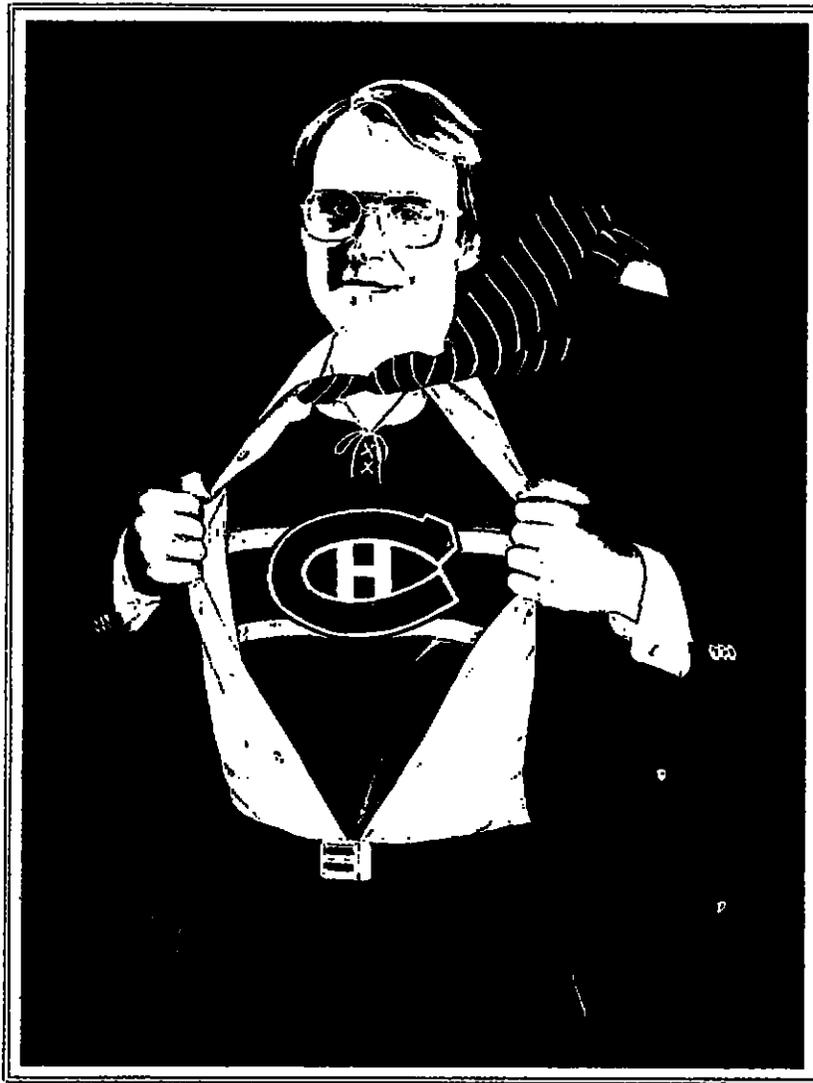


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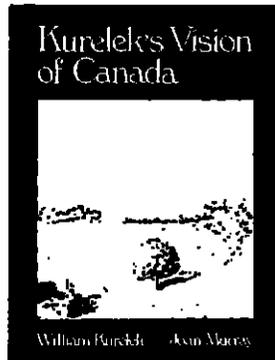


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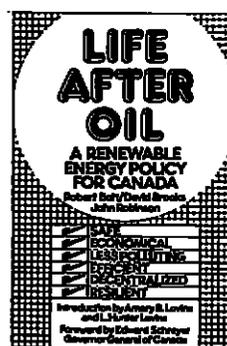
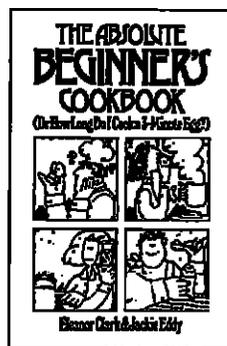
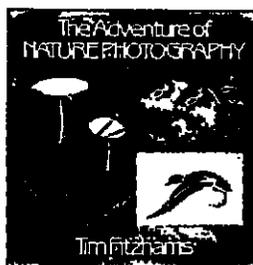
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# The literary life in Leningrad: notes on an evening with Juvan Shestalov

## White night

THE APARTMENT building where Juvan Shestalov lives in Leningrad is very near the Winter Palace and was designed by the same architect. It boasts one of the beautiful and yet rather homogenous façades that march across the 18th-century part of the city. Its exterior rose up blue and grey before us, with chips of crumbling stucco at its base, but it was its interior I was most anxious to see. I had been invited to the Soviet Union to meet Soviet writers and members of various writers' unions, but this was the first time I had been invited into anyone's home. My interview with Shestalov was set for six o'clock, and my translator Alex Lipovetsky and I were early. We stared at the building before us.

Alex sighed. "You see how writers live in our country, writers from national minorities, Russian writers, real artists. I understand it is not the same for poets in Canada." He stopped sighing and laughed gutturally, proudly.

It certainly is not the same in Canada where, next to pensioners living in Sydney, N.S., writers and self-employed artists are the lowest paid group. What was especially unusual about Shestalov is that he was a Mancî, a tribe of northerners equivalent to our native people. Now Canada isn't exactly turning out native writers, and for Shestalov to live where he lives is the equivalent, in this country, of Duke Redbird inhabiting a mansion in Toronto's exclusive Rosedale.

"We are very good to writers of our national minorities," Alex said. Then he sighed again. I wondered if he sighed because he wasn't a prominent member of a national minority in this country of housing shortages. Alex lived with his wife and son in a small Moscow flat. I didn't ask him about his sigh. I didn't want to hear about housing statistics: for two weeks I had been hearing the statistics of Soviet publishing, and that was enough. I knew, almost by heart, that *Sovremennik* alone, the Moscow house that deals primarily with national minorities, had published 307 titles translated from 44 languages, including such tongues as Nivkh, Khanty, and Shestalov's own Mancî. The total

*Sovremennik* output was 14 million copies, a far cry from the small presses or even the large publishers in Canada where 2,000 copies of a book of poems is a bestseller. At the moment all I wanted was to get inside, out of the glaring, northern, late-afternoon sun, and I pushed Alex toward the courtyard.

"Let's find his place," I said.

We passed a walled-up fireplace with two plaster griffins on each side that should have been in a museum, and entered an old-fashioned elevator, all grille-work and mahogany, about the size of a telephone booth. On the third floor, hand-painted on a door with what looked like nail polish, was Juvan Shestalov's apartment number.

Shestalov wasn't home. The door was opened by his wife, a Russian woman from Novograd, and we stood in a vestibule full of coats, shoes, and boxes under a lightbulb that, because of the yellow walls and enclosed space, turned everything the colour of tea. A babble of Russian surrounded me.

"Has he forgotten us?" I asked Alex.

"Something like that," he said. "Come in; she says we can wait."

We waited first in the living room, on a couch that was covered with a rug. We stared at rugs — a Persian-style red rug on the floor, a huge rug hung on a wall, a small rug draped over a chair. Then I stared at a blank TV and looked up at the high ceilings, which reminded me of 18th-century Edinburgh. The light was dim, which I began to think of as characteristic of all indoor life in the Soviet Union. The brilliant sunlight outside was hinted at by a window overlooking a courtyard. Alex didn't talk, and after what seemed a very long time Juvan's wife reappeared and asked us to move into his study.

Again there was the high ceiling, but every wall in this room was covered with books. Alex and I sat down, prepared to wait some more. Juvan's wife began pulling out his books, and within 10 minutes the day-bed on which we sat and the floor around our feet was covered with books. Our shoes were bathed in books. We couldn't move. Some of the books were obviously quite old, first editions with sentimental value, and I worried about their spines as Alex opened them and read.

"These are short stories translated into Finnish," he said, "50,000 copies. These are poems, *Songs of the Last Swan*, first edition, 1969, 10,000 copies. These are . . ."

I'm not sure how long this went on, but I'd had enough and I was getting so tired I didn't care.

Suddenly Shestalov appeared. He was holding a little boy by the hand, his grandson, but what I'll always remember is the way he took my hand. I've never felt so welcomed by a handshake. I stared into his creased, dark, smiling face, noticed his horn-rimmed glasses, felt his soft grasp on my forearm — by now he was shaking my arm — and forgot my irritation.

"He's sorry he's late," Alex said.

I realized Alex was laughing. Shestalov was laughing. Everyone was laughing. Alex is a wonderful translator. "He was at his dacha and got mixed up about time. You know how time goes in the country."

Our interview began with an introductory talk by Shestalov. This had happened to me numerous times in the Soviet Union — a few remarks by way of introduction. Shestalov opened conventionally enough, but he surprised me by his frankness.

"You know we have some problems of development in our North. What I try to do is find a way to approach readers to show how these problems are solved."

I nodded. I'd heard that one before.

"I have access to a wide audience. Luckily, I never have to worry about readers. Here in the USSR we never fear we won't have readers."

"So this is a writer's paradise," I said.

Shestalov's wife brought in tea. It was cold and pink and tasted faintly of lemonade. The tea was made from a herb that grew in his Mancî homeland, Shestalov said. It reminded him of the North.

"I can be surrealistic in my work," Shestalov continued. "In my selected stories, for instance. Or I can be very light, as in a book such as *Pico*. But I don't suffer for it. We have the possibility, all of us, to be pure artists, but we care about readers. But even with pure art we never fear we won't have readers. But look, the problem with us writers

and intellectuals is that we like to see people like the Mancini in the past. Yet the people want progress. Of course when they go ahead they realize, let us say, at the moment of death, they should have kept the past. The problem is a common one, eh? Look, my grandfather was a shaman, he called up spirits. Sometimes I want to go back to the past. We must keep what is valuable."

Suddenly Shestalov started tossing books and papers about. "My ideas, the way things are explained, the *embryo* of my ideas is here, eh. My work is to write!" He held up a book with a picture of a sturgeon and an oil derrick on the cover, surrounded by an embryo-shaped line. Next he handed me a copy of *Pravda*. The whole of the Politbureau was across the first page; inside was an article by Shestalov. He signed it in red ink: "We have a soul, we can see something," Alex translated. Alex was having a hard time keeping up as he explained the contents of Shestalov's article.

"There is work! There is earth, metal, stone, wood! But they are nothing without a man! A man with reason and a hot heart!"

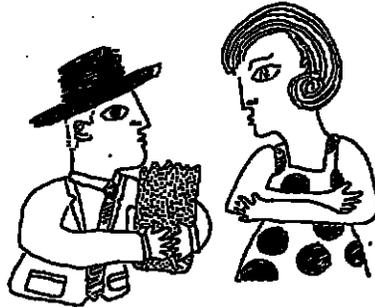
Next a bottle of cognac showed up in place of the tea, the Armenian cognac that had already made so many of my meetings in the Soviet Union delightful. Its appearance made me think that the interview, a lively if fairly conventional one, was over. We drank a toast. We drank several. We smiled. I was told I was to stay for dinner.

The table had been set in a corner of the room with the rugs. Shestalov and his wife sat down, as did Alex; Shestalov's mother-in-law, a babushka from Novograd; Shestalov's sister and aunt, visitors from the North; Shestalov's daughter; his son-in-law, a Polish student studying in Leningrad; and the little grandson, who quickly left his place and began moving from lap to lap. We started with a toast, then small, boiled, new potatoes, two kinds of smoked fish — white and pink, a gift from the northern relatives — tiny tomatoes, a tomato-and-onion salad in oil and vinegar, a cucumber salad, and black bread. There were two kinds of wine, white and red, more cognac, and vodka.

Next came a recitation of Shestalov's poem "Snowstorm." I have in my notes that this poem won the Gorky Prize eight times, but realize in retrospect that eight was the number of toasts that led up to the poem.

The way Shestalov looked at me, the passion and rhythm and intensity with which he spoke, was exciting and celebratory. Hearing Voznesensky read this way in Toronto had led to my trip to

Russia, and here, in a different language, was the same tradition of poetry as absolutely central to existence. Shestalov's grandfather was a shaman, and what Shestalov was doing now had its roots in something religious. As I listened to and watched this man I was overjoyed. How often in the West we hear the flat intoning of matters of the heart. Here was something absolute,



vital. I swayed my glass to the incantation. Shestalov's wife brought the main course.

As Juvan finished he nodded his head and glared at me. "We share something," he said. He nodded fiercely. "We share something." Then he began to talk about his life in Leningrad.

"In a sense Leningrad was tired of culture when I appeared," he said, pass-

ing the meat, which was covered in sauce and onions. "I created a storm of a kind with my 'Snowstorm,' even though it is not my favourite poem. I was accepted. Our people, the Mancini, all people, share many emotions, but the Mancini do not have a long history of, shall we say, 'traditional' culture. Yet I live now where the aristocracy once lived. We all share what is common to all people. I am Mancini, my wife is Russian, it is a happy marriage."

After a dessert of hazelnut cake Juvan's daughter disappeared, and we found her playing the piano in another part of the apartment. The room was off a long, gloomy corridor, the spine of the place, and it was very dark. The only illumination was a lamp lit over her shoulder and trained on the music. Curtains were drawn. It was near midnight and seemed it, midnight in winter in Russia.

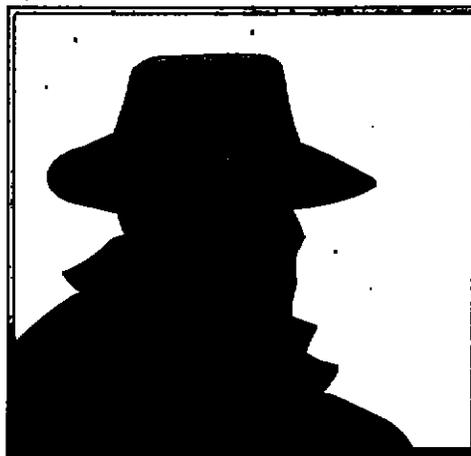
The songs, music by Glinka, words by Pushkin, spoke of love at first sight, a soul being pierced. Alex translated in loud, emphatic prose, adding, "It's Russian, eh?" Juvan looked as if he might cry, and I tried to match his sincerity by saying, "That's the most beautiful music I've ever heard." I meant it.

Later in the evening Juvan's son appeared and played the guitar. Juvan

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didn't like it, and rolled on the floor like a shaman. Alex had stopped translating. Everyone said goodbye by smiling, and Juvan's wife and sister escorted us outside into Leningrad's "white night." There was no darkness here, just air infused by the sea, grey but somehow as white as the stories describe it, and soft. A gleam of red sun came off the bronze steeple of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

"This man is a personality, eh?" Alex

said. "He can express himself."

"Oh yes," I said, thinking of the music, of Pushkin who had died nearby, of Juvan, his generosity, and the meal his wife had made for us.

Alex and I walked to the Neva, away from the shadow of the buildings, where the air was brighter, softer. The streets were deserted, and midnight was just a softening of the endless summer day.

— M.T. KELLY

## ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

If grammarians would of been more specific  
about the subjunctive mood, we  
wouldn't have to settle for compromises

By **BOB BLACKBURN**

THREE YEARS it's been since this column was introduced. That's a long time to avoid discussing the subjunctive. I was severely distressed by a letter I received in January from a reader in Toronto, Gillian O'Reilly, who complained about the increasing use of *would have* instead of *had* after the conjunction *if*. I have spent most of 1983 shuffling that letter to the bottom of the pile, but I suppose I can't put it off forever.

I think people who say, "If I would have done this or that . . ." (or, worse, "If I would of . . .") have misunderstood speakers who said, "If I were to have done . . ." At any rate, they're wrong. A simple "if I had" or even "had I" would suffice.

Fowler (second edition) makes these points about the subjunctive mood: (1) It is moribund; (2) it probably never would have been possible to draw up a satisfactory table of its uses; (3) it's no longer worth trying to do that; and (4) the only people who use it any more are trying to be either poetic or pretentious. He's simply telling us to forget it, but he then goes on for some six columns of type.

Quirk *et al.* devote but one of their thousand-odd pages to the subjunctive, beginning with the statement that "The subjunctive is not an important category in contemporary English." This work, *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, may be definitive, but it doesn't fall into the "ready-reference" category. If you nose around in it, you'll find much more about the subjunctive than there is in the main article. But I don't suggest you do that.

Theodore Bernstein says that "most authorities agree that the subjunctive as a form evidenced by an identifiable verb change is vanishing in modern English." He then goes on for two and a half pages.

If the subjunctive be dead, it refuses to lie down. I think the truth is that it is neither dead nor dying; it's just that these authorities *wish* it were. (You see, now, how both *wish* and *if* simply cry out for it?) The authorities are being lazy or defeatist in this matter. They are frightened by the prospect of being



S.M. Cabe

asked to be definitive about it but cannot resist picking and poking at it.

I am fond of it. If it come(s) unbidden to my pen or tongue, I do not turn it away. If it seem(s) pretentious, as it does to me in these examples, it will not come unbidden. What I am advising is that you play it by ear, since there are not adequate rules to follow. Even Quirk

admits that it is not quite right to say "as it was" when you mean "so to speak," and Bernstein notes, despite the authorities he cites, that anyone who says "if I was you" is going to be classed as illiterate. Fowler allows: "There are no uses of the subjunctive to which poets, and poetic writers, [my italics] may not resort if it suits [sic] them." Fowler here eschews the subjunctive and, although no ordinary writer himself, cautions us that "it is no defence for the ordinary writer who uses an antiquated subjunctive to plead that he can parallel it in a good poet."

After pausing to admire the manner in which the writer was sticking to his principles, I gave myself a few minutes to thumb through the book, hoping my eye would fall on some unnecessary or even grandiloquent use of the mood, but what I found instead was the tiny entry under *were*: "For the subjunctive uses in the singular, . . . some of which are more inconsistent than others with the writing of natural English, see SUBJUNCTIVES." Well, *he* is consistent. But if you're going to go along with him, don't let me catch you saying "be it said" or "if need be" or "far be it from me."

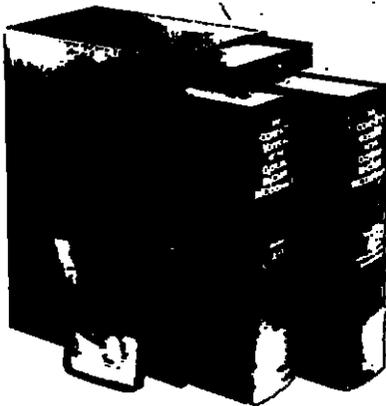
I'VE BEEN poring over the *OED* (not *pouring* over it, as the younger journalists do) in search of some justification of the common use these days by sports writers of *settle for*. I couldn't find *settle* with *for* at all before my vision began to blur, although the dictionary deals with 36 broad senses of the verb. However, for the purpose of this argument, let's say that to settle for something is to reach a compromise: You owe me \$10 but can only pay me \$5; all right, I'll settle for that. It's better than nothing.

That seems to me to be acceptable idiomatic use. But I don't know what to make of the sports writer who says that the Blue Jays took an early 3-1 lead, but after so-and-so doubled with two on in the ninth they had to settle for a tie, or that the favourite in a horse race settled for third place. I don't know what that means. If *settle* means anything in this use, it means to agree to accept something less than that that was sought. If a baseball team settles for a tie, surely that can only mean that the game was fixed. And if a horse settles for a third place, surely that gives new meaning to the term *horse sense*.

No. This is egregious misuse of *settle*. However, who cares? The sports pages contain some of the worst writing in the paper for the same reason (permissiveness) that they also contain some of the best, and if we have to put up with a lot of stupid writing in order to encourage the development of some fine writing, well, maybe we should settle for that. □

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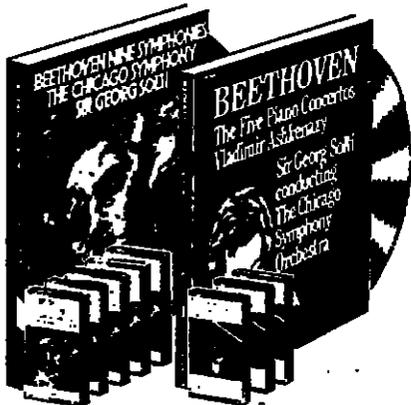
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# BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Six portraits from the backyards  
of the poets and writers who live in the  
neighbourhood of Kingston, Ontario

By WAYNE GRADY

Photographs by PAUL ORENSTEIN

"SECOND ROAD on the left past the schoolhouse," Al Purdy had said on the phone. "Large blue roof, big stand of cedars in front. Can't miss it."

The roof was large, but the blue had faded over the years to a kind of sky-grey, and the cedars were hidden from the road by the house itself. Tall and thin as poplars, they stood silent vigil over the calm surface of Roblin Lake which, as George Woodcock has prophesied, "may some day become the equivalent of Walden Pond." Purdy came out to the car to greet us, a tall, gangling poplar himself in loose clothing and dark glasses. After a quick pass through the house, where Eurithe was making lunch, he led us through the front door out toward the lake.

"There were only two other houses on this lake when Eurithe and I came here from Montreal in 1957," Purdy says. "We paid \$800 for the property — put one-third down and worked like slaves to pay off the rest. Now look at it," he says, sweeping his arm at the tight circle of cottages that sit around the shoreline like bored children at a birthday party. Across Roblin Lake, two shores away, the bright metal spire of a

church rises above the trees. "They charged us by the foot of water frontage, so that point next to ours would have jacked up the price considerably. We bought this lot instead, and Eurithe and I made this point by hand, shovel by shovel, wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow."

The yard is a pleasant mixture of green lawn and piles of disused building materials — greying sheets of plywood, frayed at the edges, old two-by-fours, a stack of hardwood flooring from a high-school gym in Belleville — that have evidently been lying about for years. Purdy, too, is a pleasant mixture of neatness and disorder, like a cluttered desk, displaying signs of random activity of a secretly disciplined nature. Like, in fact, his carefully crafted yet disarmingly casual poems:

*This tangential backyard universe  
I inhabit with sidereal aplomb*

During dinner Purdy talks precisely about the books he likes, even jumping up from time to time to haul them to the table: E.M. Forster's little-known *Pharos and Pharillon*, which inspired a batch of recent poems; D.H. Lawrence's *Col-*

*lected Poems*, part of Purdy's extensive Lawrence collection; an advance copy of Purdy's most recent book, *Birdwatching at the Equator*, written during a trip he and Eurithe took to the Galapagos Islands in 1980. The title poem, he says, "was read out in the House of Commons by a Conservative MP who was trying to make the Liberals admit they supported such nonsense through the agency of the Canada Council." The book, with photographs by Eurithe tipped in — Purdy boarding the airplane in Guayaquil; Purdy, hair tied back in a kerchief and cigar jutting belligerently out of his mouth, trying to outglare a bull seal — is one of a limited edition of 100 published by the Paget Press in Santa Barbara.

After dinner we go for a row in one of Purdy's boats, a dented metal affair with an ancient motor, which he removes, and a pair of weathered oars, which I man-



Al Purdy

A slight breeze has come up, so that the shallow lake is nattery and the smoke from Purdy's cigar is whisked invisibly away. Purdy, at the bow, talks expansively about his autobiography ("I've got it up to about age 10," he says), about quitting the League of Canadian Poets, about how that has affected his income (he's given only one reading this year, at Queen's University in Kingston). Beneath the talk is a lake of bitterness, a feeling of being neglected. No magazine editor, he says, seems very interested in the chapters from his autobiography, there have been rumours about his having arthritis and being unable to write poems any more. "The career of a poet these days seems to have become a thing of fashion," he says. "Either you're in fashion and you get a lot of readings, or you're not and you don't." But beneath that is the knowledge that, star systems notwithstanding, a poet out of fashion is still a poet, and good poets are never out of fashion for long.



Janette Turner Hospital

A SIGN BESIDE the highway warns us: "The Wages of Sin Is DEATH!" and we know we are entering Matt Cohen country, the same country that spawned the mad poet William C. Thomas in *The Disinherited* (who wrote in his diary: "That is what Death is, being purified by God & she wanted to know if He had a liver") and the Reverend Finch in *Flowers of Darkness*. The area that provided the locus for Cohen's rural novels is actually about 30 miles northeast of his present farm near Verona, which itself is about 30 miles from Kingston where Matt was born in 1942. He bought this 180-acre farm about two years ago, built his own house on it — like Purdy's, in a perpetual state of construction — and now spends almost all summer here as well as much of the winter, whenever he and Patsy Aidana and their son Daniel can get away from Toronto.

"I have a very personal relationship with this area," Matt says when we have arranged ourselves on lawnchairs on a small, grassy knoll behind the house. "My books are always bestsellers in Kingston. The postman in Verona reads them, the guy at the lumberyard reads them. It's a much closer relationship with the community I write about than I could ever have in Toronto."

Remembering the road sign I ask him if, like Alice Munro in Huron County, he has ever had a censorship problem here in Frontenac County. "No," he says, "not at all. For one thing my books are not taught in high schools. For another, I'm a man, and around here men are more or less expected to make dirty jokes."

By now the sunlight on the hillside is so intense that when I close my eyes I see bright red instead of black. I think of the poem by Tom Marshall that begins:

*Near Kingston  
country heat  
is hotter  
than city heat,*

and soon we are driven inside by the mosquitoes. The Progressive Conservative leadership convention is on television,

and as we talk through its interminable delays, Matt says he'd like to see John Crosbie win it. "Crosbie!" exclaims Patsy, who heads the Toronto arm of Douglas & McIntyre. "If Crosbie gets in neither of us would be able to make a living. Look at the budget he introduced when he was finance minister. He really slashed arts funding, Matt."

"Oh well," Cohen shrugs, "maybe it would be better if Clark won anyway; then this whole thing would have been just an expensive waste of time."

This summer has been spent tidying up loose ends of two new books — one a collection of stories called *Café le Dog*, the other a huge novel called *The Jewish Doctor*, which takes place in 14th-century Spain and is due out next spring. A Kingston film company, Margin Productions, has purchased the film rights to *The Colours of War*; *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone* is being turned into a three-hour radio play by Michael Cook; and *The Disinherited* is being translated into Italian, possibly to be out before March, when Matt is to be writer-in-residence at the University of Padua.

As we walk back to the car we pass a deserted, overgrown vegetable patch surrounded by a broken chickenwire fence. "Our garden last summer," Matt comments. "The fence was to keep the rabbits out, but the deer got in." A little farther on, huge maple and slender birch trees grow out of the foundation of an old barn, the stonework barely discernible through the thick underbrush of wild raspberry canes and speckled alder shrubs. The contrast with Roblin Lake is apparent — Purdy's wild nature being inexorably suburbanized, Cohen's neglected farmland returning to scrub bush and swamp — but the similarities are there too. It was Purdy who wrote of southern Ontario as a place

*where failed farms sink back into earth  
the clearings join and fences no longer divide  
where the running animals gather their bodies together  
and pour themselves upward . . .*

CHURCHILL CRESCENT is a quiet, residential street lined with flaming copper maples and large, well-kept houses, the embodiment of what Matt Cohen in *The Disinherited* calls Kingston's air of "peace and propriety." The driveway into

# OUR FALL LINE-UP

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By Leo Heaps  
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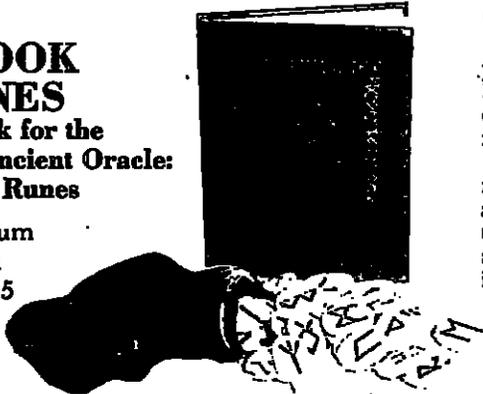
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METHUEN PUBLICATIONS

Janette Turner Hospital's house is also a crescent, and this double crescent — street and driveway — seems appropriate for a house filled, as hers is, with art and books and religious artifacts from India. Janette lived with her husband and two children in a remote province of India — the volatile Marxist state of Kerala — in 1977-78 during her husband's sabbatical from Queen's Theological College, where he now is principal. Janette's first novel, *The Irvy Swing*, which won the 1981 Seal Award, takes place in India, and I asked her how winning the \$50,000 that accompanies the award has affected her writing.

"Well," she said, "I guess the most important thing was that it made me feel part of a larger writing community. It got me out of Kingston to do promotional tours, to give lectures and attend conferences. Kingston is incredibly cut off from the real world, you know, it's so smug and middle-class and narrow-minded. I can't stand it sometimes. I don't know how I've been able to live here for 13 years without going out of my mind."

We were sitting on a redwood deck that juts out over her backyard, and the view from its raised level was of carefully tended gardens, swimming pools, croquet lawns, and geometrically manicured flower beds. Looking down its foreshortened vista, Paul Orenstein remarked that it reminded him of the film version of John Cheever's story "The Swimmer." The whole atmosphere seemed oppressive and neighbourly.

Janette put down the proof sheets for her new novel, *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* ("I was sure they'd want me to change the title," she said, "but I'd have dug in my heels. It's from a poem by T.S. Eliot, do you know it? 'The tiger in the tiger pit/is not more irritable than I.'") and went inside to change for her photograph. She'd been wearing cut-offs and a white Indian cotton blouse, and she came out wearing neatly pressed jeans and a red Indian cotton blouse. "I'd really like to have my picture taken down at Bellevue House," she told Paul. "There's a little gazebo in the yard there that reminds me very much of India. Do you mind?"

Bellevue House, the restored home of Sir John A. Macdonald, is a short walk from Churchill Crescent, but with all Paul's equipment we decide to drive. The gazebo, a green and white and yellow muffin in the shade of a giant twin oak, "was built to resemble the garden house that once stood on Bellevue Terrace," a plaque informed us. As Paul began to set up his camera and lights, a young, large woman dressed in 19th-century homespun and bonnet came out of the main house and walked toward us along the finely gravelled path. "Are you a professional photographer?" she asked Paul. "Are these photographs going to be published anywhere? Well, I'm afraid you can't take any pictures here. This is government property, you know. You have to get permission from our publicity director, and he isn't here right now and can't be reached. I'm sorry, those are the rules."

As we packed up the equipment and walked toward another location near the lake, Janette was nearly speechless with fury. "You see!" she hissed. "You see what I meant about this bloody town!"

"SMUG!" EXCLAIMS David Helwig when we tell him about Janette Hospital's complaint. "I don't find Kingston smug at all."

"God," says Helwig's wife Nancy, "for the first five years we lived here I think everyone we knew had been in jail at least once."

"I think in those days we would have welcomed a bit of middle-class smugness," says Helwig. He and Nancy were teaching drama and creative writing in the Kingston Penitentiary, living in the poorer part of Kingston — the part portrayed in Judith Thompson's play *Crackwalker*. Helwig wrote

a book in 1972 about the life of a convict — *A Book About Billy* — and in Helwig's Kingston quartet, though most of his characters tend to be middle-class editors, writers, professors, and law students, there are criminal elements such as Michael Remnant in *A Sound Like Laughter* who make Helwig's Kingston not quite as homogenous as Janette's.

Even now, standing on the second floor of Helwig's new house (a former army building on Montreal Street that was built in 1841, it has been gutted by Helwig, and he is still in the process of putting it back together), we can look down through a back window into the neighbouring garden, where a large, somewhat sloppy-looking woman is tending a particularly eccentric patch of flowers and weeds. She is, Helwig proudly proclaims, one of Kingston's most notorious prostitutes, who used to ply her trade along the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway between Cornwall and Belleville. Helwig bought the house from Zal Yanofsky, the former member of the Loving Spoonful who fell in love with a Kingston girl and now owns Kingston's most popular restaurant, Chez Piggy. Yanofsky lives next door in a house identical to Helwig's, except that above his front door is mounted a huge, golden unicorn's head.

Helwig had said earlier that what he liked best about French film directors was the way they used diffused light, and now, as we stand amid the exposed joists and wiring of his unfinished bathroom, the late afternoon sun slants in through a dusty window and bathes him in its soft, photometric haze. He is using a sledgehammer to reconstruct a two-inch floor out of salvaged boards, and as he works he tells us an anecdote about Gérard Bessette that he heard from Bessette's translator, Glen Shortliffe.

"There's a character in *Incubation*," Helwig says, "a woman, and she thinks she's pregnant, and she gets so worried about being pregnant that she misses her period. Well, when

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Shortliffe sent his translation to Bessette's English publisher he got it back from a female editor who said in a note that such a thing was physiologically impossible. Bessette heard about this and was so incensed that he went to see a doctor in Montreal, who turned out to be Gabrielle Roy's husband. Bessette showed him the offending passage, and the doctor assured him that what he had written was quiet possible. Bessette got up, strode out of the consulting room and into the waiting room, which was filled with pregnant women waiting to see the doctor, and he turned to them and said: '*Courage, mesdames! Fausse alarme!*' "

THE WALLS in Gérard Bessette's living room are also covered with photographs: one of Bessette in Montreal taken by Kero, another of him at the age of three, one of his father, taken in the 1920s, standing beside a tiger cage in New York's Central Park Zoo. The tiger is moving, slightly blurred, and there is an unidentified girl half-hidden behind the father's left arm. But the father seems perfectly calm, regarding the camera with a quiet composure. "Was he strict?" I ask Bessette.

"No, not very," Bessette replies, looking at the photograph. "You know, another photographer was here, and when he saw that photograph he said it was very, how do you say it, *oedipique*. Oedipal? But I do not think it is so *oedipique*, do you?"

"Are you jealous of your mother?" I ask.

"No," he says, smiling, "not any more."

Bessette has lived in Kingston since 1958, when he moved there to teach at Royal Military College. In 1960 he began teaching at Queen's, and stayed there until last year, when he retired — "in a manner of speaking," he says. "I have reserved the right to go back to teach a course from time to time."

He is contemplating a return to Montreal, but he is afraid that it will prove too noisy there for him to work. "Kingston is very quiet," he says. "I don't like noise. In my study I put in triple windows to keep the noise outside. Some noises I don't mind, motors, for example. But children — I hate children."

When Paul asks him to step outside for a photograph Bessette first turns on his television to check the weather on one of the cable channels. On the front porch, dressed in a grey track suit and slippers, he gazes toward the camera and slightly above it, to a porch across the street where a group of students are watching us. After a few shots Bessette's wife, Irena, comes outside and chats. She is a lawyer, and when last year the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec purchased Bessette's papers, Irena advised him to take the money in five annual instalments. Now she joins him for a series of photographs, flirting with him before the camera, at one point putting her arms around him and kissing his cheek. I am strongly reminded, suddenly, of the photograph of Bessette's father: Bessette, calm, regarding the camera with a quiet composure, but aware of love on one side of him and, at the same time, of a caged, restless tiger on the other.

TOM MARSHALL is standing in front of his house on Victoria Street beside a pair of twin juniper bushes — "The kind they make gin from," he says, and it's true: crush the tiny buds between your teeth and your mouth is filled with the bitter, green taste of gin. Like Purdy, Marshall whisks us quickly through the house into the backyard — we catch glimpses of newly upholstered antique sofas, a long coffee table covered with so many small objects it looks like a kind of artistic Kim's Game. On the dining room wall is a blue-and-white abstract landscape by Kim Ondaatje, and an unframed poster in the study, titled "Kingston Poets," shows photographs of Marshall, David Helwig, and Gail Fox. The kitchen is immaculate, the tile floor polished, the counters barely used, the cupboards and fridge almost empty — a bachelor's kitchen.

There is an enclosed back porch that has been turned into a writing room, a small table in the middle with a portable typewriter on it. A wooden stoop gives out into a long, narrow strip of grass surrounded by low shrubs. Marshall's five-year-old neighbour, Tony, comes over with his baseball bat and ball and demands a game, and for a while Tom is entirely taken up with either fending off or giving in to Tony's insistent shrieks for attention.

"He's a very bright kid," Marshall says during a lull. "I think given half a chance he might turn out all right. But his parents are useless, always on welfare, you can hear them screeching at each other a block away. I think the father has taken off somewhere — he does that from time to time — and Tony is very disturbed and angry just now."

Tony has already squirmed or snuggled his way into Marshall's poetry. One poem published in *Writer's Quarterly* refers to Tony and to his father, and in a recent tribute to the late George Whalley, who died a few days before our visit, Tony reappears:

*I think*

*that we persist in subatomic memory  
as five-year-old Tony starts the car*



*Irena and Gérard Bessette*

*next door, whams into garagedoor . . .  
We make such impact on all the ages*

This is an echo of something Marshall said in an interview published by Jon Pearce in *Twelve Voices* (Borealis Press, 1980). Pearce asked Marshall how poets became poets. "That's so mysterious," Marshall replied, "that I don't know if I can answer it. I think it begins very early in childhood.

There's one theory that all children are artists and that they gradually have it drummed out of them, and perhaps that's true. But the more interesting question would be why the ones that don't get it drummed out of them survive as children, if you like, and I think the artist does have a child-like consciousness in some way."

Marshall's genuine concern is that Tony is having it drummed out of him daily. "It's depressing," he says as we finish our drinks in the living room, looking at Tony's nose flattened against the front windowpane, "to think of all that energy and apparent intelligence so negatively deployed."

As we left, Paul took a quick Polaroid shot of Tony, and he ran off home with it. A minute later he came running back. "Mom likes the picture," he said breathlessly. "She wants you to take one of my brother." □



*Tom Marshall and Tony*

# NET GAINS

What makes a brilliant goalie into a successful writer? Perhaps it has something to do with his position on the ice

By RICK SALUTIN

BACK WHEN he was a goalie (*the* goalie of the 1970s, many would say) Ken Dryden would occasionally phone and ask, How's the book — or play, or article — going? Rotten, I'd reply — or Lousy, or Shitty, or Don't ask! He'd crack up. He found it incredible that anyone could be so oppressed by the mere process of writing that they'd explode the routine etiquette of a telephone conversation.

About two years ago, when he'd already spent 18 months on his book about hockey, I called Dryden and inquired how it was going. "You don't wanta know!" he barked. "You don't even want to *think* about it!"

The goalie had become a writer.

WHILE HE WAS still with the Montreal Canadiens, Dryden already exhibited one of the preliminary symptoms of a writer: he was a natural observer. When we collaborated in 1976 on *Les Canadiens*, a play about hockey for Montreal's Centaur Theatre, he would call about once a week, often from a road trip. He'd always begin, "Something just happened, I don't know whether it'll be of any use to you . . ." I came to take this as my cue to get down every word he spoke.

Once it was about a visit to the dressing room by a former Canadian defenceman, and the unwilling gulf that existed between him and the players of today. "I don't know what it was," mused Dryden. "Well, I do really — it's the money!" — referring to the stratospheric hike in hockey salaries that occurred with the expansion of 1967.

Another time he reported the mood of fans and players during a game on the night the Parti Québécois won its first election victory. "We're not used to being ignored," he said, "in Montreal, in the Forum, when we're winning!"

His descriptions were pointed, dramatic in form, including dialogue, and usually contained pithy conclusions about the meaning of the event. When he came to rehearsals of the play, following practice at the Forum, his contributions were not only "The Rocket was a left-handed shot," but also, "That line will have more impact if Eric pauses first." He was already making notes to himself on scraps of paper, often during the early morning hours when he unwound after a game, and stor-

ing them in his desk drawer for use sometime in the future.

After the 1979 season, Dryden announced he was leaving hockey. The silence of the sports press was deafening. No one could figure it out; it was unprecedented. It was as if Trudeau had quit in, say, 1971, at the height of his popularity. (Dryden had starred for the Canadiens through four straight Stanley Cups, never missing a playoff game, and had won the Vezina trophy as top goaltender each year.) In terms of a hockey life, retirement made no sense. But as Dryden describes in the book (which derives much of its drama from the fact that the week

in his life recounted by Dryden was the one in which he reached this decision) the game was no longer fun.

In terms of a human, as opposed to a hockey, life, everything was reversed. In hockey he had already achieved a vast amount — like, say, Picasso by 1920. He had only to coast through the rest of his career, maybe a decade, then glide into coaching, or management, or perhaps the first chair of hockey at a Canadian university. In any different career, though, he was far behind others his age. Even in his well-known persona as a law student he had articed but not taken the bar admission course. And he had a firm sense that his life was to involve more than hockey.

This did not mean he planned to write for the rest of his

years; he had other projects in mind. But he had a writer's double instinct: to use your writing as a means of ordering your experience, reliving it and making sense of it. The first task of the rest of his life became a book about hockey.

The year following his retirement he went to Cambridge, England, with his family. He started work with the expectation of transforming his notes into a book. A year later he returned to Canada with a book-length manuscript and realized it wasn't a book. He rented a house in downtown Toronto that contained "The Room." "I can't believe how much time Ken spends in The Room," said Lynda Dryden that year. "Well, back to The Room," Dryden would intone dolefully at the end of practically every conversation or meeting. He spoke its name as if it was the Star Chamber or the Black Hole of Calcutta. He sounded like the Count of Monte Cristo returning to his cell. He sometimes looked it.



Ken Dryden

By the end of that year the book had found its form: the classic shape of a journal. During the third year after his retirement, in another rented house in Toronto, and another room, Dryden discovered and developed those pedestrian techniques of cutting, honing, and fiddling with words that turn good ideas into effective prose. He also wrestled with and conquered

### Athletes and politicians have happy childhoods; writers experience a youth of torment

those sections that became the most original contributions of *The Game: Heroes versus Celebrities, Experience of an Average Game, and Why We Play the Way We Do.*

Dryden once announced over the phone that he'd noticed that athletes and politicians claim to have had happy childhoods; writers on the other hand have experienced a youth of torment. This arrangement appeared necessary, he explained, so that each could fulfil his or her proper function. Athletes, for instance, are accustomed to relatively speedy resolutions of their conflicts. The game is over, the result is known; though limited reflection may be useful, it is important not to brood over what has been done. There is no way to return to it and improve it — which is precisely what a writer must do. Unhappiness and irresolution are just the things that lead a writer to introspection and self-examination, which in turn produce literary insight and, theoretically, good books. Since Dryden had a happy childhood, by this schema the transition from athlete to writer would have amounted to having a personality transplant, which he performed on himself. More likely both dispositions existed in him; a hockey life emphasized one, writing drew out the other.

He was probably aided in the transition by his chosen position on the ice. The job description of goaltender involves a dense rubber disc, further hardened by freezing just before game time, projected toward you at speeds up to 100 miles per hour. Your task is to *get in front of it* — an unnatural response to say the least. Goaltenders may have had happy childhoods, but a trace of masochism crept in. They never have the opportunity for the near-orgasmic pleasure available to goal-scorers. ("I could see the tension drain out of Rocket as the puck went in the net," said Toe Blake once about the greatest scorer of all.)

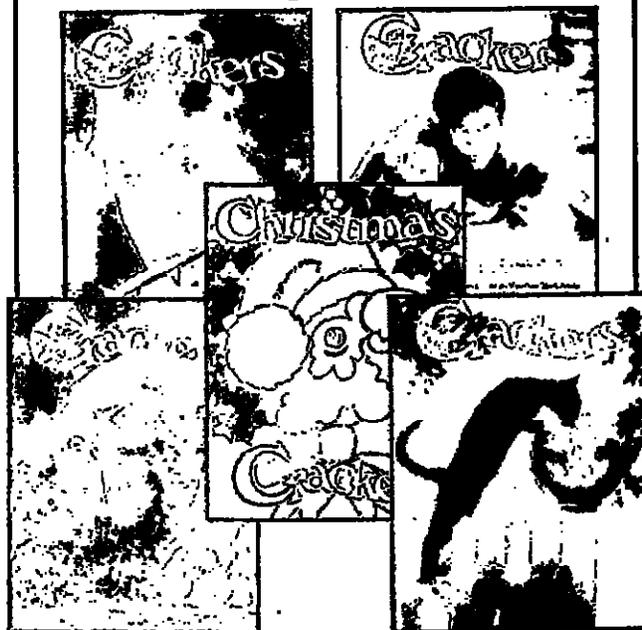
Since they cannot score, goaltenders cannot win games; they can, however, be blamed for losses. In theory the only result a goalie can be responsible for is a 0-0 tie. They almost never have the chance to relive their triumphs, since contemporary history, in the form of sportscasts, replays goals, not saves. Instead they savour their failures. Dryden recently sat through a film about the 1972 Russia-Canada series in which he watched himself scored on 19 times.

This kind of work experience naturally prompts some self-questioning and even self-doubt — and goalies, it seems to me, are the most introspective and articulate of hockey players. Jacques Plante, a creative genius and one of Dryden's predecessors with *Les Canadiens*, once told me his "philosophy" was contained in his book, *Goaltending* (1975). I said I thought the book was just a manual on how to play goal. He directed me to three or four pages near the beginning. I told him I found it moving, and that he'd obviously thought intensely about being a goaltender. "It was my life," he said. He had actually calculated the percentage of his waking hours since birth that had been spent in the net.

There is another way that goaltending, according to Dryden, contributes to writing; it has to do with the isolation of the position. Unlike everyone else, the goalie is always on the ice, but also uniquely, he is set apart from the play, inside his crease. For much of the time, he watches the game as it



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unfolds in front of him, some distance up the ice, ebbing from and flowing toward him. At a certain point, as the puck moves in on him, he inserts himself into the play. Because of this interrupted quality in his participation, he is never "in" the

**A goaltender is a kind of involved spectator, and the best kind of writer might be described in the same way**

contributes to writing: it has to do with the isolation of the game the way writers are. (The exception that proves this rule occurs when the opposition carries the puck behind his net, à la Gretzky. The jerky, frantic, almost spastic behaviour of goaltenders at such a time indicates how dependent they are on the play unfolding in front of them, in full view.) A goaltender is a kind of involved observer, and the best kind of writer might be described in the same way. Dryden insists that this is a loose analogy: being a goalie is not the same as being a writer. It is, however, better preparation for writing than playing left wing.

These crossover traits of the goalie-cum-writer characterize much of *The Game*. On the one hand, from time to time there is a moodiness and self-doubt, even the churlishness and misanthropy of, say, a Billy Smith swinging his broad stick at anyone who invades his territory. This book will challenge and, I think, disturb many people. It is not sensational in the glib and commercial way of Jim Bouton's *Ball Four*, which smugly exposed the sexual peccadilloes of famous athletes. Bouton scandalizes; Dryden undermines. He questions our common attitudes toward our game: heroism, celebrity, romance, wealth, competition. He picks at these things as if they were scabs. He wants to get underneath.

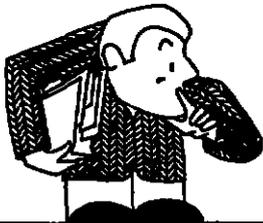
On the other hand, there is the involved observer. In a *tour de force* near the end of the book, Dryden reconstructs the entire history of hockey — not in the manner of a Pierre Berton, telling an interesting tale from beginning through end (which leaves us contentedly unmoved), but from that unique vantage point at one end of the rink, watching the game unfold

Asking and wondering: Why do the Russians use the ice so much better than we do? Why didn't we discover in 100 years the things they learned in 30? Why can't we exploit the most useful of their discoveries in our play? Then delving further and further into the past of the game in order to unearth the roots that still anchor our behaviour. Then analyzing the psychology — even uncovering a sort of collective hockey unconscious — of those who perpetuate a flawed style of play,

generation after generation. All in aid of determining how and where to insert oneself in this unfolding of hockey history in order to change things as they are and alter the future of the game. It is the sort of imaginative recovery of history that could probably have been done only by a goalie who had become a writer.

IF YOU ASK Dryden how it feels to be finished his book, he replies waspishly, "That's another thing about writing a book. It never seems to end." Though the book is completed — it sits there on his shelf — he continues to experience the writing of it like a phantom limb, another experience known to writers.

It is a curiosity of sports literature that many fine books have been written about baseball and virtually none on any comparable sport, including hockey. The reasons are obscure. Why has Dryden succeeded so well in *The Game*? Perhaps because, as both goalie and writer, he knows how to watch, and when to insert himself into the action. □



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## The boys of winter

By JACK BATTEN

*The Game*, by Ken Dryden, Macmillan, 259 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9721 7).

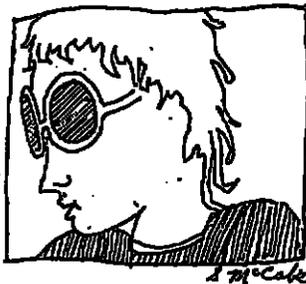
WITH HIS remarkably fine book, Ken Dryden has nudged sports autobiography on to a third level. The first and busiest level is occupied by the as-told-to books. That's where the athlete or coach turns over his memories and *pensées* to a writer who shapes them into a book that deals in the first person. In cases where the athlete/coach is an especially perceptive observer and the writer is a particularly graceful stylist — for example, Punch Imlach with Scott Young — the book turns into a rewarding exercise. On the second level of sports autobiography, much skimpier than the first, the athlete supplies both the reminiscences and the authorship. Easily the best example up till now of this sort of book is *Life on the Run*, the recollections of a few weeks in 1976 from the life of the marvellous New York Knicks basketball player, and now senator from New Jersey, Bill Bradley. His book, every word written by Bradley, was thoughtful and enlightening and altogether serious, and in a sense it prepared readers for Dryden and the third level of sports autobiography. *The Game* is also thoughtful, enlightening, and altogether serious, but what makes it fresh and different is that it happens to be beautifully written. Dryden may not be a Scott Young in the stylistic department — who is? — but he writes better, with more ease and precision, than any athlete ought to and most sports writers are able to.

In form, the book is rather like Bradley's. Dryden has taken nine days from near the end of the 1978-79 regular season and crammed into them a blend of impressions, character sketches, remembrances, and reported incidents. The period, by itself, held a special significance. It marked Dryden's last season as the Montreal Canadiens goaltender, and it signalled the decline of the magnificent string of Canadiens teams, the era when Savard and Gainey, Lafleur and Lemaire and the others won all those Stanley Cups. Thus, the book

has a built-in sense of wistfulness, of doors closing and adventures concluding, and Dryden makes wonderful use of the feelings that this series of transitions generates. He is tuned in with complete fidelity to the immediate events of the dressing room and the arena, and he also has a faithful detector that records the larger emotions. He catches something that I've never noticed in hockey's literature, a curious and sometimes awful sense of crisis and sadness that may be as much a part of the game as the more obvious joy.

The book is full of such revelatory moments, and that explains its uniqueness. Dryden tells us things that no outsider, not even the most diligent sports writer, could get exactly right. He has been there, and he has the willingness and gifts to explain just where *there* is. How does it feel to play goal? Why is Scotty Bowman such a superior coach and such a weird guy? What does fighting mean for good or evil to the game? How does celebrity affect a hockey player? And how do members of a team sort themselves out by language, friendship, talent, and personality? Dryden doesn't steer away from any of the questions, and he takes a splendidly clear-eyed approach to all his answers.

For the pure fan, perhaps Dryden's sketches of seven or eight of his teammates comes as the book's most satisfying set pieces. Larry Robinson, Rejean Houle, Bob Gainey — all of them used to be, at least for me, merely shadows on the television screen and figures on the



Gardens ice, but with his concise and gorgeously observed portraits, Dryden has succeeded in moving them next door to me, making them into men as immediate and idiosyncratic as my friends. Here he is on Pete Mahovich:

... if I have one lasting image of him, it is from off the ice — wearing a patchwork sports jacket, the kind Heywood Hale Broun might wear, a rough, tweed fedora on his head, pushed up and punched to look a certain way, a cigar in his teeth, a day's growth of beard, a big, picket-fence grin, and saying in a voice with a too-loud laugh, "Hey, who has more fun than people?"

Very nice — and so's the whole book. □

## Store wars

By DANIEL FRANCIS

*The Company Store: James Bryson McLachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1900-1925*, by John Mellor, Doubleday, illustrated, 362 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 12812 6).

THE YEARS following the First World War were years of unprecedented labour strife in Canada, but nowhere was the war between labour and capital as ferocious as in the mines and steel mills of Cape Breton. Soldiers routinely patrolled the streets of Sydney and Glace Bay to pacify miners forced at gunpoint to accept wage cuts in the face of rampant inflation. Families deprived of fuel froze in their homes, children starved, property was smashed and burned — all so that a huge conglomerate could maintain its profits. In *The Company Store* John Mellor relates this story in compelling detail.

He begins in the 1890s, when a group of small Cape Breton coal producers amalgamated into a single company to take advantage of American capital and markets and enjoy a period of rapid growth. In turn the miners organized unions, and the stage was set for a long series of confrontations. The first of these occurred in 1909 when the company's campaign to keep out the U.S.-based United Mineworkers of America (UMWA) led to a vicious strike during which federal troops mounted a machine gun on the steps of a church to break up a peaceful protest march of miners and their families.

Divided between local and international unions, radical and moderate leaders, the workers did not usually achieve the same unity as their employer. One segment drifted leftward and found its voice in James McLachlan, who came to Canada in 1902 from his native Scotland, where he was blacklisted for labour activities, and emerged as one of the leaders of the UMWA during the 1909 strike. A committed socialist, later a member of the Communist Party, he was an eloquent, uncompromising foe of the coal company.

In the 1920s attempts to reduce wages lower than starvation level were met by

more strikes. Leaders were jailed, families were kicked out of their houses, company property was destroyed, and one striker was killed by police before the exhausted miners were forced back to work. Militant union leaders were replaced by moderates who accepted the logic of wage cuts, and an era of violence and turmoil drew to a close.

Through this tale of oppression and misery Mellor weaves a description of daily life in the mining communities. The company store, where most inhabitants did their shopping, becomes symbolic of the hold the company had over its employees. Unable to make ends meet on meagre salaries, miners fell deeper into debt. Then, during times of conflict, credit was used to coerce or punish the men. Similarly, housing, health care, heating fuel, and so on — all controlled by the company — were weapons used to tame an unruly labour force. Those who did not cooperate were locked out of the company store.

Mellor's book can be read as a case study of the relationship between business and government in Canada. According to liberal orthodoxy, in the 1920s as much as today, the state is an impartial arbiter between contending social forces. The hollowness of such a claim was shown in Cape Breton. Different levels of government, friendly with business interests and eager for coal royalties, consistently intervened on the side of the employers. The state was no friend of the Cape Breton coal miner.

Mellor is not a detached historian. He is plainly on the side of the miners and is pleading their case. "Men, women and children would be starved, beaten and shot to allow international financiers to receive bloated dividends on their watered stock." That pretty well sums up his analysis of the situation. The book gives a fine account of what it was like to work in the mines and suffer at the hands of the company. It does not pay much attention to the larger problems of the industry and offers no convincing discussion of the company's financial arrangements. In short this is labour history, not business history.

More than that, it is labour history that often verges on hagiography. We are meant to believe that James McLachlan was a saint in miner's lantern. Other union leaders are approved or dismissed according to McLachlan's ideology and tactics. The miners were apparently fighting a losing battle. Time after time McLachlan led them into confrontations that brought terrible hardship and few results. A more even-handed appraisal of his role, and a more charitable appraisal of his union rivals, would seem to be in order.

However, Mellor's sympathy for the

miners and his clear sense of outrage at what they endured are also the strengths of his book. He is always opinionated, never disinterested, and the result is a spirited introduction to one of the most shameful episodes in Canadian labour history. □

## REVIEW

# History's soldier

By DAVID STAFFORD

**A Date with History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian**, by C.P. Stacey, Deneau Publishers, 293 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88879 086 4).

BEHIND THE ANEMIC dust-wrapper of this book lies a far from lifeless memoir. Charles Stacey might be familiar to Canadians as the author of *A Very Double Life*, the book that in 1976 revealed Mackenzie King's consortings with ladies of the street, but to professional historians Colonel C.P. Stacey is the doyen of Canadian military history. He is responsible for the standard official histories of the Canadian army in the Second World War and of other monographs dealing with military and strategic history. During the war he was historical officer at Canadian military headquarters in London, and subsequently director of the historical section of the general staff in Ottawa until 1959. Under his aegis a generation of military historians served their novitiate, as did many of the war artists whose efforts he nourished.

In his own way Stacey has had a double life, writing history for the general reader and at the same time taking command of large and scholarly research projects. In part this arose from his determination to avoid the errors that had occurred after the First World War. Official histories of the Canadian forces overseas were commissioned, but only one of the eight projected volumes ever appeared, and that was in 1938. This lamentably failed to meet the demand for a prompt and publicly accessible account of the war. Under Stacey's leadership, the historical section in Ottawa did far better. Within three years of Germany's surrender, the first fruits of its work appeared in a summary writ-

ten for the general public under the title *The Canadian Army, 1939-1949*, which gave readers probably as full an account as was needed of events on the battlefield in the war years. (It might be noted, however, that the other services did not fare nearly so well.) More specialized volumes appeared in due course, and the series was completed in 1960. Within 15 years Stacey had successfully completed an operation that satisfied both specialist and generalist needs. There are other reasons, however, why Stacey is worthy of note.

Military historians can be a dull and tedious lot, and military history, except to the dedicated buff, can seem as delectable and gripping as the contents list of a packet of dried soup. Stacey, however, knows how to package his product and make the contents palatable to those whose tastes normally run to more exotic fare. It is unlikely that he will be remembered as a historian with a grand theory such as Creighton or Innes. But he should be recognized as a fine practitioner of the craft of history. History took him into military affairs rather than the reverse, and he was trained in the good old days when history was regarded as a branch of literature. He was educated at Toronto, Oxford, and Princeton, and took the best they had to offer. He began as a generalist, and read widely in British, European, and American as well as Canadian History. Early on, he learned the discipline of writing. He insists more than once that a research report may have no merit as a book, and that he would have failed in his public task had he written work that was unreadable.

In the production of the official histories he took on much of the writing himself. Many of his excellent research assistants were simply not up to the demands of writing good prose. Stacey is a warrior in a battle he senses he is losing. He delivers some well-aimed blows at colleagues in the historical profession, some of whom he calls mute and inglorious, and others, if not mute, close to semi-literate. Such views are not very fashionable or popular in the historical profession today. But unless it listens, more and more of its research will be read by fewer and fewer people; and then indeed those now howling for the blood of academics may have their way.

Stacey writes with style and wit, so that we are both entertained and instructed. His account of battles with various high priests of secrecy in London and Ottawa over access to documents betrays much laughable stupidity on the part of his superiors. Those who had defied the mighty sword of the Third Reich often showed inordinate fear of the pens of Stacey's

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historical platoon, and his victories were won only after a great deal of resistance on his part and to the accompaniment of continued guerrilla skirmishing. Those inclined to believe that official histories are merely what officialdom wishes us to read should see what Stacey has to say here about the genesis and evolution of his major work. There are indeed problems with official histories, and Stacey is not immune from the over-reverential view they assume toward the contemporary written document. He is a traditionalist in this area as in others. It is to be expected that the historians writing official histories are those least likely to dissent from the basic assumptions that inform them. But that they are mere puppets of their political superiors is amply disproved by Stacey's account.

He has a good eye for the telling anecdote about many of those with whom his official duties brought him in contact. We see Mackenzie King touring the bat-

tlefields of Normandy after liberation, patently more interested in the plaudits of the crowds than in the scenes of battle, and nervously fingering the increasingly grubby piece of paper from which he would read, in his excruciating French, inappropriate phrases to bemused mayors and other officials. How, Stacey wonders, did King so masterfully conceal the qualities he must have possessed to be in power so long? Perhaps he underestimates Mackenzie King's loathing for the military, and the crafty old man was getting his own back by embarrassing them all.

Of General Crerar, who commanded Canadian forces during the liberation of Europe, Stacey deploys one of his favoured tactics, the backhanded compliment. He was, he told an eager wartime correspondent — and he repeats it for us here — the sort of person who would never make a bad mistake. Of Brooke Claxton, King's post-war

minister of defence whose cuts seriously threatened Stacey's project, we are told he was "not one of the couther people I have met." Of all those he did meet, he remembers with greatest warmth MacNaughton, Crerar's dismissed predecessor. "Meeting him was like shaking hands with a dynamo," he recalls, and some of that energy was obviously transmitted to Stacey. It was from MacNaughton, too, that he heard in London in 1940 what now has become the authorized version among many of the Stacey school: that the autonomy of Canada was worked out on the battlefield, and that the test of sovereignty was control of the armed forces.

On the whole, Stacey says of his experiences as an historian in soldier's uniform, Clio's servants were well treated in the Canadian army. Clio has been well served by Stacey. Ignore the cover. Read the book. You will smile, and you will learn. □

#### FEATURE REVIEW

## No excuses

Despite occasional glimmers, in his new novel Robert Kroetsch fails to live up to the quality his *intended* story requires

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

*Alibi*, by Robert Kroetsch, Stoddart, 239 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 20146):

ONE OF THE few basic plots available to a writer of fiction is that of the quest. The purpose of the quest may be hidden even to the writer (in fact, the obscurity of the goal may be, as in Kafka, the purpose of the story); the obstacles encountered along the way become the story itself. Robert Kroetsch's past fiction explores a number of such quests. We understand that in the beginning something has been lost, and that the characters set out in search of that something. Whether they achieve their goal or not is no longer important: essential to the novel is the quest itself.

In Kroetsch's first novel, *But We Are Exiles*, which tells of a journey of deliverance along the Mackenzie River, the characters are exiles in the sense in which Homer's Ulysses is an exile — that is,

someone banished from what is his by a will other than his own. In a recent interview in *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*, Kroetsch admitted to being surprised when a critic traced the structure of his first novel to Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," but did not disown the relationship. I think that rather than Coleridge, Homer provides a better source of reference: in both the Mariner's and Ulysses' voyages there is an expiation to be accomplished, but while the Mariner is a passive adventurer ("I could not draw my eyes from theirs, / Nor turn them up to pray"), Ulysses is a man of action ("tired and worn out by perils") — and Kroetsch's exiles are essentially men of action. *Badlands* (1975) refers to the Odyssean quest by opposition: on the second page Anna Dawe needs to state: "I was not Penelope because no man wagered his way towards me." *Badlands* is an Odyssey in which the hero/heroine never

quite leaves home. Between *But We Are Exiles* and *Badlands* lies *The Studhorse Man*, a splendid *tour de force* and a true novel of quest: a man in search of his sanity, a horse in search of its perfect mare, a woman in search of herself.

In *Badlands* and *The Studhorse Man* Kroetsch's Aegean is the province of Alberta. His new novel is also a quest, but unlike the others it is not limited to one part of the world. In *Alibi* the traveller has suddenly widened his horizons: Alberta yes, but also England, Portugal, and above all Greece, where the Ulysses theme is brought back to its source. It also serves as contrast: Alberta (vast, wintry, or green) set against Greece (small, summery, and dry). This time the quest is borrowed: it is not the hero's own, even though it does become his own in the end. We guess at the plot: Kroetsch seems to be saying that whatever we look for, in the end we find only ourselves. We are the answer, no

matter what the question might be.

*Alibi* is told through the voice of Billy Dorfendorf (Dorf for short), a man in his 40s whose wife has been unfaithful and who is now employed by an invisible millionaire called Deemer to scour the world for all kinds of things that take the millionaire's fancy. Names have a special significance in Kroetsch's work. "Dorfendorf" repeats the German word for "village" (Kroetsch was brought up in a bilingual household, and the idea of travelling "from village to village" is imbedded in Dorf's name. Deemer (Old English for "judge") is a modern superpower, infernally rich, with spies in every country. He is that faceless, voiceless god (Dorf speaks only to his secretary) who spins his servant's destiny. We can guess that, like Chesterton's Sunday in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, perhaps the finest example of a modern quest, Deemer becomes anything his servant dreads or wishes, a divinity fashioned by man's prayers, an ogre bred by man's own nightmares. The novel's title is of course Latin for "elsewhere" — the exile's home, and also his excuse.

The novel begins when Deemer sends Dorf on one of his wild quests: this time in search of a spa (unbelievably, Dorf, a well-travelled if not well-bred man who drinks champagne at Max Ernst openings, has no idea of what a "spa" might be). The first spa Dorf discovers is in the Rockies, and he decides to visit it accompanied by a lady friend, Karen Strike, a film-maker. As soon as they arrive (barely five pages into the book) Dorf, in the spa's steaming pool, meets a beautiful floating head: her name is Julie Magnuson, and Dorf makes love to her in the hot, vaporous waters. When Julie unexpectedly blurts out "I'll kill you," Dorf begins to suspect that his life may be in danger. After the pool, and before jumping into bed with Karen, Dorf decides to shower but, confusing the hot tap with the cold, badly scalds his penis: love-making with Karen must be postponed.

Next day Dorf persuades Karen to leave him on his own in the spa (he hopes to see Julie again) and to come back a few days later with a change of his clothes. In a laundromat he comes across his third woman, Estuary, and Dorf's pilgrimage begins. First Bath, in England (on the plane Dorf meets his elder sister Sylvia), then Portugal where, as if by chance, he sees Julie again, this time accompanied by a dwarf, a Portuguese doctor called Manuel de Medeiros. Dorf, Julie, and the small doctor form a curiously shaped love-triangle until Julie is killed in a car accident seemingly intended for Dorf. Dorf leaves for Greece, Karen comes to join

him, and Dorf's two teenage daughters (in his former wife's custody) drop in to visit. In Greece he takes to mud-bathing, which he believes will cure him of all his ailments (whatever they may be), and while wallowing achieves the best orgasm of his life in the capable hands of a group of Greek women.

At last Dorf returns to Calgary, and somewhere near Banff he finds the perfect spa. Mysteriously, all the characters meet, including a spectral Deemer and the ghostly voice of the dead Julie. Why? How? The novel ends with a few pages from Dorf's journal (a gift from Karen) in which a few more facts, mainly dealing with ornithological matters, are given. The final note seems to read "to be continued," but that is no excuse: the book as it stands should make sense in itself. Perhaps Kroetsch is saying that after a long quest for a spa, Dorf has discovered that whatever we seek for (like Maeterlinck's blue bird) lies at home.

Two important variations occur in *Alibi's* Odyssean plot (I might add that in one of Dorf's adventures he meets a character who, like Ulysses, calls himself Nobody). The first is a variation on the fountain of eternal youth theme: spas, health, youth, water, sex, and the passage of time are traditionally linked. Karen points out that Deemer may be looking for just such a fountain, and in drinking the waters from many spas Dorf is more or less consciously (we infer) looking for the miraculous one that will cure all evil. The very notion of its existence gives hope to the quest; simply believing that a miracle may be encountered tinges life with a sense of the miraculous. Dorf, who has found so many strange things for Deemer (Sicilian dominoes, a collection of teeth, the skeletons of every kind of sea-creature in the world including a mermaid, a showcase of rare eggs) does not question Deemer's demands: he acts on the assumption that if it can be requested it can be found, and furthers this belief by supposing that if it can be looked for it must exist. Dorf's quest echoes Landolfi's: "I know the unicorn lives in this wood because it is here that I have searched for it."

The second variation, whether deliberate or not, is a parody of the James Bond films, and this unsuccessful parodic style is, I believe, at the root of *Alibi's* failure as a novel. *Don Quixote* is, among many other things, a parody of novels of chivalry, and as such it works because books such as *Amadis* or *Tristram le Blanc* did not set out to outdo themselves, to become their own caricatures. The James Bond films, on the other hand, *intend* to appear larger than life (and twice as real); they are, so

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to speak, their own parody; it is impossible to carry the joke one step further. even though Kroetsch may not have used the James Bond theme intentionally, all the elements that stereotype the genre are there: the adventurous unattached man, the beautiful, willing (but deadly) women, the acrobatic love-making, the invisible M-like boss, the money-is-no-object attitude, the five-cities-in-three-days setting.

*Alibi* can be defined as a parodic quest in which neither the language, nor the characters nor the story itself, is convincing.

Let us look first at the language. To reach the plot, the reader must fight his way through unbelievably uninteresting dialogue that perhaps seeks to imitate the James Bond's jargon. For instance;

[Karen:] "I'm touching myself."

[Dorf:] "What does it feel like to have a cunt?"

Another dialogue:

[Karen:] "Have you seen Godard's *Weekend*?"

[Dorf:] "Never heard of it . . . It's a movie, isn't it?"

Meaningless images abound:

And when I inhaled . . . I filled my head with the heat of her desire, rankly sweet, like iron newly lifted from a bog.

Another:

The octopus fastened itself to my damp body. It was unimaginably cool, a cool poem I later explained to the ignorant student, not a study of a poem but the poem itself, finding me.

And another:

I was the torso of her rapacity.

There are examples of socio-philosophical poetic phrases:

Is not the telephone its own version of intimate need?

And further on:

We are all exiles, sometimes even from our own hands. Even to strike back is to seek.

(The meaning of these lines totally escapes me.)

Bad jokes:

. . . in three years I hadn't made love to anything — man, dog, beast, or woman — not to anything but my right fist, and that, infrequently.

Another:

Right there in Bath where Dr. William Oliver invented the biscuit as part of the cure.

"This takes the biscuit," I said.

Pedantic use of "the right word":

The cocks, misremembering their time, crowded in the further distance.

Peter Thomas, in his essay *Robert Kroetsch* (1980), published in Douglas & McIntyres's *Studies in Canadian Literature* series, says in his introduction that "Kroetsch's main affinities are with

those writers whose work most demonstrates [a] concern for the aesthetics of narrative — above all, Conrad, Faulkner, Beckett, Nabokov, Borges." The above examples do not warrant the comparison.

The characterization is equally disappointing: the characters never build up. Dorf is unintelligible. We do not understand why he moves, what pushes him on, and once his goal of the perfect spa is reached we do not understand Dorf's reactions. In *The Studhorse Man*, for instance, Lepages's passion is clear: the events, not the psychology, are surprising. We know and care for Lepage, and we understand his motives even if we cannot quite define them. Dorf's *Weltschmerz* is never clear, and pathos for pathos' sake does not move. Worse are the female characters: Karen seems a cut-out from "How to Be a Professional Woman" in *Good Housekeeping*; Julie is pure James Bond — the sexy, brainless puppet of a Higher Power.

In *Labyrinths of Voice* Kroetsch calls *Badlands* a "male story," and perhaps the term, in a pejorative sense, applies to *Alibi*. *Alibi* is "male" in the sense of being uni-sexual, of focusing entirely on a stereotyped version of what a male's fantasies and desires are supposed to be. Only in a "male" novel would the word "cunt" appear some 20 times; only in a "male" novel would the hero tie "the string of my locker key around my sturdy member."

"A story," says Kroetsch in the same *Labyrinths* interview, "has its own energy which carries it along." And yet in *Alibi* Kroetsch prevents it from "carrying itself along." The story is stopped, interfered with, clues are hidden and never revealed — all part of a spy-story technique, but useless if the spy story does not live up to the reader's expectations. It may be said that a novel can dispense with an understandable plot and understandable characters: it can statically portray, it can build and provoke images, it can do any number of things. But whatever it sets out to do, it must do them effectively. In *Alibi* the notion of a plot and characters is obviously there, the theme of the quest (dear to Kroetsch) is there — an understanding seems to be offered. And yet, in the end, the story makes no sense.

A writer such as John Hawkes (Kroetsch in *Badlands* and *The Studhorse Man* is close to the Hawkes of *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin*) uses language to create an artificial mood in which a contrived story becomes credible through the sheer baroque of the language itself, convoluted and marvellously intricate short sentences that convey a convoluted and marvellously intricate story. Kroetsch's

*Alibi* fails in that the language, the characters, the visible plot, are not up to the quality the *intended* story requires, the story one dimly sees behind the dregs of the story presented. Given the rest of Kroetsch's work, one cannot but suspect the existence of a better idea behind *Alibi*. Here and there along the 239 pages are intimations of immortality, as when Dorf reflects on Calgary's cemetery, and his thoughts lead on to other "great cities of the New World", and Calgary itself sees the fate of the "great Mayan places . . . as sun-scarred and ambitious and intent as this one" (every one of these three adjectives is perfectly chosen and necessary), or as when Dorf meets Nobody in the cavern. Unfortunately, these are just glimmers that heighten the general sensation of fogginess.

The reasons why a good writer fails and produces a bad novel are as mysterious as the reasons for his success. Outside any critical judgement, a good novelist's failure arouses in the reader a kind of blind anger: blind anger, and a sense of betrayal, and an irrational feeling of wasted talent and time. □

## REVIEW

# Judas Priest

By I.M. OWEN

A Time for Judas, by Morley Callaghan, Macmillan, 256 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9772 X).

MORLEY CALLAGHAN'S new novel may or may not be the best he has written; all I know is that it's the one I've enjoyed most. In theme, *A Time for Judas* is close to his his best-known pre-war novels, *Strange Fugitive*, *Such Is My Beloved*, and *More Joy in Heaven*; in setting, it's almost as far removed from them as it could be — instead of 20th-century Toronto, it takes place in first-century Judea. In style, it is certainly his best work. He has always been good at landscape, and a book set in Judea gives him more scope for this talent than his urban novels did. And his dialogue, for once, is mostly satisfactory; the speech of the characters isn't archaized at all; but somehow the subject-matter pre-

serves them from what George Woodcock has called the "peculiar Callaghanese way of speaking"—except in one place, which I'll quote shortly.

The heroes of those three early books were two crooks, Harry Trotter the bootlegger in *Strange Fugitive* and Kip Caley the bank-robber in *More Joy in Heaven*, and one priest, Stephen Dowling in *Such Is My Beloved*. The hero of the new book is none other than Judas Iscariot, and as Callaghan interprets him he inevitably reminds us of Father Dowling — intellectually superior to those around him, but done in at last by his own obsession.

The narrator, Philo of Crete, puts his finger on the weakness in the gospel version of Judas's betrayal of Jesus. "Everybody knew the Galilean, and what he looked like. No one had to point him out. He wasn't in hiding, was he? No one had to be led to the hiding place." It's in the stress of this moment that Philo blurts out, in the authentic accents of Kip Caley: "What's going on around here, Ezekiel?"

If it weren't for that sudden intrusion of unmistakable Callaghanese, we might almost be taken in by Callaghan's prologue, in which he represents the novel as the work of a deceased Welsh friend of his named Owen Spencer Davies (I enjoyed speculating on the association of ideas behind that particular combination of names) who had read the authentic manuscript of Philo of Crete, since suppressed by the Vatican.

Philo is a representative Callaghan character: amiable, intelligent, and moderately crooked. Normally he is business agent for a corrupt Roman senator, the father of his late wife; but just at present he is living obscurely in Jerusalem as scribe to Pontius Pilate while he waits for a profiteering scandal to blow over.

Chancing to make the acquaintance of Judas, Philo becomes interested in the doings and teachings of Jesus. Judas is portrayed as a sophisticated intellectual, in marked contrast to the simple Galileans who form the bulk of the disciples. He even introduces Philo to a young Samaritan harlot, Mary, whom Philo sets up in a house just outside the city wall. This Mary eventually joins Jesus, and we learn that the stories told of Mary Magdalene were really about Mary of Samaria. Mary Magdalene, it seems, was never a harlot, but was the faithful lover of Jesus — in a discreetly put but striking departure from the teachings of Callaghan's Church.

Early in the book Philo is captured by an Edomite bandit chief named Simon. They become friends, and Philo acts for a time as Simon's spy within Jerusalem, telling him when rich caravans are leav-

ing the city, and where they are going. Simon, a Robin Hood figure and the most vivid character in the book, is destined to be one of the two thieves crucified beside Jesus. It is Philo's affection for him more than his interest in Jesus that leads him to become a witness of the Crucifixion.

Afterwards, a desperate Judas comes to Philo and tells him the whole story of his association with Jesus, and the truth about the "betrayal" — that Jesus chose him for this role, necessary for the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. He was chosen as the most intelligent of the disciples, the most capable of understanding what Jesus was up to; but he is tormented by the thought that perhaps he was chosen also because of a flaw in his nature — that Jesus saw him as the only one who could play the part of a traitor. Later, he is tormented by the realization that in telling the truth to Philo he has failed in his duty; it is this, perhaps, that makes his suicide inevitable.

It would be unfair to reveal in a review Callaghan's explanation of the Resurrection. It's ingenious and — quite properly — not fully rationalized. Jesus does die, does return, and briefly appears to Philo. What he sees is not a ghost, he knows, but a palpable physical presence.

But Philo also knows, literally, where the body is buried. Callaghan here adopts the orthodox Pauline doctrine of physical resurrection, from that passage in First Corinthians that always makes me want to giggle during funeral services, as Paul struggles to reconcile irreconcilables and explains the inexplicable — at last shrugging his shoulders and saying, "Behold, I show you a mystery."

By a happy coincidence Robert Graves's 1946 novel *King Jesus* has been reissued this year in a handsome new paperback. It deals with the whole life of Jesus, but the treatment of Judas in the two books has remarkable similarities as well as differences. The authors approach the subject from drastically different religious points of view. Callaghan is a cradle Catholic, whereas Graves is an adopted son of an older Trinity: the Triple Goddess (Virgin, Nymph, and Mother) who ruled the Mediterranean world before the arrival of Zeus, Jehovah, and all that masculinist crowd. In two novels (the other is *Hercules My Shipmate*, also reissued this year, with its title changed to *The Golden Fleece*) Graves shows the Goddess coping with this incursion.

In Graves's novel, as in Callaghan's, Judas is the most intelligent of the

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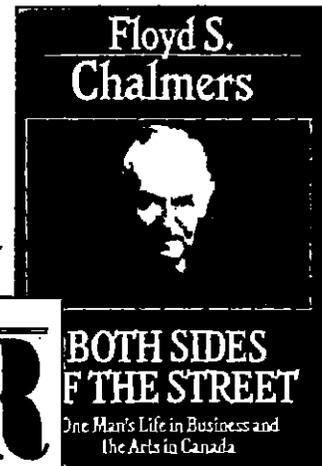
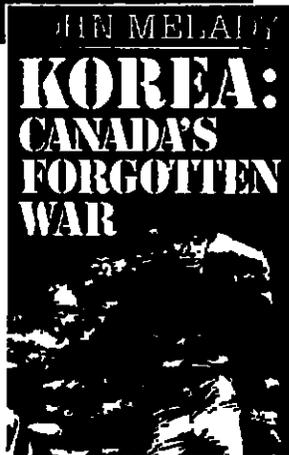
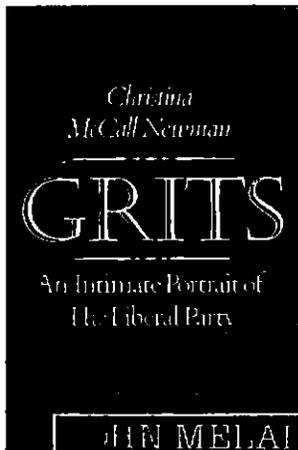
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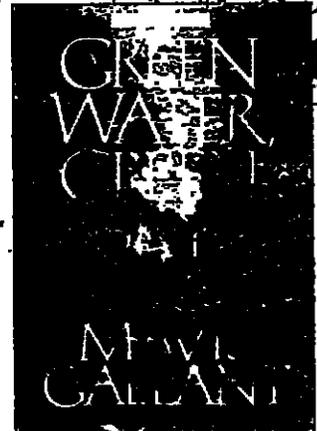
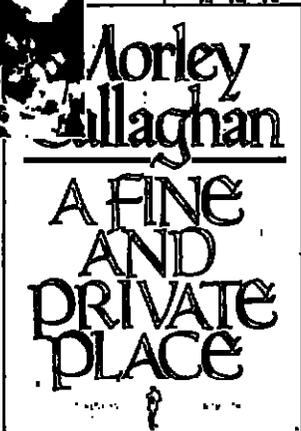
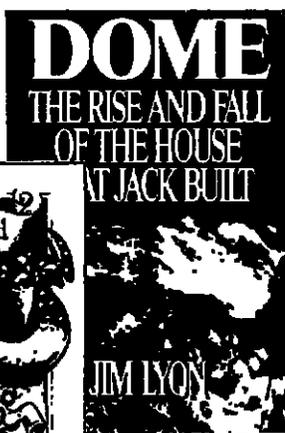
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disciples, and the closest to Jesus. His motivation in the betrayal is similar, but subtler and more complex. Graves is equipped for historical fiction both with enormous scholarship and with colossal

nerve in inventing, deadpan, where scholarship fails to provide the answers he wants. Callaghan, I should think, wouldn't claim much scholarship in first-century history, but he has the skill

and sense to keep his narrative pared down to avoid the traps into which a lack of specialized knowledge might have led him. He's clearly cut out for a fine new career as a historical novelist. □

## FEATURE REVIEW

# The thin man within

Although one cannot exactly *like* Paul Nolan, the hero of Robert Harlow's new novel, one can enter the inner life that gives a tragi-comic flavour to his predicament

By GEORGE WOODCOCK

Paul Nolan, by Robert Harlow, McClelland & Stewart, 400 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4006 7).

AS I WAS reading *Paul Nolan* I naturally thought about Robert Harlow's earlier novels and realized that, except for the first two, *Royal Murdoch* (1962) and *A Gift of Echoes* (1965), they have appeared at longish intervals—seven years between *A Gift of Echoes* and *Scann* (1972), six years between *Scann* and *Making Arrangements* (1978), and now five years since *Making Arrangements*. This led me to the interesting question of the periods of gestation that writers need. There seems to be almost as much difference as between elephants and cats. Some novelists, despite being dedicated, continuing writers, never seem to increase their facility of writing; the process is always difficult and at times agonizing, and books tend to emerge as much out of long subterranean developments as out of conscious choices. Margaret Laurence is, of course, a prime example of the writer who operates by such rhythms, and so, I suspect, is Robert Harlow. Such writers tend to produce books that get more massive in content as well as volume, as time goes on.

I'm not playing games of evaluation at this point, denigrating the other type of novelist, like Margaret Atwood or Robertson Davies, who can be relied on to produce a fine, well-crafted novel every year or so without great ups or downs of quality. Nor am I edging myself onto thin ice by suggesting that *The Diviners* and *Paul Nolan* are equals, except perhaps in the ironic Orwellian sense. But I am talking about

kinds of writers, and I do find it interesting that there is a much more pronounced sense of history among the writers who build up over the years, and through long hard labours, to novels that are big in size and also in texture and feeling.

Perhaps the reason is that only a clear historic structure can hold a big novel together and prevent its disintegration into a perilous marsh of words and feelings like the appalling prolixities that Thomas Wolfe once tried to pass off as novels. The successful big novels have always been either openly historical novels, like *War and Peace* and *Le Rouge et Le Noir* and *Middlemarch*, or they have been novels in which time and memory, operating within a clearly defined and limited social structure, provide the moving force, like *Ulysses* or *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In its own modified way, I would say that *Famous Last Words* is an example of the first kind, the novel propelled by history, and *The Diviners* an example of the second — time driving through a single life which memory places within a richly evolved social continuum.

Where does all that place *Paul Nolan*? In terms of development, I would say that Harlow has followed the kind of course I sketch out in my first paragraph. His instinct has always told him that stark economy, in the early Hemingway or the late Gide manner, is not his way, and, having a feel for words, he has rightly followed, at the cost of a good deal of early verbosity, a taste for rich rather than spare prose, for the full canvas rather than the window pane. He has also, as W.H. New once remarked, felt the "urge to write a *big*

novel, sprawling through space and generations," and in *Royal Murdoch* he made his first attempt, refining the chronicle form with more elaborate devices aimed at verisimilitude in *Scann*. *Paul Nolan* will, from the look of the set of galleys I have been working with, perhaps be the biggest of all Harlow's novels in terms of length — more than 160,000 words on a rough calculation.

In terms of kind, *Paul Nolan* stands somewhere between the historical category, to which *Royal Murdoch* mostly belonged, and the time-and-memory category, to which *A Gift of Echoes* belonged. It is in a way a family and generation novel, since Paul Nolan in the present is shown in the heart of his disintegrating family of wife and children, and in the past in the heart, not of his own natural family, but of the family of his closest friend, Matthew Donatis, to whom he is tied by bonds of affinity and guilt.

Paul is, on the surface, almost a type of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, who wants *all* the satisfactions, respectable (decent wife, wholesome children, conspicuous means) and unrespectable (covert sexual adventures especially) that his money and his social standing among the West Coast *nouveau riche* can bring him. One's first reaction is dislike, of Paul and of the world in which he and his enamelled little power maniac of a wife are struggling to excel. Why should one read about the West Vancouver achievers whom in real life one despises and — as a fellow West Coaster — avoids?

Yet by the end one has come not exactly to like Paul, who in most of his actions remains a cad not even good at

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the game, but to enter the inner life that gives a tragi-comic flavour to his predicament, and to recognize him, in fictional terms, as a complex and rather interesting creation. George Orwell once remarked — and Paul's friend Matthew repeats him without acknowledgment — that within the thin self of rectitude that most of us display there is a fat man, sensual, sly, and totally amoral. But whatever figure he may cut in his three-piece suit, in Paul it is always the fat man who comes to the surface when he cannot resist the imperative demands of his penis and commits such follies as having sex with two whores, one after another, in the hotel suite he shares with his priggish elder son, and being sexually used on his own lawn, with his wife in the house, by his younger son's girl friend. Paul is 49, in what used to be called "the dangerous age," the so-called male menopause, and he certainly plays the part, so that in the end everything comes out, everyone tells on him, and the existence out of *Western Living* he put so much effort into constructing collapses about his ears as his wife makes her final assertion of power by locking him out.

Paul's thin man is within, and that is his downfall:

Mostly he lived in his head — a den full of temptations, good and bad dreams, fears, hopes for survival, panics. There was chaos all of his own, which he knew came from being indulgent — of himself, but of others too, so that there was not much control over his life.

He is the rare type whose existence seems to be phallically — but is in fact cerebrally — motivated. For decades his relationship with Matthew — the person nearest to him — has been carried on in letters, with their never meeting until the death of mother Donatis, which is one of the book's catalytic points. In his thought Paul continually carries on the dialogue sustained in the letters, which provides an easy novelistic device for bringing in the past without flashbacks. In all his relationships that restless mind is ticking, and fantasy becomes a substitute for feeling, so that when he is caught in a situation with no time for calculation, he fumbles it and reveals to the other characters, all of whom seem more immediately perceptive than he, his emotional inadequacy. Nobody in the end comes to trust his love or his loyalty.

But in the process of showing up Paul the others show themselves up, and one's sympathy builds for this subterranean rebel, this intellectual grafted on to natural man, this *homme disponible*. His hard, self-righteous wife, his priggish elder son, his daughter who will grow up the spitting image of her

mother, his street-wise younger son and the wandering girl friend who is that male nightmare, the professional victim turned predator, and even his friend Matthew, good for a letter but no help in a crisis: all of them turn against him and in so doing reveal their own failure of feeling. And, as Paul sets off on the last page for the *terra incognita* of Hong Kong, it is with him that our interest goes, not with those who stay behind. They will never change, Paul may.

So what in its conventions is realistic fiction, even giving a new life to the old epistolary devices of the 18th century in the Paul-Matthew correspondence, turns out to be a moralistic novel of some strength, exposing, through the triumphs and final tribulations of a man who never comfortably fits, the ways in which social orders, whether those of respectable society or those of the counter-culture with its own rigid conventions, close against the individual who refuses or cannot make a final commitment. The price of such freedom is solitude. □

#### REVIEW

## How the East was won

By ERIN MICHIE

*Fortune & La Tour: The Civil War in Acadia*, by M.A. MacDonald, Methuen, 228 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 95800 X).

SO MUCH Canadian history taught in school pales beside the colourful heroes and heroines of an American school-child's heritage. Yet it is not because of a lack of native pigment that Canadian children suffer; any Canadian historian will tell you that there are numerous figures in our archives that could be presented more vividly. Charles de Saint-Etienne, Sieur de la Tour, an animated Frenchman who came to Acadia in the early 17th century to be inextricably bound to the future of the region, is one of these little-known yet vibrant characters.

Through M.A. MacDonald's eyes, La Tour's early years in Port Royal were spent with a handful of other Frenchmen and Micmacs who led an adventurous, roving existence following the fur trade. The vast fur resources of the

area were the principal reason for the existence of New France, but political turbulence on the European continent seldom allowed the attention of France to be directed to its colonial holdings. Cardinal Richelieu's political advent saw renewed interest in the region, however, and after a series of appeals to France for financial support by La Tour resources were sent by the Company of New France to build a few forts, and the commission of lieutenant-general — including a mandate to establish posts and encourage settlement — was given to La Tour.

MacDonald delineates the immense potential of Acadia as a French colony and the promise of La Tour's career there. It is depicted as a small but auspicious area of settlement, perhaps rivalling Quebec as the future stronghold of the French presence in the New World.

Shortly after La Tour's commission the other leading character arrived on the scene: Charles de Menou, Sieur d'Aulnay, commander of the largest ship in a fleet that was the last great expedition of the Company of New France. D'Aulnay remained in Acadia and began to acquire power and influence. It is not known exactly when or why La Tour and d'Aulnay first clashed, but they began a bitter contest that would cost many lives, much money, and prevent Acadia from attaining whatever prominence it could have achieved.

MacDonald's adroit characterization of the two men is enlivened by her unorthodox use of handwriting analysis: D'Aulnay emerges on the side of villainy; La Tour, by contrast, is seen as the underdog. D'Aulnay was a member of high standing in the French establishment; La Tour's father was a mason's son in Paris. The two enemies are not, however, fixed in these roles. MacDonald represents within her protagonists the mixture of complexity and contradiction inherent in any personality.

D'Aulnay cunningly twisted the actions of his rival in his reports and visits to France, undermining La Tour's position in Acadia, and eventually La Tour was outlawed. D'Aulnay pursued him with more zeal than necessary, destroying French property and interests in the process. La Tour and his family, along with a few loyal followers, were forced to retreat to Fort La Tour, near Saint John, where the last few years of La Tour's resistance were based.

MacDonald vividly describes these last, desperate years in the civil war and the increasing futility of La Tour's situation. Forced to appeal to the New Englanders for help, La Tour made the first of many visits to Boston and found

the contrast between the two colonies startling. The English settlement was prosperous, already home to thousands of people, while Acadia's scattered population of a few hundred eked out a meagre existence after almost 10 years of warfare between their two strongest leaders.

During these difficult years La Tour's wife, Françoise Jacquelin, emerges as an attractive and courageous figure. Coming to Acadia as the wife of a governor, she soon found her expectations dashed as d'Aulnay skilfully stalked her husband. Nevertheless, she remained loyal to La Tour, braved affliction and injustice, travelled back to France twice in attempts to regain support for her husband, and, having been stranded in Boston, fought a long, arduous court case there in order to rejoin him. This eminently capable and steadfast woman died three weeks after leading the final defense of Fort La Tour, which d'Aulnay seized during one of her husband's absences. Breaking his promise of quarter to the survivors of the siege, d'Aulnay hanged the remaining men before her eyes.

But even d'Aulnay proved capable of a change of heart. He spent the last few months of his life repenting his misdeeds and, too late, decided to devote his energy in earnest to the development of Port Royal before he was drowned.

It is easy for the reader to become entangled in the fortunes of these people and the spectacle of history as unfolded in *Fortune & La Tour*. La Tour himself is manifestly the most intriguing character in the tale. Indomitable and protean, he survived his enemy and managed to get himself reinstated in Acadia, with all rights and privileges. He then carried off one of the most remarkable coups of his career: he persuaded d'Aulnay's widow to marry him, in order to "promote peace between their families and in Acadia." But New England by this time was rapidly gaining strength. Acadia's time had passed. As MacDonald says: "From the time of de Monts and Poutrincourt, and for hundreds of years to come, no one who pursued that will-o-the-wisp would prosper."

*Fortune & La Tour* is the first in a series of historical publications sponsored by the Saint John Bicentennial, Inc. in order to make their city's "rich past more available to . . . citizens and good friends everywhere." MacDonald accomplishes this admirably; forgoing an academic approach, she presents the brief but critical period of the civil war in Acadia in an engaging and unpretentious manner. Her interpretation of primary sources, often cited, appears sound and plausible, and the passages in



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which she candidly speculates on the settings, motivations, moods, and manoeuvres of the characters in her Acadian drama substantially enhance the chronicle for the general reader. □

### REVIEW

## Behind the façade

By HELEN PORTER

**Dark Secrets**, by Veronica Ross, Oberon Press, 101 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 473 6) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 474 4).

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, when I began teaching a creative writing class, I gave Sinclair Ross's "The Flowers That Killed Him" as an example of an excellent short story. I'll always remember the reaction of one of my students, a man in his late 60s: "I read it, but I wished afterwards I hadn't. I didn't like the way it made me feel."

Veronica Ross, in this her second collection of short stories (the first, *Good-bye Summer*, was published by Oberon in 1980), has more in common with Sinclair Ross than a surname. The feeling of desolation that swept over me after I'd finished reading "Dreams and Sleep" and the title story was similar to the way I felt after my first encounter with Sinclair Ross's work. Still quite a young woman, Veronica Ross has not yet achieved the mastery of her namesake in the short-story form, but she's getting there. Like him, she has an eye for the telling detail; like him, without being at all sentimental or obtrusive, she can almost break the reader's heart. Although she still lacks Ross's superb skill at creating atmosphere, there's the same suggestion of dread and doom hanging over most of her work as can be found in "The Lamp at Noon" and "The Painted Door." Her evocation of rural and small-town Nova Scotia has the same tone as Sinclair Ross's evocation of the Prairies.

*Dark Secrets* is an appropriate title, both for the collection itself and for the title story, in which a young couple named Lyle and Nancy Jerome hide something dreadful behind the cheerful façade of a happy marriage. This story

and some of the others, especially "An Understated Look" and "That Summer," are told in such a straightforward, matter-of-fact style that one is not totally prepared for what emerges at or near the end, although on looking back one can pick out hints and clues almost too subtle to have been noticed earlier. Veronica Ross spares neither her characters nor the reader. Her people are as they are; she makes no attempt to doll them up.

When I started to read "Thanksgiving," which begins: "The year she was fifteen, Leslie hated her mother Geneva," I thought, "Oh no, not another cliché-filled story about the friction between a teenager and her divorced mother. As I read on, however, I realized there was more depth here than I had expected. Slowly, skilfully, Veronica Ross builds on that shaky foundation until, by the end of the story, she has a solid structure. "Thanksgiving" ends on a more positive note than most of the other stories, but it is very far from being pat.

Veronica Ross deals with ordinary people and commonplace situations in a way that makes them unique. In this she reminds me not only of Sinclair Ross but of another fine writer, Norman Levine. She has a way of lulling the reader along and then, when it's least expected, hitting out with a sentence that's truly shocking. "That Summer" is about the Nova Scotian summer of some thoroughly modern visitors and Eunice, the teenage girl they hire as a babysitter. A small child drowns, and in a chillingly ordinary few paragraphs Ross tells what later happens to the adults. Then, right at the end of the story, we have this one-sentence paragraph: "None of them knew what happened to Eunice." And there the story is, forever jelled in the memory.

"The Girls," the story of three sisters, is told from the point of view of their aging but still very perceptive mother. Even the youngest daughter Augie is on the verge of middle age; the other two are well into it. The mother listens, observes, and remembers as Augie, now a successful lawyer, tries her best to



resume a long-ago love affair with a local, now married, man. "I cannot look at Augie," she thinks near the end of the story. "Her face is so gentle, so beautiful, so happy. But so *mistaken*."

REVIEW

# Unrapping the world

BY ROBERT BRINGHURST

*Birding, or Desire*, by Don McKay, McClelland & Stewart, 128 pages \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 5761 X).

WHAT IS LOVELY in these poems is their sidewise lope — their lithe, eccentric movement — their freedom from self-interest, and their sensuous love of the living world in all its intimate, quick detail. What is loveliest in them, in sum, is the unobtrusive, almost self-effacing service of their theme, which is encrypted in the title. It means: pay close attention to the world, as birders learn to do; the human heart is rooted there.

Wordsworth's vision of the natural world was full of rapture instead of detail. He said "tree" and "bird" where McKay will say white pine, red pine,

loon, or Blackburnian warbler. That Wordsworthian vision of nature is still very much with us, and because it runs on generalized rapture instead of granular, fecund detail, its appeal is strongest among those writers, readers, and tourists who are content with a state of perpetual adolescence. The kind of attention Don McKay, in these poems, pays to the natural world demands a different kind of concentration. The intelligence perceptible in this book is an adult intelligence in the best sense: compassionate, curious, and knowing; learned and out to learn. In their precise attentiveness, these poems have less in common with the poems of Wordsworth than with the novels of Flaubert.

Two of the finest poems in the book are, not surprisingly, small portraits of the author. For the book's most fortunate readers, they may be portraits of the reader too. As a piece called "Field Marks" tells us,

*his mind  
pokes out his ears the way an Irish  
Setter's nose*

*pokes out a station wagon window. . .*

In "Field Marks (2)" we proceed to greater detail:

*Distinguished from the twerp,  
which he resembles, by his off-speed  
concentration. . . .*

David is fidgety, anxious to be off, to go home to his wife. So guilty, too, and yet there is the same smugness I witnessed from my window. It is *him* I look at, and I hope the look I give him is not a pretty one." The old mother's anguish on a daughter's behalf will be familiar to any parent who has sat helplessly by while a grown child, supposedly mature and sophisticated, makes the mistakes that are common to every generation.

The collection is a unified one, with each story having its own secret or secrets. Readers who prefer cheerful, uplifting material will not find it here. In a recent interview Rudy Wiebe was critical of some of the greatest contemporary novels, which he describes as works of "massive hopelessness." He would probably put *Dark Secrets* in that category. I would like to have seen more humour in the book; in real life funny things have a way of happening at even the most sombre times. Apart from that I have little criticism. Veronica Ross has taken us inside the minds and lives of men and women, teenagers and children, and has shown us what she found there. She is a realist who does not paint pretty pictures, but her eyes and ears are clear and discerning. I look forward to reading her first novel, which she has already completed. □



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And there is a third poem, "The Bellies of Fallen Breathing Sparrows," which I quote in full:

*Some things can't be praised enough,  
among them  
breasts and birds  
who have cohabited so long in  
metaphor  
most folks think of them as married.  
Not only that, but  
when you slide your shirt (the striped  
one) off  
the inside of my head is lined with down  
like a Blackburnian warbler's nest,  
the exterior of which is often rough and  
twiggy  
in appearance.  
And as the shirt snags, hesitates, and  
then  
lets go, I know exactly why he warbles  
as he does,  
which is zip zip zip zip zee  
chickety chickety chickety chick.  
The man who wrote "twin alabaster  
mounds"  
should have spent more time outdoors  
instead of browsing in that musty old  
museum where  
he pissed away his youth.*

Watch closely, the poems say, and something dissolves. That something is the wall we build between us and the world. Suppose, to take another example, that what you're watching is not the

woman you love pulling her shirt off, but the landing of a whistling swan:

*Gliding in that long caress the last  
half mile to the pond  
the Whistling Swan films high points  
of my life dissolves  
the sweet arc of my jump shot to the  
smooth  
glissando of your body on the hillside  
sliding  
braking down the long back of the air  
he brings  
imagination brimming to its edge  
before,  
with startling black feet braced,  
our ache dissolves to water.*

Birding, and desire. We do and do not, the poems remind us, share in that grace; we rest and keep forgetting how to rest in the hammocky web of that unpeopled world. Watch a sharp-shinned hawk, and

*Suddenly, if you're not careful,  
everything  
goes celluloid and slow  
and threatens to burn through and you  
must focus quickly on the simple  
metal band around her leg  
by which she's married to our need  
to know.*

Or watch a sparrow hawk, a kestrel (not an accipiter like the sharp-shin, but a tiny falcon, one of those birds which, as

McKay says, "have a repertoire of moves so clean their edge is/the frontier of nothing"):

*plump familiar pods go  
pop in your mind, you learn not  
principles of flight but how to fall,  
you learn  
pity for that paraplegic bird, the heart.*

Such two-eyed, lithe, affectionate attention to the world is far rarer than it should be in our writing. We have a long tradition, beginning in English in 1500 with John Skelton, in which the poet as ornithologist puts words in the mouths of parrots and lists winged creatures he has never seen. The view that poetry is merely vocabulary and imagination is, in fact, so strong that living writers such as Guy Davenport or the American poet Ronald Johnson, who are presocratically attentive to the world, are seen in Canadian universities chiefly as freaks of the avant-garde.

The basic force of Canadian culture remains as Northrop Frye 20 years ago described it: "the conquest of nature by a mind that does not love it." In other words, the rape of the world. The counterforce that might have been offered by Canadian art has been generally vitiated by a grandiose and inept romanticism or, more recently, by a grandiose and incapacitating egotism. Our literature, like our industry, has often taken mindless refuge in vastness. But behind these small, almost weightless poems of McKay's is the simultaneously carnal and intellectual love of the world by a mind that knows it can never be wholly united with or separate from that world, and can never know enough about it. In other words, the love of the world.

It is as Matthew Arnold remarked 120 years ago: the poetry of Wordsworth and his contemporaries is disappointing because "it did not know enough." Much Canadian poetry of the present day also does not know enough, and shows no wish to know. Its practitioners are in great numbers content to play in the fenced garden of language, or are busy (understandably enough) with merely human and political themes. The result, no matter how often it mouths the names of places, is a literature of rootlessness. Neither language nor politics is a place in which myths can coagulate or a living being come to be.

Don McKay knows — if not enough, at least more nearly enough. He knows, in these poems, a good deal, and is not (like Wordsworth) prevented by his oddly circumscribed notions of poetry from steadily learning more. In short, his is a kind of poetry in which a poet, a literature, and even a country, can mature. This country, for instance, and this literature. □

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# Cries from the heart

By KEITH GAREBIAN

*No Birds or Flowers*, by Diane Keating, Exile Editions, 62 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 47 9).

*The Phases of Love*, by Dorothy Livesay, Coach House Press, 112 pages, \$6.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 250 3).

*Houses of God*, by Gail Fox, Oberon Press, 56 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 87750 461 2) and \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 462 0).

IN HIS BLURB for Diane Keating's book of verse, Robin Skelton claims he is tempted to call her lyricism "pure poetry" for its lovely, magical delicacy and humour that are far removed from anecdotal social criticism or autobiographical confessions. Keating's verse, strangely fantastical and melodious, is airily free from thematic smog, although its lightness can also signify a deficiency of thought. It manifests the poet's relish for metamorphic turns ("In the thick stillness/ clouds gather./My body becomes a cocoon,/my heart, writhing wings"), although these transformations are not always charmingly innocent. Enchanting reveries can wound: "It is always the same./When I close my eyes/my body becomes a castle./ Through the frosted glass/I watch the throw of dice/and thrusting swords./I call to my mouth for help/but it chatters /like a magpie./I send out my hands,/a pair of golden ponies./They return maimed." There are blood and violence



even at the core of fairy-tale enchantment and fantasy: a rainbow garrottes a swan; stars are "wounded geese/under a hunter's sky"; the poet dreams of canaries warming and singing in her palm as she presses needles into their eyes.

The most appealing aspect of Keating's verse is its graceful lyricism, whether in chant ("Mad Apples") or in description ("Twilight Tapestry"). Keating is first and foremost a dreamer

whose dreams are masks or transfigurations. Often her dreams do not seem to lead much beyond their vivid images, but when they become the landscape of love, they are alive with revelations.

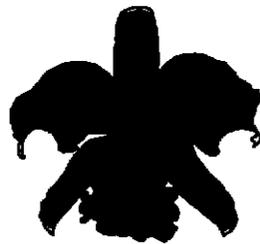
Dorothy Livesay is no mean lyricist herself. It has always seemed to me that her purest poetry has been her lyrics on love or related passions — not her socially conscious didactic verse. In *The Phases of Love*, a gathering of poems from the past six decades, she sounds the female heart right from adolescence, and the fire or frost of youth and maturity, to the sibylline wisdom of old age. There are numerous miniatures ("Cinquaine," "A Tale," "Analysis," "Primitive"), and there is a preponderance of short lines, but the song is clear and strong as she makes music of love as a sickness ("When my breath's seized with such arrest/I shake and tremble/cannot withhold my eyes from your bent look/and, in the words that stumble/out of my mouth,/cannot dissemble"), or as a fire that envelops her being in one flame so tall that "it can unshape the shaping clouds/unearthly move the sphere." The pitch and balance can be impeccable as in "Aubade," which displays a very fine music of corporeal passion and metaphysical ingenuity.

Livesay can be so unrelentingly single-

minded that sometimes her lyrics are merely facile or thin. But at their best they crowd her book with the notations of love. In contrast to Keating's verse, Livesay's is candidly confessional, occasionally perplexed ("If we are two-halves /of the same fruit/why must we fight/ over the stone?"), pulsatingly sensual, and charged with the anxieties, frustrations, and ecstasies of womanhood. What is missing is the *mind* of woman, although at the end Livesay assumes a sibyl's voice appealing for knowledge: "O do not put me down/teach me to be more human/and to learn/in the clutch of loving/how small miracles/shatter the facts —/explode!" Is this a special plea or simply a small wisdom for living each moment concretely and without any predisposition toward absolutes?

Gail Fox begins, like Livesay, with the body and love. Like Livesay, she frequently indulges in short-lined verse that appears to emphasize emotion rather than technique. But where her earlier poetry (as in *God's Odd Look*) often had a dully prosaic, banal, or jargoned texture, her most recent verse is lyrically compressed, sensitive, musical, and acutely contemplative. Always a seeker of harmonies, she now appears to have travelled from the spaces of mind and heart into the divine cosmos where joy

*Alibi*  
A NOVEL



ROBERT KROETSCH

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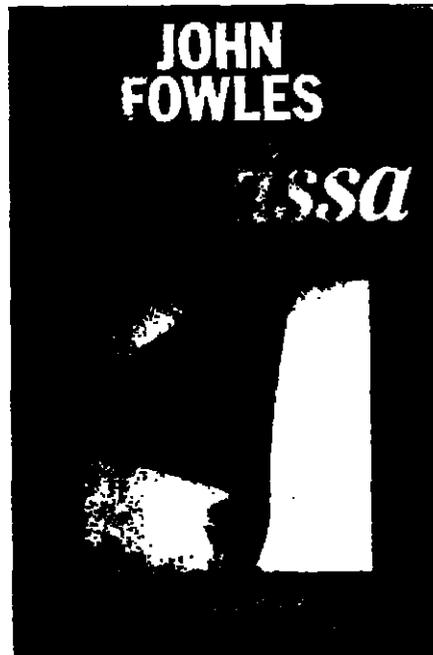
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and pain become effulgent with a questing faith. *Houses of God* is an implicitly Christian book — a questioning of human and divine love. Alive with doubt, misery, and pain, it reaches into the poet's wounded heart and cleanses it of grief. The suffusion of melancholy in both sexual passion and meditateness ("I am slowly dying to the intense timed /sequence of the leaves") is scored to music ("The light twists like music in a /string quartet"; "I dance the intricate steps of the/music, listening to myself sing") which is forsaken only when she becomes didactic.

The most impressive music is composed for her contemplation. It becomes gorgeously intense and apocalyptic: "Look, the sparrows hop, as/though the world were on fire./And glints of light are forcing/through the trees"; "I tell you truly that now I know the shape/ of goldenrod, that God, the fireball, against/a backdrop of deep pines, is sinking into my/head at the velocity of dark light"; "Lord of the Dance, how the/rhythm of the stones lets the/purple blossoms through." This is not simply

vividly striking imagery or sound. This is metaphysical poetry that transcends the mere pictorial beauty of trivial things. With her contemplation, Gail Fox sharpens perception and moves in the direction of Margaret Avison (to whom one of the pieces is dedicated). Her artifice reaches its apex in the final, title-poem, which is at once a magnificent memorial for her deceased sister, a cry of a lonely heart, a spiritual purgation, and a discovery of the "artifice of eternity."

From the body, one type of house, to the soul, a house for God; from earth's dwelling to "the pieces of the sky," Gail Fox inhabits the spaces that art makes. She arises refreshed from questions, doubts, and fears about God, love, and life, and finds a resting-place for her alert imagination and quick soul. Her words "merge from the/dark interior of things," but where buildings and bodies do not endure, her words usher us into an in-dwelling for redeeming grace. *Houses of God* has the sort of poetry to which we can ever return without diminished admiration. □

## INTERVIEW

'One of the concerns we have in the urban world,' says Robert Kroetsch, 'is a recovery of the natural world. We have a different sense of it from our ancestors'

By GEOFF HANCOCK

ROBERT KROETSCH was born in 1927 in Heisler, Alberta. After graduating from the University of Alberta and McGill University, he taught English at the State University of New York before returning to Canada to live in Winnipeg, where he now teaches at the University of Manitoba. His first novels — *But We Are Exiles* (1965) and *The Words of My Roaring* (1966) — were received enthusiastically by the critics, but it was *The Studhorse Man* (1969) that received national acclaim. His other novels include *Badlands* (1975), which is being made into a film script by Michael Ondaatje, and *What the Crow Said* (1978). *Field Notes*, Kroetsch's collected poems, was published in 1981, followed this fall by his most ambitious novel, *Alibi* (reviewed on page 20). On a recent visit to Toronto he spoke to Geoff Hancock about the conception and intention of this multi-layered undertaking:

**Books in Canada:** *Could you tell me about Alibi? Is it part of a projected novel cycle?*

**Robert Kroetsch:** I think of it as a flower that keeps elaborating itself, or a cabbage that keeps growing. It's not really a cycle. I'm not Wagnerian about this. I like to think, though, that I'll be free after four titles. A good magic number. Some of the characters will be in all four. An expanding cast of characters as the series goes on.

**BiC:** *Is Alibi number one in the series?*

**Kroetsch:** You wouldn't have to read them in any order. But it's the place where I had to begin. The crucial moment takes place in Portugal when the lady dies. Or vanishes. Depending on how you read the alibi.

**BiC:** *Why Alibi?*

**Kroetsch:** An alibi might be your explanation of where you were, or it might be your cover-up story when you don't

want to tell where you were. The reader has the pleasant task of deciding how to read the story. How to read the alibi. In a larger sense we all have alibis that we tell ourselves.



Robert Kroetsch

**BiC:** *Is Alibi a departure for you, or is it linked with your other work?*

**Kroetsch:** I felt it was a departure because it was a consequence of my returning to Canada after a long absence, my attempt to deal with a Canada that for me had become very urban. Characters like Dorf and Deemer have an urban world to explain, to talk about, to find a story for. What interests me right now is that task of speaking our version of urban. It's amazing how many novels and stories are still about the small town. Two out of three on this year's Governor General's list were about small-town places.

**BiC:** *Is that why Alibi moves about the world?*

**Kroetsch:** That's one of the reasons. Also, we are people who travel. We take travel as absolutely natural and so our sense of place is a consequence of all this travel. It's just natural for one of us to be in London, England, or on Vancouver Island. We are very easy with this new sense of place.

**BiC:** *Each place your characters go to in Alibi has a spa, a natural opening in the earth. Not a city.*

**Kroetsch:** One of the concerns we have in the urban world is a discovery of, a recovery of, that natural world. We have a quite different sense of it from our ancestors of even two generations ago. If we go to the Upper Hot Springs and stay at the Banff Springs Hotel, we get a wonderful combination of high urban, the natural world, the make-believe world, and real experience. I'm writing transformational stories, as you suggest; I'm fascinated by the kinds of transformations we go through as individuals.

**BiC:** *Yet Alibi is a more traditional novel. It's less innovative, in many ways.*

**Kroetsch:** It's different in some ways. The journal in *Alibi* is a rewritten journal, so two kinds of story are operating.

The first is the kind you make as a keeper of a journal, where you respond to the immediate. The second is the kind of story we make as rewriters when we try to organize all those days to make some kind of continuum. That's why Dorf's journal is appended.

**BiC:** *The fantastic elements of Alibi occur naturally. You're not straining for the fantastic as you did in What the Crow Said. The mudman in Alibi is just a man emerging from mud.*

**Kroetsch:** I went to a mudbath in Greece. Right into the mud up to my neck, wondering what the hell I was doing there. I had that experience in a place where people use mud as a healing agent. *Alibi* is less fantastic than *What the Crow Said*. That's part of my returning to the material. I'm having to deal with the natural and urban worlds that go along with our language.

**BiC:** *In doing so you've touched the eroticism of the earth. Every rock with a crevice offers possibilities. The earth as a sensual experience.*

**Kroetsch:** My sense of the erotic goes beyond the mere sexual parts to a sense of how we feel and perceive the world. *Alibi* has a different sense of the erotic.

**BiC:** *Are women seen as both threats and seductive lures?*

**Kroetsch:** The narrator has had a rather

calamitous experience with his previous wife, and he is trying to work out the implications of that experience. But that's what I would say. You have to read his alibi.

**BiC:** *Why the spas? What attracted the story-teller in you to them?*

**Kroetsch:** The idea of healing is everywhere in my work. It may be as radical as the sky sometimes, but the idea of healing we have to have in our world is everywhere. I think spas are fascinating as magic places. It's stronger in Europe, but even in our culture we have a strong sense of the spa as a magic place. I got the idea when I was thinking about Banff and the people who go paddling around who at once knew and didn't know where they were.

**BiC:** *You've said, "In the absence is always a presence." The structural motif of Alibi is in the negatives. Seven negative chapters. The book that is not there. Chapters in which nothing happens. The main character, Deemer, is not present, and when he finally appears you can't see him.*

**Kroetsch:** I'm fascinated by desire. One of the curious things about desire is that it is often based on an absence. Some of our best sexual fantasies, our most-painful longings, are in times of absence rather than in times of presence. It's a

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puzzling, frightening aspect of human beings, how that absence generates so many things! Our actions, our dreams, our despairs. I like to deal with the notion of absence, as a photographer does, in the negative.

**BiC:** *Are the names of characters clues to who they are?*

**Kroetsch:** Only marginally. Less so than in some of my other books. Words mean and don't mean. I'm always tempted by that double thing. There seem to be a lot of Karens in the world right now. A character named Deemer might be a loaded name. But his first name, Jack, is ordinary.

**BiC:** *Can we look at Alibi as a post-modern work? In Labyrinths of Voice, a book length interview, and your col-*

*lected interviews and essays in Open Letter magazine, you like to remind us that a narrator makes things up.*

**Kroetsch:** What I hear myself doing is going back to the idea of story-telling narrative. The chapter heading has been one of the principal devices in the novel since the 18th century. I like to go back to story prior to everything else. In imagining a novel, I have to deal first of all with the idea of story. It's one of the basic human ways to think about ourselves and relate to the world. I don't know if you can call that post-modern, or post-post-modern.

**BiC:** *Or prehistoric.*

**Kroetsch:** That fits with the ideas of spas. Our longings when we go into the spa. Prehistoric in the basic sense. □

### IN TRANSLATION

High on sophistication and low on assimilation, Canada's Chilean writers have much to offer and much to learn

By PAUL STUEWE

THE POST-1973 exodus of Chilean refugees to Canada included a number of prominent literary figures, and the Ottawa-based Ediciones Cordillera has been introducing them to us in sturdy bilingual editions. *Chilean Literature in Canada/Literature Chilena en Canada* (\$7.00 paper), an anthology edited by Nafn Nómez, contains some very fine writing about the experience of exile, and also suggests that this experience has been a bitter and often traumatic one for many Chilean writers.

*Chilean Literature in Exile* would be a more accurate title, since most of the collection's contributors are still employing Chilean contexts as the basis of their literary art, and seem to be largely uninfluenced by any identifiably Canadian realities. Editor Nómez, and Jorge Etcheverry earned rave reviews in this column for their 1981 titles *Stories of a Guarded Kingdom* and *The Escape Artist*, and their contributions here are of a similarly high standard: Nómez's poems are consistently successful in articulating complex, thoughtful responses to new cultural stimuli, while Etcheverry's demonstrate that surrealist visions and radical politics can make for some very exciting — if at times irritatingly simplistic — verse. Ludwig Zeller operates along more

traditional surrealist lines in work taken from his two Mosaic Press/Valley Editions books, and Ramón Sepúlveda's short story, "Grey Suede Shoes," an engrossing slice-of-life from the urban multicultural mosaic, demonstrates that hard-edged social realism can be an equally effective mode of expression.

The generally high level of quality is momentarily let down by the conventional images and forced associations rampant in Erik Martínez's poetry, but on the whole *Chilean Literature in Canada* is a successful exhibition from a group of writers who certainly constitute a welcome addition to the Canadian literary scene. Time and the processes of societal assimilation will bring them to a more knowledgeable and more stimulating relationship with their new milieu; in the meantime, their sophisticated use of techniques often poorly handled by Canadian writers shows that they have much to offer as well as much to learn.

Pablo Urbanyi is an Argentinian exile whose novel *The-Nowhere Idea* (translated by Nigel Dennis, Williams-Wallace, \$9.95 paper) takes a lighthearted romp through the groves of academe. Unfortunately, it's also something of a lightheaded one, since its amusing burlesques of scholarly pomposities are unsupported by anything resembling a

coherent plot. The "nowhere idea" of the title is a secret, supposedly innovative, revelation that ultimately proves to be a double-edged device: concealing its character does generate some suspense, but when the idea turns out to be literally nowhere the reader can't help but feel cheated. Those nostalgic for the humorously esoteric footnote, as done to probably inimitable perfection in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, may want to sample Urbanyi's much less adroit variations on the theme; those who view the phrase "academic humour" as an oxymoron, conversely, will want to steer clear.

Montreal's Guernica Editions has been issuing some noteworthy titles in its Essential Poets series, and recent bilingual editions of verse by Juan Garcia and Claude Beausoleil keep up the good work. Garcia's *The Alchemy of the Body and Other Poems* (translated by Marc Plourde, \$15.00 cloth, \$6.95 paper) was originally published in English translation by Fiddlehead in 1974, although that edition has been out of print since the late '70s. This "revised and expanded" version once again presents a title poem that feverishly invokes the gods and remorselessly examines the author's body for evidence of salvation. At times the results are rather close to the sort of neurotic prayers produced by adolescent religious crises, and one feels that Garcia is luxuriating in a self-pitying mood rather than striving for latent, but as yet unexpressed, insight. But these periodic clouds of emotional rhetoric are usually dispelled by passages of hard, vivid imagery, "where the horizon strikes with its rhythm and cruelty,"

*and deep in the blood the silence of  
fresh water  
holds the old gossip of a stream among  
the leaves  
when the steadiest forks stir with moss  
and from an open heart like the  
beginning of a sea  
flow islands of words by the thousands  
that slip into the smell and penetrate the  
skin.*

Although it isn't pure gold, *The Alchemy of the Body and Other Poems* often glitters with the sparkling intelligence and evocative language of authentically high-grade verse.

Claude Beausoleil's *Concrete City: Selected Poems 1972-1982* (translated by Ray Chamberlain, \$20.00 cloth, \$10.95 paper) takes a deconstructionist approach to writing poetry — one in which "the text" is the locus of concentration, and it is the author's tasks to decode, rearrange, and "unread" it. Fortunately, those of us who merely read will still be able to enjoy Beausoleil's work, which uses deconstructionist techniques as a means of

generating interesting linguistic relationships and disjunctions rather than as the universal antidote to basic philosophical problems. Since it's difficult to avoid sounding pretentious when discussing deconstructionism — by no means the least of its faults — here's an example of how it works out in practice:

Pause(s)

*write myself in words. lose myself.  
flowdown/words.  
on overcoming (digressions)  
first sign of prints evil:  
residue  
text-spectre by the lake  
the object show of the subject  
's spectacle night:*

*dinopinion(ing)s lead to disapp'tment  
citycomplaints  
(merely) the bizarre as (merely) lighter  
(merely)  
the lie takes a form*

Although there's clearly a substantial amount of intellection behind and amid the words on the page, they still work as poetry regardless of how one feels about them as elements of a deconstructive process. *Concrete City* is an unusual and often exciting collection that does deserve to be called "essential." It has the additional merit of offering us a painless introduction to deconstructionist thinking, while sparing us the barbarous prose emitted by the movement's heavy thinkers. □

concerning a theatre company's journey from Alaska to the Yukon to take part in the opening of the Palace Grand Theatre in Dawson City during the gold rush. One becomes a spectator oneself, watching as MacPhee juggles a number of elements and personas. It's quite remarkable how she gives new breath to the old black-and-white photos that accompany the poems. (We still think of history as black-and-white still photos. Imagination will be much different when colour video constitutes history.)

Some of the information on which certain parts of the sequence is based came from a descendant of one of the participants about whom MacPhee writes, and the author herself made the journey from Skagway to Dawson in order to reconstruct the experience that informs some of her characters. There's really nothing discontinuous about the sequence; the poems are distinct and individual and self-supporting yet have a cumulative power and purpose. There are enough of them to let the work assume its own pace.

It's interesting to compare *What Place Is This?* with at the one extreme, Don Gutteridge and, at the other, Judith Fitzgerald. Gutteridge's impressive series of prose-and-poetry works entitled *Time is the Metaphor*, of which *God's Geography* (Brick Books, 116 pages, \$7.50 paper) is the most recent part, is a whirling amalgam of descriptive prose, scraps of newspaper articles, photographs, advertisements and the like, different from MacPhee's book or even from Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid* in that the sum of these diverse elements is an environment in which the poems themselves exist.

For her part, Fitzgerald in her new collection *Split Levels* (Coach House, 96 pages, \$6.95 paper) includes two individual sequences that could stand alone concisely and with great intensity. From the first group one can take as typical a poem "future progressive":

*that's a tense  
I aspire towards, better  
than politics, than parties  
a member of the future progressive  
spawned from the past regressive  
a dangerous proposition  
but not entirely futile.*

There's a lot of barely suppressed power here, some violent energy and certainly some cunning, and much skilful playing with language. The second sequence, a more formal one that lies at the heart of *Split Levels*, is "Past Cards," which uses various addresses in the author's personal history as an organizing device. A long succession of such addresses is also a feature of Dionne Brand's book *Winter Epigrams & Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal* in

## POETRY

### Resurrecting the long poem: from Robin Skelton's old Cornish ballads to the pornography of winter in Montreal

By DOUG FETHERLING

ONE CANNOT help but continue to watch the spreading popularity of the long poem and the influence it is having. Until Michael Ondaatje's *Long Poem Anthology* in 1979, there seemed nothing fashionable or unfashionable about the long poem — those simply weren't working considerations. Nor was there much ideological connective tissue linking the various examples, which seemed to have mainly a technical outlook in common. But now one even sees growing reaction against the short poem, particularly the lyric poem, as a medium of amateurs. (There are good thoughts on this in *Descant's Festschrift* for Dennis Lee last year, in the correspondence between Lee and George Bowering.) Everyone seems to hold views but it took Christopher Levenson, two issues back in his fine magazine *Arc*, to inject some much-needed definitions. The long poem, he concluded, must be seen "more in terms of organization and of characteristic theme or subject matter, than of length." The aim, one could almost say, is to relate poetry more closely to music, as though it exists constantly in an unplayed state and is created only when we eavesdrop by writing it down. Meanwhile, though, all sorts of long poems have been resurrected and resuscitated, and it is only a question of time, it frequently seems,

before someone finds new technical relevance in E.J. Pratt's long epics.

Some of this activity has been welcome, of course. For instance, in *Wordsong* (Sono Nis, 64 pages, \$5.95 paper) Robin Skelton publishes or republishes a dozen ballads he's written over the years, half of them relating to old Cornish folk tales. Among the others is one that was deemed too bawdy by the standards of Oxford University Press for inclusion in an earlier Skelton volume in the U.K. There's nothing particularly contemporary here, of course, but it is good to believe that interest in the long poem, the revival or new respectability if the phenomenon can be given either name, brings a book like *Wordsong* under its umbrella. It is commoner, though, for the poem sequence to grow into something more complex in its arrangement.

Surely one of the most polyphonic such sequences, and yet one, nakedly accessible, is Rosalind MacPhee's *What Place Is This?* (Coach House, 136 pages, \$8.50 paper), which amounts to a sort of interior screenplay or even a kind of multi-media affair, though it is closely bound up with narrative in the way long poems of the sort anthologized by Ondaatje or defined by Levenson are not usually supposed to be.

MacPhee's book is one long sequence

Defense of Claudia (Williams-Wallace, 38 pages, \$4.95 paper), a book in which epigrams have the same cumulative wallop as Fitzgerald's imaginative postal cards.

Brand's name is a new one to me, and I know only what the little blurb reveals, that she "is a Toronto Black poet" who's published three earlier titles, one of them poetry for children; and reading her I got quite a little thrill of discovery. Her form is sometimes epigrammatic and sometimes more that of short notation, seldom more than a few lines, apparently in the manner of the aforesaid Cardenal, the Nicaraguan poet and priest.

here!

*take these epigrams, Toronto,  
I stole them from Ernesto Cardenal,  
he deserves a better thief  
but you deserve these epigrams.*

One senses, though, that the drift toward the long poem is what allows Brand — instead of being forced to build short poems around these single images or "good lines," as would have been the case a few years ago perhaps — to make long poems composed of nothing else. It's also interesting to get

her perceptions of certain stock images. To this West Indian poet, the winter is not the stuff of the Gilles Vigneault song nor a Calvinist visitation meant to test people; it's a strange and terrible ordeal that allows her to say that, "any poem about Montreal in the winter is pornography" or "Montreal is so beautiful; winter is so unfortunate," or lets her utter the single line "coffin of a winter!" — a graffito of a poem.

The second set of epigrams relates more directly to the work of Cardenal and is more political in a direct sense, to wit: ". . . I needed no talking/after that man told me that he liked my poems/but not my politics (as if they are different)." A point well taken, of course; and the epigram form, giving the appearance of a hasty poetic scrawl, is appropriate to paranoia, anger, and other frequently political emotions. But the point is that each change in taste brings freedom to some whose turn it is to enjoy such a development and restrain to others who weren't finished with the previous convention. Brand is another unconscious beneficiary of the new flexibility that comes in tandem with the long poem. □

Japan, find much of Canada not only indescribable but also intimidating. To natives of a country where virtually every corner has been inhabited, fought over, painted, apostrophized in a haiku or ballad, the uninhabited sweep of the Rockies or a prairie sky is disturbing, obliterating.

Yet any Canadian who has the sense to get outside cities cannot deny the beauty of the land. We live here; we should have enough room in our minds to comprehend what is around us. The Group of Seven, although borrowing its basic technique from the European Impressionists, had that breadth of vision, and what they painted has framed the way we see nature now. It's hard to witness a stark Lake Superior island without thinking of Lawren Harris's brilliantly isolated images, or paddle past a wind-torn granite island in the Muskokas without seeing through the borrowed eyes of Varley or Tom Thomson. Take away the sting of our insect squadrons, and Canada's wilderness in summer can be the next thing to paradise. One of the most moving comments on that theme, not surprisingly, was made by a native Canadian, a Yellowknife brave named Saltatha. After patiently listening to a missionary's description of the joys of Christian heaven, he replied: "You have told me that Heaven is very beautiful; tell me now one thing more. Is it more beautiful than the country of the musk-ox in summer, when sometimes the mist blows over the lakes, and sometimes the water is blue, and the loons cry very often?"

The books reviewed here have one thing in common: appreciation of the beauty of wild Canada. Whether they display anything in their response that is itself uniquely Canadian is debatable. As one expects in "coffee-table" books, the colour photography is generally of a high calibre but rarely shows a distinctive style. Canada's wilds appear to be awaiting their Ansel Adams still. The imminence that Frye speaks of seems too often just outside the frame; the indescribability that perplexed Buchan does not let itself be easily photographed either.

First, two books that consider Canada's national parks: one an attempt at a monument, the other an unpretentious handbook. The first such park was founded in Banff in 1885, so these are pre-centennial efforts. Each book covers all of the 29 parks, but in very different styles. Unfortunately, they have the same main title: *Canada's National Parks*.

The big one (Collins, 296 pages, \$44.95 cloth) is in a sense a variation on the joke about a Canadian being some-

## GIFT BOOKS

Six books about the Canadian wilderness remind us that, despite our recent urban sprawl, Canada is still 'a country of the larger air'

By JOHN OUGHTON

CANADA HAS MORE wilderness than any other developed country. Although settlers and civilization have made dramatic changes to much of the landscape, we still have more nature than people. It's quite possible to live a totally urban life in any of our large cities, never venturing out of the range of urban transit, but, like a sleeping bear outside the cabin door, the endless reach of wilderness is still out there, influencing the subconscious of the denizens of high-rise jungles. Take a night flight across the country and soak up all that black space; the cities and towns that glow briefly underneath are less frequent than the galaxies you can see in the other blackness overhead.

In one of his most arguable but stimulating generalizations Northrop Frye wrote: "Everything that is central in Canadian writing seems to be marketed

by the imminence of the natural world." If that is the case, our culture should by now have produced a distinctively Canadian way of regarding the wealth of forest, plain, mountain, and water that surrounds us. But there's a problem: the bear at the door is so big that few of us can see around it, or see ourselves clearly in relation to it. It fills space.

Our most literary governor general, Lord Tweedsmuir (John Buchan), recognized the problem. Although he coined a memorable epithet for the nation — "a country of the larger air" — he cautioned: "It is impossible to describe the country, for it is built on a scale outside that of humanity." Admittedly, Buchan was speaking from the viewpoint of the European, where nature has been tamed, surrounded, and written about for centuries. Visitors from more populated countries, like

one who drives a Swedish car, watches American TV, and listens to a Sony Walkman. Here we have a text by R.D. Lawrence, who moved here from England 20 years ago; photos by two young Englishmen, Nick Meers and Will Curwen; type set in England; and colour separations and printing done in Spain. Certainly it's expensive to produce books here in Canada, but it seems strange to import the photographers. Are we that incapable of seeing our own treasures?

The international entente seems also to have fallen down in printing quality control. Some of the plates are as beautiful as they should be, but too many show hickies, hairs, smears, or poor contrast to justify the price of the book. Its saving grace is Lawrence's literate text, and his obvious care for the Canadian wilderness he has so often explored. Details on the attractions, accessibility, and activities at each park are included, as is an index of wild mammals.

The second parks book, subtitled "A Visitor's Guide" (Prentice Hall, 308 pages, \$15.95 paper), is a far more modest and useful effort, though also overpriced. It gives more detail about each park, particularly from the point of view of the avid hiker or canoeist — Marylee Stephenson is good on facts and figures in the realms of geology, geography, and biology. This is a book to give someone who really intends to visit some of the parks; it even offers maps and advice on where to get food and gas on the way to the more far-flung parks.

There are a few drawbacks, however. Stephenson is a Ph.D. in sociology as well as an amateur naturalist, and her editors haven't always kept the academic prose out. While strolling along the beaches of Prince Edward Island's National Park, you're unlikely to be humming this sentence to yourself: "Frequently held beach walks with interpreters will enhance your awareness of the dune-beach environment." Her own black-and-white photos also suffer from poor reproduction, so that the delicacy of nature disappears in oversized dots.

Tim Fitzharris's *The Island: A Natural History of Vancouver Island* (Oxford, 134 pages, \$24.95 cloth) celebrates an island that often suggests a giant park or garden to visitors. But the impact of humanity on the place has been considerable, as Fitzharris relates in his introduction, and this book is for him something of a conservation effort: "Certainly it will not be quite the same ten years from now," he writes.

Fitzharris is a gifted photographer, sensitive to the nuances of West Coast mist and fog as well as sunlight. He is

especially good at capturing waterfowl, and his work is well reproduced here. An hour spent with this book in Toronto



makes it hard to resist buying a one-way ticket to Victoria. Those who operate mines and massive logging operations on the island should take a look at it before they flatten more of the landscape that supports these marvellous creatures of the land, air, and water.

Another international effort, *Alaska and the Yukon* (Collins, 160 pages, \$39.95 cloth), at least has a good excuse. In fact more than half of this book focuses on Alaska, and a couple of pictures of Alaska get worked into the section on the Yukon. The photography features the work of Canadian Brian Milne and American Myron Wright. The colour plates are generally excellent, although (understandably) they show a disproportionate number of summer scenes.

But the best part of this book is the text. Jürgen Boden, credited as "pro-

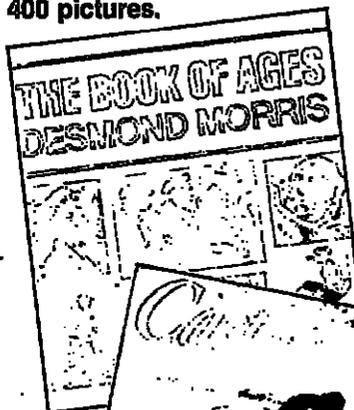
ducer," asked writers living in the two regions to contribute text. The result is an entertaining combination of anecdotes, reportage, and local pride. There are wonderful stories of heroes who pulled themselves out of crevasses with ice axes, fought off bears and avalanches, and of one resourceful Canadian pilot who, after a crash, carved a new propeller out of a log and took off again.

The photos generally celebrate natural grandeur, but the words remind us of human achievement — native as well as white — in a fierce climate. Thanks to Pierre Berton, most Canadians at least have some mental picture of the Yukon; the variety of scenery and weather in Alaska described here may come as a surprise.

Finally, two books that concentrate on bird and animal life: *A Little Wilderness: The Natural History of Toronto* (Oxford, unpaginated, \$24.95 cloth) and *Western Wildlife* (Oxford, 104 pages, \$24.95 cloth). *A Little Wilderness* is primarily of interest to Torontonians, but should open the eyes of anyone who lives in a large Canadian city. Bill Ivy's brilliant colour pictures display the wilderness hidden in Toronto's ravines, parks, and shoreline. Most Hogtowners have encountered a Rosedale raccoon and a

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**ACADEMIC PRESS CANADA**

High Park hare, but are too busy arguing over whether a pig, squirrel, or pink flamingo should be the city's sesquicentennial mascot to notice the red foxes, blue herons, or red-spotted newts nearby. This charming book merits its Toronto Sesquicentennial Board selection as one of the best books about Toronto in 1983-84.

*Western Wildlife* is charming for a different reason. Dennis and Esther Schmidt are a Western Canadian couple who decided to devote their retirement to nature photography. Their work shows not only the fruits of patience — long hours of waiting for a bird to return to its nest or a deer to stand in the sunlight — but also a real love for the animals. The birds and mammals in these pictures often gaze unafraid at the lens, mirroring the photographers' curiosity with their own. As the introduction says, "it's a marvellous feeling

of freedom to be alone with nature." Through their work, the reader is for a moment privileged to share that intimacy.

Books like this half-dozen are not meant for those who live in the wilderness. Their fate is an urban bookshelf or library. But their intent is to remind us of the imminence that awaits us beyond, and sometimes within, the city limits, the tremendous wealth of space and life out there. To conclude with another quote from a native, here's some excellent advice from a Stoney Chief named Walking Buffalo: "[The white man] is a smart fellow but he should not lose his sanity about money, and he should not allow himself to become a stranger in Nature's community." If each of the books persuades a handful of Canadians to forego the sofa and TV for a week in a canoe or on a hiking trail, they're worth publishing. □

## COOKBOOKS

### Escape from the convent: dream cooking for Canadian kitchens, from nasturtium salad to the prolific, but dull, zucchini

By DuBARRY CAMPAU

CANADIANS SEEM to be spending an increasing amount of time over their hot stoves — or elbow deep in their freezers — judging from the spate of recipes and menus that continue to pop up from all over the country. Happily, our home-grown chefs are becoming less quirky — there's not a single volume currently on my desk that suggests 1,001 Uses for Nutmeg, nor do I have any new advice on what to do with mouldy bread, tips on re-claiming tainted fish or how to improve your sex life by eating parsnips.

Instead, I have seven attractive, spiral bound, glossy-covered books that are, in the main, filled with practical, occasionally original, and often both delicious and elegant ways to prepare food that is readily available in every province.

*Favourite Recipes from Old New Brunswick Kitchens* (Hounslow Press, 177 pages, \$13.95) is a charmer. It is compiled by Mildred Trueman, and her husband Stuart has added a collection of "nostrums, old cures and medications" and illustrated it wittily. Inevitably, there is great emphasis on fish, and the chowders are excellent — especially the ones made, as they should be, with crisped salt pork. A salad that aston-

ished me is made with nasturtiums — a flower that turned out, surprisingly, to be much more pleasing to the palate than to the eye.

A mixed seafood casserole and a seafood bake with curry can both be made with a variety of fish, fresh, frozen, or tinned, and are piquantly seasoned, and the directions for cod fish balls — the best breakfast known to man — is a classic. The corn bread is also infallible and the blueberry grunt is wonderful and easy.

But beyond its culinary value, this is an entertaining book just to browse through. The medications may make you retch a bit and provoke you to wonder how the people who swallowed them lived long enough to become our ancestors. There is enough whisky in most of them to revive a three-day corpse.

More good news from the Maritimes comes in *Seafood Cookery from Prince Edward Island*, by Julie Watson (Ragweed Press, 192 pages, \$8.95). This isn't for those who fancy a smelly fish-fry but, instead, for the increasing number of would-be gourmets who are realizing that fish is a blissful blessing.

Consider the possibilities of mackerel

stuffed with clams; smelts baked with mint; trout baked with lime, onion, and curry; sole with asparagus, lemon, shallots, and mustard; cod stuffed with crumbs, salt pork, herbs, and onions; crusty and spicy crab casserole; scallops mornay; and, for kids, white fish with pizza topping. A brilliant variation for snails includes mushroom caps, bacon and parmesan cheese. The special section on sauces and stuffings will liven your culinary vocabulary for years to come.

Still on the waterfront: *The Georgian Bay Gourmet Summer Entertaining*, by Anne Connell, Helen DeCarli, Mary Hunt, and Joan Leavens (Musson, 197 pages, \$15.95). The kitchens that are clustered around these rocky shores are singularly well-equipped — gas barbecue grills, rotisseries, microwave ovens, and food processors seem to be as standard as sinks — but most of the recipes can be converted for those of us who have nothing that rolls over, slices and kneads, or even waves at us.

Although menus are the big feature of this book, it is easy to pluck out an item or two from them without following the whole plot. Topsy tomato soup, for instance, would be a merry starter for any meal as it includes not only the tomatoes but also garlic, mushrooms, bacon, and gin. A Scotch paté is also a good beginning — chicken livers, anchovy paste, bacon, pistachios, and herbs.

There's a lively Italian potato salad, with garlic, parsley, and tarragon dressing, and an easy and delicious lemon soup with rice, eggs, and chicken broth, as well as a brightly seasoned meat loaf — and if a meat loaf is done right (and this is) it is a joy either hot or cold.

However, one can only hope that the waters of Georgian Bay are packed with fluoride, as there is a terrible tendency in this book toward sweets. At one lunch two desserts are offered — an orange-peach flan made with malted milk candy bars and something called clafouti, which includes sweet cherries, pears, cherry-almond sauce, and is awash with Amaretto. Whipped cream and cream cheese also are called for in abundance — and someone's Aunt Vin makes her mayonnaise with a half cup of flour and two cups of sugar! Perhaps a dash of nouvelle cuisine is needed at the Bay.

As I attended a convent boarding school whose refectory meals still blacken my nightmares (we knew they bought the paper-thin, leather-tough steak at the cobbler's shop, and when we caught a whiff of curry in the air it was our own fault for not having eaten up the stew before it went "off"), a cookbook written by a nun didn't exactly turn me on. But the name of it is Cook-

ing with Yogourt (McClelland & Stewart, 27 pages, \$12.95), which I do a lot of, and after reading it I would trust its author, Sister Berthe, to cook with anything. You can assume that there is yogurt in all of the following dishes, and you can also take for granted that they, as well as many, many more of the recipes, are fantastically good.

Can you help but fancy chicken legs with pears, wine, and mace? How about hamburgers with onions and cognac? Or noodles with cottage cheese, garlic, onion, horseradish, bacon, and parmesan? Chicken, avocado, cognac, and mushrooms is elegant, as is good old broccoli with cashews, poppy seeds, onion and paprika. Haddock with fennel is a glorious combination. Best of all, I was delighted to see her recipe for lobster crêpes (don't brood about the pricey lobster — and you can wrap anything in them). The important thing is the yogurt in the crêpes — they're like velvet!

**The Getaway Chef**, by Jane Rodmell and Kate Bush (Key Porter Books, 224 pages, \$12.95), is an enormously valuable adjunct for a cottage or camping holiday. It tells you what food and equipment to take with you; what you can count on getting at a village store; how to wrap and transport frozen foods; how to cope with a charcoal barbecue — right down to how many briquets you need for a variety of meats. The authors assume you don't want to spend any more time in the kitchen or over the campfire than necessary, so most of the recipes are far from fussy — but they can turn out as well as if you had ordered them at your favourite restaurant.

Their fish and re-fried chips are first-rate (naturally, they recommend wrapping them in newspaper), brought to perfection with plenty of salt and vinegar. The sour cream cucumbers, made a day ahead of time, go as well in your penthouse as in the woods. There's a classic recipe for mayonnaise, as well as directions for saving its life. Roasted lemon potatoes will improve any meal, and the crab supper pie is a meal in itself, as is the pasta primavera with crisp veggies, onions, garlic, chicken stock, cream, and cheese. And they tell you how simple it is to make beef and beer (the best of all) stews.

Rose Murray's **Vegetable Cookbook** (James Lorimer, 151 pages, \$12.95) brings a happy vitality and more than a bit of sparkling flavour to all of those things that are Good For You. I'm really not mad for most vegetables, and I really don't like them at all when they are cooked so briefly they snap back at me. When I do eat them I tend to disguise them by tucking tomatoes into sand-

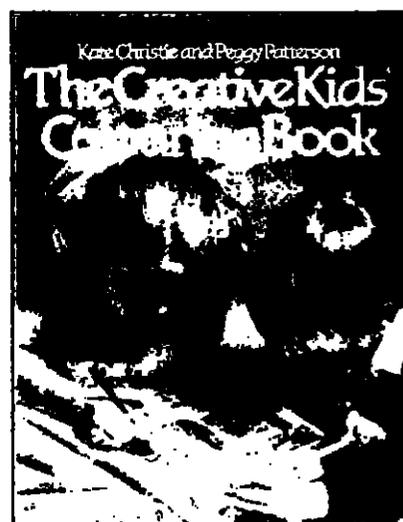
wiches and slathering hollandaise sauce over almost any of the others. But Rose Murray's knack for doing *something* with a green bean — such as sautéing it in oil, garlic, lemon juice, and savory — gave me confidence in her, and I plucked up my courage and tried some more of her creations.

Making a broccoli soufflé seems really too much trouble when you could be making one with cheese or Grand Marnier instead, but sesame Brussels sprouts are no fuss at all and so good I could scarcely believe it. Red cabbage turns into a really interesting dish when put together with her mustard sauce (the sauce would be good with almost anything, actually), and her carrots in ginger cream make a cheerful combination. The recipe for red pepper-mousse is completely new to me and utterly luscious; too good to be overcome by the tomato sauce she recommends to serve with it: yogurt or mayonnaise make the sweetness and flavour of the peppers sing through. Her baked rum squash is so rich as to be lethal — but don't miss it. The tomato ice with lemon juice and dry vermouth is excellent with seafood, but skimp on the suggested amount of sugar.

About zucchini she is endearingly honest: "It is often a challenge to find ways of using this prolific vegetable that seems to come from nowhere overnight." To her credit, she tries hard with this dullest of all garden produce, but like almost all other cooks she uses it as a prop for a sauce that is interesting in itself, or as a filler in batters. The most elaborate recipe in the book is the vegetable platter, Scaramouche style, from the Toronto restaurant of that name. It can, and should, look as beautiful as a still life and is just as difficult and time-consuming to prepare.

**Come 'n' Get It**, by Beulah Barsz (Western Producer Prairie Books, 160 pages, \$12.95), is based on good old ranch house cooking, but its greatest value is its recapitulation of Canada's frontier days, both in text and pictures. Letters and reminiscences bring the pleasures and pains of the pioneers between its pages and make fascinating reading even if you skip the recipes.

But you would be mistaken to do that, because most of them are great. Her directions for corning beef are dead on — with the minor quibble that instead of using real garlic and onion she opts for the powders. Even so, the difference between this and what you get at even the best deli is immeasurable. The Rough Puff Pastry, intended here for sausage rolls, can be used for many other purposes as it is a remarkably close approximation to the infinitely more complicated if slightly more delicate real



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stuff. And bless her for including an elegant method for preparing that woefully neglected and marvellous meat, tongue. It's done with fruit juice and white wine or beer — completely new to me, a tongue devotee, and wonderfully good. □

### 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

*Sirens and Graces*, by Lawrence Garber, Stoddart. A comic moral fable in which Garber's vision is as excremental as ever, *Sirens and Graces* won't convert many of those who hated his first novel, *Tales from the Quarter* (1969), but after 14 years those reviewers will no doubt represent a smaller proportion of Canadian readers.

#### NON-FICTION

*Louisbourg Portraits*, by Christopher Moore, Macmillan. Moore won the Governor General's Award for this magical recreation, now available in paperback, of the lives of five residents of 19th-century Louisbourg. Not the great lives, as he writes in the preface, for "instead of shaping their times" these people lived them.

#### POETRY

*The Beauty of the Weapons: Selected Poems 1972-1982*, by Robert Bringhurst, McClelland & Stewart. Though a modern poet, Bringhurst is deeply rooted in tradition and mythology. His "panning for the bones of existence" brings us "not a catalogue of the animals he has named, but a festival of those who are still speaking."

## CLASSIFIED

Classified rates: \$8 per line (40 characters to the line). Deadline: first of the month for issue dated following month. Address: Books in Canada Classified, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9. Phone: (416) 363-5426.

**OLD AND RARE BOOKS.** Canadiana Catalogues. Heritage Books, 866 Palmerston Ave., Toronto, Ontario M6G 2S2

**USED LAW BOOKS.** 30 day free examination. Write J.L. Heath, 66 Isabella St. #105, Toronto M4X 1N3. 922-0849.

**W.P.KINSELLA** bibliography — nearly 600 citations. For free details send SASE to KNIGHT, Box 400, White Rock, BC V4B 5G3.

*There was an old man of St. Bees  
Who was stung on the arm by a wasp.  
When asked, "Does it hurt?"  
He replied, "No, it doesn't,  
I'm so glad it wasn't a hornet."*

W.S. GILBERT'S witty parody (quoted above) seems to us a splendid example of how that usually humorous verse form, the limerick, may be made even funnier by intentionally making the lines *not* rhyme. We'll pay \$25 for the best new non-rhyming limericks that we receive before November 1. Address: CanWit No. 86, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

#### Results of CanWit No. 84

PERHAPS IT WAS the fine summer, or perhaps everybody was outside waving placards. Whatever the case, our request for protest-group acronyms failed to provoke the usual landslide of entries. The winner is Diane M. Stuart of Vancouver for a list that includes:

- CULPABLE: Concerned Union of Liberal Playwrights Against Betty Lambert's Excesses
- MALIGNANT: Margaret Laurence Illustrates Gross Natural Acts: Nix That!
- SANCTIMONIOUS: Society Against Non-Conforming Thinkers and Intelligentsia: Michael Ondaatje Is One Unfavourable Sample
- BARF: Broadcasters Against Robert Fulford

#### Honourable mention:

- STAMMER: Small Towns Against More of Munro's Embarrassing Revelations — Carol Buck, London, Ont.

### 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:

- The ABCs of STD: A Guide to Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, by Alan S. Meltzer, Eden Press.
- A Hard Act to Follow: Notes on Ontario School Law, Revised Edition 1983*, by V.K. Gilbert, R.A. Martin, and A.T. Sheehan, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.
- A House full of Women*, by Elizabeth Brewster, Oberon Press.
- Alaska and the Yukon: The Last Wilderness*, by Larry Beck et al., Collins.
- Attorney for the Frontier: Enos Staisman*, by Dale Gibson et al., University of Manitoba Press.
- Batteries Not Included*, by Peter Hews, Everest Publishing.
- Birds Don't Fly At Night*, by John Benson, Highway Book Shop.
- The Birth Report*, by Valma Howe Elkins, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Book of Canadian Winners & Heroes*, by Brenna and Jeremy Brown, Prentice-Hall.
- Build Your Own CN Tower: The Tallest Free-Standing Structure in the World*, by Anthony Leaning and Robert Fromm, General Publishing.
- Canada and the Little Dragons*, by Roy A. Matthews, Institute for Research on Public Policy.

- The Canadian Royal Tour*, by Robert Jeffrey and Paul Russell, Methuen.
- Cartyle's Letter-Day Pamphlets*, edited by M.K. Goldberg and J.P. Seigel, Canadian Federation for the Humanities.
- The Chaperon*, by Kurt Palka, M & S.
- A Child's Anne*, by Deirdre Kessler, Ragweed Press.
- Circle of Voices: A History of the Religious Communities of British Columbia*, edited by Charles P. Anderson et al., Oolichan Books.
- Conversano in Italiano*, by Rossana Marini, Centennial College Press.
- Coming Attractions*, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon Press.
- Count Ratsiblan and the Dances of Dishet*, by David Johnstone, Three Trees Press.
- Cultural Regulation in Canada*, by Steven Gliberman, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Cut and Run: The Assault on Canada's Forests*, by Jamie Swift, Between the Lines.
- David Milne and the Modern Tradition of Painting*, by John O'Brian, Coach House Press.
- The Diabetic Child and Young Adult*, by Dr. Mimi M. Belmonte, Eden Press.
- Economic Interdependence, Autonomy, and Canadian/American Relations*, by Charles F. Doran, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- 83: Best Canadian Stories*, edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, Oberon.
- The Elizabethan Theatre VIII*, edited by George Hibbard, F.D. Mesny.
- The Establishment Man*, by Peter C. Newman, Seal Books.
- Everson at Eighty: Poems by R.G. Everson*, Oberon Press.
- The Female Gothic*, edited by Julian E. Fleckner, Eden Press.
- The Fire, the Sword, and the Devil*, by Janet Rosenstock, Dennis Adair, PaperJacks.
- The Flight of the Callous Crow*, by Lorraine McKay, Three Trees Press.
- The General*, by Frank Etherington, Annick Press.
- Ghost Towns of Ontario, Vol. 2*, by Ron Brown, Cannonbooks.
- Governments Under Stress*, by Colin Campbell, U of T Press.
- Hearts That We Broke Long Ago*, by Merle Shain, M & S.
- In Enemy Hands: Canadian Prisoners of War 1939-45*, by Daniel G. Dancocks, Hurd.
- Inside Out*, by Cathy Matyas, Pirsens Press.
- Incoherence: The Poetry and Prose of Gwendolyn MacEwen*, by Ian Bartley, UBC Press.
- The Island: A Natural History of Vancouver*, by Tim Fitzharris, Oxford.
- The Island Family Harris*, edited by Robert Critchlow Tuck, Ragweed Press.
- Joey Runs Away*, by J.F. Jansen in de Wal, Annick Press.
- Korea: Canada's Forgotten War*, by John Melady, Macmillan.
- The Ladykillers: Why Women Smoke*, by Bobbie Jacobson, Eden Press.
- Mingle Lands: A Collection of Fairy Tales by Canadian Children*, edited by Peter Balkenberger, Three Trees Press.
- Miller's Helper*, by Wence Horat, Three Trees Press.
- Museums by Artists*, edited by A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, Art Metropole.
- My Name Is Marie Anne Gahoury*, by Mary V. Jordan, Prairie Publishing.
- Nice Place to Visit*, by Hugh Garner, PaperJacks.
- None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1948*, by Irving Abella and Harold Troper, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- On F.R. Scott*, edited by Sandra Djwa and R. St. J. Macdonald, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Ogilvy On Advertising*, by David Ogilvy, John Wiley & Sons.
- Painting Fines: The Aviation Art of Don Comolly*, Canada's Wings, Inc.
- Polices and Guidelines: Developed for Community and Technical College Libraries*, compiled by Frances Davidson-Arnon, Canadian Library Association.
- Portrait of War, 1939-1943*, by Richard S. Malone, Collins.
- Prevention of Intellectual Handicaps*, by John B. Fotheringham, et al., Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded.
- The Primary Computer Dictionary*, by Suzanne Girard and Kathleen Willing, illustrated by Melanie Hayes, Highway Book Shop.
- The River Within: Poems from the Collections of Diane Dolman, Virginia Oswald, Ann Rothery, and Jeanne Stresser*, Information Research Publishing.
- Rob Nixon, The Old White Tropper*, by W.H.G. Kingston, University of Alberta Press.
- Rabison One*, by Dennis Jones, General.
- Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada*, by Carl Berger, U of T Press.
- Signs of the Former Tenant*, by Bronwen Wallace, Oberon Press.
- 6 Posters Terrace*, by Bryan W. Fritchard, Nyrone.
- Solution*, by Cathy Matyas, Pirsens Press.
- Superior: The Haunted Shore*, by Bruce Littlejohn and Wayland Drew, Macmillan.
- A Taste of Toronto*, by Helen Duckworth, Houslow Press.
- The Three and Many Wishes of Jason Reid*, by H.J. Hutchins, Annick Press.
- Trusting the Tale*, by Hugh Hood, ECW Press.
- Western Wildlife*, by Dennis and Esther Schmidt, Oxford.
- Women and the Psychiatric Paradox*, by F. Susan Penfold and Gillian A. Walker, Eden Press.



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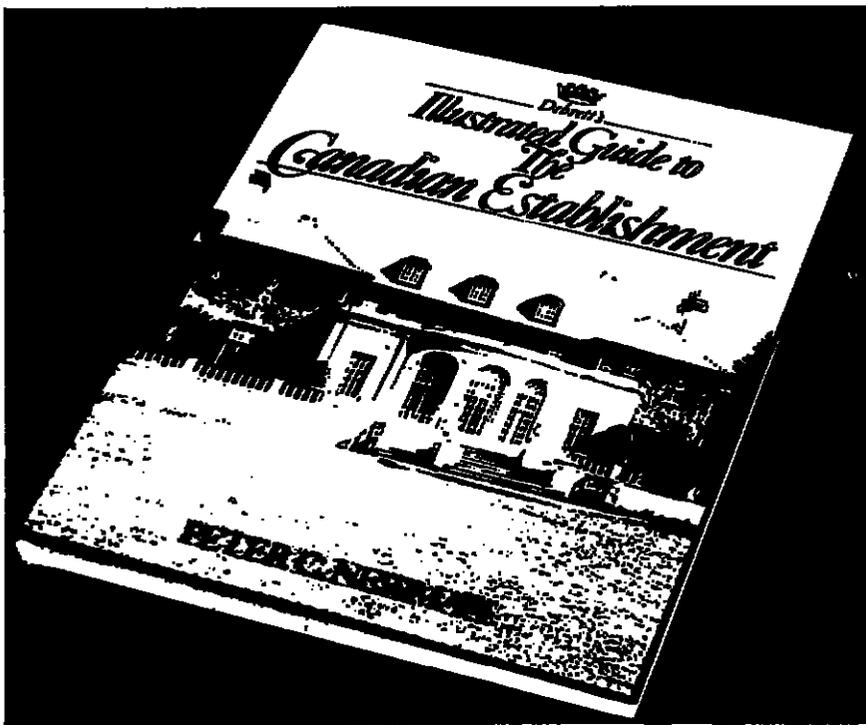
ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO

# The Canadian Establishment

PETER C. NEWMAN

General Editor

Foreword by Sir Iain Moncreiffe



Peter C. Newman's *THE CANADIAN ESTABLISHMENT*, *THE ACQUISITORS* and more recently his profile of Conrad Black, *THE ESTABLISHMENT MAN*, have shown convincingly that Canada does have an Establishment - an elite that through its connections, wealth and power exerts an immense influence on this country's decision making process. And the success of Newman's books demonstrates the fascination this Establishment holds for hundred of thousands of readers.

Debrett's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment is divided into three sections.

In Section I, Newman looks at the term "Establishment" - who is involved, the connections among its members, the criteria for admission. He discusses the rise of institutions and dynastic families that have become a significant force regionally or nationally, and he looks into families that were once powerful but have drifted into relative obscurity.

Section II looks at the "Roots of the Establishment", "The Dynasties", "Titles and Orders" and "The Establishment at Play." Photo essays show major figures and events of earlier days - the estates, pastimes and lifestyles of the rich and powerful, many of whose descendants are still influential today.

Section III consists of a detailed listings of 400 of the most influential, accomplished and notable living people in all fields - business, the professions, government, the arts, the military, religious life, science, academia, and so on. Chosen with the aid of expert consultants, these biographical listings provide a valuable (and probably controversial) guide to the powerful in Canadian society today. Many of those listed are shown in photographs.

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