

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

BOOKS

THE MACHINATIONS OF GRAEME GIBSON



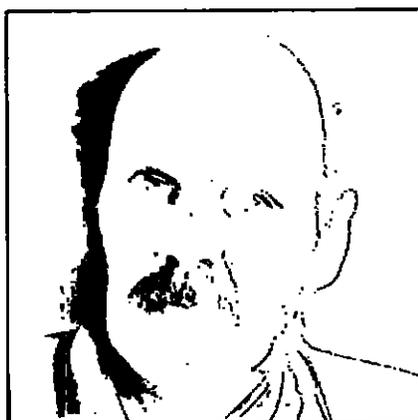
Who murdered Sir Harry Oakes?
The season's art and gift books
Reviews of new books by Hugh Hood,
Carol Shields, and Phyllis Webb

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BOOKS IN CANADA



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Bob Blackburn writes frequently about English usage in these pages. Anne Collins recently returned from a reporting tour of South Africa. Gary Michael Dault's most recent book is *Barker Fairley Portraits* (Methuen, 1981). Howard Engel's third novel, *Murder on Location* (Clarke Irwin), has recently been released. Richard English is a Toronto artist. Lawrence Garber teaches English at the University of Western Ontario. Freelance critic Keith Garebian recently moved from Montreal to Bramalea, Ont. Geoff Hancock is editor of *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. Les Harding is a freelance writer in Cornwall, Ont. Douglas Hill is the author of *The Second Trap* (Breakwater Books). Maria Horvath is a Toronto freelance writer. Peter Jensen is a Toronto lawyer. Roy MacGregor is an Ottawa freelance writer. I.M. Owen's book reviews also appear in *Saturday Night*. John Reeves's photographs of literary figures frequently appear in these pages. Stephen Scobie teaches English at the University of Victoria. Toronto artist Adam Vaughan's drawings appear throughout the issue. Morris Wolfe is co-author, with Bill McNeil, of *Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada* (Doubleday).

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Rough cuts: in South Africa not attracting attention is a well-cultivated quality

Silent screening

BEFORE SETTING OUT recently for South Africa to interview Nadine Gordimer in the country she so effectively stripmines of themes, I had (I thought) thoroughly researched her. I had been to see her read at the Amnesty International Writers' Congress in Toronto in 1981. I had read seven story collections and all eight novels, burrowed through reviews and pieces she herself had written for the *New York Review of Books*, sniffed for traces of her name in newspapers and sundry periodicals. I was prepared to find gaps in information and inaccuracies, but no major surprises of fact. This is, after all, the era where famous writers are chronicled as they walk, and clipped between the covers of biographies even before they drop. I was doing it myself.

But that was before I discovered the South African artist's passion for privacy. Privacy that doesn't turn its seeker into an enigmatic cult hero as it would here (J.P. Donleavy, J.D. Salinger), but is necessary simply in order to get the next project done. My first meeting with Gordimer was a kind of pre-interview, so we could talk and get a little used to each other. It took place in the thick Johannesburg sun in the late afternoon on the patio of Gordimer's large, white, suburban home. There was nothing that wasn't pleasant to the eye — all lush green and tropical shrubbery, like birds of paradise and such. A large friendly dog thumped his tail on my leg and three cats took shifts at begging for milk.

But getting used to each other in South Africa tends to mean talking about the political situation. Between sips of China tea I asked her whether the calm a visitor sees was at all real, since it seemed so much at odds with the picture of South Africa in foreign news coverage. She responded by pointing over my shoulder to what looked to me like more huge houses and trees. But just north of Gordimer's home, a few months before, the bulldozers had once again been knocking over the houses of people scheduled for "relocation" under the Group Areas Act, which designates separate living areas for each racial

group. (Needless to say, whites have rarely had to move to accommodate the grand design.) Petty apartheid — the stuff of segregated park benches, washrooms, and queues — may have eased a little, but the South African government's "separate development" policies seemed only to gather momentum. Gordimer said she and a film crew had managed to get to the site and shoot some footage before anyone chased them away. "Footage" took a moment to sink in — what footage? What film crew? Was someone making a movie about her?

Since the need for secrecy had now passed — all the film to be shot in South Africa had been completed — she could tell me. The project turned out to be six hour-long films based on six Gordimer stories: "Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants," "A Chip of Glass Ruby," "Six Feet of the Country," "Not for Publication," "Town and Country Lovers," and the one she had read in Toronto, "Oral History." Gordimer had often been approached to sell film rights to her work, particularly after her 1979 novel, *Burger's Daughter*, made such a big splash in North America. But she had turned all the offers down: "If you've seen what *Reds* has done to Russian Revolution, can you imagine what an American director would do *Burger's Daughter*?" Then European backers approached with an offer that was irresistible: full financial support from them and full artistic control for her. So, for the past two years, Gordimer has been culture-shocked by collective activity — she has turned film producer. All in utmost quiet, with a completely South African cast and crew. The slightest peep and the government would have noticed, and the police would have noticed, and suddenly obstacles would have cropped up, not to mention mysterious observers.

Once she had decided to talk to me about it, she was full of concerns and details — it was, after all, most of what she'd been doing for two years. She was running into problems now with the last story, "Oral History," about the effects of a counter-insurgency war on a native village, like the one South Africa is fighting in Namibia and which white Rhodesians fought for many years. (It is

included in *A Soldier's Embrace*, published in paperback this year by Penguin.) She knew Robert Mugabe, and had received high-level government approval to film the story in Zimbabwe, but just as her crew was about to start permission was revoked. Speculation was that such a project might upset the remaining whites — the white farmers, for example, so essential to food production in the new black-ruled state. The story was too accurately reminiscent for comfort. Swaziland had already turned it down, and now it looked like it might have to be shot in Kenya, where neither the language spoken nor the village setting would resemble Southern Africa. And it would be very hard for Gordimer to meet there with the director: her South African pariah passport was no good for entry into Kenya.

While politics, added to the ordinary logistics, made this last shoot difficult, it was no more than she had already gone through, and on the whole Gordimer was pleased that secrecy and care had produced five films as true to her work as the collective process could make them. She was also happy to take me to see the rough cuts of two of the stories, in the process driving through the first white parts of Johannesburg I'd seen that were only moderately well-to-do. The film company was camped in a small white house with a vandalized front yard, whose single glory was a full-grown, fruit-bearing avocado tree. No sign announced that business was conducted here.

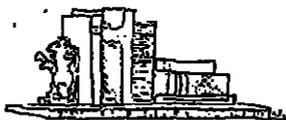
The first film screened, "Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants," had suffered a little in the translation. Though well acted and shot, instead of being a complex examination of a lonely woman's two relationships (one with a young white hood who is briefly her lover, the other with a black man who works where she does), it was a totally whitened story about dangerous love (the black character turned into an inexplicably friendly cipher). Well-acted and shot, it still suffered by comparison. Gordimer grumbled about it: she has had to curtail her solitary perfectionism while performing this new role.

The other film, based on "A Chip of Glass Ruby" — even without music and the final technical smoothing of film

qualities and colours — was strong in impact and entirely true to its source. It is about a political heroine, Mrs. Bamjee, an Indian housewife who, out of the simple conviction that "no one should be left out," combines activism with family life, running off protest pamphlets after dinner and long into the night on a machine set up on the sideboard. She meets the inevitable end — arrest in the middle of the night and detention without trial.

On the small, flickering, colour TV, I watched bulldozers rip into pale pastel houses and realized that this was the footage the crew had snatched — real bulldozers, real houses, real people displaced in the framework of the fiction. Gordimer told me afterwards, sitting in the rumpled mock living-room of the production house, that the teenaged actor who plays Mrs. Bamjee's son and, in the film, organizes a school protest, had ad-libbed the speech he gives to his classmates. "How would it be done?" the director had asked. The boy knew all about the solidarity necessary between the various shades of "blacks" in South Africa: he knew that Indian is really black and coloured is black, and had the words and feelings to rouse the actor-children to stand together.

The reality had extended even further, despite all Gordimer's personal care for secrecy. The amateur actress hired to play Mrs. Bamjee was a teacher from the province of Natal. She had already been "downgraded" once at her job for political activities, which meant she was sent to teach far enough from her home in Durban for it to be a punishment. The film was shot during school break last year, but overlapped a week with the beginning of school. When the actress-teacher asked for permission to extend the break with a week's unpaid leave she



naively told her employers a little too much about the project. Permission was granted, but when she reported back to school she was informed that her job had been terminated — for taking a week's unpaid leave. Such are the rewards of candid behaviour in South Africa. This is why artists learn early to let the world know only what they intend it to know, and only when they want it to find out.

— ANNE COLLINS

... Unquote

RESEARCH NOTES from a correspondent of this department who has recently been pondering the continued ill-health of the book business:

Canada is a small and backward country: the tongue of half of it is French. The English half is probably the dumbest English-speaking population anywhere. It reads less per capita than any other known civilized population.

— Wyndham Lewis

The lack of mental aliveness is fundamental. Canada is a non-conductor for any sort of intellectual current.

— Frederick Philip Grove

It is not lack of money that makes Canada about the poorest book market in the world outside of Senegambia. The bald truth is that Canada has the money but would rather spend it on whisky than on books.

— Robert Barr

I am the last person to assert that the writer is entitled to a reward in the form of money. . . . The trouble is that the Canadian public recognizes no other reward. The money standard, being the

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only one it knows, is the only one by which it judges. Any writer who has made a success in terms of money, even though he wrote for the mentally immature, is a great writer; anyone who has failed to make such a success, even though the best in many countries applaud him, ranks among the riff-raff of the world.

— Frederick Philip Grove

In the pecking order of literary criticism a Frenchman can humiliate an Englishman just as readily as an Englishman can

humiliate an American, and an American a Canadian. One of Canada's most serious literary needs at present is some lesser nation to domineer over and shame by displays of superior taste.

— Robertson Davies

The first qualification of the student of Canadian literature is a thick skin. He must be incapable of being bored.

— Kildare Dobbs

— LES HARDING

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Native rites: in the sneering world of word slobs and word snobbery, for every lash there is a backlash

By **BOB BLACKBURN**

"I'VE BEEN A native of this city for a long time," the head of a large broadcasting company told his audience in a televised speech. I don't know what he meant. In some contexts, it might be taken as a facetious remark, but that did not appear to be the case here. I neither know nor care whether the man was born in the city in question or not, but even if I cared, I still wouldn't know.

What really bothered me about the statement was that, according to my much-thumbed desk Webster, which is neither the newest nor the most permissive of dictionaries, one meaning of native is "a permanent resident, as distinguished from a temporary resident or visitor." Once again, I have been let down by a dictionary that has been beside my typewriter for more than 25 years, and I'm giving some thought to the idea of chucking it out. The *OED*, of course, does not condone any such use of *native*, which, were it to become common, would render the word useless.

According to Webster, I could say that while I originally was a native of Halifax I am now a native of Toronto and a former native of Ottawa, Montreal, and Washington, D.C. That's absolute rot. The *OED* clearly states that you are a native of the place in which you were born, "whether subsequently resident there or not," and to substitute *native* for *resident* is the act of a ver-bicidal maniac, no matter what any dictionary says.

I say all this despite the knowledge that there are writers emerging who will label me a word snob. Although Newton failed to mention it, for every lash there is a backlash. Just as there are writers

(such as William Safire and Edwin Newman) who have found a wide audience for their criticism of sloppy writing, there are writers (such as James Fallows in the September issue of the *Washington Monthly*) now finding a considerable market for criticism of the likes of Newman and Safire. The easy and popular way to attack a critic is to call him a snob, and that's precisely what Fallows and his kind are doing.

Fallows is a Harvard graduate with impressive credentials in journalism, and is a good and careful writer. He does no service to his profession by dismissing as snobs any of his fellows who are crusading in the cause of good writing. Safire and Newman are for certain not infallible. For that matter, even Fowler nodded occasionally. But their cause is just. They should be criticized, but not in a manner calculated to belittle that cause.

Fallows attempts to justify his use of *snob* by pointing out that these people tend to take a "sneering" attitude. Indeed, sometimes they do, and why not? *Sneer* has an ugly ring to it, but it merely means to express scorn or derision or contempt. An article about television ratings in Canada's largest newspaper referred to a program "which had to settle for what little viewers remained." I think that merits a sneer, coming as it did from a professional writer by way of professional editors. Fallows puts the word *snob* label on people who are touchy about the misuse of *less* for *fewer*, so I presume he would extend that to the matter of *little* and *few*. The distinction may not be important to word slobs, but here is one

word snob who wonders whether or not any big viewers remained and considers the mistake as ludicrous as any of those for which he himself has been justly sneered at.

A.G.S. Broughton of Vancouver has chided me amiably (not at all sneeringly) for writing "go look up [a word]," pointing out that, without putting *and* or a comma between *go* and *look* "you have created a verb verb. How do you conjugate this verb verb?" he asks. "I go look up?" "Thou goest look up?" or "Thou go lookest up?" "He goes look up?" or perhaps "He go looks up?" etc. The thing seems impossible to me."

Well, sir, all I can do is plead guilty to another of my frequent lapses into the vernacular, and ask you when was the last time someone told you to go *and* fly a kite.

Ever since the weather forecasters started attaching a percentage figure to their predictions of precipitation, I have been wondering why they sometimes say "probability" and sometimes "possibility." I suppose one might consider 20 per cent a possibility and 80 per cent a probability, but what should they do about 50 per cent? Anyway, I've always thought that a percentage had to be of something, and if they say "the probability of rain is 20 per cent," I feel obliged to ask "20 per cent of what?" All right, that *is* nitpicking. But what of the TV weatherman who told us that "a steaming pocket of hot air is cloaked around the city"?

I believe that line came from the same newscast in which a reporter told us that "the courtroom was filled to overflowing by reporters" but failed to tell us what it was the reporters filled the courtroom *with*. Even if he had said "filled to overflowing *with* reporters," he would have left us wondering what the point of the exercise was if there was no one in the room except reporters. He might argue that *courtroom* implies the presence of a judge and lawyers and so on, but it won't wash. *Court* implies that, but a *courtroom* can be empty.

No sneer distorts my benign visage as I write these words, only a slight frown of



perplexity brought on by wondering what is wrong with asking that people who are paid to communicate information to us try, at least, to do so clearly and accurately. If this be snobbery, amen. □

WHO KILLED SIR HARRY?

Still unsolved almost 40 years later, the murder of Canada's richest robber baron continues to provoke literary speculation

By ROY MacGREGOR

IN THE LOWER bar of the Nassau hotel that legend maintains — incorrectly, the family contends — Sir Harry Oakes bought just so he could fire the *maitre d'* who had refused to seat him without a necktie, British author James Leasor taps his table edge, thinking. Beyond the window a musty tropical shower has released its weighted drops, but the major disturbance is inside, where Leasor (*Green Beach, The Sea Wolves*) is considering the latest in a long string of adventure novels. His research of the Second World War and the Duke of Windsor's mysterious role in it has brought him, naturally enough, to the site of one of the century's most celebrated crimes: the murder, on July 8, 1943, of Canada's Sir Harry Oakes. The murder remains unsolved, and Leasor has come up against a wealth of speculation that continues four decades after the crime. "They say you can only go to King Tutankhamun's tomb once," he says as he sips his Heineken. "Here, you have to wonder."

Barely a block away, beneath a stern portrait of the namesake he still refers to as "Daddy" even though his own hair is whitening with age, Harry Oakes leans back in his chair, shrugs, smiles shyly, and shakes his head wearily. To a question about his father, the son only poses another: "What can you do?"

The original question concerns, naturally, resting in peace. This coming year will mark the 40th anniversary of the grisly Bahamas murder, and it is 70 years since Harry Oakes, prospector, struck gold on the shore of what now is known as Kirkland Lake. That happier occasion was recognized this year with the opening to the public of Oakes's magnificent chateau on the site of his now-dormant Lake Shore Mines. As well, Penguin has recently released the paperback version of Timothy Findley's novel, *Famous Last Words*, which dares to connect the Oakes murder with the oft-rumoured Nazi sympathies of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

Harry Oakes was born in Maine on Dec. 23, 1874. In 1924 he became a naturalized Canadian, a dozen years after he and his partners found the first vein of what was to become the largest gold mine in North America. As Lake Shore stock rose from 32½ cents a share in 1917 to \$62.50 a share in 1936, Oakes went from being a near pauper to quite likely the richest

man in Canada. But he was also a man with enormous pride in his contention that he'd made his millions at no other man's expense. He failed to see why he should pay the Canadian government \$17,500 a day in taxes just for the right to live there.

"Listen," Oakes told the Toronto *Star's* Greg Clark in 1939, "when a man makes money he has to stay two jumps ahead of the people trying to take it from him. The 'have-nots' today are completely in command. Pride of ownership used to belong to all men, but it's getting narrower. Pride of possession today belongs to the politicians. You find it. They take it."

It was an easy sell, then, when Harold Christie, an ambitious Nassau real-estate salesman, talked Oakes into moving to the Bahamas, where there were — and still are — no taxes. When he left Canada the farewells were hardly heartwarming. "Multimillionaire Champ Tax-dodger," said one headline. "Santa Claus to Bahamas. But Heart Like Frigidair to the Land That Gave Him Wealth." Snubbed in his ambition to be made a Canadian senator, Oakes walked away from the Northern Ontario area that had delivered up an estimated \$250 million in gold. In return he left behind a church site, a skating rink, some free skates, toboggans, and Books of Knowledge for

the Kirkland Lake children. In Nassau he built a waterworks and a golf course, set up a bus service for the natives, an airplane service for emergency illnesses, free milk for the children, and a fund for unwed mothers. To this he added a gift of \$400,000 to St. George's Hospital in London, England, and in 1939 King George VI rewarded him with a hereditary baronetcy. When Oakes died the Bahamas erected a monument to him. In Canada, where the baron had been refused a mere senatorship, his obituary in the *Rouyn-Noranda Press* noted sourly: "What Harry Oakes might have done, and what he did for Kirkland Lake, which gave him his wealth, are as far apart as the poles."

But it is not Sir Harry Oakes's life that they still debate today; it is the manner of his death. On that hot day in 1943, when Oakes's wife and four of their five children were vacationing in cooler Maine, his by-then close friend Harold



ILLUSTRATION BY HOWARD ENGEL

Christie went to wake him in his Nassau estate and discovered the baron's skull had been shattered by four vicious blows behind the ear. The body had been partially set afire, possibly to disguise the true nature of the crime.

It was a murder so shocking and mystifying that it shoved the war from the front pages of the world's newspapers, much to the distaste of the governor of the Bahamas, the Duke of Windsor. He had tried, unsuccessfully, to suppress the news, and had even gone so far at first as to suggest the death might somehow be suicide. Within days the Nassau hotels were jammed with reporters — including Erle Stanley Gardner, who was writing for the Hearst press. For the next several weeks there was the Oakes trial and then the war, in that order.

Charged with the murder was Oakes's son-in-law, Marie Alfred Fouquereaux de Marigny, a tall, handsome, twice-divorced Mauritanian who, without Sir Harry's permission, had married Nancy Oakes, his eldest daughter, two days after her 18th birthday. The two men had fought, and the circumstantial evidence was strong, but the case for the Crown eventually began to resemble a frame-up. It fell apart over a fingerprint matching de Marigny's that the Miami police chief — personally called in to handle the case by the Duke of Windsor — claimed had come from an object in Sir Harry's bedroom. More likely it had come from a cigarette package the policeman had pressed into de Marigny's hand long after the crime had taken place. De Marigny was quickly declared not guilty and, in the nearly 40 years since, no progress whatsoever has been made towards solving the murder.

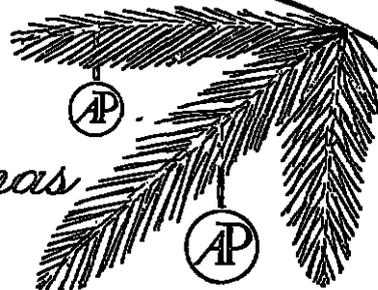
But that does not mean it has gone away. In Nassau even today the crime remains a sensitive topic. "It's something basically that you don't talk about," says Allen Duffield, Canada's honorary consul there. "You ask a taxi driver about it and he'll detour you in a holy minute away from it."

Where the case for the prosecution ended, the theories began. In *The Life and Death of Sir Harry Oakes*, published in 1959, Geoffrey Bocca vowed in his opening chapter to reveal what everyone has always speculated on. In the end he delivered nothing but a plea to exhume the body and reopen the investigation. In 1972 Marshall Houts, in *King's X*, appeared to follow through on Bocca's hints and laid the murder firmly on the doorstep of Miami mobster Meyer Lansky. Houts argued that "reliable confidential informants" had told him that Oakes and Christie and even the Duke himself had been scheming to open up the island to gambling casinos as a way of ensuring its prosperity without resorting to taxes. Oakes allegedly had reneged on the deal, possibly because of his own highly conservative morality, and also because his eldest son, Sidney, then 16, was beginning to fall under the spell of Nassau's low life — a spell that would undoubtedly increase with legalized gambling.

Houts claimed that Lansky — who ultimately did gain the gambling concession — sent Oakes a very simple, very direct message. This, according to Houts, would explain the Duke's peculiar behaviour at the time of the murder, and might explain why the Duke and Duchess soon decided to spend as little time as possible in Nassau until the war was over, when they could return to Europe.

Then, 10 years later, came Findley's *Famous Last Words*. The connection between Nazi Germany and the abdicated King Edward VIII has long been the subject of rumours and speculations, and has been strengthened by a certain amount of fact. The Duke of Windsor was a known German sympathizer. Only months after he gave up the British throne "for the woman I love," he and Wallis Simpson toured Nazi Germany and met Hitler. The Duke was of German descent; his favourite language was German; his mother, Queen Mary, had been a German princess, and spoke with a German accent. The Duke's sympathies were so well known that Winston Churchill ordered the Duke and Duchess to leave Europe for the

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Bahamas once the war began. It was strongly believed the Nazis were courting them to gain a bizarre kind of "royal respectability." It has also been suggested that this courtship continued long after the Windsors, aghast at the prospect of exile, arrived in dreaded Nassau.

Findley, who researched his fiction with all the attention to detail normally brought to a non-fiction work, came to believe that this intriguing scenario was not only plausible but "very, very real." In his fiction he followed through on the speculation, placing Sir Harry Oakes in the middle of the action as the Duke and Duchess — particularly the Duchess — scheme to quit the island by night, with a yacht arranged to take them to a waiting German submarine. Findley's fictional Sir Harry stumbles upon the plan quite by accident and is outraged, as befits any man who in real life had donated several Spitfires toward the Battle of Britain. In Findley's version, the Canadian millionaire becomes an obstacle between the Duchess and her ambitions, and his murder takes on new implications.

Suspensions concerning Wallis Simpson's motives are not new: "You can get any amount of stuff on her and her connections at the time," says Findley. But it is daring in the extreme to come out publicly with such a theory when the principal character is alive — though said to be barely — and in seclusion near Paris. For this reason, undoubtedly, publication of *Famous Last Words* has been delayed in Great Britain "for the time being" — a convenient euphemism for whatever remains of the Duchess's controversial life.

Whether the concern is lawsuits or, just as likely, royal family disapproval, the delay may be keeping Findley from his most lucrative market. His previous novel, *The Wars*, was well received in England, and *Famous Last Words* showed every sign of doing even better. Canadian sales were in the clear best-seller range, and reviews mostly good. In the United States, where the hardcover edition is currently on sale, reviews in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *Boston Globe* have been "unbelievable and gratifying," says Findley. Should the British publishers continue to delay, much of the book's momentum might be lost.

Whether the Duchess of Windsor even knows about *Famous Last Words* no one can be sure. The family of Sir Harry Oakes does, but has not bothered even to purchase a copy of it. They know only too well that the stories will not end there. *The Life and Death of Sir Harry Oakes* gave way to *King's X*, which stepped aside for *Famous Last Words*, which will be replaced by whatever James Leasor chooses to write about the affair.

Fiction or non-fiction, the family is barely interested. Complaining, they feel, will only interest more people in a story that family members wish would go away. "I don't pay too much attention to the stories," says Harry Oakes. "There's so much literature around that I can't contribute to it." Besides, the family has had more than its share of other troubles. The young daughter who stood so faithfully by de Marigny throughout the hideous trial was later divorced from him; two sons died tragically at young ages; a car accident near Nassau last year severely injured another daughter only months after Sir Harry's widow died. "The family," says James Leasor, "seems almost cursed."

It was Findley's preoccupation with another concern, the spread of fascism, that brought him to Sir Harry Oakes. "Writers aren't just busybodies," he argues. "In trying to find the meaning of fascism in an area where nobody has ever looked for it, among the artists and high-livers — rather than where everyone else had looked, among the low life and the monsters, and then dismissing it as the work of monsters — I found it among humans who are simply attracted by the glitter. Then you are walking into the dwelling place of the human race, real people whose needs are human, and it is also here.

"You have to tamper, don't you see. The fascination is there. . . . How do you ignore Sir Harry Oakes?" □

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Wheels within wheels

Graeme Gibson's third novel celebrates the romance of the machine, but ultimately it is nature that conquers with a random ferocity

By LAWRENCE GARBER

Perpetual Motion, by Graeme Gibson, McClelland & Stewart, 283 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3291 9).

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, it's been 13 years since the publication of Graeme Gibson's much-praised *Five Legs*, and more than a decade since the appearance of his second work, *Communion*. Yet both novels remain in print, a credit to his continuing appeal in this country as a fine literary craftsman. That Gibson's novels last has as much to do with the power of his materials as with his gifts as a stylist. Of course, a gap of some 11 years between novels can be misleading; those of us who have continued to read his travel pieces and interviews know that Gibson has not been in hermetic retreat. For several years he has been at work on a single novel, now at last delivered up, bound-over, intact — and an astonishing work it is.

While *Perpetual Motion* is, like *Communion*, a novel of unhinging obsession and mania, the range and complexity of its components reflect a more ambitious direction for Gibson: one in which the earlier narrow dreads have exploded into multiple interlocking patterns, an entire scale of peculiar, dazzling resonances with something of the focal effect, as Conrad called it, of looking through the eyeglass of "a damaged kaleidoscope."

In its bare bones (and bones, as a matter of fact, are important in this book), *Perpetual Motion* is a form of historical novel. The story begins in 1860 when Robert Fraser — a settler farming north of Toronto near a place called, appropriately, Mad River — discovers beneath his plough "an intricate and marvellous cage of bones," the skeleton of a great mastodon. Entrepreneurs ultimately convince Fraser to exhibit his find, and in 1865 we find Fraser in mid-19th-century Toronto, a city of public hangings, brick mansions on Jarvis and Sherbourne, rail yards and wharfs, teeming carnival grounds, brothels, and a tavern called the Frozen Ocean where men debate the hot political and scientific issues of the day. It is here that Fraser

and others discourse at length on his life's obsession, the invention of a perpetual motion machine, the search for "an essential core, some class of rejuvenating centre." In effect, Progress's version of the Holy Grail. To construct an endlessly self-generating complex, a great machine in *perpetuum mobile*, would not only serve the great cause of Progress but would, of course, confer a degree of immortality upon inventor and invention. ("There's a great future in perpetual motion," remarks Fraser, with nice unwitting irony.) In a novel where the ravages of time and nature are sometimes cruelly evidenced, and where the antediluvian vies with the



Graeme Gibson

new, such a paradox is both stunning in its conception and central to the work.

Part three brings us to 1876, with Fraser working with renewed intensity on his great project, "a man failing among his machines," while his farm and family suffer neglect and estrangement. The passage of years is no longer marked "by the seasons, the growth of his children or the inevitable decay of his own body . . . but by the discovery and acquisition of essential components," by the very advances and failures of his machine, housed in separate quarters, comprising a hot-house life within that other life he leads. By 1878, however, Fraser is a rich man: not from his great invention (which still resists solution) but, ironically, through his clever deal-

ings as supplier to hunters and in real estate. He has become unexpectedly a modern man of property and enterprise, thriving in an emergent, upwardly mobile society where progress and wealth involve knowing that the new railway will include Mad River in its route.

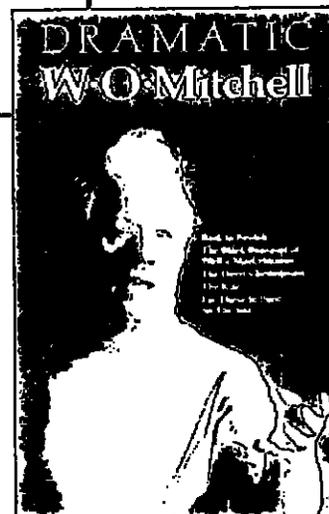
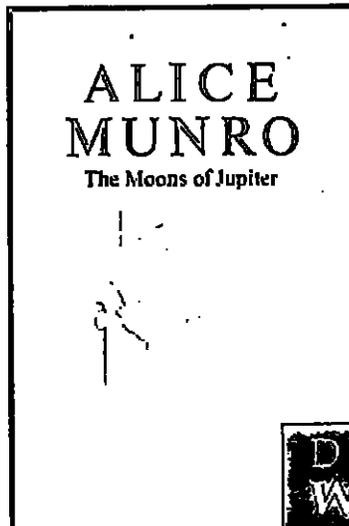
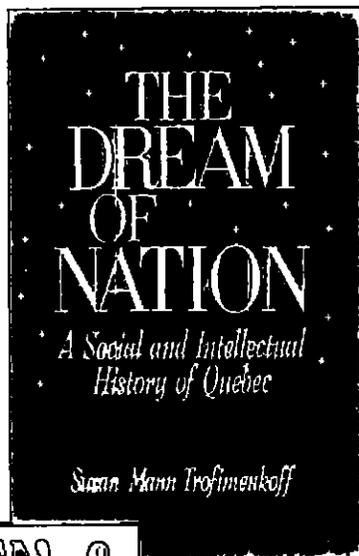
Still, the primary obsession grates and consumes until Fraser, in an explosive finale, displays the Great Machine at last to a crowd gathered like "pilgrims to a holy place," smelling "progress, the elixir of growth." This machine, meant to set into perpetual motion a model of the solar system, a giant orrery that "would move in miniature grandeur, their orbits mirrors of the originals," represents Fraser's climacteric, and an icon out of Poe or Hawthorne in which man, in his manic, insular quest to imitate the Creator, wills some terrible incarnation of the universe:

Progress as the result of some rational design . . . For what are machines . . . but a concentration of power . . . power entrapped, enslaved, to simplify and enrich the labours of man.

If *Perpetual Motion* were no more than the sum of its narrative, it would be fascinating enough. But Gibson has built into the weave of the novel a vast confederation of images and juxtapositions that constantly push the reader into confrontations with vast cosmic exempla that come close to mirroring Fraser's own raging elementalism.

Consider the concept of perpetual motion itself. Well before we conceive of it as an attribute of the Great Machine, the bush and forest and sky are seen to be teeming with living blood-motion. After discovering his mastodon skeleton, Fraser imagines it as a great construct, "a great beast moving irresistibly, bulling its way in the forest, the angular ribs, each separate vertebra in a line . . . rising on massive legs." Indeed, the novel itself begins with "rushing wings," and while he digs for the prehistoric bones "a straggle of wild pigeons shoot low over his field." Especially in these early pages — but in

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fact throughout the novel — the *natural* world is a world of perpetual motion, shimmering unrest and flux, a cadence of living things in continuous flight and prow: hens peck, sows jerk, donkeys kick, swallows chitter, the labours of men and women are constantly being punctuated by wheeling, soaring birds, or animals roaming the bush. In the great chain of being there are also the pump, bellows, and circulating waters of the human body — a perpetual motion machine if ever there was one. A woman's triceps are seen "flapping like turkey wattles," and Fraser's wife Mary images him as a construction

crammed with interlocking wheels and pendulums . . . full of restless hunger, each bit locked into the next with the whole being driven by a heresiarchal need.

The seasonal cycles, too, continue "as if the earth itself were caught, mechanically repeating the same event again and again." From Fraser's wife, who gives birth to six children, to friend Will Casey's unaligned right eye that swivels and darts beyond his control, the novel is inundated by this great polyphony of living, instant motion. (This sense of endless sway and turnover, by the way, is powerfully captured by Gibson's broad use of the present participle, the essential form to suggest the immediacy of things in flux.) So it is one of Gibson's neatest paradoxes that amidst this evidence of self-generating life, Fraser labours obliviously on his Great Machine, an imitation at best of that working nature that surrounds him and, nicest touch of all, finally makes him rich.

But the romance of the machine is powerful. Men speak in awe of the legendary constructs of those addicted to the search for its perfection. Fraser has made wooden "wind animals" whose hinged joints shudder and wheel; there are tales concerning the Voltaic Belt, the Eagle Steam Washer, the Gorton Boiler, Norman's Electro-Curative Bath, Albert Magnus's Robot, Orffyeus's Great Wheel, Vaucanson's Mechanical Duck, Maetzel's Panharmonicon, "the liberating inventions of the astrolabe, the sextant and the quadrant." But, except for Orffyeus's perhaps mythical wheel, these machines depend upon steam, water, wind, or clockwork to perpetuate their motion. It is the mysterious "rejuvenating centre," a manufactured version of natural forces, that must be found, that is the key to that motion which is self-conducting, self-perpetuating.

Not surprisingly, such a machine is projected as an exploiter, antagonist, and improvement of nature. Professor Carruthers, another seeker after the

mystery, "despised wilderness, all empty places," and his own imperfect machine "sprawled serene and immutable, freed by intelligence from all the woes and joys that burden and exhaust the human body." "The brain," we are told, "is a complicated bit of biological machinery . . . [but] it has its limits." Carruthers's agent, Hackett, states that "if Nature was to be truly conquered then Nature's own Force, her Secret Vitality, must be used against her."

And yet in Gibson's universe of opposing forces, it is nature and instinct that conquer with a random ferocity. While Fraser literally inhabits his Great Machine as if it were the extension of his own sinews and blood, his wife Mary identifies with the more powerfully evocative Great Tree that stands in front of their house "as if the rhythm of her own body breathed there against the sky. . . her brain . . . branching into twigs and shoots." Their first-born son Angus, lost for days in the frozen bush and discovered safe in the cave of a bear, later becomes a wild man, living among animals, sharing their language and habits, despising the ways of his father. Great flights of wild pigeons devastate the land. Will Casey, freezing to death in the bush, slaughters his horse, carves open its belly and places his infant daughter in the warm, redemptive blood where she is discovered safe the next day. A condemned Finn, dropping on the gallows, struggles vainly to defy gravity by catching his foot on the trap. The bones of the mastodon defy time as no machine yet can; and other bones are sighted, the set of strange "rat's" teeth with which Angus is born, Hackett's great conical skull, the yellow ancient bone that Fraser places in his orrery to orbit among his metallic planets. This ferocious triumph and insurgency of the natural order also extends to examples of mutilation and natural freakishness — two-headed calves, wind-bloated bulls, Siamese twins, Angus's mantle of fur — terrible prodigies of nature set against the dream of a manufactured perfection.

But Gibson's extraordinary novel is not simply arranged around the great dichotomies: Progress/History, City/Country, Machine/Nature, Civilization/Wilderness. For while *Perpetual Motion* is, in part, about the preoccupations of the 19th-century mind, it is by no means an imitation of a 19th-century novel. All of these big issues and conflicts seem to be refracted through the *dementia* of people caught in the traps of their singularizing obsessions, the claustrophobic loops of mania and compulsion. In this sense, it is our modern view of such dichotomies that informs the novel and focuses its materials. Even the

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hallowed terminology attached to events springs from the myth-making of its participants: the Great Exhibition, the Great Hunt, the Great Machine — dreams of fame of a century before.

Yet *Perpetual Motion* is a morose novel. There is a sombre density of mood (reflecting Fraser's own) that weighs upon the book and is rarely lightened or relieved. Even the humorous anecdotes that come our way are often freighted with grimness and malevolence. And loose ends remain, situations that have been set up are left unresolved: the ultimate fate of Angus, the nature of Will Casey's daughter, who is raised by the Frasers, the relationship of Tom Gilpin and Alice Fraser —

the child most like Fraser himself. In a novel concentrated in obsessional drives, such materials must, I suppose, be pushed to the periphery: since personal integration and sane domestic possibilities are on the outlands of the crucial centre, while "prute single-mindedness" dominates and obscures. Still, one wonders.

Countering the sometimes oppressive heaviness of its mood, though, the novel has surprising *lift*, a stylistic buoyancy. Especially in his extensive description of wildlife, and in particular bird lore, Gibson's prose achieves a remarkable fluency and momentum, a kind of perpetual motion in itself.

Nor does Gibson's rendering of the

19th-century scene seem at all stilted in its details, or mere showcasing. A few years ago Thomas Gavin published a novel called *Kingkill*, an interesting fictional account of the man hidden inside Maeizel's chess-player automaton. Yet for all its expositional detail on the lore of the great clockwork machine and descriptions of 19th-century American cities, Gavin's novel was characterized by an archival mustiness, the smell of the library, of research imperfectly digested. Gibson is never guilty of this. While he gives us some great set pieces anchored in research, he has integrated all of his materials into an intricately dramatized, seamless whole. In this, as in other ways, *Perpetual Motion* is his finest work. □

FEATURE REVIEW

After the fall

Hugh Hood's new novel is a study in conflict, between real events vividly recalled and pallid, second-hand knowledge

By I.M. OWEN

Black and White Keys, by Hugh Hood, ECW Press, 304 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920802 35 4) and \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920802 37 0).

WHEN MAY-BETH CODRINGTON, in *A New Athens*, said to Matthew Goderich "Of course the true subject for the painter is the soul's voyage in the companionship of Jesus and the angels," the voice was also the voice of Hugh Hood, stating what is to him the true subject for the novelist. With *Black and White Keys* his cycle *The New Age* brings to the centre of the stage an aspect of that voyage that lurked on the periphery in its three predecessors: the fact of evil.

The Swing in the Garden recounted Matt Goderich's generally happy childhood in the 1930s. It's a sunny book, climaxing with the glorious summer of 1939 (when it rained only on weekends). But then came the fall, and Hood raised the obvious pun to the dignity of metaphor when after summarizing the events of that autumn he ended the book with the words: "It made for a long fall."

This idea of the fall recurs. *Reservoir Ravine* has a double ending: in October, 1979, as Matt revisits the scenes of his

infancy, sad and solitary for reasons we have yet to learn; and with the Crash of October, 1929, followed by the ominous spring of 1930, when Sam Aaronsohn, the German-Jewish friend of Matt's parents, is writing to them about the rise of the Nazis and the threatened collapse of the Weimar Republic.

Black and White Keys, part four of *A New Age*, begins in another autumn (though, as the scene is Ottawa, it's winter already), when evil is clearly in the ascendant: November, 1941. Matt Goderich's father Andrew, a pacifist philosopher who resigned his university post on principle a few years earlier, is being recruited for a network based in Switzerland and run by Sam Aaronsohn that is organizing escapes from the concentration camps in western Germany. Andrew's specific mission is to help bring Georg Mandel, an eminent German philosopher, out of Dachau so that he can tell the world about what is happening in the concentration camps.

The escape is achieved. Mandel, already nearly dead from experiments done on him in aid of cold-weather military medical research, is smuggled out of Dachau in a cartload of corpses, and with great difficulty taken into

Switzerland, where he dies at last without having been able to give his testimony. Andrew stays on to continue the work, with little success; on his final trip into Germany, in August, 1943, he finds that his network is destroyed. He remains in Switzerland till the end of the war, writing a book on genocide, *Sin Quantified*, for which he receives the Nobel Peace Prize for 1950.

Black and White Keys consists of five long chapters, and this story — the Black Keys — occupies the three odd-numbered ones. The other two (G natural and A natural, I guess) contain Matt's story of his life as a schoolboy in wartime Toronto, a continuation of *The Swing in the Garden*. The contrast is sharp and effective. Innocence still prevails in Toronto; evil is represented by Raymond Massey playing Gestapo or SS officers in the movies ("the Nazis had the best uniforms") or, a little later, by the Masked Marvel, the victorious villain of countless wrestling matches at Maple Leaf Gardens, who when finally defeated and unmasked was revealed as "none other than . . . Freddie 'King Kong' Cox of Cleveland, Ohio" ("King Kong' Who?").

The movies, wrestling, pop culture

generally, constitute one of Hugh Hood's fields of special expertise, and there's a special joy in seeing him run on about it. Owing to a blind spot (deaf spot?) I have never in my life responded to his principal hero, Bing Crosby (or to the others — Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, and 15 more, all to be found listed on page 212), but I do respond to the informed enthusiasm of his writing on the subject: "while Crosby and Sinatra phrased more subtly than Como, . . . only Como understood how to produce the voice in such a way as to preserve tonal purity, and the health of the instrument itself. . . . There was a period around 1944 when Bing Crosby was having difficulty of some kind with his voice, perhaps a series of bronchial problems. He was unable to produce his customary high notes, and the voice would not 'speak' readily. Then in the later stages of his career the middle of the voice roughened; a few new tones appeared at the bottom of his range, of powerful expressiveness and sonority, and surprisingly some of the high notes reappeared. At the time of his death, Bing Crosby was singing better than he had for many years. . . ." Here's a man who knows what he's talking about, and loves what he knows.

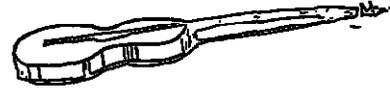
Matt Goderich tries to be a crooner himself, with disastrous results that might have been predicted from his earlier failure to be a pianist. "The black and white keys stayed separated." As do the metaphorical black and white keys of this book. The Matt Goderich chapters are illuminated with the same quality as *The Swing in the Garden* and *A New Athens* — the magic touch that transmutes remembered experience into art. That's where Hood's genius lies. The Andrew Goderich chapters suffer, even more than *Reservoir Ravine* did, from being based on second-hand knowledge. The events are strong, but the telling fails to grip, in spite of memorable scenes of horror and some of beauty. Tension goes limp as characters expound the situation to each other in heavy editorializing dialogue, rather as in Hugh MacLennan's *Return of the Sphinx*. And Andrew's lively personality has turned pallid and dull.

Hood introduces real people into the group organizing the escapes, drawn from the known members of the German conspiracies against Hitler, notably Count Albrecht von Bernstorff, Hans-Bernd Gisevius, and — never appearing but giving direction from afar — that ambiguous figure Admiral Canaris, the head of the Abwehr. Subject to correction (in case Hood has read more recent authorities than I have), I deeply doubt whether the officers who kept mounting those unsuccessful plots against Hitler

from 1938 on took much interest in matters like the concentration camps. They had made it possible for Hitler to take supreme power because he offered them job security. Then, when they saw him losing a war for them, they sought to kill him; but first they wanted assurance that the Allies would deal with a post-Nazi government, and not insist on unconditional surrender. That was why the ex-Gestapo man Gisevius was planted in Zurich as vice-consul, to negotiate with Allen Dulles, who also appears in this book. I find it hard to believe that Gisevius or his masters lost much sleep over the concentration camps. I know there's one crumb of evidence, also referred to here: a Munich businessman who was an agent of the Abwehr was arrested in 1942 for smuggling foreign currency across the Swiss border, and it did turn out that he had previously taken money to Jewish refugees. But when he broke down and told the Gestapo what he knew the information seems to have been all about the plotters against Hitler, not about escapes from Dachau. I think there's a failure of historical imagination here. Contrast the much subtler treatment of Germany in the same period in MacLennan's *Voices in*

Time, in which Canaris is a major figure.

In the Balfour debate in *Reservoir Ravine* a speaker said: "Are we to ignore the claims of Jewry because the Holy Land isn't in Manitoba or Québec? I say to you that the Holy Land is in Manitoba and Québec, and it is the other way round too." (The speaker was unnamed, but described as a young history lecturer with a "characteristic lisp" and "easy charm" — in fact L.B. Pearson. However, in this book he has acquired the name of Charlie Pope.) This statement — whose slight ungainliness is a strength, somehow — echoes through this book and provides its over-



riding theme: the nature of Zionism and its significance especially for Gentiles. Hood concludes with an appendix containing Andrew Goderich's Nobel acceptance speech, in which he pleads for a bicultural and binational state in Palestine, on the model of Canada. Hopelessly unrealistic, of course. But look where realism has brought us. □

Letter to the Past

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



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Heavyweight titles

An art book that doesn't show the artist at work is like a drafty museum — of little use to the enthusiast and inhospitable to the general reader

By GARY MICHAEL DAULT

OF THIS SEASON'S bloom of art and gift books, Christopher Pratt, by David P. Silcox and Merike Weiler (Prentice Hall/Key-Porter, \$60.00) is probably the most satisfactory or — to put it more realistically — the least irritating. A trade version of the thousand-dollar Quintus Press edition of a couple of years ago, this handsomely made volume reproduces all of the important paintings by the enigmatic Newfoundlander, and does so with such fidelity (and on such heavy, glamorous paper) that they actually maintain something of the lonely, evacuated airlessness that lends Pratt's pictures their authority as engines of mystery and meditation.

One of the pleasant surprises of the book is the inclusion in it of many of the preliminary studies and working drawings for Pratt's major paintings. An important function of a book like this (and how many are there, after all?) is to allow us, if possible, a glimpse of the artist at work, the artist in the process of being what he is. Otherwise, art books turn into drafty museums of little use to the enthusiast and inhospitable to the general reader. *Christopher Pratt* is, with all its slickness and even glibness, a genuine attempt to show what Pratt really is like and what his pictures are about.

Silcox's preliminary essay ("Night Window" is too Gothic a title for such amiable chit-chat) is breezy and informative and not so gauchely written as his text for *The Silence and the Storm*, the Tom Thomson book he did a few years ago with Harold Town, though he is still capable of such infelicities as: "Pratt approaches the business of sailing with the single-mindedness of the returning salmon." Merike Weiler's conversational afterword ("Reflections") is a watery biographical meander with the artist that refuses to ask the hard questions. (It is remarkable, is it not, how little you have to do to garner co-authorship?) All in all, however, the book is earnest and honest (as far as it goes) and attractive to hold and look at.

Not quite so much can be said for the even more lavish and expensive *The Canadian Earth: Landscape Paintings by the Group of Seven* (Cerebrus/Prentice-Hall, \$75.00), by Roger Boulet with Paul Duval (who did the potted biographies) and A.J. Casson (who did a foreword full of the requisite special pleading). This leaden slab of a book is awash in the typographical cartouches and filigrees so favoured by Cerebrus (there are even decorative twiddly-bits surrounding the page numbers) and aflame with the blazing colour that is sometimes the work of our over-heralded Group and sometimes the work of colour-printers seized with messianic zeal.

The book is divided into sections devoted to each of the Group's members, each section featuring (for some reason) 11 paintings, except for Franz Johnston (who only gets to show five because he wasn't very good) and Fred Varley (who only gets to show five because, well, he was mostly a portrait painter, I guess). Boulet's text is flat-footed in tone and boy-scoutish in its unthinking enthusiasm. (The text is divided into such sections as "Blazing Trails" and "Algonquin Days.") The paintings are big and pleasant enough to look at, if a bit over-familiar.

What is really needed (though not until a few seasons hence) is an honest, un sentimental, well-researched study of the Group, their reputations, the real nature of their meaning to us as Canadians. Something sinewy and critical. Until then, glamour presses like Cerebrus will continue, I suppose, to grind out these big, graceless celebrations that cost too much and tell us too little.

Joe C.W. Armstrong's *From Sea Unto Sea: Art and Discovery Maps of Canada* (Fleet Books/Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$39.95 until December 31, \$45.00 thereafter) is an exciting collection of 38 early maps, exceedingly well reproduced, shored up by the vivid prose of a man whose entire life revolves

around the tracking down and bagging of these beautiful and strange graphic episodes in the burgeoning understanding of our country.

A passionate enthusiast, Armstrong writes about his maps with something approaching genuine *fervour* — leavened with wit and a not inconsiderable amount of learning. ("This map is all artwork. No navigator could rely on this delightful cartography. The work is really a giant cartouche, a huge baroque Germanic extravaganza disguised in the French language to give it an air of authenticity. . . .") Amusing for the specialist and fun, too, for the novice, *From Sea Unto Sea* has a hectic glamour and light-hearted scholarship that succeed in conveying to any reader the author's deep and expansive pleasure in maps and map-makers. Armstrong's joy is infectious. And delightful.

Also delightful — if not quite so mercurial — is *Glass in Canada: The First Hundred Years* (Methuen, \$39.95), by Canada's top glass specialist, Gerald Stevens. Completed after Stevens's death last year by his two student-protégés, Ralph Hedlin and Heidi Redekop, *Glass in Canada* is Stevens's summary statement about, and catalogue to, all the types of glass that he has proven to be of Canadian origin.

Basically an annotated photographic gallery of everything from paperweights and lamps to goblets, plates, pitchers, and servers, the book settles down to be a highly usable guide to glass patterns, types, styles, and places of origin. It traces Stevens's great coups in glass scholarship: his discovery in 1953 of the Mallorytown Glass Works; his laborious matching of patiently excavated glass shards to previously uncatalogued patterns of the early Canadian glass manufacturers; his heavily researched interviews with old-timers from the glass business. (It is no small achievement these days to conduct and publish an interview that is actually prickly with historical importance.) It's a book to keep in your car — so you can look up

the things you see in wayside antique stores and at flea markets.

Another of the season's genuinely substantial studies is *Iron: Cast and Wrought Iron in Canada from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, by architectural historians Eric Arthur and Thomas Ritchie (University of Toronto Press, \$35.00). A carefully written history of iron as a substance and ultimately as an idea, *Iron* traces the chemical and then the social and aesthetic history of this soft and stolid metal from which we have molded and beaten everything from stoves to weathervanes, manhole covers to fountains, gates and railings to the locomotives that pulled the cars that ran on the rails that opened up the country.

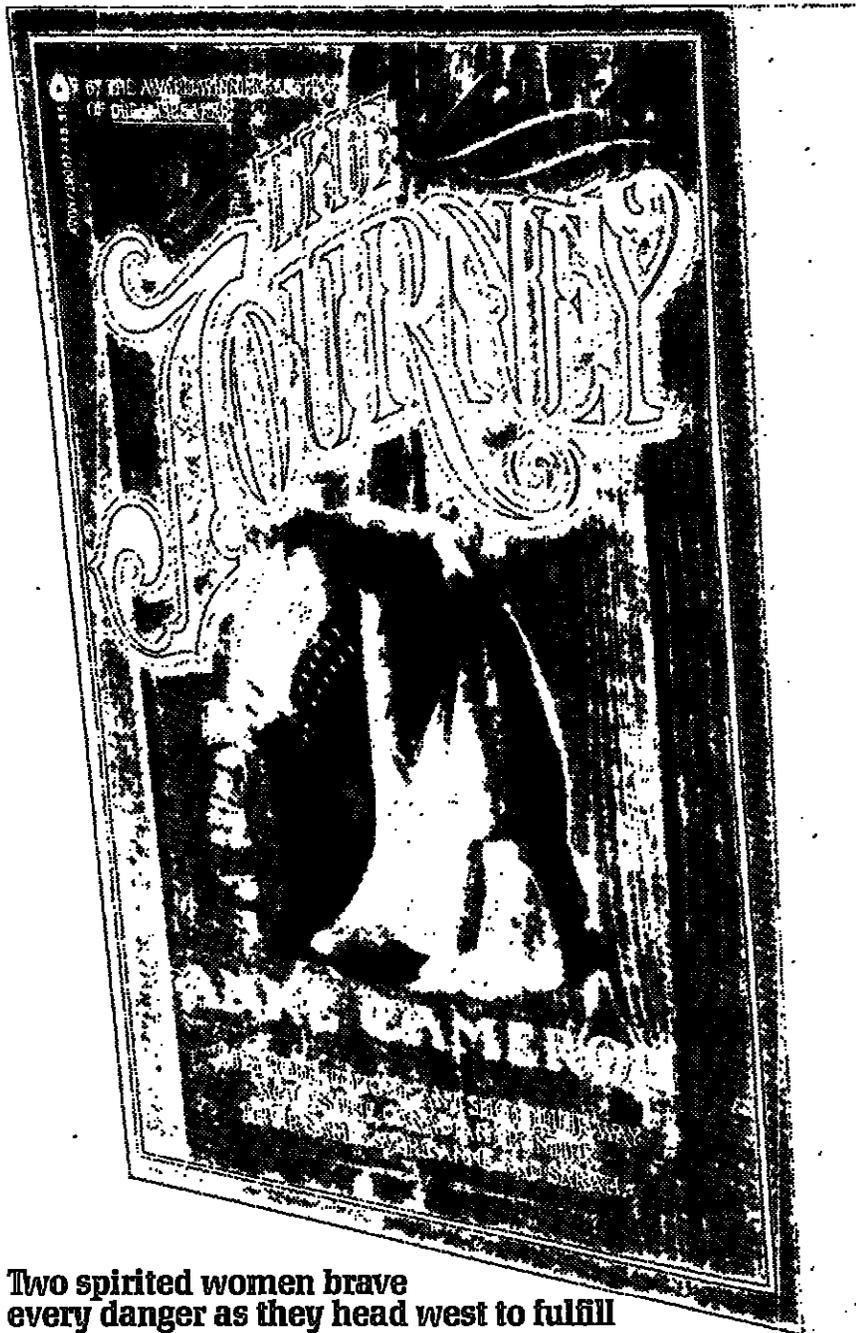
Because iron is as malleable as it is, it is workable in ways that are surprising for such a heavy, sublunary substance. Arthur and Ritchie discuss some truly breathtaking manifestations of delicacy in ironwork and re-examine the artistry of the engineers, architects, and craftsmen who made 19th-century Canada a showcase for the authoritative black filigree that we now think of as synonymous with Victorian elegance. The book is generous with illustrations, and many of them are astonishing.

Also authoritative is Robert W. Passfield's *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside/Parls Canada, \$24.95), a modest and rather charming celebration of this year's 150th anniversary of the building of Colonel John By's famous and controversial inland waterway. The book proceeds historically and by means of delightful contemporary watercolours down the Rideau from Ottawa to Kingston, Ont. The text is detailed and hard-working and full of the minutiae of canal-building. (Who knew it was such a demanding business?) The illustrations (46 in colour, 27 in black and white) are beguiling — though smaller than one would have liked. Basically a good solid job.

Speaking of beguiling leads us to the books whose only purpose is to be pretty for the holidays. There is a great slew of them, and I'll take a glancing blow at as many as I can manage.

First, a couple of surprises within the genre. *A Basket of Apples: Recollections of Historic Nova Scotia*, by Harry Bruce with photographs by Chic Harris (Oxford, \$14.95), turns out to be more than just another collection of searing colour photographs with a symbolic drizzle of text by somebody or other. Harris is a good photographer. Not great, but good. He sees things from sometimes surprising angles. He doesn't scream at you. He's gentle. And Bruce, of course, can write. ("Since lobsters are

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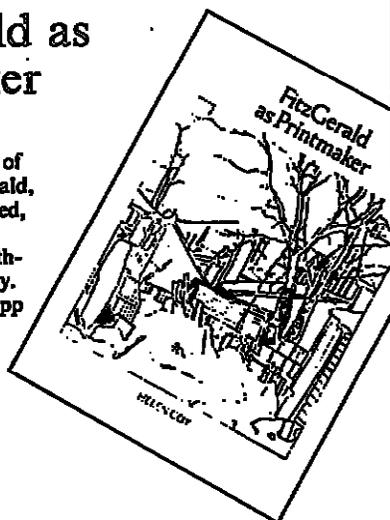
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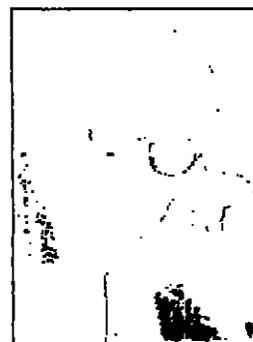
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Also surprising in their wit and verve within this usually lacklustre genre are a couple of new books from Altitude Publishing, an enterprising press from Banff, Alta. Altitude's book, *Rockies* (\$15.95), by Carole Harmon (who took the photographs) and Stephen Hutchings (who wrote the two-page introduction), is squarely within the dumb book category. *Rockies* — not "the" Rockies, just *Rockies* — is pretty pictures of peaks and valleys, gorges and glaciers, all just what you'd expect. Nothing wrong with it, exactly. But nothing distinguished either.

What a surprise, then, to pick up Altitude's *Lake Louise: A Diamond in the Wilderness* (\$19.95), by Jon Whyte and the aforementioned Carole Harmon (who here has merely "compiled and edited" the photographs), and find a funny, touching, and exciting history of this jewel among the mountains, this "Niagara Falls without a Blondin, Times Square without pornography, San Francisco Bay without a Golden Gate." Here, in the first national park in Canada (created by John A. Macdonald in 1885), we see, because of the lavish and intelligent use of the sometimes wonderfully bizarre archival photographs, Lake Louise as the first visitors saw it, as Sir John A.'s wife saw it when she rode in on her train's cow-catcher, as Van Horne saw it when he erected its first hotel ("Since we can't export the scenery, we'll have to import the tourists"), as Lawren Harris saw it (he couldn't look up at Mt. Lefroy without seeing "two damned poached eggs on the top of the cliff"). It's fun to read about John Barrymore trying to make Ernst Lubitsch's *Eternal Love* at Lake Louise in 1928, about Randolph Scott making *Canadian Pacific* there 20 years later. It's fun to look at the old postcards and the members of the Chateau Lake Louise Orchestra stiffly posed in 1930 along the shore with their instruments. There's even the sheet music for Mort Greene and Harry Revel's snappy little song from *The Mayor of Forty-Fourth Street*, "When There's a Breeze on Lake Louise."

The book is legitimate history, and no mistake. But it's the history of a phenomenon as well as a place, and therefore an endearing history of hopes and foibles as well as styles, trends, and traditions. It is a model of the way to

manage books that purport to be a celebration of a particular area of the country. But I suppose not just anybody can whack together a solid, funny, informative, and meaningful social history.

Altitude's *Rocky Mountain Madness* (\$16.95), also by Jon Whyte, this time with help by Edward Cavell (who chose the photographs), is a sort of companion volume to *Lake Louise* — a playful homage to the guides, Indians, tourists, painters, photographers, and other characters who lived in the Rockies in the last century and the early parts of this one, and who gave the area the kind of colour nature alone couldn't provide. The book is full of an antic and errant lunacy, and is more fun than *Rose Marie* re-cast for the Marx Brothers.

Most of the other pretty books for the season are not very invigorating. *Southwestern Ontario*, with photographs by John de Visser and a negligible introduction by Orlo Miller (Oxford, \$15.95), is a collection of what are, for the theatrical de Visser, astonishingly restrained pictures of the Kitchener-London-Sarnia area — with colours dampened down into something like those of the real world. Which is a nice change. De Visser's pleasant photograph of the black buggies lined up geometrically around a bright, white Mennonite church in Waterloo County is almost art, although the filtered clouds still pop out at you like cotton candy.

Southwestern Ontario is the last of Oxford's Regional Portraits of Canada series, which comes to a bright, loud, but somehow dispiriting climax with *Canada Coast to Coast* (\$24.95). Here is the great pan-Canadian synthesis of all the more discreet books that have gone before, and (is it the printing?) the result is fuzzy images in sweet-hot acidic colours. The emerald green of the summer homes at Roches Point on Lake Simcoe nearly knocks you out of your chair; the blue saturating Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons near Midland, Ont., is like an anaesthetic. The cover is massively unattractive.

What is more attractive — initially, at least — is *Spirit of Place: Lucy Maud Montgomery and Prince Edward Island*, by Francis W.P. Bolger and photographers Wayne Barrett and Anne MacKay (Oxford, \$14.95). The trouble begins when you open this well-made little volume and find that it is nothing but a clutch of tiny, candy-coloured photographs set off, I guess you'd say, by Bolger's wanton plunderings from Montgomery's autobiography and letters. Is it necessary to point out that these snippets are frequently forced into service as captions, and as such sit there on the page as bits of immovable bathos? Why does a publisher bother?

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Canada: A Landscape Portrait, edited by J.A. Kraulis with a foreword by Robert Fulford (Hurtig, \$27.50), is a collection of 84 artsy colour photos (with 16 in black and white) of mountains, rows of tulips, impossible sunsets, reeds reflected in streams, frost on trees. Pretty and trite.

Canada: A Symphony in Colour — the titles get more pathetic as you go along — with a text by Grace Deutsch and Avanthia Swan and undistinguished photographs by photographers who appear to be anonymous (Collins, \$29.95) is, you will all be less than overjoyed to find out, the first of a proposed series covering British Columbia (already completed), the Atlantic Provinces, the Prairies, Ontario, and Quebec. If *Canada: A Symphony in Colour* is any indication of the quality of the others, the series will have all the warmth, wit, and physical beauty of the encyclopedias they sell in groceries.

One more. *The Colour of Canada* (McClelland & Stewart, \$12.95), by Hugh MacLennan, with photographs by a number of well-known colour photographers (they overlap from book to book), is the fourth edition of the book MacLennan wrote in honour of our centennial year. This new edition reprints his original, rather endearingly overwrought essay and the original photographs with 30 new ones added. All of the photos are shrill but not uniformly hateful — and at \$12.95, that is cause for rejoicing. □

REVIEW

Ordinary people

By MARIA HORVATH

A Fairly Conventional Woman, by Carol Shields, Macmillan, 256 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9724 X).

CAROL SHIELDS BEGAN her writing career as a poet, and her first three novels reflect a poetic view, a lyrical perspective. Two of them, *Small Ceremonies* and *Happenstance*, were especially notable for their imagery and for Shields's skilful handling of the musings of the main characters. In them Shields

portrayed suburban life in great detail, but her descriptions, even of the prosaic, were almost always fresh and insightful. And because of their curiosity and imagination, her characters were appealing. Most important, she wrote with a delicate touch, so lightly that the reader discovered much more about the characters than the narrators apparently intended to reveal. Unfortunately *A Fairly Conventional Woman* is a weak successor to her previous accomplishments.

Readers of Shields's novels have already met the heroine, Brenda Bowman, wife of the historian Jack Bowman in *Happenstance*. We saw her only briefly before, because she was at a national crafts convention in Philadelphia. In her present novel Shields seems to have lost command of her character. In *Happenstance*, as seen through her husband's eyes, Brenda was a fascinating creature, a prize-winning quilter, gifted, artistic, still exciting to her husband after 20 years of faithful marriage. But in *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, which tells her side of the story of that week-long visit to Philadelphia, Brenda is quite an ordinary person. The title is not ironic.

Brenda's tale begins the day before the trip. She goes through all the motions of everyday life, preparing breakfast and laying out the table, planning the drive to the airport, worrying about her daughter, who's becoming overweight.

But there is so much still to do, and she hasn't started packing. Two of her blouses need pressing; the green one, the one that goes with her suit and with the pants outfit as well, and the printed one, which she plans to wear to the final banquet. At 3:15 she is having her hair cut, tinted, and blown dry at a new place over on Lake Street which has wicker baskets and geraniums in the window and scarlet and silver wallpaper inside. And if there's time, she wants to make a casserole or two to leave for Jack and the children — lasagna maybe, they love lasagna. Not that they aren't capable of looking after themselves; even Rob can cook easy things — scrambled eggs, hamburgers — and Laurie's learned to make a fairly good Caesar salad. They're not babies any more, Brenda says to herself, neither of them.

This unnecessary attention to minutiae is a problem throughout the book. Shields records in meticulous detail, for example, the chit-chat with the man in the seat next to Brenda on the plane:

"Of course, I'm young." He shot her a glance which seemed to Brenda to be partly apologetic, partly sly. "I've got lots of time to develop my, you know, my potential."

The great coda

By KEITH GAREBIAN

Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture, by Northrop Frye, edited by James Polk, House of Anansi, 199 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88784 093 0).

AT A TIME when almost everything in the country has suffered some form of devaluation, it is eminently uplifting to read a book of cultural commentary by Northrop Frye, one of our most precious national resources. In 13 essays (many of which were designed as speeches) that range over areas as diverse as student politics, the teacher's authority, future-shock, academic freedom, Canadian history, literature, and culture, Marshall McLuhan, and the humanities, Frye rehearses many of the

"Oh yes," Brenda said. "That's true."

"Hey, look out there."

"Clouds."

"Pretty, huh?"

"Yes."

She transcribes in the same manner the interminably long interview with the woman at the desk of the hotel, the proceedings of the convention's meetings, and the small talk at the reception. What one asks, is the point of all this tedious detail? Is the author trying to show the contrast between the banality of real life and the creative energy of an artist's life? Is she telling us that a gifted artist can also be boring? Shields never makes this clear.

In her other books, Shields used dramatic irony to create friction between the main characters' knowledge of themselves and what her readers learned about them. In *Small Ceremonies*, for example, the heroine, a writer of biographies, slowly and carefully researched the lives of her subjects. She studied both the dramatic events and the commonplace happenings in their lives. In the end she pieced together a fascinating picture; there was a sense of discovery and surprise. In a similar way, and with equal excitement at the discovery, the reader got to know the heroine.

There are no such surprises about Brenda Bowman in *A Fairly Conventional Woman*. She is just what she herself says she is — orderly, good-hearted, a realist, neither introspective nor original. The few hints of a more complex character are not followed up: "What did this mean, this new impatience, this seething reaction to petty irritations. . . . Part of it, she sensed, was regret, for lately she had been assailed by a sense of opportunities missed." We are not told what these opportunities were, nor the difference that seizing them might have meant.

Because Brenda is quite predictable, the tension of the novel's one significant encounter quickly dissipates. Will she or won't she succumb to the temptation of a brief extra-marital affair at the convention? The reader knows long before Brenda decides.

In a few places Shields writes with the imagination of her previous books, as in her description of how Brenda is inspired to design her beautiful quilts:

. . . the patterns themselves seemed to come from some more simplified root of memory; sometimes they arrived as a pulsating rush when she was pulling weeds in the yard or shovelling snow off the front walk, but more often they appeared to her early in the morning before she opened her eyes, an entire design projected on the interior screen

of her eyelid. She could see the smallest details, the individual stitches. All the pieces were there, the colours and shapes and proportions selected and arranged. When she opened her eyes to the light, she always expected the image to dissolve, but it remained intact, printed on an imaginary wall or beating slowly at the back of her head.

And Shields has developed a sharp, witty voice. Anyone who has attended a conference of any kind will laugh aloud at the pronouncements and jargon of the amateur politicians, the turgid analysis by the keynote speaker ("The history of craft is a history of renunciation," he croons into the microphone.), and the pretentiousness of the guest lecturer, with her talk on "Quilting Through the Freudian Looking-Glass: A New Interpretation."

Carol Shields is a good writer and should not be judged by this book alone.



I look forward to her next novel and hope it will combine the imagery of her previous books with the satirical tone heard briefly in this one. □

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ideas that have come to dominate his philosophy and, like a superior cartographer, charts with precision and accuracy the divisions in Canada that are paradoxically integral to her shape. Although editor James Polk has divided the essays into three sections (Writing, Teaching, The Social Order), there is no clear-cut separation of themes, for Frye's ideas operate with fluid interaction, and what might have been a tedious repetition of thought in some other writer is here an illuminating rhythm.

Frye contends that all his books have been "teaching books rather than scholarly books" because they "keep reformulating the same central questions," trying to put them into a form to which some reader will respond with excited discovery. The personal or confessional touch that is demonstrated in many of the pieces lends a gracious, authentic quality to the most refined intellectual exercises. The autobiographical tone is not a product of egotism or rash garrulity; it provides a point of view "for a surveyor who has lived entirely within the territory he surveys."

As long as he has been a literary critic, Frye confesses, he has been interested in "the relations between a culture and the social conditions under which it is pro-

duced," and in his opening essays he explores the mercantilist assumptions behind creativity in Canada, where it was believed that "priorities had to be material ones, and that literature and the other arts would come along when economic conditions were more advanced." Canada was colonized in the Baroque phase of European development, which tolerated no compromise with contraries. This unyielding dogmatism is what lies behind our "arrogant ascendancy over nature," our "improvements" in communication, which have practically eliminated nature, and our death-wish destructiveness that has increased in efficiency and ferocity. Everything in colonial Canada was based on militant propositions — Nature must be conquered; the savages must be civilized; garrisons must be maintained. Baroque civilization was not "culture as interpenetration," and so there was no vision to become a focus for a nation.

In the 1930s, a theory of culture developed that was a modified form of mercantilism, and articles proclaiming the advent of literary greatness led to Milton Wilson's scoffing phrase, "one half-baked phoenix after another." These birds are too frequently with us, but there are some genuine, rejuvenated

phoenixes now, although Frye prefers to see them on the same genealogical tree ("A world like ours produces a single international style of which all existing literatures are regional developments"), which accords with his view that writers imitate not life, but one another's art. With subdued but real optimism, he feels that Canadian literature of quality will increasingly filter through the new technology that usually follows "the centrifugal and imperial rhythms of politics and economics more readily than the regionalizing rhythms of culture."

Although appreciative of Canadian creativity, Frye is not a grimacing cultural nationalist because he wisely perceives that "nationalism suggests something aggressive," whereas "culture in itself seeks only its own identity, not an enemy; hostility only confuses it." Moreover, contemporary Canadian culture "is not a national development but a series of regional ones."

Paradoxically, by moving away from cultural nationalism Frye becomes most acutely perceptive of our national culture, and marks off, with the greatest perceptiveness, the distinctions between America and Canada. His analysis of Canadian documentary art (in painting

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and literature), "meditative shock," and the "divided voice" of our poets (a phrase borrowed from Francis Sparshott to describe two sides of the same person), strike the most extraordinary notes of cultural commentary.

To say that Frye is witty is to commit the most banal truism, but wit informs every epigram like a rare bloom on some exotic fruit. Rarely has the inductive method adapted so flexibly and gracefully to the pressure of wit, but this may be on account of Frye's prose style, which admits no jargon — no blustering arrogance ("roughly comparable to placing a spittoon on the opposite side of the room"), no coyness, moral debasement, or dithering that "jerks along in a series of dashes, a relay race whose torch has long since gone out." Who else but Frye could temper devastation with satirical wit in such a delightful way that we shiver with pleasure as we are being vivisected? His revised conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada* gives Frye the feeling of "driving the last spike, of waking up from the National Neurosis," and as he does these things, he wittily delineates our identity as "a growing giant coming apart at the seams, of an elastic about to snap." He concludes that "Stephen Leacock's famous hero who rode rapidly off in all directions was unmistakably a Canadian."

Aware that "knowledge is secret and elitist by its very nature," and that our universities have been alienated from the past and are unable to build up an educated public for the culture of the present, Frye offers a humanistic viewpoint that reconciles leisure with anxiety, work with play, social contract with education, mythology with science. His intellectual virtues are moral ones: prudence, sympathy, idealism, patience, and, most of all, wisdom with charity. Aware that people get trapped in phony mythologies, he advocates the liberalization of the imagination, exploration of shadows and darkness, a conformation of the unexpected with tolerance. In his final piece, "Rear-View Mirror: Notes Toward a Future," where he depicts us moving in time "with our backs to what's ahead and our faces to the past," Frye propagandizes a fight on the front line of social goodwill. It is a powerful essay, culminating in a vision where William Morris and William Blake meet in wisdom and prophecy. In Frye's metaphor of the rear-view mirror, "there is no guide to the future except the analogy of the past," and no freedom except that which is known and determined in the present.

Those who expect the New Jerusalem will surely be disappointed. But those who like intellectual music, in which a

"ground" sounds a theme repeated as "divisions" or variations, will hear startling and provocative notes in an orchestration that culminates in a resounding coda. □

REVIEW

The boys at the bar

By PETER JENSEN

In Court, by Jack Batten, Macmillan, 256 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9717 7).

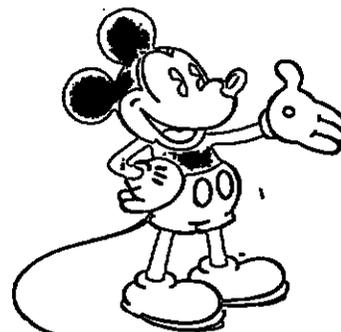
MOST FRIDAY mornings Jack Batten entertains CBC-Radio listeners with his movie reviews. "But I guess I give the plot away early," he admitted the other day. It's true. He does. Even in these anecdotal stories about lawyers. You keep listening or reading because you like the way he rattles on. There's a warmth and friendliness in his voice and his narrative, while at times folksy, is straight.

In Court focuses on 10 lawyers, their style and their cases. Half the lawyers are drawn from Toronto, three from Vancouver, the remaining two from Winnipeg and Kitchener. Of the cases that form the meat of each chapter, most are criminal. All 10 men are "courtroom lawyers," as Batten calls them, advocates or barristers. These are his favourite people. He admires the nerve and wit they display in court — a sort of improvisational theatre in his view. They've got to respond speedily to the unexpected and be spot on.

In an earlier book, *Lawyers*, Batten looked at solicitors. They're the Bay Street types, the fellows who spend their days in offices and libraries handling the paperwork in the law. He took pains in detailing their lush practices, their trim yachts, and tasteful houses. *In Court*, though, has none of that nose-against-windowpane quality. It's an enthusiast's book.

The courtroom lawyers selected are disparate types. Some are sleek movers amongst the comfortable; others are brand-new, freshly learning each day an advocate's skills. And some are the stuff of classic success stories: like the senior partner in a solid firm occupying the top

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floor of an edifice at Portage and Main where once he had stood outside selling newspapers as a boy.

Batten recognizes that the sort of cases that hold the public's attention are murder or treason or titillating libel, cases in which the human story is strong and clear. They are invariably tried before juries, which may explain the popular interest since the decision is in the hands of people much like you and me. In jury trials, it's often a sense of common decency that decides the issue. A blunt example is related by Batten in the chapter dealing with Harry Walsh of Winnipeg.

A young woman was charged with murdering her biker husband. The defence was automatonism. She claimed she had shot him during a deep, troubled sleep and thus lacked the requisite intent. The woman was painfully honest, and was clearly unsettled by what she had done. There was a sadness about her and a compelling innocence too. The prosecutor nevertheless had his job to do. In cross-examination, he confronted her with the rifle used in the killing. She began to cry. The courtroom was still to the echo.

"You son of a bitch," one juror suddenly swore at the prosecutor.

The rest of the jury were plainly startled, Walsh said, but you could see that this one juror had crystallized their feelings. The woman was acquitted in short order.

In a case like this, the defence counsel almost seems irrelevant. There's no legal sharpness involved as TV would have you believe is essential. On the other hand, it does appear that patience is a handy virtue. In one of the treason trials following the Gouzenko spy revelations, Batten relates how Joseph Sedgwick freed an accused who might well have been convicted. The judge had summed up tellingly for the Crown. He spent a long time doing so. One juror nodded off. The judge, seeing the tiring effect of his words, called a short recess and wrapped up quickly thereafter. In his hurry, however, he forgot to put the defendant's case to the jury. While such an omission is fatal to a conviction, the result on appeal would only be a re-trial. Consequently, at the close of the judge's summation, Sedgwick said nothing. He waited until the jury had gone. Then he spoke up. The judge recalled the jury and this time gave them the defendant's side of the story. Thus, when they again retired to deliberate on the fate of the accused, Sedgwick had ensured that the

words they took away with them were all highly favourable to his client. Patience had its reward. There was an acquittal.

The art of the advocate, however, is not the true subject of Batten's book. Rather, it is "the piece of magic" that unfolds "in any courtroom where gifted counsel are at work." Batten loves the story in the law and thus is attracted to the story-tellers, the lawyers who transform cold facts into a gripping tale:

The story comes in many voices and yet one man, the counsel, arranges the sequence of paragraphs and chapters. He asks the questions which evoke the answering lines but, in the end, the questions are rubbed out and all that remains is the flow of the narrative, the (human) story in its simplicity and drama.

The best chapter Batten left till last. The struggle of Mike Robitaille to get the Vancouver Canucks to recognize the true nature of his injury and subsequently to obtain redress from the hockey club makes compelling reading. What is first-rate about the account, however, is the clear-eyed way in which you are led through the story and how the law applies to it. In the result, the job of the advocate is made comprehensible. It is to put his client's case in

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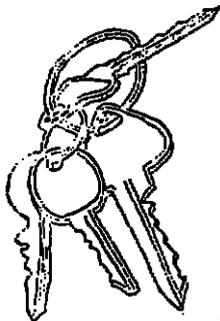


the best light possible. That's how the system works.

All the same, as you read through these potted accounts of lawyers and their cases, you wonder what it is about these people that attracts them to pick through the bits and pieces of other men's lives. Batten doesn't directly address that question — it may in fact be unanswerable — but there's a certain emptiness about the book in its absence.

One task which Batten set himself in writing *In Court* was to make plain to Canadians that their barristers are just as capable, just as romantic, clever, cantankerous, or cheerful as any American they might have heard about. In so many aspects of our lives, the touchstones are foreign. In law, the popular understanding is pretty much a product of Perry Mason and Clarence Darrow. But fact and fiction are interwoven in the American myth. The Canadian story appears less dramatic, less convincing because it is told as fact alone. John Robinette, Julian Porter and John Laxton are, as Batten outlines, accomplished Canadian counsel. In the end, however, they remain flat on the page. In part, this may be due to the nature of our political system. Advocates rarely champion causes. In any event, the legal system, at least until the Charter of Rights, has not afforded the opportunity to lawyers to mould the shape of things, to meddle in the lives of you and me. And while Batten has used the craft of the story-teller, he lets the facts tell the story.

Ultimately, these skilled lawyers remain flat because they are so clearly unrepresentative. Not one is from Quebec or the Maritimes. None are from small towns. Above all, what's missing is an account of someone like Claude



Armand-Sheppard, who got three juries to acquit Henry Morgentaler of performing illegal abortions in the face of clear directions from the judge to convict. That's the sort of lawyer to make a reader sit up and take notice.

They won't be making a movie out of this book, so Jack Batten won't have a chance to review it. What are you left with then? A good read. □

REVIEW

The single hook

By **STEPHEN SCOBIE**

Talking, by Phyllis Webb, Quadrant Editions, 153 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 86495 012 8).

PHYLLIS WEBB, who lives on Salt Spring Island, is one of the finest poets now writing in Canada — in fact, dropping the academic equivocation, she is *the* finest. Her work has always been distinguished by the profundity of her insights, the depth of her emotional feeling, the delicacy and accuracy of her rhythms, the beauty and mysterious resonance of her images, and by her luminous intelligence.

It is that intelligence, the fine tuning of an acute and cultured mind, which is most to the fore in *Talking*, a collection of Webb's essays, reviews, and radio talks. And certainly Webb demands intelligence of her readers as well: her prose is concise, aphoristic, and penetrating, and the range of her subject-matter is wide and challenging.

The reviews are never less than fascinating. Sometimes their interest is that of time-capsules (a 1964 glimpse of that promising young poet, Margaret Atwood, "who is essentially a portraitist"), but many of their judgements are as acute and valid today as when they were first written. Irving Layton seen in 1961 seems very much the same as Irving Layton seen in 1982:

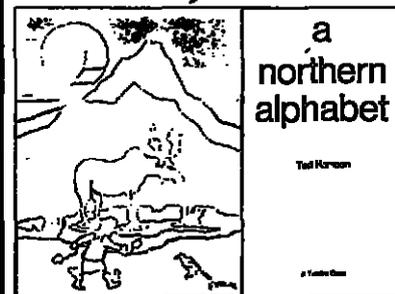
Although the Foreword to Irving Layton's new book *The Swinging Flesh* was directed only to the "Elect," I went ahead and read it. The now familiar roar of the Layton lion exploded in my face from every page . . . Between its teeth the lion has taken not only the "bourgeois-Christian civilization" but also the monolithic Communistic culture, has taken and has devoured. The lion roars because the diet disgusted him and his belly ached. And I can sympathize with the lion — who wants to eat *that!* — but his roar bored me.

The reviews, however, are limited by the length-restrictions under which they were originally written. *Talking* is at its strongest in the more extended pieces, such as "Phyllis Webb's Canada" (probably the best article ever to appear in *Maclean's*), which begins with the

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vision of the artist Vazan drawing long curved lines on the beaches of P.E.I. and Vancouver Island, enclosing Canada within parentheses.

From the parenthesis to the question mark, that "hook/sickle/scythe . . . Succulent lobe of the ear," as Webb calls it in "A Question of Questions," one of the major sequences in *Wilson's Bowl*. The essay, "The Question as an Instrument of Torture," stands in a complementary relationship to the poem: each exists independently, yet they illuminate and reinforce each other. Webb's essay was originally written in 1971 for a CBC-Radio series on the nature of evil ("Give me a series on Good and I would talk about the question as an instrument of revelation"), and it explores the oppressive uses of the interrogative mode in philosophy, law, literature, and above all in torture. "Torture writes the question mark on the body and the method is usually successful in getting answers or dead men. Or answers and dead men." Eleven years later Webb still answers urgently to this terrible question: her latest poem, "Prison Report" (published as a broadsheet by Slug Press in Vancouver, with proceeds going to Amnesty International), is based on the writings of Jacobo Timerman. "Is there," Webb asks (using inescapably the form of the question in order to question the form), "any language, or has there ever been a society in which the interrogative form did not exist? In the beginning was the word, but was it followed by a question mark?"

For students and lovers of poetry, the most interesting sections will be Webb's reflections on her own work and craft. In "Up the Ladder: Notes on the Creative Process," Webb sketches the origins of some of her own poems: as with most such explanations, the more they explain of the incidental details that make up the circumstances of creation, the less they explain the intuitive leaps of that creation itself. In "On the Line" she offers tantalizing and aphoristic insights into why poets break the line where they do.

Finally, Webb's sensitive account of the correspondence between Wilson Duff and Lilo Berliner is essential reading, not only for its own sake but also as background to Webb's major work, *Wilson's Bowl*. Again there is the sense that Webb's concise, controlled prose is touching on areas of vast implication: in one direction, the whole question of suicide, that question which has "concerned our best philosophers" and which offered too great a temptation, or too fine an illumination, for Berliner and Duff; and in another direction, to

the whole tradition of West-Coast Indian art, its incredible sophistication, its mythic articulation of a land- and sea-

scape that haunts us still, out on the shores of the one (bracketed) edge of the world. □

INTERVIEW

Graeme Gibson on the decade that transformed him from a despairing novelist into a 19th-century balladeer

By GEOFF HANCOCK

GRAEME GIBSON was born in London, Ont., in 1934, and grew up in Ontario, with brief stops in Halifax, Fredericton, and Australia. A former English teacher at Toronto's Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, he is a founding member of the Writers' Union of Canada, and served as its chairman in 1974-75. He is also a former chairman of the Book and Periodical Development Council and the Writers' Development Trust. His first novel, *Five Legs* (1969), was a stream-of-consciousness account of academic and sexual failure. His second, *Communion* (1971), was a series of symbolic fantasies about the violence within his characters. Gibson published a book of interviews, *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, in 1973, and is currently writing a sequel to his third novel, *Perpetual Motion* (reviewed on page nine). He spoke to Geoff Hancock in his Toronto home, where he lives with writer Margaret Atwood and their daughter, Jess, about the long creative process involved in his latest book:

Books in Canada: *Could you tell me about the germination of Perpetual Motion?*

Graeme Gibson: After *Communion* I wanted to write another contemporary novel. I didn't want to write a despairing novel because *Communion* had done that adequately. I tried for a year or more to get at what the novel was going to be. I had long lists of characters. I was thinking it through and I could not come to terms with it. The main reason was that I could not do anything with the present until I went back and found out where my characters had come from. The name of the character in the contemporary novel, with his sense of *angst* and breakdown, was Robert Alexander Fraser. Where did he come from? I decided to go back to his great-grandfather. The more I began looking at that, the more aware I became that

the novel would take place in the 1860s.

At one point, I thought the novel was going from the 1860s to the end of the 1960s, to the imposition of the War Measures Act, all in one volume. That gave me a lot of trouble. I'm not that kind of writer, but it took me some time to discover that. In the contemporary novel, one of the themes is the return of the character to the land, to bird-watching and canoeing. In the 19th century there are the passenger pigeons. That was the massive event for central Canada, in the way the plains buffalo was for the West. An astonishing number of animals were destroyed very quickly by man's efforts. The birds became a strong focus for the book.

I was also living on a farm near Alliston, Ont. I still thought I could write a contemporary novel. I hadn't been on a farm since I was nine years old. We worked the farm, took out 3,000 bales of hay every summer, learned how to plough, how to fix machinery. I even started shaving with a straight razor. In retrospect, it was all preparation for this book.

Then I read local histories. Many wonderful histories were published during 1967. All kinds of towns would get their oldest articulate citizens to put down everything they knew about the town. Not 30 miles from our farm, in the 19th century, an old fellow actually did turn over the bones of a mastodon while ploughing. He put the skeleton together and took it to circuses. It was only a short entry on him, but it went straight into my head, and into the book. While trying to find the other focus to the book, the idea of perpetual motion came. I just built it from there. **BiC:** *Five Legs and Communion were a major breakthrough in narrative technique in Canada, and certainly one of the most promising stylistic breakthroughs of the decade. A new use of language*

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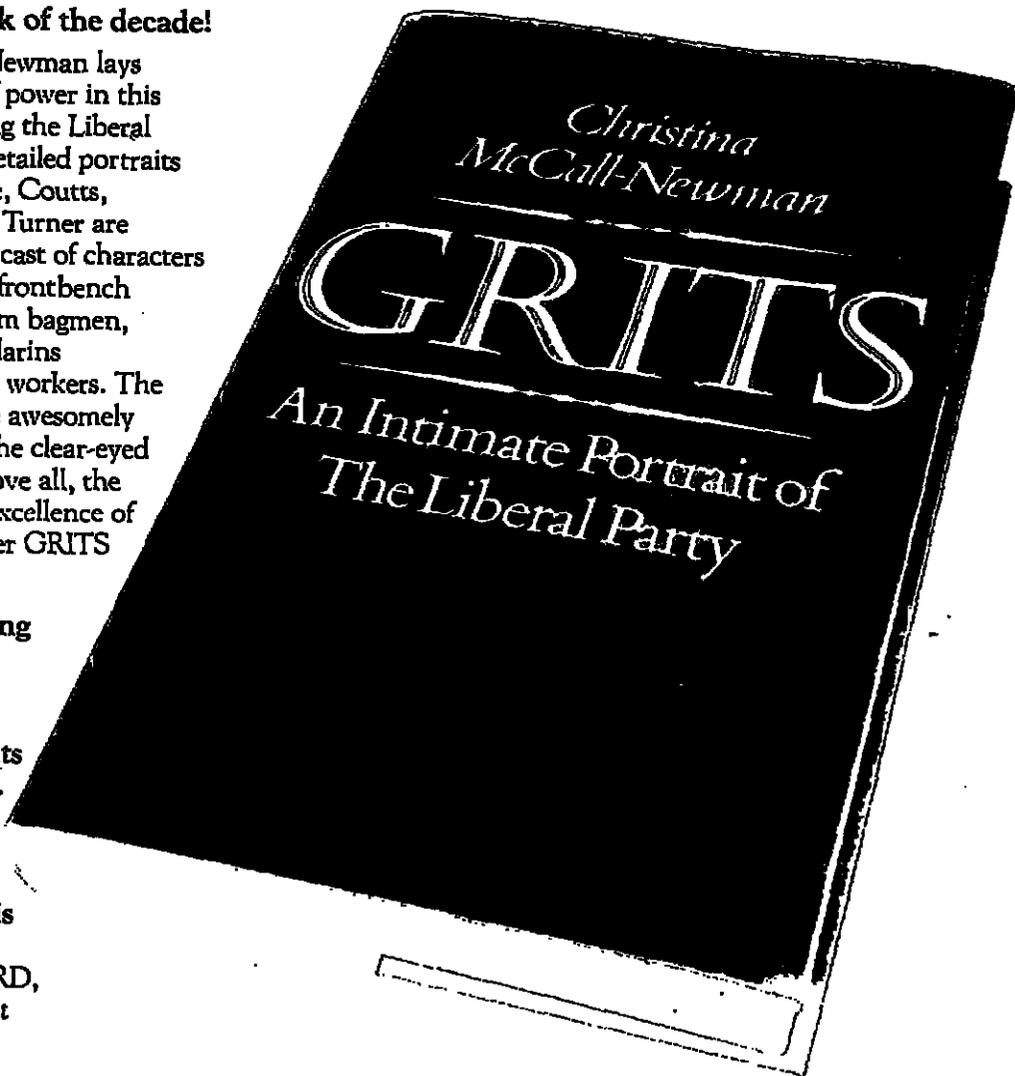
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seemed imminent. But it didn't catch on. Gibson: In my case the internal monologue and the personal psychological novel — I don't mean autobiographical — suited very well the preoccupations of young men and women who were battling through their internal processes, trying to arrive at some kind of objectification of self. That kind of language worked very well for the young man that I was. Also, when I was learning about writing, I had the arrogant sense that Canadian literature was absolutely ignorant of what had happened to the novel in the 20th century. There was Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, of course, but at first it vanished like a stone. Because of my training in literature, and because I admired James Joyce up to *Ulysses*, Beckett, Kafka, and especially Malcolm Lowry, it seemed right to do at the time. But having done it, I didn't feel the need to do it again. It's not a matter of "catching on." That kind of style only works when the material is appropriate. I could not imagine writing *Perpetual Motion* in that style.

BiC: Did you need almost a decade to find the style you needed? What were you doing all that time?

Gibson: I read sections of *Perpetual*

Motion in Vancouver as early as 1974. It wasn't the style I couldn't get; it was my relationship to the material. I couldn't sustain the style. The voice was wrong. I had signs of it, and knew how I wanted to do it, but the book had not jelled for me. I couldn't get at enough episodes that worked for me. I knew they were there, but I spent a lot of time writing badly, or not writing at all, because I couldn't find — I don't have the vocabulary for this — my relationship to the material. I got very involved with cultural politics, partly because I had to do something and partly because I had a fire in my belly over it. All the time kept working on the book. By the end of 1974 I had the style and the characters and a much bigger book than I have now. But I just couldn't get the entrance to it.

BiC: You've chosen a hinting style, one that doesn't always deal directly with the key images. Things are seen out of the corner of the reader's eye. Could you comment on this moody, spooky quality?

Gibson: It's important to me that the thought processes of my major character relate to the description of what's happening in the external world around him. The more obsessed he becomes with the machine, the more his mind becomes machine-like. Not only does he

hate the bush, is terrified of it, and its chaos, but he is horrified, appalled, and frightened by the nature within him as well. The relationship between the internal and external world of my characters cannot be known under these circumstances. His wife identifies with a tree. So these things that cannot be known drive him to a machine that can be known. Its logic can be followed. He wants step-by-step logical thinking. The book doesn't give that except in some descriptions of the machine and his obsession with it.

BiC: So writing for you is as much a process as a product?

Gibson: Writing for me is exclusively process. It becomes a product when the book is finished. To answer that old chestnut, "Who do you write for?" I write for the book. First, I write for the idea of the book, and then all my best instincts and energies are for the book itself. Then I edit for the ideal reader, to make the book clear and presentable. Once it gets into the publisher's hands, then the book is mere product.

BiC: Is part of your narrative strategy to build toward a climax of plot? The forest fire? The machine's explosion?

Gibson: I didn't know how I was going to end the book. I knew he would have to test the machine. That Big Day had to come. In writing the book, I really didn't know until a few months from the end whether or not I would have the machine work for him. Or what the implications would be if it did. In history, of course, the perpetual motion machine has never worked.

BiC: Is a book about the past really a book about today? Are we heading towards self-destruction? Is that the perpetual motion of history?

Gibson: *Perpetual Motion* is certainly about the past that has made us. On one level it's about our way of thinking. What wins in this book is the mechanical, technical mind. The organic, superstitious, more aesthetic mind is driven mad. Fraser's son is a feral child, a wild-child. At the slaughter of the birds he has to vanish from the book — vanish, at least, as a physical presence. He cannot continue to live in a world where that kind of slaughter goes on. Less dramatically, Robert's wife is associated with tree imagery, and Robert drives her to the background of the book by his rather heroic obsession with the machine.

BiC: I thought Canadian fiction was supposed to move forward. But you are writing a novel about the past. Is this a major departure for Canadian writing?

Gibson: This kind of book is a major departure. But if you look at *Five Legs*, I wrote a history of the major characters. So to do a history of a

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culture instead of an individual is not a radical departure. It's a significant one, however. With all our concern for modernity in Canadian literature, the ballad-making tradition has vanished. That's a story-telling tradition that people can explore and participate in. If you get influenced by too much symbolism, in the T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden approach to literature, then it is harder to tell your stories. So much Latin-American literature is historical. In a post-colonial society, that's what you have to do. You have to go back and tell your history in a way that is meaningful to the people who actually live there.

Years ago, Dennis Lee and I decided to write a casebook of essays on the

great 19th-century Canadian writer we all assumed to be there, but just wasn't. We find bits of it in Susanna Moodie, bits in *Wacousta*, bits in Isabella Valancy Crawford. But not that really seminal Canadian writer. We weren't sure if it was a he or she, the young officer, or the young officer's wife, writing this stuff.

I wouldn't be surprised if we don't find more of this. We've seen it in Margaret Laurence, in people like Rudy Wiebe, in Matt Cohen's *The Disinherited*. Our generation seized upon experimentation in the 1960s. We had to seize hold of the present. But now that we have seized it, I think we have to find out how we got to the present. □

FIRST NOVELS

Growing pains: from a dismaying treatment of child abuse to a celebration of Jewish adolescence in Toronto

By DOUGLAS HILL

The Hathaway Decision, by Bryan W. Pritchard (Nyron, 213 pages, \$3.95 paper), is a disturbing novel in two quite distinct ways. Its focus is child abuse, and the author, a former lawyer and obviously a passionate and knowledgeable crusader with a strong case to argue, delineates that unsettling subject and its complexities adequately. But to my mind, he's compromised, even obscured his concern by attaching his indignation to a pot-boiling mystery structure and developing it through stereotyped characters and incidents and banal prose. The subject of the novel dismays; so does the treatment.

The story can't be summarized. It takes the bizarre twists and counter-twists of a Chandler/MacDonald plot and constructs of them wholly implausible nonsense. Intricacy seems to serve only intricacy; surprise and revelation are heaped upon chicanery and double-cross until a reader is numbed. That's probably since it lets one avoid the wordy cuteness and superficiality of the style.

Curiously enough, the book turns out to be readable. Pritchard is competent with the courtroom and law-firm drama that centres his plot, though it's best to ignore the clichés that rise from his context between the dedicated young female defence lawyer (assigned to an accused child-batterer) and the wily old pro-

secutor (male) who opposes her. It's readable, but read it fast, skim the details, skip the sex altogether.

Child abuse is serious stuff, of course. If the novel's serious on that score, it's a joke on most others. It's too easy to ignore such a distressing crime. *The Hathaway Decision*, paradoxically and sadly, manages to make such wilful ignorance easier.

NESSA RAPOPORT'S subject in *Preparing for Sabbath* (Seal Books, 288 pages, \$2.95 paper) is the growth into spiritual (and social and sexual) awareness of a young Toronto Jewish woman. The story is told with feeling and control; the heroine's quest, as child and adult, is hardly free of struggle and disappointment, but Rapoport finds in her material cause for celebration, not anguish.

Judith Rafael leads a somewhat privileged life: well-to-do loving parents, good schools and camps and trips, understanding friends and charming — if confused — lovers. Her world is filled with intelligence and opportunity; Rapoport takes for granted that adolescents think, that the questions they face have substance and weight.

The language of *Preparing for Sabbath* is sure. The early parts, which focus on childhood, show a crisp, alert prose, a deliberate simplicity of

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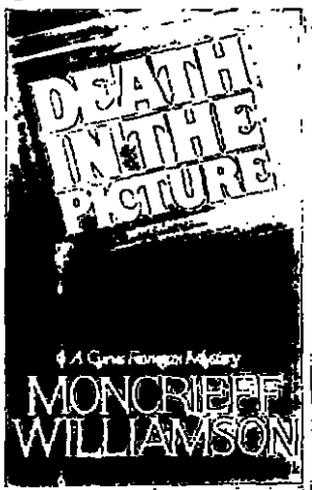
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approach. As Judith matures, Rapoport describes her feelings lyrically, with a bold use of biblical imagery. It works, and produces a few lovely scenes.

The novel's dialogue is not always sharp, and there are occasional weak lines in the narrative. At times the book seems a bit thick and muddy, seems unable to work free of a tendency to self-absorption. But if it now and then spins its wheels, the integrity of its commitment — to Judith's demands for full Jewishness in her life and a full life in the world — makes for satisfying reading.

The Flare of a Match, by Jim Young (*Breakwater*, 157 pages, \$6.95 paper), tells a simple, straightforward, and often moving story. The narrator (named Jim Young) hires Michael Gillman, a young American deserter (it's 1970), for a teaching post in an isolated Labrador community. Michael comes under the

spell of Black Rock and its ways, develops teaching skills that depend on a respect for children and local customers, falls in love with the daughter of the village postmistress.

There's some turgid writing in the novel — too much stylistic repetition, patches of awkward dialogue, laboured statements of the obvious. But Young is capable of good, direct prose, too, and when he hits his stride the book moves along well. Stronger editing might have helped; certainly there are too many typographical errors and inaccuracies.

As a picture of a (fortunately) still not vanished possibility of Canadian experience — the outsider pulled and opened to an alien culture — *The Flare of a Match* looks honest, authentic. There are no surprises here; though the force and skill of the narrative are uneven, it's a basically interesting story told with compassion and fairness. □

PAPERBACKS

Despite their charnel atmosphere,
the ghost stories of Robertson Davies are
more puppyish than spooky

By ANNE COLLINS

EVER SINCE that impressionable age when, as I strolled a dark and lonely country mile in search of Hallowe'en treats, my two older and wicked sisters leaped upon me from a ditch yelling the guttural Japanese for "Surrender!" I have harboured no particular love for either would-be ghosts or ghost stories. I have been to only one horror movie in my adult life (persuaded by a 12-year-old male relative of mine) — *Poltergeist*. And even while my intellect sneered sharply over the gate to the spirit world being depicted as a pulsating raspberry-jello-coated birth canal, my heart beat so high I was light-headed for a full hour afterward. In other words, I scare easily.

Therefore the news that Penguin had collected Robertson Davies's ghost stories in an original paperback did not fill me with joy. My duty, I thought as I picked it up, lies too often beyond peace of mind. But I should have taken a cue from the title, *High Spirits* (\$5.95), for never was a more puppyish and friendly a group of otherworldly tales unleashed in mean November.

Davies, too, was scared as a child but he seems to have enjoyed the sensation.

Perhaps because the first time wasn't in the dark, but was after supper among his elders, while Mrs. Currie told the story of the strange disappearance of Oliver Lurch, a boy who went outside to get some wood for the fire and never came back. "I fell asleep that night fearing the Mighty Clutch," writes Davies in the introduction. He woke the next morning with a heartfelt admiration for the effects of ghost stories and the feeling that no party should run its course without the telling of one. When an older Davies became the first master of Massey College at the University of Toronto and was asked to make a contribution to the festivities of the first Gaudy Night — an annual college Christmas party that began in December, 1963 — what came to his mind was a ghost story. In "Revelation from a Smoky Fire" the first master meets the future ninth master, and discovers that the first master is really a shade who disappeared from the college under a cloud. (I notice as I'm writing a slight osmosis of style. Davies hoped to honour by slight imitation a writer of *grimoires*, the Reverend Father Alphon-

sus Joseph-Mary Augustus Montague Summers, whose prose style "displays a fruit calyness and port-wynness" and who delighted in words like "sepulture" and "charnel." Unfortunately it's catching.) The first story was followed by a second, then a third, and then one every year until Davies resigned last year. Cheerful ghost stories to populate a new college: "It was never my intention to frighten anyone."

Just to amuse, instruct in the history of universities (Toronto in particular), to poke fun at, and to jazz up, the luminaries of the college appear in many of the stories. In one, Davies reincarnates them all as their ancestors were in 1774. He is careful to portray himself as the humblest, a Welsh shepherd of dignified spitting habits but overpowering smell: "The air seemed infected with a woolly greasiness." There was Farmer Bissell — "Capability Bissell he was called." And "That Scotsman — for he could be nothing else — almost naked except for a much-worn plaid, and bearing every mark of crushing poverty — could it be Walter Gordon?" Professors C.P. Stacey and J.M.S. Careless were even then arguing politics: "Stacey, obviously a Tory of the darkest blue, was becoming very angry with Careless, whose less formal dress suggested some revolutionary sympathies."

The tender psychological condition of graduate students was also very much on the master's mind, concerned as he was to balance the university's main diet of rationality with a healthy tonic of the irrational. One, writing his Ph.D. thesis on Dickens, is slowly vampirized by a bust of that presumed-dead author — Davies had been noting how students often become wan reflections of the great artists they study: mini-Joyces, bed-ridden Prousts. In another, a hall don doing mysteriously well in law turns out to have captured Asmodeus or "The Devil on Two Sticks" — a specialist in such matters — in a bottle. Davies is tempted to let him out and passes some hairy moments perched on top of the college tower in his company. Yet another student takes a leaf out of Mary Shelley's book to build a college mascot, a cat 12 times normal size who takes a layer of skin off Davies's arm with one friendly lick, then escapes over the wall to Trinity.

My favourites, though, are those in which Davies meets the shade of a famous soul. The one in which he plays piano to Einstein's violin, for instance. Or in which he communicates with William Lyon Mackenzie King through the same little table King used to huddle over with Mrs. Patteson summoning the spirit of his dead mother. Davies is

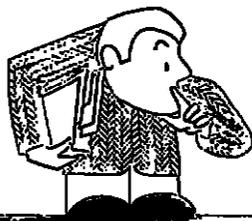
always at a conversational loss with these persons and has to retreat to small talk:

"How's Pat?" I asked.

The table seemed to brighten up. It did some frisky tapping. Two-fifteen-twenty-three: twenty-three-fifteen-twenty-three. Bow-wow. Obviously it was Pat himself talking, so I feigned great benevolence and patted the table with the *faux bonhomie* I adopt toward other people's dogs. The table responded by rapping twenty-three, fifteen, fifteen again, and six. Woof. And, so far as I was concerned, that was enough from Pat.

He communes better with Sir John A. Macdonald, who seems to have devoted the afterlife to the further joys of sherry, and with whom Davies consumes a ghostly banquet just like the one served in Charlottetown to the Fathers of Confederation:

There was a Lapin Sauté which had been made to stand upright, its paws raised as though in delight at its own beauty, and a charming fluff of cauliflower sprigs where its tail had been a few hours before; you could see that it was served au Champignons, for two button mushrooms gleamed where its eyes had once been. There was a Côtelette d'Agneau with, naturally, Petits Pois. There was a Coquette de volaille, and a Timbale de Macaroni which had been moulded into the form



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ANANSI

of — of all things — a Beaver.

I know Robertson Davies wrote these stories to entertain faculty and junior fellows, their guests and unsuspecting family members. His dedication to masterly conviviality is awesome; he must be at least as genial a fellow as he portrays himself in this book. My only wish is that his editor (or Davies himself, who apologizes for this in the introduction) had decided to cut or vary slightly the openings, in which he once again has

to introduce and explain himself to his audience. Eighteen times the same thing is a touch too much repetition. I amend that wish to add a second but equal clause, which is that Davies continue to write his non-scary ghost stories but for a party that entertains a wider cross-section of the world. A few non-academics, at least, might allow a more eclectic table setting for the fruit cakyness and port-winyness, and silly invention. □

THE BROWSER

Sticks and stones: from the perplexities of modern-day etiquette to yet one more shameful episode in Canadian history

By MORRIS WOLFE

None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948, by Irving Abella and Harold Troper (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 336 pages, \$19.95 cloth), is, as reviewers have remarked, an important book that brings to light yet another shameful episode in our history. What reviewers *haven't* commented on is the ponderous style in which the book is written. It takes *real* effort to plough one's way through sentences like: "King's July refugee policy statement in the Commons may have dampened the sense of urgency felt by its supporters, along with the mixed response from the press." My fear is that all too few readers will actually finish this book. It's too easy, I think, to blame the wooden prose on co-authorship. Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton's recent book *Vichy France and the Jews* is eminently readable.

"SOCIOLOGY," SAYS Ernest Gowers in the revised Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (1965), "is a new science concerning itself not with esoteric matters outside the comprehension of the layman . . . but with the ordinary affairs of ordinary people. This seems to engender in those who write . . . it a feeling that the lack of any abstruseness in their subject demands a compensatory abstruseness in their language." Sociologists, of course, aren't the only offenders. And James H. Boren, author of *Fuzzify!* (John Wiley & Sons, 197 pages, \$17.50 cloth), has built a career out of sending up compensatory abstruseness of bureaucrats and others. Unfortunately,

Boren isn't nearly as much fun in print as he is on television.

"TIME AND AGAIN," says Robertson Davies, "I am forced to the conclusion that if we want intelligent comment about writing . . . we are more likely to get it from writers themselves than from critics." Using that thought as their starting point, Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman of the University of Guelph have assembled a surprisingly interesting collection of statements by 32 19th- and 20th-century English-Canadian writers on the theory and practice of fiction. Included in *Canadian Novelists and the Novel* (Borealis Press, 284 pages, \$23.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper) are comments by Thomas Haliburton, Susanna Moodie, Hugh MacLennan, Margaret Laurence, and Robert Kroetsch. Unfortunately, Daymond and Monkman have been served badly by their publisher. The book is poorly designed and printed on a yellowish stock that's extremely hard on the eyes, especially when the pages are over-inked.

DON'T GET ME wrong. *Class Acts: Etiquette for Today*, by Eve Drobot (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 168 pages, \$12.95 cloth), is a good, well-written little book. It tells us how to deal with many of the awkward situations we find ourselves in. ("Dear Eve: Who goes through a revolving door first — a man or a woman?" "Dear Eve: Is one expected to tip the person who delivers pizza?") The trouble is that books like this never quite get around to the *really*

thorny problems. Like how to deal with bores and fools. Or how to deal with panhandlers — especially now that their numbers have increased so sharply.

I RECENTLY READ the volume of Hector Charlesworth's *Candid Chronicles* that describes in detail Charlesworth's shabby treatment at the hands of the Ottawa bureaucracy during his tenure as chairman of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in the 1930s. Charlesworth probably was badly treated, yet 50 years later it all seems like a tempest in a teapot. And it is he, rather than the bureaucrats, who looks silly — is diminished — as a result of his account. I was reminded of Charlesworth by John Metcalf's collection of essays, *Kicking Against the Pricks* (ECW Press, 216 pages, \$8.95 paper). Metcalf lashes out — satirically, we're told — at the Canadian literary community, whose greatest sin, it seems, is that it hasn't given one John Metcalf the respect and attention he deserves. Everywhere Metcalf turns he runs into pricks. They come out of the woodwork. Two of the biggest pricks, you should know, are the editor and managing editor of *Books in Canada*. And I think Metcalf even suspects me of being a prick.

"PREMATURE MEMOIRS," writes British essayist Clive James, "can only be conceited. I have no excuses against this charge, except to say that . . . to wait until reminiscence is justified by achievement might mean to wait for ever." James's ability to take himself seriously and *not* seriously at the same time makes his own *Unreliable Memoirs* (Picador, 174 pages, \$4.50 paper) a joy to read. But then James is a joy to read on *any* subject, as *First Reactions: Critical Essays 1968-1979* (Knopf, 240 pages, \$12.95 cloth) reveals. He writes about poetry better than anybody. (He's as good as V.S. Pritchett on fiction.) And like Gore Vidal he brings both a highly developed political sensibility and an outrageous sense of humour to his writing.

Nowhere is he funnier than in his television criticism for *The Observer*. Here he is on a BBC show on yoga:

There was a doctor on hand to say that Hatha Yoga really could deal with arthritis, bronchial asthma, colitis, dysentery and things like that. It seemed more than possible. That someone who could wrap his legs around his head would be an unlikely candidate for arthritis seemed a truism. . . . A man bent a steel bar with his eyelid . . . a much older man smashed a milk bottle and lay down in

the pieces while they put a heavy roller over him. There was a fulsome crunching as the small pieces of glass became even smaller pieces. The man rose to his feet long enough to brush a few slivers from his unmarked skin. . . . Then he lay down again and they drove a Mercedes truck over him. Plainly this skill would come in handy any time you fell asleep on a broken milk bottle in the middle of an autobahn.

James may be the finest and funniest essayist now writing in the language. □

LETTERS

The feminist mystique

Sir:
Kevin Roberts's report of the League of Canadian Poets annual general meeting (*Field Notes*, August-September) and particularly of the Feminist Caucus,

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which he quaintly incarnates for his own rhetorical purposes as a women's caucus, is not merely inaccurate, it is sheer invention.

There are so many errors in Roberts's report that a detailed rebuttal would be futile and boring. Canadian readers and writers should know, however, that the Feminist Caucus of the league is open to men and women who are interested in taking action against sexism in Canadian literature and that, further, our recommendation that juries at all levels should have female representation bears no relation to Roberts's invention of a desire for all-female juries. The caucus is against single-sex juries.

David Donnell, the league's president, will certainly be surprised to hear that he is a woman — or is Roberts implying that any person who aligns himself with anti-sexism automatically undergoes sex-change by association?

Perhaps the fact that Roberts spoke only with those male members most vehemently opposed to the caucus and failed to attend the information session or read the motion explains his gross inaccuracies. One would not like to think that Roberts pre-judged an issue or that his biases would interfere with an ability to reason.

Roberts fails to raise the central issue

facing the league; public accountability. This is not surprising; he seems to be completely unfamiliar with the idea in any of its applications, from the accountability of a reporter to present accurate information to the accountability of a person who accepts public money for the purpose of attending a meeting to attend to the business of the meeting.

The major issue facing the league is the conflict of vision between members who wish to see the league providing professional services and those who want to get together to "cheer each other up, get a few drinks under their belts, and kick around a few notions of art and craft" at taxpayers' expense. The self-elected, sociable elite Roberts describes is simply against any challenge to its tattered standard, which is one of control, not "quality."

Roberts intends readers to infer that anyone who disagrees with Skelton, Rosenblatt, Lane, or other members of the social network does so because of inferior ability. This is nonsense, and dangerous, totalitarian, vicious nonsense at that. No one disputes that quality should be a criterion for publication. However, Skelton, Roberts, *et al.* try to make the statement, which is not an argument but a premise, serve as a defense of institutionalized sexism. The

statement is merely cheap rhetoric, a red herring meant to confuse political issues with aesthetic ones, the sacred bull of political reactionaries.

That Roberts's cheap and shoddy edifice should be presented as a defence of quality is ludicrous. It is also a form of propaganda designed to obscure self-interest.

Sharon H. Nelson
Managing Editor
Metonymy Productions
Montreal

Kevin Roberts replies: Ad hominem (literally) comments are not credible arguments, and Ms Nelson's failure to read my piece carefully or understand its motivation and chronology may well justify some of my comments.

Catcher in the corn

Sir:
I read with interest and amusement Douglas Glover's article, "Catcher In The Corn" (August-September), in which he claims that "the Iowa Writers' Workshop has become the thought control centre of CanLit." Cheer up, gentle



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readers. We need not yet worry that CanLit, sick for home, will stand in tears amid the alien corn. The old Iowa grads who are presently teaching creative writing in Canada appear to number exactly eight, all male. And although I don't believe that creative writing can be "taught" or that degrees up to the doctorate level should be passed out by any group of pundits for same, I can hardly imagine that the Gang of Eight is engaged in some dark conspiracy to take over Canadian fiction under the banner of the Iowa cornbelt. I admire much of their writing, and don't think that corn is where it's at.

Having said that, I should add that while a bunch of the boys were at various times whooping it up in Iowa, enjoying "the smell of pigshit in the evenings, the beer in Irene's... the chaos of writers and writerly egos," others of us were learning our trade in various corners of the world, including our own land, without benefit of instructive workshops, and on the whole I'd say we've done just as well as they have in terms of the quality of work produced. I am thinking of a goodly number of our male colleagues, but I'm also thinking quite strongly of such writers as Gabrielle Roy, Alice Munro, Joyce Marshall, Sylvia Fraser, Helen Weinzweig, Rachel Wyatt, Constance Beresford-Howe, Joy Kogawa, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Carol Shields, and, if I may say so, myself.

Despite Mr. Glover's fears... or, as it may be, hopes... the Iowa takeover is not imminent. It occurs to me that the reverse may even be the case. I'm now reading W.P. Kinsella's marvellously fantastic novel, *Shoeless Joe*, in which one of the fictional characters is J.D. Salinger, who in so-called real life is the author of that classic and much-banned novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Do I detect a faint note here of what we might term Canadian Club? Unlike one of the old Iowa grads, I do not go "all mushy over the maple leaf flag," nor do I engage in raucous singing of that worst of all possible songs, "The Maple Leaf Forever." Nevertheless, I and my work are of this land and people, and if our literary detectives are going to crack open the case of Canadian Club, I'd like to be kept informed. Cheers!

Margaret Laurence
Lakefield, Ont.

Letters may be edited for length or to delete potentially libellous statements. Except in extraordinary circumstances, letters of more than 500 words will not be accepted for publication.

CANWIT NO. 77

THIS MONTH'S SURVEY of art and gift books reminds us that this is the season when once again publishers truck out all their favourite clichés in attempts to create an instant best-seller. Our old friends at McClarkan & Newspider have several new titles in the gift-book sweepstakes, *Margaret Trudeau's Book of Movie Heroes*, *Madame Benoit's Guide to Pac-Man*, and *Marc Lalonde's Solar Heating Book* (revised edition, with an introduction by Jean Chretien), and on the international lists we recently spotted *Princess Diana's Book of Dogs*. Contestants are invited to compose other trendy titles that guarantee financial success. The prize is \$25. Deadline: December 1. Address: CanWit No. 77, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5Z 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 75

OUR REQUEST for titles for the house organs of various organizations and businesses produced an embarrassment of bad puns — so many that the editor who writes *Books in Canada's* headings became jealous. The winner is Keith Cole Angus of Kemptville, Ont., for a list that includes:

- The United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union: *Cod Pieces*
- The Canadian Cattlemen's Association: *Bull Sheet*
- General Motors: *As We Recall*
- General Electric: *Watts New*
- Pro-capital punishment lobby: *Good Noose*

Honourable mentions:

- Newfoundland Liquor Commission: *The Screech*
- Atomic Energy of Canada: *Glowing Report*
- Air Canada: *High Times*
- Canadian Bar Association: *Last Call*
— Patrick Sullivan, Ottawa

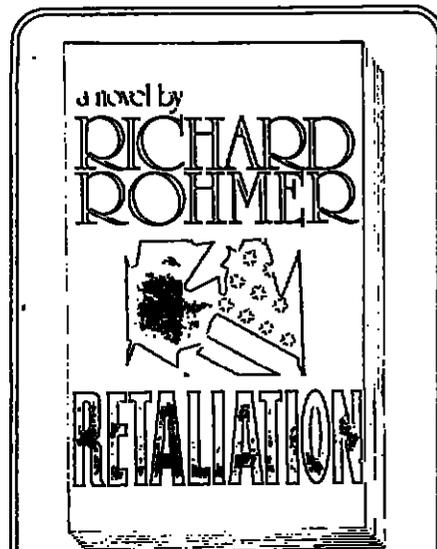
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- The Royal Bank: *Of Principal Interest*
- The Canadian Football League: *Offensive Lines*
- B.C. Liquor Control Board: *The Grapevine*
— Ian C. Johnston, Nanaimo, B.C.

* * *

- Canadian Intelligence Service: *The Listener*
- Canadian Dairymen's Association: *The Grab Bag*
— Frederick D. Weir, Coboconk, Ont.

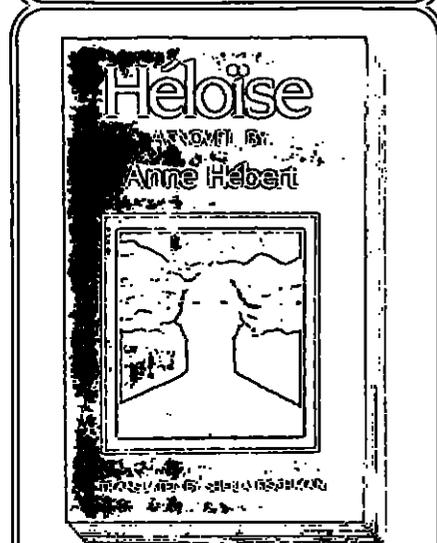
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— Michael H.B. Kortsen, London, Ont.

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□ Canadian Correctional Institutions: *The Pen Pal*

□ Canadian Union of Postal Workers: *The Last Post*

— Mary Lile Benham, Winnipeg

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 Moons of Jupiter, by Alice Munro, Macmillan. Whether she calls it Jubilee, Dalgleish, or Logan, Ont., Munro's fictional territory is a rural society that can be enriched or depleted by an individual's consciousness, but never destroyed. It is a constant presence through which her nar-

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rators weave and dodge like a blind man trying to find his way through an unfamiliar house.

NON-FICTION

The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada, by Marian Fowler, House of Anansi. In any sort of embroidery details are important, and Fowler has found many in her examination of Susanna Moodie, Anna Jameson, Catharine Parr Traill, Lady Dufferin, and Mrs. Simcoe. Readers may not agree with the parallels she draws between her heroines and others in fiction and real life, but her book is thought-provoking and always enjoyable.

POETRY

War in an Empty House, by Don Domanski, House of Anansi. Domanski doesn't have to scramble through either the self-doubt or self-indulgence that mars the work of many young poets. Instead, he leads us by the hand through his beautiful and frightening world of dream and bodily sensation, and his particular kind of surrealism is more poignant and haunting than ever.

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:

Ace, by Spencer Dunmore, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Arches in British Columbia, by Chuen-yan David Lai, Sono Nis Press.
Atlantic Spectrum '83, edited by Leslie McKillop, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Awe, by John Nold, Longspoon Press.
Baker's Heaven, by Wence Horai, illustrated by Sarie Jenkins, Three Trees Press.
Beautiful Dreamer, by Allen Morgan, Kids Can Press.
Beaufort, by Jocelyn Cobb, M & S.
A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario, by Clive E. Goodwin, U of T Press.
Bulders of British Columbia, by G.W. Taylor, Morris Publishing.
Calling Home, by Merna Summers, Oberon.
Canadian Songbirds and their ways, by Trudy and Jim Ring, illustrated by Kathryn De Vos-Miller, Tundra.
The Case of the Dowhill Theft, by George Swede, Three Trees Press.
Chester's Barn, by Linde Climo, Tundra.
Children's Literature in Canada, edited by Naim Nomez, Ediciones Cordilera.
Class Acts, by Eve Drobat, Van Nostrand Reinhold.
Computers on the Job, by Heather Mendes, James Lorimer.
Consequences, by Margaret Trudeau, Seal.
CORE: Stories and Poems celebrating the lives of ordinary people who call Toronto their home, collected by Ruth Johnson, edited by Erid Lee. CORE.
Country of the Open Heart, by David McFadden, Longspoon Press.
The Critical Wager, by William D. Gardner, ECW Press.
Dancing in Asylum, by Richard Lemm, Potlatch Press.
Danger on the River, by J. Robert James, Clarke Irwin.
Death over Montreal, by Geoffrey Bilson, Kids Can Press.
The Dictionary of Canadian Quotations and Phrases, by Robert M. Hamilton and Dorothy Shields, M & S.
Digging In, by Elizabeth Brewster, Oberon.
The Discovery of Insulin, by Michael Bliss, M & S.
Disneyland Hostage, by Eric Wilson, Clarke Irwin.
Enlightenment Walk in Water, by Jeannette C. Armstrong, Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project.
Excuses for Archery, by Glenn Deer, Longspoon Press.
Ferry Command, by Don McVicar, Ad Astra Books.
Food 101, by Cathy Smith, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
For a Better Life, by Anthony W. Rasporich, M & S.
Founders & Guardians (Second edition), by Irma Coucill, John Wiley & Sons.
The Garden Transformed, by Vernon Smitheran et al., Ragged Press.
Going Through the Motions, by Katherine Govier, M & S.

Gophers and Swans, by Gwen Hauser, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.
Haida: Their Art and Culture, by Leslie Dryw, Hancock House.
A Hard Act to Follow, by V.K. Gilbert et al., Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Hemlingway in Toronto, by David Donnell, Black Moss Press.
Hernon, The Third Treasury, by Jim Unger, Andrews and McMeel (U.S.).
A Hill for Looking, by Martha Brooks, Queenston House.
How to Sell Your Own Home, by A. Vendor, Hurtig.
I'm Only Afraid of the Dark (at Night), by Patti Sreen, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
Is that you this is me, by Elspeth Bradbury, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.
Is This "One to Those Days," Daddy?, by Lynn Johnston, Andrews and McMeel (U.S.).
The Ivory Swing, by Janette Turner Hospital, M & S.
Jack in Port, by Judith Fingard, U of T Press.
Kissing the Body of My Lord, by Doug Beardley, Longspoon Press.
Know Your New Rights, by Michael J. McDonald, Fern Publishing.
The Lace Volcano, by M.L. Knight, Child Thursday, the least you can do is sing, by Cecelia Frey, Longspoon Press.
Letter by Letter, by Louise Mahaux-Forcier, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon.
Lords of Shouting, by Joseph Sherman, Oberon.
Mass on Cow Back, by Wilfred Watson, Longspoon Press.
Mind Tricks for Parents, by Helene Hoffman, PaperJacks.
Mindkiller, by Spider Robinson, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
Miss F. and Me, by Florence McNeil, Clarke Irwin.
Mollie Whipple and The Giant, by Robin Muller, North Winds Press.
Money, Banking and the Canadian Financial System, by H.H. Binhammer, Methuen.
Montreal, the New City, by Gerald Clark, M & S.
Mueder on Location, by Howard Engel, Clarke Irwin.
Murmel, Murmel, Murmel, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by M. Martchenko, Annick Press.
The New Canadian High Energy Diet, by Sandra Cohen-Rose and Colin Penfield Rose, Corona Publishers.
A Northern Alphabet, by Ted Harrison, Tundra.
One for the Road, by Gilles Archambault, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon.
Only So Far, by Hilary Thompson, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.
Ontario Spectrum '83, edited by Daryl Cook et al., Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
The Other Mrs. Dieffenbaker, by Simma Holt, Doubleday.
The Pacific National Exhibition: An Illustrated History, by David Breen and Kenneth Coates, University of British Columbia Press.
Patriots, by Robert E. Wall, Seal Books.
Patterns of Time, by Albert W.J. Harper, Southwestern Ontario Poetry.
The P.E.T. paperdoll dress-up book, by Graham Plisworth, Key Porter Books.
The Pitak Retribution, by Angus Brown, Williams-Wallace.
Plunkun Trava: The Daultchobors, by Kozma J. Tarasoff, MIR Publication Society.
Power Sources, by Carolyn Smart, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.
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