa Citizen* and later with the CBC in Montreal. Their European honeymoon was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War; they returned to Montreal to find Patrick's job gone, and so came to Toronto where he went to work for the *Star*. Toronto was their base until 1945. Miriam took a diploma in social work from the University of Toronto and then earned her Master's from the University of Pennsylvania. After the war they returned to Montreal, where she worked as assistant director in a Jewish children's agency.

The war period was the beginning of Waddington's double life of poetry and career, which she has pursued ever since. Despite a busy extra-literary life she remained an active poet, corresponding with her colleagues scattered by graduation and the war, and publishing her work in the few Canadian literary magazines then operating. The most significant event for her literary career during this time was the acceptance of some of her poems by *First Statement*, which had begun publishing in January, 1943, and her meeting with John Sutherland when she visited Montreal in March of that year.

Sutherland remains in Waddington's mind an exemplar of the Canadian writer dedicated to his craft and to the creation of a healthy national literature. "There's no explaining a person like John," she says. "He seemed to come from nowhere, there was no explanation for him in his background or the environment of those times. That's so often the case with real creative and critical intellects." Sutherland edited *First Statement* from 1942-45 and then merged it with its Montreal rival, *Preview* (published by a group including Patrick Anderson and P.K. Page), to form *Northern Review*. Under Sutherland, *First Statement* and *Northern Review* published poetry and encouraged the development of disinterested criticism which, Sutherland felt, was crucial to the growth of an independent and non-colonial English-language literature in Canada.

Such ideas and ideals remain basic to Waddington. They colour her conversation and are expressed frequently in what she has written. In her introduction to an edition of Sutherland's criticism and poetry, which she compiled for McClelland & Stewart in 1972, she wrote:

Although popular journalists, reviewers and career scholars are plentiful everywhere and at every time, critical talents are scarce

because they demand the same kind of painstaking and psychologically costly dedication as any of the other creative arts, while the rewards are usually non-existent . . .

The thing that we [Canadian writers] all share is that, like Sutherland, most of us have to go it alone. We may all of us be part of a geographically vast mosaic, but we are each isolated fragments in that mosaic which hasn't yet resolved itself into a pattern. This is as true today as it was in Sutherland's time.

Sutherland asked for her first book, *Green World* (1945), and hand-printed it in his Craig Street office.

*When I step out and feel the green world
its concave walls must cup my summer coming
and curving hold me
beyond all geography in a transparent place . . .*

This was followed by *The Second Silence* (1955), requested by Ryerson Press, which also issued her third book, *The Season's Lovers* (1958). Since then she has published almost exclusively with Oxford University Press. Her books have included *The Glass Trumpet* (1966), *Say Yes* (1969), *Driving Home* (1972), the much-acclaimed *The Price of Gold* (1976), and *The Visitants* (1981).

In the progress from her first book to her latest, her verse lines have shortened and grown sparer, more nervous and muscular. The earlier flowing lyrical phrases (sometimes echoing Dylan Thomas) and the often rhetorical anger of her social protest poetry from the 1950s have all but disappeared from later, more fully assured books such as *The Price of Gold* and *The Visitants*. It is chiefly the passion and power for affirmation, and the devotion to the things of this world, that remain as a living thread connecting the earliest work and the latest.

Waddington's ability to express her primary intuition of joy and affirmation has grown as she has become older and more concerned with loss and death. She has focused more boldly and more minutely on the individual details of life. In her early work, closely observed fragments were swept along in the rush of a poetry that seemed to proclaim joy not out of experience but out of its own innocent exuberance:

*May was a wonderful country;
all the world's children were in pilgrimage
to greet the summer and on the way
they stopped at the zoo and lifted spells from the golden tiger
and lonely lion . . .*

In her more recent work, a still gaze searches out the secrets of beauty, power, and frailty in each thing, and augments rather than diminishes their baffling richness:

*how hard it is
to understand
snow how it is
a burning pillow
and a white
sea a halo of
greeting hello
from a far star
and a suddenness
of seeing*

"The good things of the world," says Waddington in another poem, "she learned long ago/from the sun out there/in the prairies in that light." She lays claim to "a blazing innocence/easy to learn," but freely admits that "the other/things that harmed her/(even herself) those/she could never explain." Yet she does not shrink from gazing directly at "the other things," nor does she claim the ability to explain joy. She has exulted in their inexplicable depths, and it has never seemed to her that the enigma of pain outweighed the mysterious gift of being.

Her attitude seems completely natural, without reliance upon philosophical or religious ideas as to what may occur beyond death. Though she acknowledges the human fear and

helplessness before mortality, she is free of that anxiety that makes life a burden because it must end. This outlook finds expression in the strongest poems of *The Visitants*. "Past the Ice Age" is a deceptively simple-looking lyric in which she succeeds in identifying herself with the expanse of geological time, and takes a titan's pleasure in its unfolding without deluding herself that even such eons are immortality:

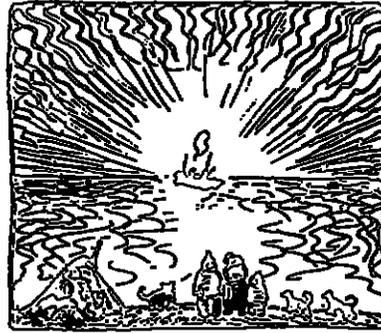
*All of a sudden
I was empty spaces,
Flexible snow
wrapping the air . . .
And I wanted to
live a long time
just to hear
the new music
in everything.*

"I'm fairly prolific," she says. "I haven't published all that I've written: about half to two-thirds, probably. I've also destroyed a lot. I think the technical gift for poetry is genetic, you have to be born with it. When I look at some of the things I did when I was 16 or so, they're technically as good as what I'm doing today. What they say may be immature, but the technical aspect is there."

She considers her poems as individual short wholes, not related to a consciously elaborated life's work. "I didn't think of building up a work, perhaps because I'm a woman and didn't think then of poetry as a career. It was just something I did, and certainly not something to boast about, because it didn't help your social life any." The unity she perceives in her poetry is one that grows from the unity of her life. "I have written from my own experience and feelings. I don't think the great myths that critics like to pursue are very often models for people's lives. Of course, everyone has one or two myths that run through his life, but I think they should remain secret."

After years as a social worker in Montreal, Waddington was divorced from her husband in 1960 and came to Toronto with her two young sons. To have more time for them, she left social work and taught night courses in English and Canadian literature at Atkinson College. This led to an offer of a full-time teaching position at York University, which she accepted in 1964 while working toward her Master's in English at the University of Toronto. Today she is a full professor within one year of retirement. Her Master's thesis on A.M. Klein led to her penetrating book on the poet (Copp Clark, 1970) and to her edition of his collected poems (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1970). One of her chief activities at present is scholarly writing and publishing; her credits include a long list of articles published in journals, addresses to learned societies, and translations from the Yiddish. Though she often deals with mainstream writers and central questions of literary theory, she also takes time to champion writers who remain obscure to readers of Canada's official languages. She is tolerant of the fact that some of the things she loves elicit little response: "I remember delivering a paper on the writer Moshe Nadir and comparing his work with that of Stephen Leacock. I glanced up at the audience, and it was like 23 solitudes sitting there."

Waddington often alludes to, or addresses directly, a duality she feels within herself between her poetic activity and her non-literary life. The awareness of it goes back at least to her meeting with Sutherland in 1943. She writes that "at that time only half of me was a poet — the other half was a romantic middle-class social worker — I was utterly horrified by John's complete lack of concern for material comforts and his future." She has long since become a complete poet, and yet poetry has never received her full time and energies, with the exception of brief periods on grants or at writers' retreats. "I've been lucky," she says. "I've been able to follow my own inclinations. I simply wish I had more time to do more of the



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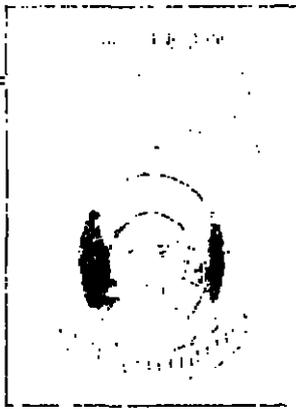
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things that come to me. I had a good working experience in social work. I was an excellent social worker and think sometimes I'll go back to it after I finish teaching. It was emotionally rich but it didn't offer anything intellectually. I find teaching intellectually difficult and challenging. But most of all I feel lucky that I can write. I'm still hoping to produce my great work when I leave teaching."

Such ambivalence does not amount to a real conflict or anxiety for Waddington. She views the road not taken with an equanimity born of her confidence in the one she did take. Her longing for the full-time professional literary life often seems to be as much a hope for Canadian literature as it is a wish for herself. In fact the doubts, regrets, and reservations she has about her own career and reputation are inextricably bound up with her aspirations for Canadian writing as a whole: that it be mature, tolerant, self-confident.

"I don't have the place in Canadian literature that I think I deserve," she says, "and I think I know why. I'm a Jew, a woman, I don't write out of the Christian tradition. And above all I hate all this about blood and knives, and writers writing about Indians and Eskimos when they know nothing about it. . . . This is the great thing for me: I know I'm a good writer and I have faith that my work, the best of it, will endure. My only regret is that I could have been better and could have written more with more encouragement. If I were starting out, I would like to be a full-time artist, but it wasn't possible then. Today it is possible in Canada, and that's a good thing."

In fact, though, being too busy is not a worry for Waddington, but her element. Her current schedule includes collecting her stories written from 1940-76 (to be published as *Summer at Lonely Beach* this spring by Mosaic Press), the preparation of scholarly papers, the reading and other work required of a professor, her busy classroom and office schedule, her participation in the development of a women's caucus within the League of Canadian Poets, a full round of social and professional activities among friends and colleagues outside the literary sphere, not to mention everything from soup to wingnuts around her home.

A busy and contented scenario. Yet the disquieting, severe joy of her poetry is there to bear witness to the truth of her words when she says, "I don't feel at home anywhere in the world, but I feel less not at home in Canada. My bond is with the landscape. I have the feeling that the landscape knows who belongs to it - and those who belong are not always the people who were born here, either. I hope that nature will revenge herself on the people who are speculating on and ruining the land. There are these possibilities of justice. There is a kind of indifference in nature, as is often said, but there is justice, too."

The movement of her words, from tribulation on the earth to justice, mirrors the essential movement of her poetry, perceived so clearly and captured with such essential spareness of form in the best poems of her most recent books. It is a difficult yet confident movement that actually begins from mortal death and burial, and moves with endless patience to a mysterious and fundamental delight:

*the heart of
the earth is buried
forever
and the pulses
of water must
sound here forever
flowing back
to the cave
of green light
and water back
to the source
of their shadowy
laughter*

□

The other Canadian

Though cosmopolitan in content, Naim Kattan's short stories explore a familiar Canadian duality: the plight of the stranger in his own land

By WAYNE GRADY

The Neighbour and Other Stories, by Naim Kattan, McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library, 183 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 9284 9).

EVERY WEEKDAY MORNING at six o'clock Naim Kattan wakes up in his single rented room in Ottawa's east end, eats a solitary breakfast, and begins to write. He writes in French, in longhand, using peacock-blue ink that flows from a \$200 German Mont Blanc fountain pen, heavy gold with a small white cross embossed on a red background at the top, like a Swiss Army knife. At eight o'clock he stops writing, dictates the morning's work into a tape recorder to be typed later by a secretary, and takes a bus to his office at the corner of Albert and Queen streets, where since 1967 he has been the Canada Council's chief literary officer.

Kattan was born in 1928 in Baghdad, Iraq, and received his early education at the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Baghdad School of Law before going to France on a government scholarship to study literature at the Sorbonne. At first a Jew in a predominantly Moslem culture, then an Arab in a predominantly Christian milieu, Kattan learned early the attractions and the dangers of assimilation, and virtually all of his writing has been an investigation of that push-pull relationship between man and society, as well as of the differences and similarities between Eastern and Western civilization. He came to Canada in 1954 because, he says, he was "attracted by Canada's attitude toward Time." By time he means "tradition"; Canadians have managed somehow, he feels, to be young and vital without feeling obliged to sever their roots in Europe. He agrees with Northrop Frye's aphorism that "a Canadian is an American who has rejected the Revolution."

At lunch in Ottawa's revolving restaurant atop the new Holiday Inn, Kattan is affable, talkative, and relaxed. He jokes with the head waiter, points

out some of Ottawa's topography as it passes our window 25 storeys below: the Supreme Court, the West Block, the magnificent Ottawa River and, beyond, the spring-green Gatineau Hills. All the while he is talking. He talks with his whole body, his hands, his shoulders, his forehead, like a man who is perpetually buoyed up on ideas.

"I'm not Canadian just because I prefer Canada to the United States," he

ity of their lives they feel *rejected* by Europe, and they feel then that they are not free in their own surroundings. This feeling is the acceptance of Time as continuation. This is the real difficulty, and it is the Canadian choice."

In a way Kattan's affinity for Canada also has to do with the Canadian attitude toward nature, which is very similar to the Arab's. "In Greece," he wrote in his first collection of essays, *Reality and*



PHOTOGRAPH BY TERESA AVEY

is suddenly saying. "I have become part of the ethos of what is Canada. Canada doesn't deny Time. There is an aspect of not denying Time that makes people more boring, more depressed, less heroic. There is a difficulty in being in Time, because Time is tragic: you decay and die. How to preserve what has already died? Up till now — and this is very evident in the Canadian novel — there was an oppression of Time through tradition. Take Sinclair Ross, or Margaret Laurence. Their people still live in Europe, in some kind of *idea* of Europe. But when they look at the real-

Theatre (1970), "nature enveloped man, surrounding him with her benefits . . . She might on occasion seem hostile, but well-being and happiness had their source in her all-pervading presence." This Hellenic view of nature has quite naturally pervaded Europe, and has been roughly transplanted in Canada, where nature in reality is much rougher in tooth and claw than it is in Greece. Canadian nature is, in fact, more Arabic than Hellenic: "In the Eastern desert." Kattan writes, "nature was the enemy, the hostile force from which man needed constant protection." And between the



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soup and the meat, 25 storeys above Ottawa, he expands on his point: "The first time I saw the Prairies in winter, covered in snow, I thought of the desert."

Kattan settled immediately in Montreal, although he taught for a while at Laval University. He became the founder and editor of the *Bulletin du cercle juif*: the first *Bulletin* publication was called *Cercle juif de la langue français* (1965), in which Kattan's contribution — an article about Mordecai Richler, who had very little to do with "la langue français" — is an early example of Kattan's curious and eccentric tendency to blend two cultures. It is not surprising that Kattan also sat on the B&B Commission when it was chaired by André Laurendeau.

Since *Reality and Theatre*, for which he received the France-Canada Prize as well as letters of approval from both Northrop Frye and André Malraux, Kattan has written a dozen books — more than one a year — as well as numerous radio and stage dramas, essays, and reviews. "I have three kinds of writing," he says, making a little tent with his fingertips. "I write novels, which are direct chronicles of ordinary life, mainly reminiscences that have some kind of autobiographical base." These are *Adieu Babylon* (1975) and *Les fruits arrachés* (1977), both translated by Sheila Fischman as *Farewell, Babylon* and *Paris Interlude*. The third novel in the trilogy, *La fiancée promise*, is still unpublished. "Then I write short stories and plays, which are to me the same kind of writing." The stories have appeared in four collections — *Dans le désert* (1974), *La traversée* (1976), *Le rivage* (1979), and *Le sable de l'île* (1981) — most of which remain untranslated. *The Neighbour and Other Stories* is a selection of 11 stories from the first two collections.

"And then," as Kattan puts it, "there are the essays." The essays weave in and out of Kattan's fiction, augmenting it, explaining it, filling it up. Kattan says the essays "complement" the other works, but it is more than that. The essays are *assimilated* into the fiction, are *synthesized* by it: in fact, in both the essays and the fiction the word "synthesis" is crucial when describing Kattan's method as well as his purpose.

"*Reality and Theatre*," he says (and here it should be noted that the French title is *Le réel et le théâtral*, not quite *Reality and Theatre*, more like *The Real and the Theatrical*: in book stores the translation is usually hidden away in the drama section; it is not about drama), "like all the essays, is a reflection on the East/West dichotomy, the myths of these very different civilizations and how

they both deal with reality. My second book of essays, *La mémoire et la promesse* [1978], is a reflection on North America mainly, the differences between the United States and Canada in their relationship to Time and Space. The third, which is now ready for publication, is called *Le désir et le pouvoir*, and is a study of the relationship between desire and power. There is a chapter, for example, on knowledge as a substitute for desire; it's really on Goethe and *Faust*, and my relationship with Germany, which is a very personal one. There's another chapter on genealogy. Another on imagination as power — it's mainly on *Macbeth* and *Madame Bovary* — desire as created through imagination. There's one on *Don Quixote*. There's one on *The 1001 Nights*, about the meaning of seduction and the relationship between desire and death. There's one on the Arabic mystics, the Sufis. They believe that it is good to desert the body, not to control it but to rise above it completely. They wrote the most beautiful poetry in the Arab language, but it was not what they wanted to do."

The stories included in *The Neighbour and Other Stories* also reflect this meeting of cultures, which is not so much a clash as a process of absorption. In the title story the narrator lives in an apartment building in Montreal and observes over the years the Chinese man living in the next apartment. They have almost no communication other than the occasional greeting in the hall or the foyer, until one day the Chinese comes over to say goodbye. After 23 years in Canada he is going home to Peking, bringing with him only a trunkful of notes he has taken from hundreds of political and cultural events: "Canada is a marvellous country, and what a mine of knowledge! Never a night without a lecture or a meeting. I've kept everything. I'm taking all my notes with me. I'll need ten or fifteen years in which to consult them, to put them in order, to assimilate them and to absorb this treasure." The man has clearly and perhaps tragically gained nothing from his stay in Canada — his notes, like his non-relationship with the narrator, will not reveal to him the truth or the meaning of Canada: "My father," he says earlier, "always sought out the most precious thing a country can offer — knowledge." It is not knowledge that the man needs, however, but human warmth. And we can see that the story is a fictional form of Kattan's essay on Faust and his substitution of knowledge for desire.

The other problem Kattan reveals in these stories is the danger of assimilating too far into an adopted culture — of

Innocence and experience

By BARBARA NOVAK

disappearing entirely into a new society and thereby endangering that society. In "Baggage" an Englishman, Edward, marries a French Canadian and sets out to become more French Canadian than she is. He changes his name to Edouard, develops a taste for beer and hockey, and admonishes his wife for not liking beer, hockey, or her neighbours. In the end she leaves him: "I was suffocating under the weight of it," she says, "I had to leave before I got to know him, before it was too late."

"I had a reading of my work in Paris," Kattan says. "One of my stories, 'Le secret,' was taken by *Le Monde*. After the reading the people who were there told me I was speaking about a different North America from the one they knew. It is a North America seen from a distance, but also from within." This dual vision, the superimposition of cultures, creates nonetheless a character that is familiar in much contemporary fiction, especially in Canada: the self-imposed exile, the stranger in his own land. In one story, "The Visitor," an Egyptian returns incognito to his native Cairo, as a spy. In another, "From the Balcony," a Brazilian imprisons himself in his apartment in Rio, in the grip of a paranoid delusion that "they" are stalking him. Robert Fulford has called Kattan "quite possibly the most cosmopolitan Canadian alive," and George Woodcock has noted that these stories contain "a simplicity that makes us feel we are looking through clear glass into the hearts of men and women who are strangers to us and to the world as well." The two modes — cosmopolitanism and simplicity — need each other to survive.

Kattan's cosmopolitanism is reflected in his life as well as in his writing. Though he keeps a room in Ottawa during the week, he still officially lives in Montreal with his wife — the actress Gaetane Lariel — and their 14-year-old son, travelling back and forth by train every Friday and Monday. Somehow this divided life — the Ottawa bureaucrat in a rented room, the Montreal writer in a spacious house near the Oratoire St. Joseph — is a comfortable one for Kattan; he's been living it for 15 years. On a recent trip to China, Kattan gave a copy of his story "The Neighbour" — about the Chinese clerk who returns to Peking — to the secretary of the Chinese Writers' Union. "He seemed to like it," Kattan says, "because he told me the next day, very formal, very discreet, 'I am your other Chinese, but a little different.'" In many ways, Naïm Kattan is our other Canadian — our other voice, through which we obtain a fuller description of ourselves. □

Coming to Grips with Lucy, by George McWhirter, Oberon Press, 140 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 417 5) and \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 418 3).

The Driver, by Nora Keeling, Oberon Press, 109 pages, \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 421 3) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 422 1).

THE OPENING OF the title story in *Coming to Grips with Lucy* establishes the author's artistic priorities: "In the beginning was the water well" — not the "word" but the experience. A poet and author of two previous collections of short stories, George McWhirter is an expert stylist who uses words as tools to give shape to experience. The image of the water well is sustained throughout the first paragraph, which concludes: "The well was rumoured to be bottomless. If so, it must have reached, like a rod of water, right through the world to Australia." The Ulster-born author's heritage appears to run just as deep, for his Irish sensibility flows through the entire collection — the stories set in Canada and Spain as well as the six stories set in Ireland.

Several stories involve some sort of parallel action, a technique McWhirter handles brilliantly. In "Coming to Grips with Lucy" the narrator recalls an afternoon when his 17-year-old sister (whom he is supposed to be chaperoning) rides off on a motorcycle with the local hellion while the narrator goes mackerel fishing with the hellion's sister, Lucy. The narrator's own sexual awakening parallels that of his sister:

It seemed impudent, impertinent to think of Lucy with a fella. I didn't think of trees with fellas, boulders with fellas, not doing things with them. Whatever quality she had was powerful, handsome, hidden like a tree's in its leaves and bark. Better than beauty, a power and a presence. Then, gradually, I began to see Lucy in an opposite light, that of a boy looking at a woman. I saw her hair. I liked it. It was long. She wound it into a whorl at the back, like a reel of harvest bread, burnished, bannock-shaped. Russet head and bold face. Rough, yet you trusted it. That too

is stamped inside the memory of that day. The image of a face I could trust.

There isn't a weak story in the collection. All are perfectly constructed and told with a tremendous rush of creative energy and conviction. And yet they are tightly controlled. The best are those told from the point of view of a youthful narrator, especially the two "Firstie" stories. In one, a 13-year-old boy (Firstie) discovers a beached dolphin at an age when his curiosity about nature has led him to plague his biology teacher with questions such as: "Did the gulls get dry in the mouth when they ate? Or was everything kept well watered by the sea? Did they actually drink salt water? . . . Do woodpeckers get headaches with bashing tree-trunks with their heads? Do tortoises know they are slowcoaches?" His teacher's answers satisfy him that there is, indeed, an order to the universe. But when his efforts to save the dolphin fail, he feels a sense of outrage that makes him look forward to the beating he knows he'll receive for staying out too late. "Firstie wanted to share his Da's rage. He wanted to put himself right with blows."

In "The Followers (Or Babes in the Field)" Firstie comes to terms with the revulsion he feels toward his two backwards cousins, after spending some time with a group of inmates from a local mental institution. He recognizes their smiles as being like those of his cousins, "whose smiles never seemed right, never seemed to surge from the inside and beam out." Like a smile that's right, the stories in *Coming to Grips with Lucy* do seem to surge from the inside and beam out. The result is totally engaging.

The Driver is an uneven collection of short stories by Nora Keeling. In general, the stories seem self-conscious and lacking in vitality. The author intrudes into the narrative and burdens her stories with too many qualifiers and far too many commas, so that they never manage to build up a momentum of their own. The following passage from "Himmler, Hotshot and Dandy" (a story about an old woman whose disappointment in the weakness and brutality of her sons leads her to take a firm stand on behalf of a pet), illustrates some of the technical problems that could have been overcome with the help of a good editor:

And, although he, George and his mother, could, on occasion, use more money than they had, and although Mathew always offered some, sheepishly and with discretion, neither George nor the old lady would ever touch a penny that they hadn't earned themselves.

In an odd sense, they lived together much like a couple. George ate her

cooling, having provided her with the wherewithal to cook. He slept in the bed she had made up for him between starched and ironed sheets, falling asleep immediately upon touching the pillows, before he had had the time to think of anything irksome — or indeed, anything at all.

Keeling is at her best in a surrealistic mode, with a story like "Green Blades of Grass." The first-person narrative in this story bounces between dialogues the narrator is having with her therapist and with her fiancé. The diction and the ironic tone are appropriate to the story, and the numerous qualifiers become almost poetic in their intensity.

The author is undoubtedly a writer of talent; certain passages in each of the stories do manage to soar. But occasional flashes of brilliance are not enough to sustain an entire collection. *The Driver* is badly in need of a good editor. I suspect that the collection did not receive the benefit of any editing at all. In any case, by publishing these stories in their present form, Oberon has done Keeling a disservice. □

REVIEW

Ordinary people

By GARY DRAPER

It Is Always Summer, by David Helwig, Stoddart Publishing, 203 pages, \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2001 4).

THE FIRST TWO novels in David Helwig's Kingston tetralogy are pretty good books. In *The Glass Knight* (1976) Helwig tells the story of Robert Mallen's not-very-successful affair with the exotic Elizabeth Ross. *Jennifer* (1979) is Robert's wife, and that book is her story. These are novels of character. Robert and Jennifer are ordinary people, caught in the ordinary confusions of growing older and falling in and out of love, in ordinary old Kingston, Ont. Helwig convinces, and makes the reader care, by means of his attention to detail and to the truth: the way people are in this book is the way people really are.

It Is Always Summer is the fourth book in the sequence (the third, *A Sound Like Laughter*, is slated for

publication in 1983). It has the virtues of its predecessors and more. The time is 10 years after the first novel, and most of the action takes place on Wolfe Island. Many of the people from the earlier books reappear, along with some we haven't met; they are, as before, both ordinary and credible.

The central figures are Robert, Elizabeth, Robert's daughter Cindy, Elizabeth's old friend Wayne Burch, Wayne's wife Jane, and a man named Carl Baines. Helwig lets the reader overhear the interior monologues of all of these characters, each of which is distinguished not just by habits of mind and what each character thinks about, but also by a kind of inner tone of voice. This is always impressive when it's done well, as it is here. And Helwig, keeping six balls in the air, doesn't resort to verbal tics or caricature, though I have to say I found the women's inner voices a shade less convincing than the men's.

If the extended cast of characters is one of the ways in which this book is more ambitious than the earlier two, the techniques of characterization are the same. Helwig shows the different faces (or facets) that each character reveals in different social contexts. In addition, as I've said, the six central characters reveal their private, inner spaces. The effect is something like those marvellous line drawings that revolve in computerized projections. You get to see all round, and through. Mordecai Richler has said that one of the things he's interested in doing is making a case for the apparently unsympathetic man. One of the things that Helwig is doing is demonstrating the complexity and the fascination of the apparently ordinary. This extends beyond character: Helwig also plays the surface view against the inside view of marriage and other pairings. He asks and then answers that nagging, perennial question, "What on earth does *she* see in *him*?"

Helwig is perhaps better with outer than with inner voices. This means that we get to know his minor characters pretty well, even if we never get to look inside, so to speak. Wilf and Lois and Charlie and Paul are vivid and credible, again, not because of surface tics or twitches, but because they have been imagined and realized from the inside out. Their voices are true.

It is not surprising, then, that some of the most successful passages in the book are those in which Helwig orchestrates a conversation of many voices. There are some real virtuoso pieces here, drawing power from a sub-surface of sexuality, individual voices crackling with desire, jealousy, fear, and sometimes love.

For the most part, the images of *It Is Always Summer* support the narrative without calling attention to themselves.

The imagery of flight, for example (insects, birds, angels, souls), informs and extends both character and event. There is no one-to-one equivalence here, which narrows meaning, but a pattern of interrelation, which broadens and enriches it. The mosquitoes that plague Carl and the wings that Paul traces on Cindy's back are evocations of sexual desire, among other things, frustrating and maddening on the one hand, releasing on the other. The heron that Robert follows is more than just his desire for Elizabeth, but, because it is that too, it draws on a whole network of related images. Even Wilf does a kind of barnyard mating dance.

Helwig's prose at its best is supple and uncluttered:

The heron had vanished somewhere in the morning's silvery spaces. Robert stood at the edge of the water, as if puzzled after having followed the bird's flight and lost it. It had been something suddenly clear in all the fog and fear and regret. Here is the bird. Follow it.

(That heron, by the way, is the central device on the book's dustjacket, which is not only appropriate but very beautiful.)

The faults of *It Is Always Summer* — and it has a few — are the result of its ambitious reach. Sometimes the prose tries a little too hard. Sometimes the imagery — the patterning of earth, air, fire, and water, for instance — seems just a little too apparent. Occasionally the narrative takes an arbitrary turn. But these faults come from Helwig's willingness to take chances. They are small and forgivable in a novel as good as this one. □

REVIEW

A tale of two cities

By MATT COHEN

The Dean's December, by Saul Bellow, Harper & Row (Fitzhenry & Whiteside), 312 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 06 014849 7).

SAUL BELLOW has been quoted as saying that "the writer who influenced me most was God." Perhaps because he has remained true to his source, Bellow has since won the Nobel Prize — an achieve-

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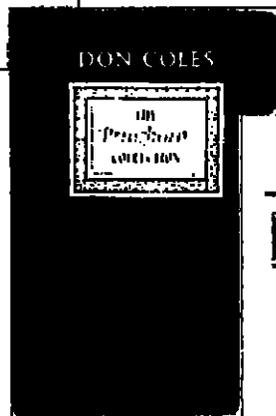
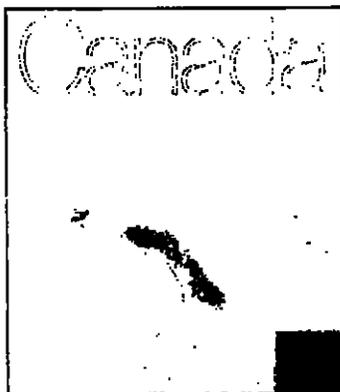
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ment which, from a North American point of view, seems usually reserved for obscure foreign writers whose books subsequently become available in much-admired but enigmatic translations. Bellow, on the contrary, not only fails to be foreign, he fails to be obscure: his books have been best-sellers almost since the beginning of his career — so much so that he wrote *Humboldt's Gift* about the burdens of money and success — and he won, in a fitting prelude to the Nobel Prize, three National Book Awards for fiction as well as a Pulitzer Prize.

Thus each time one picks up a book by Bellow one is not reading merely a novel, one is reading a product about to garner fame, honours, and money. This screen between the reader and the book is compounded by the fact that in his books Bellow, or the version of himself he has invented for public purposes, is ubiquitous — an emcee presenting us with not only the characters and plot but also, absolutely free, the quirky smart-aleck tough-guy tone of voice of the Narrator-Source Himself: a cynical realist with a big heart of gold and a pocketbook to match. It is as if Humphrey Bogart and Albert Camus turned out to be the same person after all.

Even to open one of Saul Bellow's books is an act of daring: with what incredibly romantic but neurotic sicko will the reader be asked to travel? And where will the journey lead, if not deep into the heart of Bellow's heart-of-gold-and-pocketbook-to-match celebration of the United States of America?

The central character of *The Dean's December* is Albert Corde, a one-time journalist who has become a university dean in Chicago. Unlike Bellow's previous characters, Corde has not crippled himself in the search for fame or money — though he is quick to assure us that he has plenty of both. Corde's obsession is social justice: an armchair philosopher with a typewriter, he has determined to tell the world what he thinks of it whether the world wants to listen or not. Thus, from the barricaded position of Dean of Students, Corde has become embroiled in a controversy that began when *Harper's* magazine published a series of his articles about Chicago, a series that in semi-poetical language exposed and condemned the corruption of Chicago and its bureaucracy's decision to write off large numbers of poor people as necessary casualties of inner city decay.

These articles were, naturally enough, unpopular in Chicago: in fact, they were doubly unpopular for having been penned by someone in Corde's position — a position generally suited to being affable and raising money. Corde, however, becomes aware his deanship is secure not

because of the university's commitment to free speech, but because he is married to an astronomer of enormous repute. Corde's wife Minna is beautiful, unbearably brilliant, and comes from a country where (the reader can't help noticing) freedom of speech is even rarer: Rumania. It is in Bucharest that the novel opens: Corde and his wife have gone there in order to watch over the death of Minna's mother, Valeria.

As it turns out, the death is not easily observed. In fact, for Albert and Minna, the mother's dying becomes entwined with a battle against the hospital which doesn't want visitors, especially American visitors, to disturb its efficient functioning.

At the same time that he is fighting the Bucharest Communist plot — and what could be more nasty or heartless than officials who refuse to let a dying woman's children visit her as she expires? — Corde is occupied with thoughts about the Chicago bureaucracy, and whether his attack on it was justified or merely a public settling of old scores.

Most of the "action" of the novel takes place in Minna's childhood bedroom where Corde sleeps compulsively, drinks brandy to keep warm, and ruminates in his overcoat. And most of the "dramatic conflict" of the novel is the contrast between the Communist heartlessness of Bucharest and the Democratic heartlessness of Chicago, neither of them an inspiring vision.

Yet *The Dean's December* is a book of remarkable power and optimism. As should be with all books, its power rests first of all on the language itself: Bellow's quirky tough-guy sinewy voice has never been so effective. His sentences ramble, but never without making unexpected points: thus ideas that seem ridiculous when reflected upon and reduced to their logical components are completely persuasive in the voice of Bellow's narrator.

But beyond the language itself, *The Dean's December* carries the force of its own convictions. Not only is it written in an eccentric and energetic prose, it is about an eccentric and energetic world. Although it is true that the cities he portrays are authoritarian and corrupt in the worst ways — the civic monsters of the '80s have no redeeming features in this novel — the people who inhabit them have not been reduced. Bellow believes in his characters: even the worst are gigantic in their ambitions, their pride, the banality of their motives.

The corruption that Bellow portrays is not essentially different from the corruption in which he has specialized in his other great novels, *Humboldt's Gift* and *Herzog*. The desire of the human soul to

cash itself in for money, sex, status — this is the transaction Bellow has always watched. A lifetime of observation has given his narrator the cynical tough-guy mode, forgiving it the heart of gold.

The Dean's December is not quite Bellow's best book; its attempt to span two cities with political clichés strains even Bellow's capacity for maintaining contradictions. But it is an excellent book. Sprawling, ambitious, superbly written, it is the slightly self-conscious but nonetheless honest attempt of a novelist to look at his world as it really is, and to keep looking until he finds the centre. □

REVIEW

Howls of academe

By DuBARRY CAMPAU

Going Grand, by Jack MacLeod, McClelland & Stewart, 289 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 5563 3).

THE CHARACTERS IN *Going Grand* are almost all academics, but their ivory tower is a big city university, open on all sides to urban excitements, misadventures, temptations, and traps. MacLeod's protagonist, economics professor J.T. McLaughlin, lives amidst the intellectual in-fighting of his ivy-draped college and the trendy and financially exhausting milieu of mid-town. Inevitably, he has become somewhat schizoid.

When McLaughlin appeared in MacLeod's first novel, *Zinger and Me*, his main problem was academic survival. Now that he's an associate professor with tenure, he is worrying about how to keep his own world together. With three children and a beautiful wife whose hobby is extravagance, he describes himself as being in "the caboose of the gravy train." His house typifies his plight: it is on the fringe of the best neighbourhood, has phony shutters and carriage lamps, but only one bathroom.

Among his colleagues are Grimsby and Nobby, both of whom he appreciates, neither of whom he understands. Grimsby is dour, loveless, and conscientious; Nobby is a dilettante with forged credentials but genuine charm. In a sense, McLaughlin caroms between their

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MACMILLAN OF CANADA
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personalities — he is devoted to his students, respects his subject, but deplores dreariness and fancies malt whisky and the good life.

This is a picaresque novel — flamboyant, wildly funny episodes are interlarded with quiet conversations. Among the splendidly antic moments are McLaughlin's public lecture, which he attempts to make under the inadvertent influence of LSD, the unveiling of a fountain during which an uncontrollable firehose slashes every dignitary within its reach, the wild ride that follows a party where McLaughlin seems to discover that he has been abandoned both by his wife and his career, and the gorgeous climax in which he turns almost simultaneously into a criminal and local hero.

The muted moments are more truly revealing of McLaughlin's personality. Among them is an unwelcome but tolerated after-dinner talk with Grimsby in which, in order to cheer his sad and boring guest, he tells him about the things in which he believes. They are wonderfully various and among the long list are Bertrand Russell, Flann O'Brien, oysters, decency, peonies, Guinness stout, and turtleneck sweaters. A bed-time chat with his younger son is also touching, not because it is sentimental but because with this little boy he becomes totally relaxed and delights the child with a delicious and spontaneously created nonsense rhyme.

Like most of us, McLaughlin spends his days and nights with other people, sympathizing with them, conning them, helping or insulting them, but in some way bouncing off their assorted personalities, needs, or deserts. Alone, he is pitifully revealed. Attempting to write his public lecture he becomes an expert in procrastination. His ability to postpone almost indefinitely the moment of physically and mentally getting down to it is a joy to everyone who hates to write but knows no other way of earning a living. He goes through a file, gets a fresh pack of cigarettes, sharpens six pencils, counts the days on his calendar before the deadline, finds, reads, and checks the fine print on a lapsed insurance policy, inspects the meters in the basement without understanding the numbers on them, changes the kitty litter, clips his nails, and, finally, types out an entire sentence.

For most, however, the high points of the novel will be the comic, manic scenes of disorder. But MacLeod has a command of chaos, always controlling it, weaving together threads of confusion into a brilliant, riotous pattern.

These scenes are so marvellously noisy and colourful they tend to overshadow much that is even more worthwhile in the novel. MacLeod has the rare ability

to perceive and understand and communicate to us the way we live now — and even why. □

REVIEW

White water chants

By LIBBY SCHEIER

The Mad River and Other Stories, by Douglas H. Glover, Black Moss Press, 110 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88753 080 X).

"WE ARE ALL ARTISTS. Life seeks to transcend itself," says a character in Douglas H. Glover's fine first book, *The Mad River and Other Stories*. Most of Glover's characters seem to feel that if they can't make things work out well and they can't feel optimistic, at least they can cope with life creatively, inventively — whether through self-abasement ("Between the Kisses and the Wine"), murder/suicide ("Pender's Visions"), or tenacious struggles with nature ("The Mad River," "Horse"). The worst thing they can do is to let life pass by without anything happening, as Lucy in "Wild Horses" says to herself. Lucy "wants to be immortal" — and the characters in these stories find various "artistic" ways to seek immortality.

Male confrontations with nature are at the centre of the first three stories, but Margaret Atwood would not have used them to prove her thesis in *Survival*. Glover's characters are usually not passive in front of nature, but combatants ready to engage in struggle. The white-water canoeist (or kayaker) in "The Mad River" battles with nature and is, in one sense, defeated, but he does not really lose: at the crucial moment he embraces his opponent and they become one. His attitude represents an aesthetic or moral triumph.

The next three stories are about people's struggles with each other and within themselves. A similar viewpoint informs these conflicts. On the surface, many of Glover's characters are grotesques in an imperfect and disaster-ridden universe, but they transcend hopeless situations by the way they think, feel, and respond. Every person is an artist and can transform an ordinary or ugly

moment into a unique poetry.

Glover is an ambitious writer who seeks to combine a metaphysical approach and style with the nitty-gritty details of daily life. It works. The reader is initially taken aback by such phrases as "a swinging bridge between two poles of infinity" and "the wheels of eternity" alternating closely with "Arty shrewdly married a white girl and started a successful lumber business and Indian craft store." This alternation between an almost *Pilgrim's Progress* style of writing, in which the characters often seem to be archetypes, and casual, detailed urban-novel language and information, characterizes all these stories, with the exception of the fable, "Panther." But Glover's artistic integrity and coherent vision allow him to succeed in this unusual and innovative conception and style.

One of the best stories in the book, "Pender's Visions," is about a half-breed Ojibway whose life is filled with hideous experiences not of his making (like many of Glover's characters). He gradually degenerates, snaps, and becomes a sniper holed up in a house in town. Pender is described as "a recalcitrant artist" and the sniping as Pender's "creative spurt": his action is a creative way to cope with, and end, a badly damaged life.

Three of the seven stories are told from a female viewpoint. It is a difficult undertaking, and often the mark of a talented writer, to be able to speak in the voice of the opposite sex. Glover's women are complex, authentic personalities. He has chosen to portray women occupying traditional female roles and done that well.

The three remaining stories are told in straight, narrative style, while the others move around between past and present, and in and out of different modes of a character's consciousness. In "Panther," the fable/myth that ends the book, Glover seems to relax after the hard work of the other stories. Based on a Jewish legend that Jesus was the son of a Roman centurion, the story is a beautiful and apparently effortlessly written tale of gore, drama and magic.

One small complaint: I would be happier if Glover had not overworked some of his most successful stylistic traits. For example, the Zen-ish list-description is striking when it appears in the title story ("he is the paddle, the boat, the river, the rock"), but, precisely because it is so striking, it loses impact when it turns up in a similar way in other stories. Such, perhaps, are the perils of collecting in one volume stories written at various times. But consider that a reviewer's quibble (every review must have at least one quibble) with a very fine first book. □

The gift of the gab

Antonine Maillet's Acadian odyssey is a triumph of story-telling—an affirmation, above all, of the vitality and significance of the spoken word

By MARCY KAHAN

Pélagie: The Return to a Homeland, by Antonine Maillet, translated from the French by Philip Stratford, Doubleday, 251 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 17133 1).

In *Pélagie: The Return to a Homeland* (which, as *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, won the 1979 Prix Goncourt), Antonine Maillet recounts the 10-year odyssey of her forefathers, the intrepid band of Acadians who returned to Atlantic Canada in 1750 after years of exile and dispersion in America following "the Great Disruption of 1755."

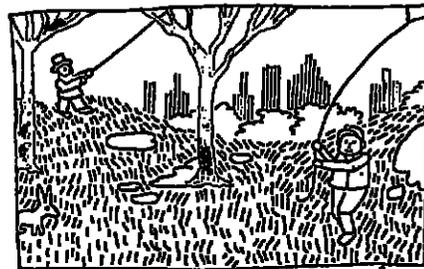
The leader of this motley troupe of refugees is Pélagie LeBlanc, "a stiff-necked, proud-browed" widow, who nurses the crippled, the aged, and the abandoned, and silences the loudmouths and the whiners as she drives her oxcart from the cotton fields of Georgia to the marshes of Tintamarre. As a representative of tough-minded, great-hearted Acadian womanhood, Pélagie serves as a welcome replacement for Longfellow's long-suffering maid of Grand-Pré, Evangéline.

Other characters are equally memorable: Bélonie, the chin-wagging, 100-year-old chronicler of the past, obsessed by the phantom Wagon of Death that accompanies Pélagie's caravan; Céline, the club-footed healer and midwife, whose ancient herbal remedies work miracles during the harsh winter of 1777; La Catoune, the mysterious orphan of the Great Disruption, a cherished wild child with her own language of babbled sounds. At times, the story reads like *Mother Courage* rewritten by Rabelais: the troupe is enlivened by the addition of P'tite Goule — an eight-foot giant of the same breed as Gargantua — and Pierre-à-Pitre the Fool, whose fantastic improvised tales complement old Bélonie's official chronicle history.

The narrative of *Pélagie* is rich with incident — famine, drought, rains, epidemics, quarrels, and defections. Fundamental human experiences and

rituals seem more poignant in the context of deprivation and hardship: the deaths of an old man in South Carolina and an eight-year-old boy further North; the birth of a girl in Virginia; the wedding of Pélagie's only daughter in Philadelphia in 1776. There are scenes of slapstick farce; the rescue of La Catoune from the Charleston slave market (an event highlighted by the incidental emancipation of a Negro), and a happier interlude in Baltimore, where the good ladies of the town surrender their silks, laces, and cashmeres to the magical fingers of Pierre-à-Pitre the Fool. There are tales of woodland adventure, including the capture of Pélagie's eldest son by the Iroquois and his subsequent marriage to a princess of the tribe. There are fantastic tales of the White Whale and the Giant Lady of the Night — told and retold to revive weary spirits on the long journey home.

Romance enters the story in the person of Captain Broussard-called-Beausoleil, "the Robin Hood of the high seas," whose four-masted schooner rescues exiled Acadians along the Atlantic coast. Pélagie and the Captain pledge their mutual devotion and, in the story's most moving chapter, offer up their lives for each other when the cart becomes mired in the marshes of Salem. Both survive the crisis, thanks to the resource-



fulness of old Bélonie, whose extraordinary dialogue with Death distracts the phantom wagon from its intended passengers.

Throughout the narrative, the sense of outrage and anger against their British

persecutors remains muted. It finds expression in Pélagie's devastating understatement: "What they did, they did. And the way things stand, don't let anyone come asking me to fetch them a basin of water to wash their hands in." Or in the drunken chorus of a wedding-party song: "And shit to his English Majesty/Who declared his war on you and me!" And there is a muffled rumour of Acadians being used for target practice by Bostonian Loyalists.

At the end of the novel, we discover that the chronicle of the odyssey itself has vindicated the Acadians. Pélagie and her "scraps of relations and neighbours" finally reached their beloved homeland, only to discover that Grand-Pré remains burnt and deserted by British edict, "abandoned to the gulls and the wild grass." Pélagie tears off her kerchief, opens it to the wind, folds it by the four corners, and sticks it in her apron-pocket. In that pocket lies preserved Grand-Pré, plus a stock of ancient words — "words she wouldn't leave as a heritage for foreign throats."

This heritage includes the memory of the harvest season and the maple-sugar season and the season of the wild strawberries; of Céline's sacks of camphor, linseed poultices, and doses of senna, wildcherry, and witchgrass root; of the "aboteaux" — the wide dikes bordering the meadows, stealing land from the sea. It is a heritage of cunning survival: never equal to defending themselves in direct combat, since they are never on equal footing, the Acadians manage "by brushing up on the gift of the gab and by learning that the way out of an impasse is sometimes by way of a cul-de-sac."

What is most clearly celebrated in *Pélagie* is this "gift of the gab," an affirmation of the vitality and significance of the spoken word. The narrative is framed by the quibbles and laughter of a third-generation Pélagie and Bélonie, who try to keep the details accurate out of concern for the integrity of their ancestors. The story is regularly punctuated by an incantation of names: the

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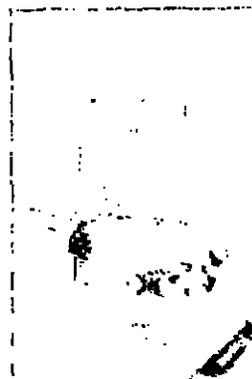
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names of the families thrown indiscriminately into schooners by the British soldiers; the names of newly discovered neighbours and relations, who come out of hiding as the cart proceeds northward; a final roll-call of families at the end, establishing who resettled where. Even the dashing Captain Broussard-called-Beausoleil triumphs over an English naval commander not with cannon-fire but with the hypnotic spell of his story-telling.

Acadia may be a nation without institutions, but Antonine Maillet, like the Bélonies and Pélagies before her, has pocketed up enough ancient words to preserve its compelling, irrepressible voice. □

REVIEW

A flight of egos

By JAMIE CONKLIN

The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, by Tom Wayman, Thistledown Press, 98 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 45 3).

In Transit, by Colin Morton, Thistledown Press, 83 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 43 7).

A New Improved Sky, by Don Kerr, Coteau Books, 65 pages, \$5.00 paper (ISBN 0 919926 10 X).

AT LONG LAST Tom Wayman has gathered the Wayman poems into a single collection. By "Wayman poems" I mean those poems in which Wayman uses the third person to develop a Wayman persona as a character in the poetry: in an "afterword" Wayman remarks that "my hope is that the Wayman persona will give people room to laugh at this blast of ego which, explicitly or implicitly, is a necessary part of every poem in which someone is telling you how he or she is responding to the world."

For the most part it's a very effective device. The poems piece together a picture of a well-intentioned individual who is beset by more than his fair share of the foibles and paranoia of modern life. Whether he is talking about a Mazola oil party in California, his fear of flying, or his feelings about poetry editors and publishers, Wayman succeeds in show-

ing the various shades of humour that underlie the ordinary problems of daily life.

In a section entitled "Actively Seeking Employment," Wayman deals with the subject that seems closest to his heart: work. He brings warmth and vitality to descriptions of the details of a factory:

Settling in, getting to know the place, Wayman discovered both box-end and open-end wrenches, fine- and coarse-threaded nuts.

Also the forklifts, which never failed to release a warm fart of propane when Wayman passed behind them.

The Wayman persona allows the poet a humorous and lighthearted vehicle with which to pursue his vision of people cooperatively building the world they share.

But this collection is afflicted by at least one problem: despite its comic touches, the "blast of ego" that accompanies these poems is often intense. The ego of Tom Wayman is everywhere, introducing and explaining poems, occasionally forcing cumbersome metaphors onto material or punching home a poem with an ineffective joke. Consider, for example, "Travelling Companions," in which Wayman debates censorship with a character named Four Letter Word, or "Teacher's Aide," which deals with Wayman marking English essays and ends with his realization—that "he has been marking time." In both poems the poet foregrounds his own self and poetic devices instead of "the conditions and quality of our contemporary life," which he elsewhere claims to be his primary intention.

The poet's stance in relation to his subject is of equal importance in Colin Morton's *In Transit*. Morton has organized his first book of poems into several sections that deal with beginnings, connections, and journeys. His poems recall generations of people moving through their lives and across the earth, and he develops this theme with a wonderful sense of detail. Whether explaining how to fill a watermelon with rum or describing moving into an old house, Morton sets a scene with precision and skill:

Smells accumulate in corners year by year: of mildew in cupboards, ash in the woodstove downstairs, dust and cobwebs over all the hoarded jars and hardwood and molding in the rafters, the cool smell of water dripping on wood.

Morton is not interested in finding devices that allow the writer to distance



himself from his own ego. Rather, he observes that "every self is the centre." He conveys the sense of a self that is actively pursuing and constructing its life. And having conducted his search, he ends the collection by addressing his son, projecting his own past onto his son's future, and concluding with the quiet rush of history:

above the rain satellites plough silent cameras through what is left of the twentieth century,

almost everywhere on earth it is tomorrow.

In Transit is an illuminating glimpse at the transience of 20th-century life, at how an individual caught in the movement over space and through time attempts to piece together a meaningful sense of identity.

But of these three works, I found Don Kerr's *A New Improved Sky* the most successful. The poem that opens the collection — "My father's soul" — anticipates much of what is to follow. In vivid detail, Kerr recalls going to a hockey game with his father, the sights and smells and tastes of the evening, and concludes by remarking "I take my boys to the games." This emphasis on place, on the past, present, and future of the people of Saskatoon, is sustained throughout the volume.

In "Capital punishment, December 1, 1979," Kerr writes about a man, Mr. K, who tries to defend "the future of the past" by opposing urban development. He describes the aim of the developers as the construction of "a new improved sky," and worries about such changes: "people take their kids out and say/now you remember this sky because/it won't come back." For Kerr, the developers are purveyors of ego who anticipate a time when "their self is their facade" — a cold, rational future, justified by "the absolute clarity of commercial comfort."

Kerr's book has a great deal to recommend it. From "The day the Marxist discovered money" to "Fred, it's still all right," he places the comedy of ideologies and the tragedy of personal loss into a context abundant with detail and insight. He takes us to a home town, a city that is full of meaning for the poet and that is threatened by the ambitions of men who have no sense of history. This is the crux of Kerr's poetry and why he concludes with a poetic meditation arising from Bergman's film *The Seventh Egg*: our daily lives are housed by history, and hence the meaning of our lives must be sought in contexts that often seem remote. Kerr captures both aspects of this dilemma: the tender details of a life spent in Saskatoon, and the anger occasioned by the imposition of unsympathetic historical events. □

The vertical man

A new biography portrays an aging, queenish Auden, not good at hygiene, but a stickler for manners and financial probity. Then, too, there is his poetry

By M.B. THOMPSON

W.H. Auden: A Biography, by Humphrey Carpenter, Methuen, 495 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 04 928044 9).

"A SHILLING LIFE will give you all the facts." In that case an \$18.95 life should give you considerably more, and this new biography largely does. It complements and rivals Charles Osborne's *W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet* (1979), *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, edited by Stephen Spender (1974), and Edward Mendelson's *Early Auden* (1981). Between these and Mendelson's bruited account of the later Auden, we have as much biographical Auden as we are likely to want.

And here we are on rather shaky ground. Carpenter goes to some pains in his preface to argue himself out of the request, published by Auden's executors after his death in 1973, that no biography of him indeed be attempted. In an essay in *The Dyer's Hand* Auden quite passionately dissociates biographical inquiry from a just assessment of any writer's work, and he is on frequent record as asking friends and correspondents to suppress memorabilia, particularly letters and personal reminiscence.

Of course, almost nobody did so. Carpenter dismisses the case for silence by citing Auden's own oft-expressed approval of biographical or even gossipy procedures and by guessing that Auden wouldn't have minded a biography being written after all. The poet was scarcely discreet about all manner of "highly personal" details, encoding them not so bafflingly in a number of his most important poems, and was quite prone at times to retail them even to casual strangers. Auden or not, anyway, we have here a solid, 500-page account of his life and loves — his odd, busy, productive life, his human loves.

At issue in all this, as most readers of 20th-century poetry know, is the question of Auden's homosexuality. The fact that he was predominantly homosexual is of no moment one way or the other.

But do we need to know how coolly promiscuous he sometimes was about it, how he preferred oral sex to the other kinds, above all whom he did it with at almost every juncture of his life? Since Carpenter is not writing a study of the poetry, but only "how it often arose from the circumstances of his life," it would be careless of him to pretend that Auden's sex (and love) life did not exist. The poet did not, as we know, exactly preserve a resounding silence about his numerous liaisons, and as the climate grew more permissive he was apt, in certain company, to plume himself on his pleasures, make quite open gestures of admiration, change the pronouns in not a few of his earlier love poems. Nor was he inclined to be secretive about the amount of drink he downed throughout his life. He was as happy about his drinking as he was about his sex, and



took no trouble to hide it. Carpenter plays both issues as sensitively as possible, noting them where they pertain, without sensationalist overstressing. He is equally fair and thorough about subjects some readers might consider just as private: religion, politics, literary opinions, particularly concerning eminent contemporaries. Auden is thought of by many as a Christian poet, though his orthodoxy would no doubt be suspect to a purist. He moved through what Carpenter shows to be a slightly guilty

indifference in his early years to the wry, touching position best expressed in "Horae Canonicae," in which he asks: "Can poets/Be saved?" We all of us can, if we remember that "we must love one another or die," as Auden put it in one of his best-known poems, "September 1, 1939," a line he first changed to "we must love one another and die" and later repudiated completely.

The later work intensified this simple and unfashionable message, and Auden was seen by many critics and disciples as having gone soft-centred, even mawkish. The brainy aggressive young master of the opaque utterance had become a snuffly pantouffled old buffer: in the fourth of his *Bucolics* (1952) the use of the word "comfy" provoked not a few young turks to dismissive contempt. As Carpenter comments: "After his long period of spiritual development and change had reached a climax in the 1940s, his poetry, having recorded and even inspired that development and change, slipped a little into the background."

The left wing took even more huffily what they saw as Auden's political betrayal. The Evelyn Waugh of the world dismissed Auden as one of the "homosexual socialists," but as Carpenter shows, Auden's political savvy was skin-deep at the best of times, and amounted to little more than a fuzzy amalgam of 1930s trendiness and shy, kind-hearted philanthropy. He worried about his religion a bit, but even in his radical heyday he knew little and cared less about the hard core of politics in that most political of decades.

Auden was first and foremost a poet, and it is because he was a poet that Carpenter, Osborne, Mendelson, and we are interested in him. Poetry is not "about" religion anyway, or politics, or even sex as such. Many of Auden's old friends were distressed in later years that he disclaimed poetry's power to affect anything in the "real" world: "I know that all the verse I wrote, all the positions I took in the '30s, didn't save a

single Jew." Poetry can happen because of an external pressure like Hitler, or an internal one like a new or a lost friend, and perhaps it is of mild marginal interest to know a little about these.

Auden was, besides being the dominant poet of his generation, a professional teacher, essayist, reviewer, librettist, translator, and raconteur. Much of the sane, civilized, literate tone of his poetry is to be found in his essays and occasional pieces, and Carpenter firmly blocks in the likable, ruffled, egocentric, queenish figure who produced them. To know something of the heights and depths of the central love in Auden's life for Chester Kallman adds something valuable, not indispensable, to our enjoyment of the writing, to plumb the warm friendships Auden had (some sexual, some not) with men (Isherwood, Stravinsky, James Stern, Spender, Kallman) and women (Erika Mann his wife, Rhoda Jaffe, Elizabeth Mayer, Gypsy Rose Lee, Ursula Niebuhr) lets us in, perhaps, on a few of the minor secrets of the work. All this Carpenter furnishes, plainly, uncensoriously, unhagiographically.

The minor tics are fitted into place too, if they matter: the personal tastes in

the other arts, the other writers. Auden worshipped that queen of arts, opera, and wrote several for Stravinsky, Henze, and Nicolas Nabokov. He considered ballet, quite rightly, to be a thoroughly minor pastime, though he wrote a few of those too. He idolized Tolkien's dreary *Lord of the Rings*, thrillers, Icelandic sagas, lead mines, and limestone, and he never peed in a lavatory if a sink should happen to be handy. He was generous to other poets, and by and large abstained from definitive castigation of those he could not like. He was not good at hygiene, dress, or exercise, but was an absolute stickler for punctuality, manners, and financial probity. This, in effect, is the sort of thing that Carpenter lets us know.

But he gives us, too, the poetry, bright product of the manure in which it blew, and a sense of the far-reaching influence on the young that Auden once so potently exercised. One of Carpenter's saddest pictures, among not a few poignant images, is Auden in his last year sitting alone in an Oxford coffee-house waiting for the new poets to come and hear him, to learn what he, the indisputable master technician, had to tell them. In the '70s, the trendy young poets did not want to hear, as Auden himself had disdained to

hear the old relics in the '20s.

Just about every one of Carpenter's reviewers has turned his piece into an "I remember Auden when . . ." maunder. I think of 15 years before that sad last year, 20 or more now, when, as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, Wystan Auden held thronged court in the old Cadena Café, like him now gone, and the young men reeled away as if they had taken tea (oh, the gallons of that he drank) with some legendary god, verbose, raunchy, bloody-minded, a trifle campy, but a god for all that. The class of '73 blew it.

Humphrey Carpenter has given us lots of the man, and through the man we can still glimpse the god. To our peril we ignore the craftsman, and only to our grievous loss do we consign to oblivion the maker who lived so hard, so excitingly, and so well, and who could leave it like this, all said and all done:

*though one cannot always
Remember exactly why one has been happy
There is no forgetting that one was.* □

REVIEW

Reflections of gilt

By RUPERT SCHIEDER

Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait, by Patrick White, Viking Press (Penguin), 288 pages, \$20.95 cloth (ISBN 0670 317 594).

WHEN PATRICK WHITE'S *Flaws in the Glass* hit Australia last fall it achieved a *succès de scandale*. Many Australians, touchy, defensive where their national image is concerned, thought that their continent and a number of notables — including the Queen and Prince Philip, a Governor General, local politicians, a well-known academic, and their foremost painter — had been savaged mercilessly. Many were offended also that Patrick White, the public figure and winner of international awards, should be so shamelessly frank about his private life. The reactions in England were more temperate. Now that the book has finally reached North America, it should be possible to regard it with equanimity.

I must immediately admit to a bias, for if I were asked to name the contem-

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porary writer of fiction in English who interests me most, I should have no hesitating in replying, Patrick White. I believe, however, that *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait* has a variety of aspects that will interest, concern, and entertain a wide audience here: White the Nobel Prize winner, White the public figure, White the private man, and, obvious from the first page, the book itself as an admirable example of a particular form, an addition to White's distinguished list of novels, short stories, and plays.

Although most of the key people and incidents in White's life are included, the subtitle indicates that this is not a chronologically arranged autobiography or diary or journal kept for oneself. The form is closer to the confession or the apology, written for a public, a kind of self-justification, self-exposure, a defence, and in some parts, an offence or attack. This is a book that White had to write.

The title, indicating the difficulty involved in this genre, derives from a flawed gilt mirror that distorts and fluctuates as Patrick the boy moves: the impossibility of knowing and projecting "the creature I scarcely knew myself" to others. "What to tell and what to leave out while conveying the truth remains a great question. . . the details that make or mar a portrait." The self-portrait is made up of a number of different colours and strokes, mingled, conflicting, foreground, middle ground, and background, arranged in three main blocks: "Flaws in the Glass," "Journeys," and the briefer, ominously labelled, "Episodes and Epitaphs."

Typical of White and this genre, the published works do not occupy the foreground. (White leaves the mutilation and misreading to critics and academics whom he despises and avoids. Mutual friends suggested that I call on him in Sydney; I decided to spare him and myself that process.) All the novels, collections of short stories, and plays are mentioned in the first section, almost in passing. He does list his "three best" (a judgement that may surprise some White readers): *The Solid Mandala*, *The Aunt's Story*, and *The Twyborn Affair*, adding a barb at "what is sacred to Aust.Lit." The other works are mentioned not for their own sakes — for this is not a literary portrait or an artistic credo — but in connection with the figures and incidents that prompted them. Since it is a self-portrait and since White's *raison d'être* is writing, the foreground is dominated by White the man-writer, Siamese inseparables.

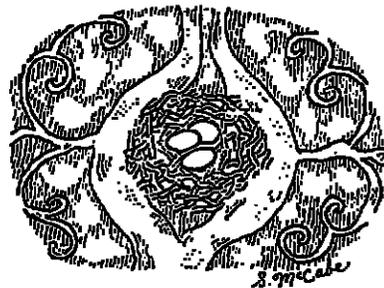
Not pretending to be modest, White says: "My work as a writer has always

been what I understood as an offering in absence of other gifts." If he is brutal with some others, he never spares himself. Hating his appearance as a timid, introspective, hypersensitive boy, at home nowhere, he felt the need to "escape his own reflection in the glass." Half a century later he sees himself as vain, prickly, unforgiving, bitter, jealous, violent, a slasher and a destroyer. Treating White the man, his stress is constantly on the "flaws," the negative. When he shifts his emphasis to White the writer, the positive emerges. The connecting tissue is stated directly. "Doomed to become an artist. . . sexual ambivalence helped drive me in on myself. . . I chose fiction, or more likely it was chosen for me, as a means of introducing to a disbelieving audience the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed."

He claims: "As an artist, my face is many-faceted, my body protean . . . ambivalence has given me insights into human nature, denied, I believe, to those who are unequivocally male or female."

Writing he also sees as a "mask," a "shield," particularly in Australia, a "hostile land," an "escape," but significantly an escape "into a more vital world." The actual process of delivering the "resistant novels" is cruel; for the work inside him is like "a calf twisted in a cow's womb." "The price the novelist pays for living so many lives in one body" is high. Fortunately, White believes he has achieved what he most hoped for, not "worldly success," but "a lasting relationship with a human being I can respect and trust."

The second section, "Journeys," containing some of the sharpest material I have read on the traveller's Greece — to be read after travelling — serves the formal unity of the book, for it is not a travelogue. He uses his reactions to Greece and Greeks to "add to this self-



portrait that I have undertaken." He never really leaves "home" — not that he has been at home anywhere — for his love-hate relation with Greece and Greeks is continually related to that with Australia and Australians.

It is easy to see why the book offended

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some of his countrymen. The unflattering comments splattered across the pages of the first two sections become the centre of "Episodes and Epitaphs," the shortest, most acid, most topical, and yet most personal section. Targets that have been general become specific — unfortunately, in the case of his friend Sidney Nolan and his wife — but as White says of the job at hand: "It had to be done." The section is worth having if only for examples of the verbal felicity evident in all his work, the ability to impale a subject or person with a phrase:

"the perfection of the *unctuous* flesh of Fort Lauderdale avocados"; the Queen "piping in her high-pitched, cold, *china* voice"; Prince Philip as "a Glucksburg bully apeing the English in his tweedy hacking jacket"; and John Kerr, the Governor General, as "an amiable, rorty old, farting Falstaff." It is to the first two sections that I'll need to keep returning, for I think this self-portrait will need no sequel. I can't be sure. White says: "At the age of 69 I am still embarking on voyages of exploration which... may lead to discovery." □

INTERVIEW

Antonine Maillet charts the long journey
that transformed the Acadians from
a people in exile into a cultural asset

By DORIS COWAN

ANTONINE MAILLET was born in 1929 in Bonctouche, N.B., "one of the ancient villages of the Acadians," whose history and culture provide the basis for much of her writing. Her first novel was published in 1958, and since then she has written short stories, seven more novels, and 10 plays. Her most famous *théâtre*, the one-woman show *La Sagouine*, has been performed with great success in both English and French. She has received many literary prizes, including the 1979 Prix Goncourt for her novel, *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, which has recently been published in translation by Doubleday (see page 17). During a visit to Toronto she talked to Doris Cowan about her life and work:

Books in Canada: When you began writing, did you think you would be writing for your own people, for Acadians, in the Acadian language?

Maillet: I think I had that at least in my unconscious. It wasn't clear. When I wrote my first book, I was trying to be as universal as possible. That's the worst thing to do. I was trying to write in a very neutral, classical French. Of course, I didn't succeed, happily, because if I had, the book would have had no character at all. But *Pointe-aux-Coques*, in spite of me, is an Acadian book. I used Acadian material — the story is based on a fishermen's village near Bonctouche — but I was trying to use the techniques and structures and language

of the great writers. One day I was fed up, and I thought, I'm going to write in my own way with my own language, with what I hear around me. That was such a step that I thought, I'll write it just for me — nobody will hear of it because nobody would accept it. So I wrote a play, and the first word is a



PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY DUBOIS

swearing — it means God-dash-to-hell — and if you begin a play with a word like that, OK, you're free, you can go on. From then on, I knew it could be done. I could write in Acadian French. **BIC:** Can it be translated?

Maillet: Everything can be translated. If we can translate Shakespeare, then anything can be translated. You lose, but it's still beautiful. *Pélagie* was translated beautifully. Not being English, I can see the rhythm and the spirit in it, and it's

very faithful to the French. Of course, there's no English equivalent for Acadian French. You would have to go to Chaucer, and yet you couldn't do that either, because there's no such thing as a Chaucerian spoken English, and Acadian French is a live language.

EC: *What has the reaction to Pélagie-la-Charrette been like among the Acadians?*

Maillet: They feel it's so theirs and so true that they want to know, Why didn't you mention so-and-so? They question me, Why wasn't my grandfather there? What about the Babineaus, the Goguens? Every family wants to be in it.

EC: *In Pélagie the narrator claims descent from Bélonie, the old story-teller who comes back with the cart. Is the narrator you?*

Maillet: Yes, the narrator is me. There's no Bélonie in the Maillet lineage really, but I wanted to be part of the story-tellers, rather than the leaders. Acadians are either the Pélagie type, or the Bélonie type: the active, or the meditative.

EC: *What about Pierre-à-Pierre-à-Pitre?*

Maillet: That's another Acadian type, the real clowns. In my family we have all that. The Maillets are the thinking people, the wise ones, the Bélonies. The Cormiers, my mother's family, are the fun-makers. And on my grandmother's side I come from the Goguens, they're the Pélagies, the tough ones, the leaders.

EC: *In Pélagie-la-Charrette the women are the leaders, the strong ones. Is this because, historically, the men were killed in the Expulsion, or is it just that the women are stronger?*

Maillet: Those are two reasons. It's true that the Acadian women are stronger than the men. It's true today. The leaders of Acadie are still women. And the subject of *Pélagie*, the rebirth of a nation — well, who gives birth? It had to be a woman that would take that people back to the land. Also, another reason, and this is a little bit *osé*, a bit daring or radical. I think that nations have sex, that there are male people and female people, like the animus and the anima, and their virtues are male or female ones. Patience would be more on the female side, but a certain kind of strength, a courage that is exterior, that could be more on the male side. Acadie is female, its virtues are all on the side of patience, a sense of time, some kind of interiority, more *viscérale* than *cérébrale*. Its reasoning comes from instinct, not at all from logic, from the *cartésien*, like the French. Pélagie, the symbol of Acadie, is a woman. Even the word, *l'Acadie*, is the feminine gender. *Le Québec* and *le Canada* are masculine

and it doesn't at all surprise me. Québec is a male country. Of course, we are descended from the same people as the Québécois but in three centuries you develop a different mentality. Québeckers are more direct. When we make fun of them, they don't notice it. When they make fun of us, it's obvious. They are the wolves, we are the foxes. History has decided that. They have teeth to bite. They're strong. We're not.

BIC: *Is it an Acadian custom for the women to pass a given name down from mother to daughter, creating a female line of descent?*

Maillet: I don't know whether it's a tradition, but I know that it has been done. I more or less developed it. Sometimes I start with a little thing, and I make it a big thing. Not sometimes, *all* the time.

BIC: *Pélagie is dedicated to your mother, Virginie Cormier, and in the novel, as the returning Acadians pass through Virginia, a baby girl is born and named Virginie Cormier, first of the name. Was she your direct ancestor?*

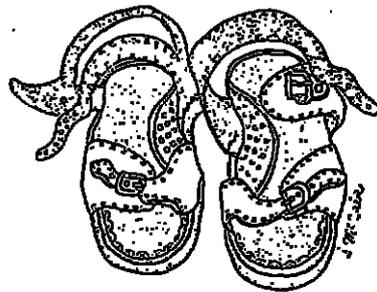
Maillet: When I was a kid I asked my mother, How come you have the name of a state? Probably she joked, and said, Well, I probably had an ancestor that was born there during the Expulsion. She didn't really know that. But in honour of my mother I made up the story of Virginie Cormier.

BIC: *How much of Pélagie is invented? The black man, for example, who was renamed Théotiste, was he a real character?*

Maillet: He's an invented character. But there were Negroes who mixed up with the Acadians and came back with them to Nova Scotia.

BIC: *And the story of the Charleston Jail?*

Maillet: Is invented, by me or by Bélonie. But when I say it's invented, there again, I know that some Acadians went to prison. The only character I didn't invent is Beausoleil, and he's the only one that looks invented. He came to me through the legend, so the presentation I got of him was unreal, but I didn't want to touch it. It was too beautiful. When I invent a character, I wouldn't want to invent one that was so unreal. I'm trying to be true to life.



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BiC: *So Pélagie is not a legendary heroine?*

Maillet: No, she's not legendary, and she's not a heroine at all. When she starts, she's just taking her family home, that's all. Her heroism is built up during 10 years. She ends as a heroine but she is not conscious of it. She is the anti-hero. She's not Joan of Arc. The Acadians' way of being heroic is not *grandiloquent*, it wouldn't fit their mentality. But when Pélagie chooses to take the people back instead of going with Beausoleil, that's heroic, because she loves him. And when she dies, she has the vision of what she did, and knows what she has done, but just at the end.

And it's funny, usually I write with a very alert style, but I couldn't manage that in *Pélagie*, and I finally understood that it was because the oxen had a low pace. I was doing everything along with Pélagie, I felt the same way she did, and I couldn't follow oxen and be alert. So the style was *plus lourd*, heavy. I felt it. I couldn't help it. I knew it was going to take 10 years, so I had a long breath.

BiC: *This is really the history of your people, or a large part of their history. Did you feel that responsibility during the writing of it?*

Maillet: Yes. Well, I didn't know when I was writing it how far it would go. I wasn't trying to be the *parole* of my country, or anything like that. But I knew that this story was important and that once it's written it can't be written twice. Yes. I felt that.

BiC: *Have you ever written anything before that was as directly about Acadian history?*

Maillet: Not as far back. And when I started to write I didn't intend to go so far back. I started to write about 1880, when the Acadians who had been in hiding came out. After 30 pages I realized I had to go back to give the background of the 1880 story, and I decided to make a chapter with the story of Pélagie. So I rewrote the first 30 pages, and when I got to that damn 30th page — that kind of loose plank — I thought again, This is not it. I have to go back and write the whole story of Pélagie. So I set aside the story of 1880 and said, that will be my next book.

BiC: *And that was Cent ans dans les bois?*

Maillet: Yes. It's just been published in French in Montreal and it will come out in Paris in May as *La Gribouille*. The French chose the other title because they don't understand what it means, to be in the woods, in the bush. We have woods here; they don't.

BiC: *Acadians are now spread through New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Do they still*

think of themselves as Acadie?

Maillet: Yes, and that's funny. One day the students at the universities decided that was all old-fashioned patriotism, Evangeline, and all of that. From now on, they decided, we're francophones of the Maritimes. The very day they decided that, Acadie was born. The next day, everybody was Acadian.

Since the 1970s, when Pierre Perreault made the film *Acadie, Acadie*, and *La Sagouine* was performed, and Edith Butler began to sing, there has been a revival. Acadie officially doesn't exist, but even in Ottawa now some members of parliament call themselves *acadien*. You could not have imagined that 20 years ago. Even Trudeau will say Acadie instead of Nouveau-Brunswick, when he means the French-speaking part.

BiC: *Is the Acadian language being preserved?*

Maillet: It used to be preserved by the very fact of the way of living. To my

father and mother, the Acadian language was spoken in real life, as it is still in the rural parts of Acadia and within a certain generation. But in schools and in the literature it's become some kind of a *chic* to speak *acadien*. So there is a revival that is a little artificial, let's say. But it's become a cultural asset. I just heard that in Paris. *C'est chic d'être acadien maintenant*. It sounds funny because we felt so inferior up to now and suddenly it's *stylish*.

BiC: *What is the French attitude to literature in French from outside the country?*

Maillet: Now it's changing, and the Goncourt was a big part of that. It's the first time in the Goncourt history not only that the award was given outside of Europe, but that they would accept to give it to a book written in another French than authentic Parisian. That was a law, an unwritten but traditional rule, and I've overruled the rule. □

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Crimes of fashion: the perfidies of ad writers, the 1925 Ontario high school grammar, and other language bashers

By BOB BLACKBURN

ONE OF THE BEST and most enduring advertising slogans ever devised was RCA Victor's "The music you want when you want it." Terse, yet euphonious, it delivered its persuasive message effectively and grammatically, and, evidently, sold many phonograph records. When RCA introduced its new videodisc players, therefore, one might reasonably have expected to see "The movies you want when you want them." But what did their advertising geniuses come up with? "Watch what you want when you want," that's what. It may be alliterative, but it is also solecistic, and thus is without charm.

There is reason to be angry about this. Most of the offences dealt with in this column are the result of carelessness or ignorance, but the advertising writers employed by big companies are very smart cookies, and you can be certain when you see the language being savaged by them that they know exactly what they're doing. From the days of "Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should" to today's "more cheesier" commercial from Kraft, these people have been

degrading English with total disregard for the terrible consequences.

There is no shortage of examples of these crimes. Some years ago, as a daily newspaper columnist, I started a practice of devoting a paragraph a day to such horrors. I had no trouble finding examples, and could have kept it up forever, had I not been muzzled by a publisher who felt, perhaps not without reason, that things were tough enough in the business without gratuitously criticizing the people who pay the freight.

An anonymous reader recently sent me a clipping from the *Hamilton Spectator* of an ad for "a service being *trialed* by Bell Canada." I would welcome (and print) similar submissions, including the name of the advertiser, from readers.

ANOTHER READER, Mrs. Honor Buttars of Gore's Landing, Ont., writes that her 1925 Ontario high school grammar says that "each other is always used with reference to two, and one another is used with reference to more than two," and she asks if this rule has been dis-

carded. I don't believe it ever *was* a rule, except in the mind of the author of that book, who should have written "sometimes" instead of "always." Says Fowler: "This differentiation is neither of present utility nor based on historical usage." And so another schoolteachers' superstition bites the dust. One wonders if Matthew Arnold, had he been educated in Ontario, would have written (in "Dover Beach"), "Ah, love, let us be true / To each other!" and thereby spoiled his metre.

AS JOHNNY CARSON SAYS, let's see what's in the news. It seems that a recent General Motors layoff was suspected of being "in retaliation for the union's refusal to *accept* wage concessions." Perhaps the union refused to accept a proposal that it *make* concessions. It is, of course, possible to refuse to accept a concession, but it required an examination of the context in this case to understand that the writer was not saying what he meant.

Bashing is enjoying a vogue in journalism these days, as in gay-bashing, cop-bashing, tenant-bashing. It's a colourful colloquialism, and I have no objection to its use in the popular press. But when a political reporter referred to federal-bashing, he was language-bashing. The term calls for a noun; federal is an adjective (although Federal does have a very limited use as a noun). If the writer wanted to be properly slangy, he should have said *fed-bashing*. Perhaps he felt that would be undignified.

We were told of a "contentious debate" in Parliament. I don't know of any other kind. Another reporter said that "the prime minister had no reaction." He may not have exhibited one, but surely it is a bit presumptuous of the reporter to say that he had none.

When the Tories ended their boycott of Parliament in March, we were told that the next step was "to cut the energy bill down to mutually digestible chunks." That would mean that the chunks could digest each other. There is no saving that sentence. The man who wrote it should be sent out to a bread-and-water dinner with the police reporter who wrote "So far, any leads have come up empty."

THIS COLUMN RECENTLY dealt with the unavowry but permissible use of *loan* for *lend*. I wouldn't have believed then that this month I would be reporting that the Toronto *Sun* has decided not only that *loan* is a verb, but also that it means *borrow*. That may seem incredible, but I have the clipping: "Loan an engraver from your local police station," advises an article on household

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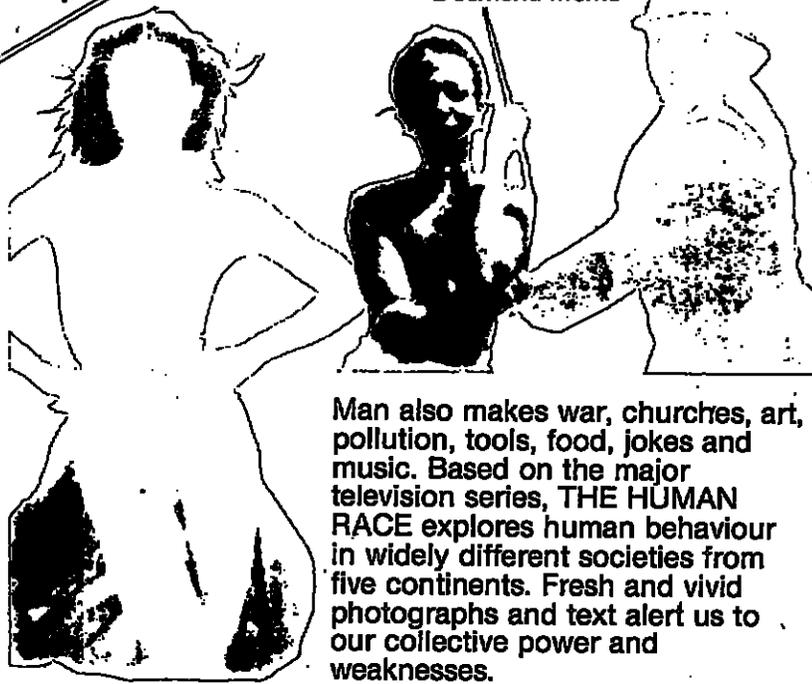


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METHUEN

security precautions. And after you've done that, you'd better loan a dictionary from your local borrowing library.

A READER HAS asked whether he should use *toward* or *towards* (as a preposition). You can suit yourself. I lean toward *toward*. The *s* serves no pur-

pose. Fowler warns that using *toward* could make you vulnerable to a charge of putting on airs. I'm willing to risk that. *Towards* is the more widely used form, and it's perfectly acceptable, but most dictionaries define *towards* as *toward*, rather than the other way around. □

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Experimental fiction: three challenges to the printed page, from the dance of the bees to an elliptical novel within a novel

By DOUGLAS HILL

AFTER A LONG dry spell, three openly experimental first novels this month — avant-garde not so much in ideas, though they can be that, too, as in the challenges they offer to the limitations of the printed page. Their inventiveness appears in features of design, typography, and prose style. All are successful, avoid sterility, and on the whole argue persuasively for their unconventionality.

A MILDLY PUZZLED commentator on events in *The Bee Book*, by Ann Rosenberg (Coach House Press, 208 pages, \$7.50 paper), observes: "it is clear that there are analogies to be drawn between the life cycles of the bees, the substances they produce and human affairs." Indeed — and as Rosenberg would have it, human *sexual* affairs pre-eminently. This novel is a brilliant structure of verbal and graphic effects — dialogue and diagram, letters and lists, drawings, typefaces, concrete poetry, photographs — all to illuminate the power and mystery of (chiefly female) sexuality, all thoroughly enjoyable.

The book is intricately organized, with chapters that parallel the rituals of hive-life. Concerned with the biography of Habella Cire, herself a student of the bee, it delivers a wealth of miscellaneous lore, funny and moving scenes, acerbic and tender portraits. There are some quite amazing probes at the nature of girlhood, courtship and marriage, motherhood. The plot is slight and improbable, but it never gets in the way of the fun or the pain.

Another narrator — the main one, Matthias Harp, Arabella's thesis-partner

and confidant — remarks on their "pursuit of the exquisite (not the precious) and the witty (if possible)." Most of the time the novel attains those goals. Not every page lives up to the expectations the best will raise; not every conceit escapes affectation. These are minor reservations. *The Bee Book* integrates its materials, makes a self-justifying context of them. It dances, hums.

ANOTHER FROM Coach House, where the quality of the product — the book itself — still seems to count for something. Reading *Blue*, by Geraldine Rahmani (176 pages, \$6.95 paper) is an intense, suggestive experience, though it's not an extended one.

The principal novelty — and difficulty — this book offers is its narrative structure on the page. There are three speakers — Maggie, her brother Danny, a painter named Michael. The book is divided into three parts (two speakers in the first two, three in the third), each with five chapters. Each speaker is assigned a horizontal one-half or one-third of the page (he or she may use it for a word, a phrase, a paragraph), and keeps it for all the pages in the part. The two — or three — narratives treat roughly the same events.

It's possible, then, to read across the top half, or third (or middle or bottom segment), of two or more pages, following the reasonably linear (though sometimes tortuous) flow of a single narrative. Or one can read each separate page from top to bottom and observe complementary but often conflicting points of view. It's up to the individual reader to devise and test his strategies, or at least

to consider how, and to what degree, he's become involved in the structure, been manipulated by it. It's fun. Rather like watching a Michael Snow movie — *Wavelength*, say.

The narratives touch on vision and hallucination, dream and nightmare, madness and aberrant behaviour. There's a plot, involving a funeral, a love-affair, a quest for "blue," another death. There's a good deal of deliberate mystification, too, but it seems apt for the creation of mood, which the novel certainly manages.

Rahmani's prose is chiselled, quite self-consciously crafted, poetic. There's a fine control of imagery — most of it visual — effective in part because of the fevered, strung-out narrators who are defined by it.

Blue will strike some readers as perhaps too studied, too much an exercise, a *tour de force*. There's a certain artificiality, to be sure — a touch of pretentiousness, a hot-house unnaturalness of hue and scent. But I think this is only to be expected, and may be allowed, in a book so tight, so "written." There don't seem to be many like this around.

THAT'S WHAT I thought until I struck *Dead Ends*, by Keith Harrison (Quadrant Editions, 135 pages, \$6.95 paper). In its elliptical, associative density it makes *Blue* look like *War and Peace*. The prose here is stripped down to essentials; it winds upon itself in knots and tangles of puns, images, clues, fragments.

This is a novel wrapped around another novel; it presents a writer at work. What she's writing — the core-novel — is a fairly straightforward but exceedingly murky thriller, set in Vancouver. These are the parts of the book with the most taxing, allusive language. This plot hinges on a matter of industrial espionage. The hero, Danforth/Black, is a disturbed Vietnam veteran with crises of identity far more serious than the imposture he's trying to pull off. As the author puts it (referring to his life as well as his mission), he can't "figure out the boundaries of the problem, let alone a solution."

"The author" is a young Jewish woman from Montreal, Jessica Trudel. Chapters tell of her progress with the novel; her father's dying, her failing marriage. Her own story mirrors, with considerable complexity, the one she's trying to tell: "The mess of other lives, the ones I'm paid to recreate, those I long to create, and the one I've pro-created, exhausts, mixes up my own."

If *Dead Ends* has a serious flaw, for me it's a tendency to preachiness about cultural and political matters (problems in Quebec, American ownership of

Canada). These are the only places where I thought the prose went flat. Other than that, Harrison maintains a level of insight and tension — about contradictions of living and writing, about some of the forms that domination can take — that's constantly high, demanding, rewarding.

A POSTSCRIPT: The formal experiments

in these three books are stimulating, occasionally exhilarating. The human lives they present are almost without exception seriously depressed and depressing. The characters are mired in being, tortured by it; the emotional needle of their days wavers between despondency and suicide, never swings above anxiety. Is this a paradox? If it is, should it be surprising? □

IN TRANSLATION

If the artificial ideas of Elias Canetti get you down, why feel guilty? Perhaps it's time to curl up with a little Simenon

By PAUL STUEWE

IT'S PROBABLY NO accident that the Canadian publishers with the strongest literature-in-translation programs also have well-defined corporate images. Lester & Orpen Dennys, whose handling of its International Fiction List is an object lesson in how to aggressively market worthwhile books, presents a brashly confident face to the world. And Oberon Press, whose English-language editions of contemporary Quebec writing are an important contribution to Canadian letters, relies upon elegantly designed understatement in offering us a large and almost uniformly distinguished catalogue. Although they project very different personalities, both firms stand out in a publishing world characterized by increasing homogeneity and timidity, and their most recent releases suggest that this tradition will continue.

The new additions to Lester & Orpen Dennys's list are Manuel Mujica Lainez's *The Wandering Unicorn* (translated by Mary Fitton, \$16.95 cloth) and Aharon Appelfeld's *The Age of Wonders* (translated by Dalya Bilu, \$15.95 cloth). Mujica Lainez is a highly respected Argentinian writer — the book comes with an endorsement by Borges — and his *Bomarzo* is a brilliant historical novel that inspired a fine operatic treatment by Alberto Ginastera. *The Wandering Unicorn* is a myth-based fantasy of picaresque adventure in medieval Europe, and it is simply delightful: complexly delightful, actually, given the detailed tapestry of love, enchantment, and chivalric valour the author has so beautifully woven

around the figure of the serpent-woman Melusine. I particularly enjoyed the tone of the narration, which manages to be simultaneously chatty, suggestive, and gnomic in a way that very few writers — Borges of course among them — can consistently control. It's a marvellous piece of work, and just the thing for anyone who finds Tolkien entertaining but less than adept at the delineation of character.

Aharon Appelfeld is an Israeli novelist and short-story writer who has also achieved a substantial international reputation, but *The Age of Wonders* doesn't quite succeed in creating a credible fictional representation of a Jewish family's misfortunes in pre-war Austria. The novel is narrated by a 10-year-old boy who nonetheless expresses himself in the language of a 40-year-old intellectual, and Appelfeld compounds this very basic disjunction by limiting the boy's understanding of events to a degree commensurate with his age. The result is a text that reads like a childish 40-year-old intellectual's account of his youth, and it just doesn't work. The experiences of persecution and the discovery of evil that are being dealt with here are clearly important to the author, and there are times when the tragic forcefulness of his story silences any critical objections; but this mood is always destroyed by the unsettling narrative point of view. As a result one can never relax and enjoy the positive qualities of *The Age of Wonders*.

The latest in Oberon's Quebec literature series is Gilbert Choquette's *Wednesday's Child* (translated by David

Lobdell, \$17.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper), a spare, rigorously controlled novel of a young man's frustrated idealism that makes effective use of implicit tensions between its method and its material. The book can be superficially read as the standard romantic melodrama of a sensitive soul's destruction by a crass society, but the protagonist's awareness that he in a sense *deserves* — in a complex and almost fatalistic manner — what happens to him supplies an enriching substratum of meaning that lifts it far above the conventional. *Wednesday's Child* is a very accomplished novel, which among other things demonstrates that a talented writer can spin satisfying new variations on even the most familiar themes. It's a fine addition to a noteworthy publishing project.

Elias Canetti was if anything an even obscurer recipient of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Literature than had been 1980 winner Czeslaw Milosz, and since I had at least heard of Canetti I was all set to impress my friends with my profound knowledge of his work — as soon as I could read the expected new editions, that is. *Auto-Da-Fé* (translated by C.V. Wedgwood, Clarke Irwin, \$27.95 cloth), a 1935 novel generally considered his major literary achievement, is now back in print, and I must say that I'm not particularly impressed. This is a novel of ideas that can't be bothered with conforming to the convention that ideas require the existence of reasonably believable fictional characters to express them. Even though they are often very stimulating and compelling ideas, they're presented in such a contextual vacuum that their fundamental artificiality is heavily underlined. The other major work of Canetti's career, the psychological study *Crowds and Power*, may well be a more straightforward exposition of his thought, but in any event *Auto-Da-Fé* can be recommended only to those who view the novel as a mere theatrical backdrop for abstract intellectual speculation.

It may well appear downright blasphemous to offer Georges Simenon, a French author who is popular, prolific and — shudder — a frequent composer of mystery stories, as an example of more sophisticated literary technique, but this seems to me to be the case. Simenon's "straight" novels, such as *Big Bob* (translated by Eileen M. Lowe, Academic Press, \$15.50 cloth), are usually intense explorations of the psychological ramifications of a single crucial event in the protagonist's past, and they succeed precisely because they take a manageable amount of material and develop it thoroughly. Here it is the inexplicable suicide of the title character

that sets off a series of existential crises in the lives of his friends and relatives, a chain of events capped by the narrator's realization that suicide is the logical culmination of an essentially meaningless existence. It is simple, inexorable and profoundly disturbing, and it's difficult to see how it could be bettered.

Simonson's Maigret novels are cosier and more formulaic, but here too reality keeps breaking in upon the famous superintendent of the Paris police. In *Maigret on the Defensive* (translated by Alastair Hamilton, Academic Press,

\$14.50 cloth) a young woman charges him with sexual harassment, and before Maigret clears himself he has been brushed by the same web of circumstantial evidence and equivocal testimony that has entangled the innocent in several of his previous cases. It's one of the most satisfying of a generally excellent series of police procedurals, and if you ever feel that you're being culturally manipulated into reading *Auto-Da-Fé* or some other overnight sensation, take two Maigrets with a glass of white wine and go straight to bed. □

THE BROWSER

The view from the funhouse: a consideration of Canada's place in the history of the world and the contribution of women to hysteria on the tube

By MORRIS WOLFE

IMPOSSIBLE AN ASSIGNMENT though it is, *someone* has to attempt, every couple of generations or so, to write a history of the world with the general reader in mind. The last person to do so in English was H.G. Wells, whose *Outline of History* was published in 1920. Now we have *The Pelican History of the World* by J.M. Roberts (Penguin, 1052 pages, \$9.95 paper). Roberts, a professional historian, has written a book that is a joy both to read and to browse in. As might be expected, Canada gets but fleeting attention in this bird's-eye view of human history. We're settled by the French on page 617, conquered by the British on page 619, become a Dominion on 754, settle the west on 758, and join NATO on 946. That's it. But if it's any consolation, many events — Watergate, for example — aren't regarded as important enough to make it into Roberts. There are a couple of interesting differences between Wells and Roberts. At the end of his book, for example, Wells is optimistic, arguing that "clumsily or smoothly, the world . . . progresses and will progress"; Roberts is far less sanguine. For Wells, history is the story of great men; for Roberts it is as much the story of ordinary people. When Roberts asks himself at the end of his book what he's learned from his study of history, he offers a Zen-like reply: "Only two general truths emerge . . . One is that things tend to change much more, and more quickly, than one might

think. The other is that they tend to change much less, and much more slowly, than one might think."

"THE CENTRAL FACT of North American history," writes June Callwood in *Portrait of Canada*, "is that there were fifteen British colonies before 1776. Thirteen rebelled and two did not." Their "great refusal" (as Frank Underhill termed it) has been crucial in shaping Canada's cultural and economic life. Herschel Hardin, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, Margaret Atwood, and Northrop Frye have all explored some of the implications of that refusal. Dennis Duffy's *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario* (University of Toronto Press, 160 pages, \$25.00 cloth, \$10.00 paper) is a significant addition to that body of writing. Duffy looks at the writing of William Kirby, Major Richardson, Charles Mair, Mazo de la Roche, George Grant, Dennis Lee, Al Purdy, and Scott Symons. I wish he'd commented on what connections, if any, he sees between his work and Frye's.

ALSO FROM University of Toronto Press comes *Letters in Canada 1900* edited by W.J. Keith and B.-Z. Shek (245 pages, \$25.00 cloth, \$7.50 paper). "Letters in Canada," a review of the previous year's books, used to be published only as part of the summer issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. Beginning this year

it's also being published as a book, which means that now many of us won't bother looking at *UTQ* at all. It's far too specialized a periodical for the general reader. On the other hand, I wouldn't want to miss a single copy of *Queen's Quarterly* (\$12.00 a year, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6). The Winter 1981 issue of *QQ*, for example, contains a provocative essay, "Lost in the Canadian Funhouse," by Stan Fogel, a teacher at the University of Waterloo. Fogel is an unabashed post-modernist who worries that Canadian writing and criticism have been insufficiently affected by Lévi-Strauss and the structuralists. The result is that we have fallen behind the Americans. "For too long," Fogel writes, "Canadian literature and criticism have been Fryed — what is needed is a better balance of *le cru et le cuit*, the raw and the cooked." The reason Canada hasn't yet produced a John Barth, Fogel says, is that "the context within which the avant-garde can flourish is absent."

Public Corporations and Public Policy in Canada, edited by Allan Tupper and G. Bruce Doern (The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2149 Mackay Street, Montreal, H3G 2J2, 398 pages, unpriced, paper). Public enterprise has played a crucial role in Canada's development. We've been forced to choose, over and over again, as Graham Spry put it, between "the state and the United States." That choice continues to be made: almost three-quarters of our crown corporations were formed in just the past two decades. A number of these new crown corporations are involved in resource and manufacturing sectors of the economy where government previously had no direct role. This book presents case studies of 10 public corporations — including Petro-Canada, the Atomic Energy Commission, the CNR, and the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan — and offers some generalizations about their implications for public policy. Not a great read but a useful book.

THE BACKGROUND PAPERS of some Royal Commissions are far more interesting than their actual final reports. That was true, I think, in the case of Judy LaMarsh's Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry. The reverse is true of Tom Kent's Royal Commission on Newspapers. *Its* final report is much more than the sum of its research parts. I've now spent some time browsing through the first seven volumes of studies commissioned by Kent — *Newspapers and their Readers*, *Newspapers and the Law*, *The News-*

paper and Public Affairs, etc. — and I recommend them to anyone for whom all else has failed as a soporific.

Advertising in Canada: Its Theory and Practice, edited by Peter Zarry and Robert Wilson (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 450 pages, \$35.00 cloth). Although the Association of Canadian Advertisers has been in existence since 1914, it's only now put together the first *Canadian* textbook on the subject (previous texts were American). I turned to this book expecting to learn about some of the differences between Canadians and Americans as perceived by advertisers. The Foreword states "that Canadians are very different in some very obvious and some very subtle ways. Not only do we have a deliberately bilingual and multicultural society and economy, but we also have habits, manners, and traditions that vary greatly from those in the U.S." But that's it. Nowhere in the rest of the book are those differences explored.

Perpetuating Poverty: The Political Economy of Canadian Foreign Aid by Robert Carty and Virginia Smith (Between the Lines, 212 pages, \$8.95 paper). Carty and Smith reject Willy Brandt's *North-South: A Program for Survival*; they view its recommendations as part of the problem. All cases of underdevelopment, they argue, are cases of "underdeveloped — structures, powers and governments" riding the backs of the poor and choking off development possibilities. Canada, it becomes clear, has been as guilty as anyone in this respect. There are no easy solutions, according to Smith and Carty. More aid is in itself *not* the answer. An excellent but depressing book.

Vichy France and the Jews, co-authored by Michael Marrus of the University of Toronto and Robert Paxton of Columbia University (Basic Books, 432 pages, \$27.25 cloth). Paxton and Marrus reveal in meticulous detail the extent to which the French eagerly collaborated with their Nazi occupiers between 1940 and 1944 in carrying out The Final Solution. More than 75,000 Jews were identified, arrested, and transported to their deaths with the help of the Vichy government. There's no way of knowing how many fewer would have died without that help.

IS IT JUST my imagination or are we witnessing a growing backlash against the woman's movement by male journalists in this country? The enormously powerful documentary about pornography, *Not a Love Story*, was dismissed by male reviewers across the country as

strident and a feminist tract. Now we have television columnist Roy Shields of *Starweek Magazine* complaining about the growing number of women journalists on TV. "The trouble with television," he says, "is that it brings out the worst in women. It has something to do with the voice. When women try to engage in a hard-hitting interview they somehow sound hysterical. They always remind me that I haven't taken out the garbage." Question: Should editors let a statement like this go by? Would they let it go by if the word "black" were used instead of the word "women"? □

LETTERS

The German connection

Sir:

I have read your survey on how CanLit fares abroad both with interest and surprise. Taken as a true picture of the foreign response to the literature of your country I would say that the interviews conducted with critics and writers from several countries reveal a bleak situation and hardly justify Ms Wade's introductory remark that "we are, on the whole, doing very well, thank you." This sounds like the famous, or should I say, infamous inferiority complex of Canadians who apparently still practise the Victorian virtue of humility and are happy when foreigners are able to drop the odd name of a Canadian writer.

Speaking of the plight of Canadian literature in Germany I can only say that you are doing much better than the meagre results of the interviews suggest. We have had annual conferences on Canadian Studies since 1977. In November 1979 the first German conference on Canadian literature was held in Bremen. In February 1980 the German Society for Canadian Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien) was founded and has just published the first number of *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien*. Canadian literature is part of the English Studies program at the university of Kiel. We offer at least one Canadian literature course per term. The situation in the English departments of the universities of Cologne, Hamburg, Mainz, Augsburg, and Trier is similar. In Trier Canadian literature is taught by Prof. Walter Pache who has just published his *Einführung in die*

Kanadistik (Introduction to Canadian Literature). We also encourage our students to write examination theses on Canadian topics. So you see that Canadian literature is thriving in Germany.

If your interviewers had consulted the right sources they could have found furthermore that the state of CanLit in Denmark, France, or Italy is very promising. The university of Aarhus (Denmark) specializes in Canadian literature (Prof. Jorn Carlsen). The university of Lyon (France) held a conference on Margaret Laurence in May last year. Issue 87 of *Canadian Literature* contains an article on "Canadian literature in Italy," thus showing evidence of the increasing academic interest in Canadian literature in that country. It remains for me to sum up that all is not yet lost with respect to the plight of Canadian literature in Europe.

Konrad Gross
Kiel, West Germany

Dead reckoning

Sir:

Eleanor Wachtel's article on the Governor General's Awards (March) includes the following interesting statement: "The judges only caught up with Lowry (posthumously) in 1961 for *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*."

This is a remarkable example of fitting the qualifications to the job. Who could be better able to assess such a work than a panel of judges who had gone to their reward?

Ian McCausland
Toronto

Squaring the record

Sir:

Judy Margolis is wrong in her review of Gunther Plaut's *Unfinished Business* (January) when she says: "He might at least have taken advantage of the opportunity an autobiography affords to air differences, to vindicate or if need be to vilify."

Perhaps the juiciest tidbit in the book is Plaut's squaring of the record with Reuben Slonim, Conservative rabbi cum Toronto *Telegram* reporter, whose evenhandedness regarding the Middle East alienated him from many of his Jewish followers. Plaut candidly admits: "I delivered a Friday night lecture which I titled *The Telegram and the Truth*. Before a standing room only congregation I was bitterly critical. Now, many years later, it has become clear that much of what Slonim wrote was quite true; in today's changed climate the substance of his reportage would hardly cause a stir."

Plaut doesn't stop here: "We exiled

one of our ablest people to the periphery of the community. . . the book which Slonim later wrote, *Both Sides Now* was an intelligent restrained critique of Israel."

This apology leads to Plaut's summing up of the quarrel between the Canadian Jewish community and the *United Church Observer* editor, A.C. Forrest. "For Forrest the 1967 war was the watershed. Forrest had written approvingly of Israel in the past but that summer he became highly critical of it." Many of Forrest's anti-Israel editorials are cited. Plaut brings the entire affair brilliantly into focus.

S.L. Drache
Ottawa

CANWIT NO. 73

IN PREPARING their spring list, our old friends at McClark & Newspider must have found last fall's spectacular publishing season a tough act to follow. After so many blockbusters, their latest titles seem a trifle second-rate. For instance, there's a new Morley Callaghan novel, *More Joy in Moose Jaw*, and W.O. Mitchell's *How I Spent Last Tuesday*, not to mention Mordecai Richler's *Joshua Once in a While*. Contestants are invited to submit other book titles that don't quite make it. We'll pay \$25 for the best list received before August 1. Address: CanWit No. 73, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 71

OUR REQUEST for clerihevs brought a landslide of ill-scanning couplets — including, no less, an entry from Mrs. G.E. Clerihew of Vancouver. The winners (who receive a copy of *The Complete Clerihews of E. Clerihew Bentley* and a cheque for \$25) are Janet and Barry Baldwin of Calgary, two frequent CanWit contestants, whose verses offered a combination of irreverence and rhythmic mayhem:

*William Lyon Mackenzie King
Did an unusual thing.
He used a notorious mother fixation
To become the father of his nation.*

*Margaret Trudeau's
Books win no kudos
As art, but about her physical
Charms all Canadian men are now quizzical.*

*Lloyd Axworthy
Should bear in mind that a curvy
Woman nowadays wants*

*You to consider what's in her mind rather
than her pants.*

*Marian Engel
Did something that would have made Casey
Stengel
Tear out his hair
When she got to first base with a bear.*

*Aritha van Herk
Cannot be said to irk
Her readers by repetition. Look how she
segues
From pigs to pegs.*

*René Lévesque
Smokes cigarettes avec
Monumental disdain
Again and again.*

Honourable mentions:

*Northrop Frye,
Here's mud in your eye!
It's been a long, hard road,
But you've finally cracked the Code.*

*L'honorable Marc Lalonde
Ressemble beaucoup à tout le monde,
Sauf qu'il sourit quand il pense
Au prix de l'essence.*

*If Sir William Van Horne
Had never been born,
Who would have had the honour
Of holding the spike for Lord Strathcona?
(Even Pierre Berton
Isn't quite certain,
Nor, if it comes to that,
Was Ned Pratt.)
— J.E. Baxter, Willowdale, Ont.
* * **

*Marilyn Bell
Thought big waves were just swell;
So naturally she found the lake
A piece of cake.*

*Exclaimed Claude Charron:
"Merde alors, bon!
I follow the separatist line —
To steal from the Anglos is jus' dam' fine!*

*Donald Sutherland,
Far from his motherland,
Encountered Jane, who, fond, acute,
Opined, "I really think he's Klute."
— Odyrmar Vingo, Toronto
* * **

*Louis Riel
Was hanged north of Qu'Appelle.
Some say this rebel upstarter
Was really a Metis martyr.
— A. Leonard, Halifax
* * **

*Peter Pocklington
Who lives in Hockeytown
Will never complain
When his star's on the wayne.
— H. Orpen, Powell River, B.C.
* * **

*Charles Ritchie
Is charmingly bitchy,
But at his most emphatic*

Unfailingly diplomatic.

*Donald A. Smith
Is scarcely a name to conjure with.
But his descendants are known as
Lord Strathconas.
— Janice Tyrwhitt, Toronto
* * **

*Pierre Berton
Is never quite certain
Who will edit,
But he takes the credit.
— D.E. Tacium, Montreal
* * **

*'Tis said Barbara Amiel
Can cause men to congeal.
I suspect, in intimate clasp,
She'd poison the asp.*

*Billy Bishop
Little dreamt that they'd fish up
and dish up*

*Various
vicarious
thrills
From his kills.*

*K.C. Irving
Has one tenet unswerving:
If it doesn't make a profit —
Off it!*

*Does Richard Needham
Really expect anyone to heed him
Crying out like Jeremiah or Job
From his little corner of the Globe?
— Marvin Goody, Toronto
* * **

*William Aberhart
Preached a new start.
In the land of milk and honey
He produced his funny money.
— Frank Cummins, Morrin, Alta.
* * **

*Vincent Massey
Wished of all things to be classy.
He waxed quietly frantic
When they called his accent mid-Atlantic.
— Cornelia Schuh, Toronto
* * **

*Farley Mowat
Didn't always know it.
He discovered wolves and whales
And turned them into sales.
— Maralyn Horsdal,
Fulford Harbour, B.C.
* * **

*For Mackenzie King
The occult was the thing.
He asked for canine permission
When making a decision.
— Hendrika Neuberger,
Beloeil, Que.
* * **

*Robertson Davies
Made books his babies
They came out in a string.*

World of Wonders! He made triplets of everything.

— The Room 255 Monday Night
English Class
Clarke Road Secondary School
London, Ont.

THE EDITORS RECOMMEND

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

FICTION

The Almost Meeting and Other Stories, by Henry Kreisel, NeWest Press. Like I.B. Singer and Sholom Aleichem, Kreisel has that European sensibility that lends itself to taking a relatively small encounter and shaping it into a finely crafted story that is rich in humanity.

NON-FICTION

Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier, by Hugh Brody, Douglas & McIntyre. A powerful blend of personalized and social history that adds up to a searing indictment of the way the white man has systematically disinherited Canada's native people.

POETRY

S'ney'mos, by Kevin Roberts, Oolichan Books. A restrained "documentary" treatment of coal mining on Vancouver Island, based on contemporary sources and historical facts, and written in hard, sparse, direct language.

CLASSIFIED

Classified rates: \$8 per line (40 characters to the line). Deadline: first of the month for issue dated following month. Address: Books in Canada Classified, 368 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9. Phone: (416) 363-5426.

OUT-OF-PRINT CANADIANA — history, biography, literature. Books, pamphlets, periodicals. Catalogues free on request. Huronia Canadiana Books, Box 685, Alliston, Ont. L0M 1A0.

OLD AND RARE BOOKS. Canadiana catalogues. Heritage Books, 3438 6 St. S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2S 2M4.

USED CANADIAN BOOKS. Free descriptive catalogues. C & E Books, Box 2744, Stn. B, Kitchener, Ont. N2H 6N3.

BOOKS RECEIVED

THE FOLLOWING Canadian books have been received by *Books in Canada* in recent weeks. Inclusion in this list does not preclude a review or notice in a future issue:

As She Began, by Bruce Wilson, Dundurn Press (1981).
The Anthem Lie, by Sunil Namjoshi, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.
Barbie Allen Dance/Exercise, Personal Library.
Basie Black, by Arthur Black, Penumbra Press (1981).
Beginning Keyboard Harmony, by Caroline Bering, Waterloo Music (1981).
Black Diamonds, by James Houston, M & S.
The Black Queen Stories, by Barry Callaghan, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
The Boy in the Drawer, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick Press.
Breaking Forth, by J. Berkeley Reynolds, G.R. Welch (1981).
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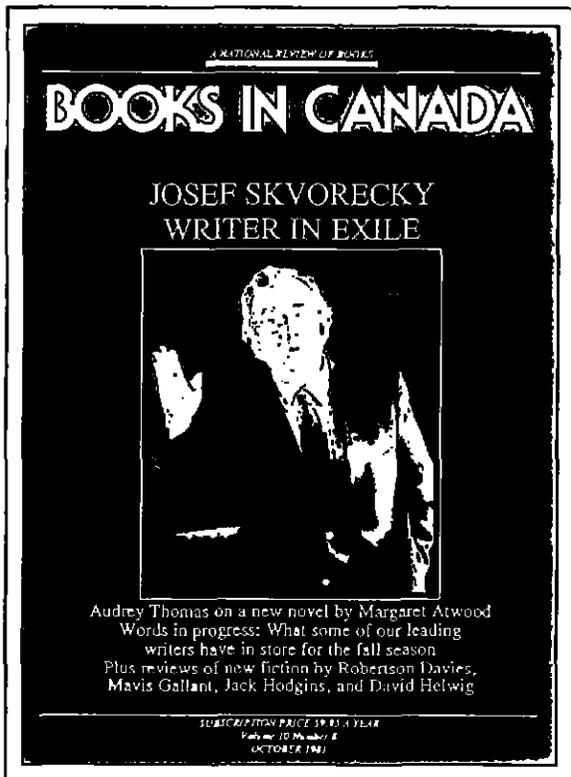
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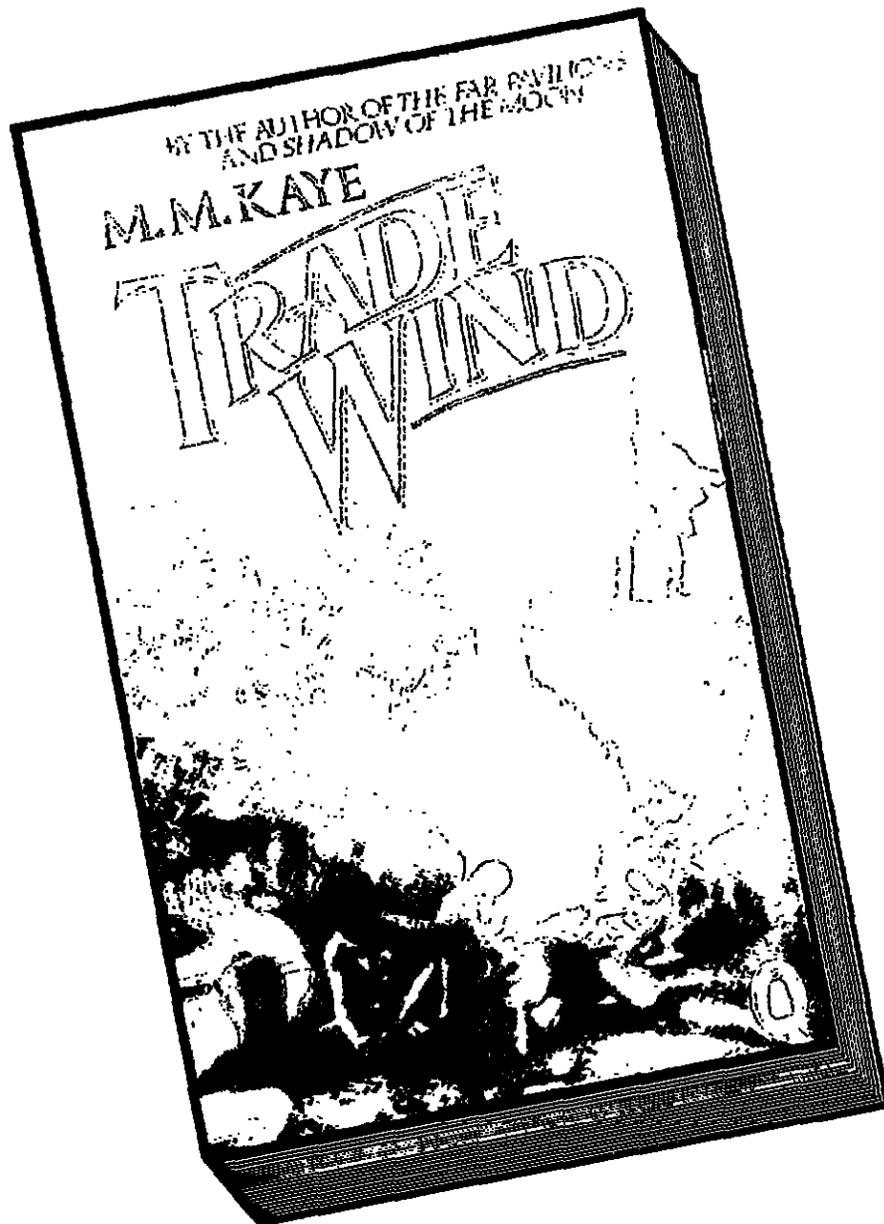
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