VIOLENT RIVER:
The Miramichi novels of David Adams Richards

An interview with Joe Rosenblatt

PASSAGES
New fiction by Rohinton Mistry

And reviews of new books by David Stafford, Austin Clarke, David McFadden, Ralph Gustafson, and the Glio Collective
Demonic possessives

If you were introduced to Brian Mulroney and (not being one of his close friends) sought to put him at his ease by asking him where he lived and where he worked, I don’t think even he would reply, “I live on Ottawa’s Sussex Drive and my office is in Ottawa’s Langevin Block.”

By I. M. Owen

IN THE MARCH ISSUE I reviewed a book by C. E. S. Franks. On opening the magazine, I was surprised to see glaring at me from the top of the column: the phrase “Franks’s” book. Had I written that? No, my carbon copy revealed. I had written “the book.” But if I had felt it necessary in the fourth paragraph of a short review to refresh the reader’s memory about whose book I was reviewing, I’d have written Franks’s. The reason for omitting the apostrophe when a word or name ends is presumably that two sibilants in succession are hard to say. But they’re not. We have words like thesis and plurals like fuses. If we can talk about keeping up with the Joneses, surely we can say Jones’s book without difficulty. I admit, though, that the final s becomes troublesome if it is followed, or its last syllable is preceded, by another sibilant. Thus we say for goodness sake, for Jesus sake. Some authorities say that the final s should be dropped after all names derived from ancient Greek and Latin that end in s. This is too arbitrary. I think, I have no trouble with Asclepius’s or Augustus’s. But it’s true that Stichocles’s and Themistocles’s are awkward mouthfuls. Can anyone offer me an all-purpose formula to cover this point? Pending that, I’ll just have to go on varying our practice according to what sounds right to us.

The editor has drawn my attention to a curious point. A phrase that we see in the papers with monotonous frequency in connection with appointments made by the federal government is “a close friend of the prime minister.” While acknowledging in passing that a man with so many close friends can’t be all bad, I must point out that this isn’t idiomatic English. We don’t say a friend of me/yours/him/hers/his. Therefore, we must also say prime minister’s. The idiom is anomalous, but it’s too well established to be abandoned now. It goes tight back to Middle English: the first citation in the OED is from 1300 (“aught of his”); Chaucer writes “A Wench of bis that called was Pandare”; and the royal accounts for 1502 list “a young horse of the Queen’s.”

One more possessive matter. In an article in Maclean’s I found “Peterborough, Ont.” Trent University ... Vancouver’s Black Rose Fii Productions ... New York’s West 57th Street ... New York City’s Rockefeller Center ... Trent University’s Wernick.” There’s nothing wrong with these phrases grammatically, of course, but apply the test I suggested in the last issue: would you ever say these things? You wouldn’t. So don’t write them. If you’re introduced to Brian Mulroney and (not being one of his close friends) sought to put him at his ease by asking him where he lived and where he worked. I don’t think even he would reply, “I live on Ottawa’s Sussex Drive and my office is in Ottawa’s Langevin Block.”

Gowler called this INCONGRUOUS and traced its origin to newspaper headlines:

even ONTARIO’S PRIME MINISTER (so are we chauvinists) can bow down before while he is capital; but when he comes amongst us in the ordinary garb of lower-case text, we pick up heart again & want to kick him.

Ernest Gowers dropped this article from his 1965 revision of Modern English Usage, perhaps thinking it a lost cause. But I continue to stamp on the usage whenever it flares up to my path. Even if I have to kick David Peterson.

Now a couple of words that have acquired new and unnecessary meanings in recent times: CAREEN As every experienced reader of
Exercise

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Issues

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TOTAL COVERAGE

Macmillan of Canada
The Laurentians in Peterborough

When Trent University organized a three-day ‘Tribute to Margaret Laurence,’ their modest fundraiser turned into a national event and attracted four times the number of people expected.

"It was as if Margaret Laurence herself were looking down on us," says, "Gee, the evening is getting too formal. How can I muck it up?"

John Wadland is talking about the three-day Tribute to Margaret Laurence that he helped organize at Trent University in March, which began as a local fundraiser and became a national event, featuring 14 literary figures and attracting four times the number of people expected.

The point at which Wadland imagines Laurence to have intervened came during the gala dinner Friday night. Three hundred guests paying $30 each were finishing their kiwi fruit and whipped cream in the Great Hall, anticipating a stroll over to Wenjack Theatre to hear readings by poet Miriam Waddington, novelist Timothy Findley, and short-story writer Alice Munro, with broadcaster Peter Geowski as master of ceremonies. But nobody bad stopped nonpaying fans from entering the theatre; and over dessert news reached Wadland that the theatre was full, an overflow room with closed-circuit television was also full, and a corridor being outfitted with two TV monitors and a few dozen chains was quickly filling.

Wadland, who is head of Canadian studies at Trent, and fellow organizerOrm Mitchell, head of English, sat stricken. "Then, says Wadland, "some guy who had nothing to do with the event suggested why not have a reading here, too?" As Pierre Berton launched into a scheduled postdinner speech on the evils of antiporn Bii C-54, whispered consultations began with other writers in the hall. Runners were sent to find books by Robert Kroetsch and W. O. Mitchell. Orn’s father. P. K. Page drove downtown to fetch a copy of Brazilian Journal from the Holiday Inn.

When Wadland tremulously announced a change of programme, the guests shuffled, then applauded. And the evening took on a fresh, impromptu atmosphere. Always one to rise to an occasion, W. O. Mitchell gave a star performance from The Washing Point, playfully slurring the word fog, and tipping dangerously over forde, bringing a sense of humour to the C-54 issue — which Berton’s speech bad utterly lacked.

The weekend continued in the same informal, celebratory spirit. At Wenjack Theatre, someone timed the applause for Alice Munro at four and a half minutes. She agreed to another reading the following night, joined by Waddington and Findley, for the dinner guests who had missed them. Fans also packed a reading Saturday night by P. K. Page, W. O. Mitchell, and Hugh MacLennan, with literary editor Robert Weaver as moderator. And on Saturday afternoon, people filled the public library for readings by Roo Borson, Adele Wiseman, Robert Kroetsch, and Sylvia Fraser. Even the black-bordered pastel Harold Town had produced for the occasion shaved a young, lively Margaret Laurence who appeared to be still with us.

Organizers at Trent wanted to honour Laurence, acknowledged as one of Canada’s greatest writers, because she had lived in the area since 1969, and had a close association with the university until the time of her death in January 1987. She received an honorary degree in 1972, became Trent’s first writer-in-residence a year later, and in 1981 was named chancellor. The event was held also to raise money for a writers-in-residence fellowship, to enable promising beginning authors to write at Trent for several months each.
Best of the West

The Calgary audience for the arts is fiercely critical and powerfully interested. It has not been accorded enough respect.

Canadian is ready to concede that the Olympic Winter Games were a success, arts festival and all. Well, what the hell can we do? — Calgary pulled it off. That has to be admitted, however reluctantly. But while people discuss the athletic events, the ceremonies, the arts festival, there is always a implied judgment of the city: this past season, Calgarians have been treated to the world media’s assessment of their architecture, their weather, their street plan, their dress code, their graveyards, their breakfasting habits, and last but not least, their capacity for culture.

Watching this process has bee” fascinating to me. I live in this city because I choose to. I came five years ago after the boom was over. out of affection rather than for money. And I write about this city; it keeps sneaking into my fiction.” I” short, I know it intimately, and it would take a lot to lure me away. So these Olympian judgements have to me, revealed more about the evaluators than about Calgary, which remains somewhat mysterious to the rest of Canada.

Still, the arts festival did reveal a good deal about Calgary’s cultural life. First of all, it has one. Olympic or not, no cultureless community could have produced, arranged for, organized, and attended the events of the arts festival. But most important were those who attended: the audience.

One of the earliest events was the international writers’ festival and book fair. And in the concluding panel on the future of writing, Robert Kroetsch said, “The future of writing is in the audience. Without audience we are all silenced.” Again and again, through films, concerts, plays, that fine kept coming back to me. What made the arts festival a heady success was not the organizers of advertising or even the Olympics, but that solid block of people who respond to and support creativity, that fiercely critical and powerfully interested audience, which has not been accorded enough respect. A wag was heard to say, after the Governor General’s Awards ceremony, attended by the largest audience the awards have ever seen”. “Oh, there are so many people here because Calgarians are so grateful.” Exactly the kind of patronizing reaction that would make any Westerner want to kick the, yes. Eastern speaker in the stomach with a very pointed cowboy boot.

There was a sense of the audience, that unpredictable octopus that comes to listen, watch, heckle, applaud, or get up and walk out. That serves as the real test of any artist’s art of any show’s success. And it was as an audience that Calgary revealed itself most interestingly. Although not enough people bought tickets to a “rock spectacular” starring Neil Young and Avantgough (the show had to be cancelled), the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra’s performance of Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony was sold out months in advance. The NOVA Corporation underwrote Alberta Theatre Projects to commission five new Canadian plays, performed during January and February. There was a film festival, dance, art, and new music, all of it oriented, and audined well.

This audience was not extremely traditional, or terribly easy to please, but it did seem to carry with its critical capacity an overwhelming enthusiasm. I saw no instantaneous standing ovations, but a sense of near-eyed evaluation, an awareness of the quality of what they were watching and a’ ability to make tough judgements. That capacity was obvious, perhaps nowhere more “forever obvious than with The Spirit Stays. The political protest of the Lubicon Lake Cree has had a powerful effect: the audience was forced to decide whether it would boycott the show; the audience was implicated in its own participation. The very conjunction of the Lubicon protest with the exhibition has rebounded: the audience may have chosen to see the exhibit, but their seeing it has raised support for the Lubicon Lake band.

Obviously, the writers’ festival was the most important event for me. The inclusion of a writers’ festival was nerver enough; there has never been a literary component to any Olympic Art Festival, and of course, this one had the task of measuring up to Greg Gatenby’s memorable international writers’ festival, which takes place in Toronto every fall. Preparations got off to a late start and seemed to be plagued by disorganization and cancellations, but by the time the festival began, those problems had been overcome.

For a participating writer, a writers’ festival is always half machinery, half dream. There are all those words in the air, books, pages, arguments, ideas, and every time you turn around, another writer. But even in that morass, there were crystalline moments, epiphanies and violations drunken parties and quiet conferences. Dancing in the corridors and brisk walks outside in 20-low-zero weather, I” short, all the insanities that “lack writers” festivals so fascinating for both writers and audience.

Why does any writer stand up in front of a panel and talk about creative nonfiction or travel or writing or mythology? We must like it, or at least we must think that the one occupation — to secretly admire its audience, to open the separating door between reader and writer. And this titer’s festival that did it, stunningly.

I' the panel, Write.” Jean Kaplinski, the Estonian poet, quietly undercuts. Donlevy’s supercilious claims about writing for money. Japanese (but born in Canada) poet Kazuko Shiraiishi talked about the community. 30 years in Svernspective of his poetry. Delblanc and bred a deep outlight. Gu Hua Chinese writing Blais caught his listener in the trance of a lengthening death. Ryszard Kapuscinski Shalves the Nelsons Lebanon t o Calgary. And publisher Anna Porter defined are to.

There was enough enoughAnd by that shifting audience had recognized a real hem of the page: it was Jean Kaplinski who earned their Their writers are as good as their counterparts in the world confirmed as Brighurst’s sup creating PinDar and the refusal hotshot American t close andtable McInermey to value Jay cocaine cleverness Enough is enough. The audience had the same reaction to the American Split Decisions the closing gala of the film festival. How unpredictable they be knows more than the organizers. — ARITHA VAN HERK
BRIEF REVIEWS

TALES UNTIL DAWN: THE WORLD OF A CAPE BRETON STORY-TELLER
by Joe Neill MacNeil, trans. by John Shaw
This collection of Gaelic folk tales, proverbs, games, and songs seems designed to be accessible to everyone from the Gaelic scholar to the general reader. The book is an English translation of stories that an old Cape Breton storyteller, Joe Neill MacNeil, told to his friends. The translation captures the simplicity of folk tales without making them seem at all cut or contrived. It is clear that Mr. MacNeil, the story-teller, and Mr. Shaw, the translator, enjoyed their collaboration.

— Wayne Johnston

SOCIETY

ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE? THE REAL CLUB MED STORY
by Patrick Blednick, Macmillan, 204 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 0662 0)

This is certainly not a book-length tourist brochure, despite its pretty cover. In Another Day in Paradise? Patrick Blednick provides an engrossing account of the Club Méditerranée phenomenon, from its humble origins in 1950 to its personal visit to the Florida “Sandpiper” village in 1987.

One might query whether the subject merits an exhaustive investigation, isn’t it? Blednick tackling a deep dive into a rather shallow pool? However, very early we discover that still waters run deep at the Club Med pool. For example, we are told that in 1977 the club was subject to four armed robberies at various locations, a murder in Corfu, two deaths by misadventure in the Tunisian desert, two arson attacks in an alpine village, and two terrorist bombings in Corsica. Nevertheless, over half a million guests paid for Club Med holidays that year, adding new meaning to the resort’s “Hands Up!” theme song.

Blednick even manages to make the complex, worldwide financial arrangements of the club interesting, demonstrating a subtle alchemy that transforms dry data into absorbing narrative.

And then there’s sex. This author does not allow Club Med’s reputation for sexual frolics to become the raison d’être of his investigation, yet chapter 17 (“Inside Paradise: The Go’s Story”) includes interesting first-person accounts of hanky-panky between the hired help and the guests.

By peering behind the glossy cover, Blednick provides a fascinating account of a company famous for manufacturing dreams.

— Timothy Chamberlain

FICTION

BRING ME YOUR PASSION
by Don Bailey, Oberon, 130 pages, $11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88770 690 9)

These stories reflect Don Bailey’s long-standing interest in lonely figures trying to make contact. Here, the main focus is on fathers and sons seeking to reach out to their sirens or offspring, in memory if not in fact. The stories would be much more effective without the unceasing flow of tears: Bailey is optimistic about the power of love but needs to exercise greater control to keep these stories from becoming maudlin. For a writer who has been publishing since the late 1960s, he shows a surprising tendency towards amateurish writing, as in “The Neutral Enemy”:

He hears the laughter, it is a familiar sound. Almost a welcome noise in the void of his isolation. The rumbles of snorts fill the room with a physical presence.

He looks in the mirror and sees a youth, a middle-aged man looking back at him. There are no worry lines in his face. Remarkable for a person of 53.

Such unsuitable stream-of-consciousness and characterization are in sharp contrast with his depictions of social outcasts, as in “The River Crests” and “Remembrance Day.”

— Allan Weiss

A FINE & QUIET PLACE
by Norm Keeling, Oberon, 96 pages, $11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88770 654 4)

Nora Keeling explores themes of isolation and the difficulty of achieving satisfactory relationships with spouses or family members. Her main characters are usually women in relationships that are sick, if not dangerous. Like the protagonists in her first collection, The Driver (1982), those in A Fine & Quiet Place undergo terrible suffering (especially miscarriages) without receiving any sympathy or affection from their mates. Their husbands and lovers are almost invariably self-indulgent animals, particularly the unnamed husband in “The Feather Pillow.” Keeling’s prose is at times annoyingly stilted, as here in “My Father’s House”:

there was, notwithstanding the material in the basement, only one individual in the great house whose value and richness was beyond question to everyone except for the creature who shared his beneficence.

Even stories that do not portray wealthy, aristocratic characters (such as “Nouvelle”) are marred by a grating preciousness of language.

The atmosphere in the collection is bleak and intense. Nora Keeling is not dating or experimental in form, but she is consistent in quality.

— Allan Weiss

May 1988, Books in Canada 5
THE BLOOD GOD

IN AN AMTRAK TRAIN travelling from New York to Montreal, a man mugs himself while shaving. Within minutes he bleeds to death. Acute haemophilia? No, murder.

Stephen Haggerty, a CBC reporter, investigates. The trail leads to Guatemala, a country ruled by a dictator so brutal that the American president has withdrawn military aid. With his two allies, a gay CIA agent and a beautiful woman, Haggerty mixes it up with death squads and Marxist revolutionaries. Along the way he uncovers an international conspiracy to assassinate an Important American ... and so forth.

It's all standard stuff. Haggerty is just more scared yet sensitive Vietnam vet. (He happens to have served as a journalist, though.) The gay CIA man is a stab at originality but a feeble one: his sexual orientation is revealed by a limp wrist.

There are interesting bits of journalistic realism — not surprising, considering that the author, Joseph MacAnthony, was an investigative reporter himself — but the tidbits about the international blood trade and whatnot are boxed pieces, with no real connection to the main story.

As for suspense, when Haggerty gets himself in a jam, the question is not, How will he get himself out of this one? but, Will he get out exactly the way I expect him to? The answer is usually yes.

MacAnthony puts sentences together well enough, but lacking imagination, he writes by formula. The result steams with insincerity, which may put off even the least discriminating reader. — BRIAN HENRY

THE PRINCE OF STARS
by Ian Dennis, Macmillan, 221 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 8645 6).

THE MEDIEVAL Arab world of Toronto author Ian Dennis seems to be inspired equally by the Thousand and One Nights and the scintillating matinee entertainments that gave most of us our first introduction to this exotic fictional locale. An adolescent adventure for adults — part nostalgia, part spoof — The Prince of Stars also operates as a complex philosophical allegory with much to say about love, death, the meaning of life, the nature of reality, and good and bad government. There's as much pop-corn as Plato in the mix, though some may feel it's a little heavy on the latter.

The sequel to the author's 1985 work, Baghdad, the book functions fairly well on its own, resuming the story painlessly with a quick synopsis and plenty of action. What's already happened is that in a revolution engineered by the Ripe Fruit Party the caliph has been murdered, but his wily young son and a few followers have escaped down the Tigris with their enemies in hot pursuit. In The Prince of Stars the chase continues across the map of a long-ago Middle East, with skirmishes, adventures, and narrow escapes. Along the way the young anthro maturities till he is ready to confront the terrible and terrifying pedantic Fruit commander, Zardin-el-Adigrab.

The two warring contingents and the odd assortment of tribes they encounter have one thing in common: a taste for philosophical story-telling. Just about every character has his own Arabian Nights-style tale to interrupt the action with, and these hasty digressions provide the book with its best and wittiest pages.

— MARTIN TOWNSEND

SCIENCE

EXPERIMENTATION IN WRITING, AS IN SCIENCE, is the exploration of new ways to tackle an old problem, and in Hockey Night in Canada, D.I. Schöepenlern demonstrates imagination and admirable artistic courage in her techniques. As is her earlier Figs & Other Stories (1986), she writes here almost exclusively about unsatisfying male-female relationships, and Schöepenlern uses novel formal devices to deal with this theme. "This Town," for example, is structured as a kind of mock sociological study, or anti-tourist guide, said "A Simple Story" is metafictionally divided into short sections purporting to "describe" every relevant aspect of a single, near-disastrous encounter in an extramarital affair. While such techniques often work, they sometimes seem gimmicky and forced, as is the case with the parentheses — () — punctuating "Live Sentences." The more conventional stories, like the title story and "Crimes of Passion," tend to be cliché and predictable, the latter work seeming more like a story outline than a story in itself. Schöepenlern's greatest strength lies in the deft drawing of the miniature portraits that are the hallmark of good story writing — like this one from "A Simple Story":

This particular woman, Marilyn, is waiting for him in the lane behind her downtown apartment building, curling her hair into her expensive fur coat, sucking on the collar.

All in all, Schöepenlern attempts to expand the boundaries of short-story form, and succeeds frequently enough to merit serious attention as she fulfills the promise of her earlier work.

— ALLAN WEISS

HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA
by Diane Schoepenlern, Quarry Press, 130 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 917590 60 6).

When Robert Oppenheimer watched the first nuclear explosion in New Mexico in 1945, he quoted the Bhagavad Gita: "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.

According to Robert Del Tredici, author of At Work in the Fields of the Bomb, Oppenheimer's statement represents an attitude of "romantic grandeur," a view of nuclear weapons as the "victor's point of view." Thus, the first half of Tredici's book eschews the traditional images of nuclear disaster. Gone is the spreading mushroom cloud or scarred survivor. Instead, Tredici focuses on the detailed and banal preparations of the nuclear industry. However, this approach doesn't really work. After the umpteenth processing-and-assembly plant, the mind becomes numbed to the reality of global destruction; consequently, At Work in the Fields of the Bomb loses considerable emotional impact.

Despite this self-imposed handicap, two haunting images do emerge from this text: a half-melted Buddha and a handful of paper cranes folded by a dying girl. These images assume an iconic stature, for in truth, they represent the victim's story.

The latter half of this book contains interviews and "field notes" that successfully portray the surreal Dr. Strange-glowe dimension of the nuclear industry. Yet here again the most compelling text is that which deals with the Japanese survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

At Work in the Fields of the Bomb demonstrates that sometimes a picture isn't worth a thousand words.

— TIMOTHY CHAMBERLAIN

INFINITE IN ALL DIRECTIONS
by Freeman J. Dyson, Harper & Row (Russell & Whitest), 319 pages, $29.95 cloth (ISBN 0 06 059081 6).

Freeman Dyson's previous books, Disturbing the Universe and Weapons and Hope, placed him in the front ranks of those scientists — like Stephen Jay Gould, Carl Sagan, Lewis Thomas, and David Suzuki — who have reached out from the lab to the public audience. The present offering, based on his Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen University, is further proof of Dyson's unique and intelligent voice.

The title reflects the author's temperament as a physicist: against those who postulate a universe ultimately reducible to fundamental law, he sees the universe as infinitely diverse and man's role in it as endlessly diversifying. This predilection for "infinite diversity" underlies his eclectic conversation on a dizzying array of topics and enthusiasms — from desert camels and bombardier beetles to black holes and nuclear disarm
ment. Along the way, Dyson spins his pet theories and hypotheses about the origins of life and speculates with tempered optimism about the future and the problems we face.

Inevitably the book is pushed and pulled too often. But it is redeemed by Dyson's constantly engaging presence: science merges with his humane vision of man's power and imagination. Like the perfect guest at a summer cottage, Dyson is endlessly fascinating, congenially eccentric, stylish yet relaxed. As always, he writes with beguiling simplicity and a gift for metaphor.

— B.K. ADAMS

POETRY

HEAVY HORSE JUDGING

by Don Summerhayes,


I DON'T KNOW anything about heavy horse judging, but I suspect it would focus on solid, down-to-earth qualities — the merit of serviceable lives. 

One poem puts it: similarly, there are no high-strung thoroughbreds in Don Summerhayes' Heavy Horse Judging. Instead, we are offered a collection of quiet, unpretentious poems, enlivened by flashes of a whimsical imagination and a puckish sense of humor. The poet announces his intentions in the opening poem in characteristically direct fashion:

speak the ordinary words clearly without assistance
choosing to say
some common thing
we have needed to hear
over and over

Occasionally Summerhayes is lyrical, but his strength lies in an understated style that shares moments of clarity and insight through childhood reminiscences, reflections of travel and on love. He is a very smart, visioned poet — he can, in fact, seem complacent, giving us a benevolent world in which even death appears innocuous: "Under the old courthouse lawn the souls of dead bums still sleeping it off."

Heavy Horse Judging is not for readers who want to be disturbed and provoked by what poetry can ship bare. But its comfortable ness and genuine savouring of small moments serve a purpose, too.

— BARBARA CAREY

EMPIRE OF DUST:
SETTLING AND ABANDONING THE PRAIRIE DRY BELT

by David C. Jones,

University of Alberta, 190 pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88864 119 2).

This book chronicles the settlement of the so-called drylands (a euphemism) of southeastern Alberta by would-be wheat farmers after 1909.

More than a history of the ravages wreaked by sun, wind, and drought — this in a land with quicksand for a welcome mat and rattlesnakes for doormen — Empire of Dust recalls a man-made disaster to rival those nature already provided.

Lured by a government eager to establish an agricultural heartland and bopped by the boosterism of land speculators and chambers of commerce, thousands of farming families poured into this virtual desert from all over the world, only to lose, within a generation, everything they had.

"The bread of the future will come from the desert of the past," the salesmen claimed, but were long gone when the farmers' hopes yielded to despair after the First World War.

Author David C. Jones, a history professor at the University of Calgary, has dug deep in the archives to unearth the painful reality of this significant era. His reconstruction of events has so much of the feel of a literary epic that the reader misses the presence of protagonists: Jones' balanced approach to those who played a part in real life gives us a cast of diverting extras. Perhaps some sense of this absence is behind the author's attention to the town of Carlsbad. Albert, but this attempt to give focus to the story seems half-hearted and only half succeeds.

A wealth of statistics and period anecdotes make Empire of Dust most respectable, though occasionally rambling, work of popular history. But it's the author's command of the story-teller's art that enables him to succeed, in general, in vividly recreating the human drama of those tragic times.

— MARTIN TOWNSEND

OVERLAND TO STARVATION COVE WITH THE INUIT IN SEARCH OF FRANKLIN

1878-1880

by Heinrich Klutschak.


This is a charming and readable book about four rank amateurs — a soldier, an artist, a journalist and a fourth man about whom not much is known except that he came from Milwaukee — spent two wildly successful years in the Arctic on a budget of $5,000 (those were the days). They survived, discovered new clues to the fate of the lost Franklin Expedition, and completed the longest overland sled journey by white men up to that time.

Heinrich Klutschak (the artist) published his narrative in 1881 in Germany where it was an instant popular success. Now translated into English for the first time by William Barr, who also supplies a concise historical introduction and detailed end notes, it is a Victorian adventure story told with intelligence and in a short, vivid prose, between A Journey to the Centre of the Earth and Pickwick Papers, which can forget the author's hair-raising dash across the Back River and anxiety on ice so thin he could poke a stick through it? Or the expedition's harrowing return journey to Hudson Bay with sled dogs dying one by one of starvation?

At the same time, tension between superior Inuit know-how and Klutschak's colonial discourse gives this book a subtext that cannot escape the modern reader. For example, while the Inuit guides construct complex Igloos, the whites do low-grade drudge work like chopping water holes in the ice. When the whites finally return to their own world, they find the process of reverse adaptation difficult and painful. Klutschak didn't draw any fresh conclusion from this experience, but his book sends us a different message.

— DOUGLAS CLOVER
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Living in Fredericton, you hear a lot of legends about David Adams Richards. Legends about this nearly illiterate kid hitchhiking down from the Miramichi through storms of sleet to read his fledgling tales at the Tuesday evening literary meetings that used to be held at the University of New Brunswick. Legends about a hard-drinking Newcastle roaring boy with his hair cut long, a ring in his ear, and a chip on his shoulder. Legends about the "instinctive" writer who slept all day and wrote in a frenzy through the night, torturing grammar, syntax, and spelling in his rush to get words down on paper.

But the real Dave Richards is nothing like that. He is a courteous, reserved, and profoundly decent man who lives with his wife, Peggy, their dog, Grace, and their Maine Coon cat, Theo, in a rented house on St. John Street, right in the cockpit of Anglo New Brunswick culture, four blocks from the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and the Playhouse Theatre and a two-minute walk from the university. He is 37 now, no longer the boyish 22-year-old who stunned the local literary community with the first masterful pages of The Coming of Winter. (UNB academic and poet Bill Bauer still speaks of the "brute excitement" he and his colleagues felt listening week
Dave Richards is the poet-thief who has given us a new human being is Joe, who, after drinking Richards's script, became another character, a peripheral one involved with a set of peripheral characters that he finally realized he had a whole other novel on his hands — the second novel of his trilogy, in fact. Richards's characters populate a huge, continuous imaginative world such that people in one book will show up in another. Kevin and Pamela Dulse from The Coming of Winter, for example, show up again in Lives of Short Duration, where we see them in another world. H. C. Balmer, a secondary character in Lives, has a whole story devoted to him in Dancers at Night. The effect is one of eerie verisimilitude — as if they were all really alive somewhere.

Richards is a passionate moralist (not moralizer, not social critic) who delights in making precise and minute observations and in unraveling the fabric of the human experience. His novels are prime examples of his ability to tell a story with a keen eye for detail and a deft touch for character development. His writing is characterized by its precision and minute observation, and he is known for his ability to create vivid, memorable characters that are both real and relatable.

Richards prefers to call himself a conservative socialist. "To think that politics can solve the problems of the poor is ridiculous," he says. "I've always thought politics tended towards the nonsensical."

Coke to keep her little sister from drinking, screaming at Joe because he won't let her rub his sore back. She exaggerates and emblazons on Joe's mistreatment. She looks for guidance to a character named Vera, the Miramichi's version of the New Person, a university graduate who has spent a year at Oxford and speaks with a mid-Atlantic accent. But the truth of Adele's relationship with Joe is that they love each other deeply. "It's a book about the conflict for the hearts and souls of the young," says Richards. "There are a lot of people like Vera who have gone away to university, and come back to Newcastle with an answer for everything. They wear the right clothes and go to the new malls, the new racketball courts and the new curling clubs, and that's all very well. But the one person who is really trying to be a new human being is Joe, who, with no promises, no guarantees, is giving up his old life, his drinking, his drinking friends."

When Richards talks about his writing, he talks about themes and personalities. He shies from discussions of style. He dislikes being asked about influences. "I don't think of myself in any terms," he says, "except that when I write about Joe Walsh he comes from my fictional world, which is mine and not anybody else's." On one occasion he dealt with the several issues of regionalism, technique and influence in a single sentence: "I think you write like your personality and where you come from."

What animates Dave Richards is the inner life of his characters, their motives, their secrets, their spiritual aspirations and failures. He has a curious way of talking, always thinking, as if you and he were talking about Joe Walsh down the street and not Joe Walsh in a novel. He uses first names, tells you things about them (traits, habits, events in their lives) that aren't written down in any book.

The real Dave Richards watches a lot of television — game shows, sports (he's a passionate boxing fan), movies — to relax from his writing. He used to curl; now he and Peggy, who works as an office supervisor for a local film production company, take riding lessons once or twice a week at a stable on the edge of town. Summers, they spend time at a cottage they own on the south shore of the Miramichi just across from East Bog, the tiny downriver village where Peggy grew up, which forms the fictional backdrop of Richards's second novel, Blood Ties. Or Richards will slip away by himself to a hunting and fishing camp he and his brothers share up on the Bll Sevogle River near the setting of the marvellous Lives of Short Duration.

In the past decade and a half, he has turned out four novels and a story collection, two books of poetry, two plays, a collection of short stories, and a number of screenplays (Capitol Films recently finished shooting Richards's script for a movie version of The Coming of Winter). He keeps on writing, on making precise and minute observations, on unraveling the fabric of the human experience. His novels are prime examples of his ability to tell a story with a keen eye for detail and a deft touch for character development. His writing is characterized by its precision and minute observation, and he is known for his ability to create vivid, memorable characters that are both real and relatable.

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tinctions, "I am always asking myself," he says, "when presented with a set of difficult choices, how would this character act? What is the proper and correct thing to do, as opposed to the thing that appears proper and correct. A lot of Nights below Station Street deals with the difference between the veneer of altruism and real altruism, supposed or assumed generosity and true human generosity."

He distrusts middle-class "sophistication" and "gentility," vices to be seen as pregnant with their own sort of violence. "In all instances where you have to be generous, affected or displaced people can be generous; but to be generous when it's not expected or when it causes hardship, when it requires the best part of human nature -- my characters can be that more quickly."

This distrust reflects Richards's politics, that combination of antiblack, antivellwe, antiworking-class sentiments he shares with fellow Easterners like the late Alden Nowlan, Wayne Johnston, and Eric Teit, a Nova Scotia writer now teaching in the U.S. Amazingly, he has been called a Marxist, and his first novel, The Coming of Winter, was translated into Russian (though he suspects the Soviets corrupted his text into a socialist-realist indictment of Canadian society). But Richards prefers to call himself a "conservative socialist" and to say things like "To think that politics can solve the problems of the poor is ridiculous. I've always thought politics tended towards the nonsensical."

Sometimes he reminds me of Flannery O'Connor (among other similarities, they're both Catholic). Like O'Connor, Richards expresses himself through characters who live at the bottom of the economic ladder, on the periphery of society, an imaginative territory they both see as inhabited by petty crooks, drunks, suicides, and mystics -- for what else is George Terri from Lives of Short Duration, dancing drunkenly with a pig's head on a pole in the middle of a burning bridge, but an ancient shaman seeking his vision? And they both get comic mileage out of the dash between the spiritual and the mundane -- George's vision turns out to be the DTs.

But where O'Connor is dogmatic (God is a character; grace is a plot device), Richards is romantic. His world, his fictional universe, is Catholic only in a deep sense, in the sense that Catholicism is the most pagan of the Christian sects. Life is nasty, brutish, and short; men and women are ruled by the Image of gross flesh, by fantasy, and by social coercion. But beneath the surface they have souls of essential goodness, yearning to be free, to express themselves in decent, loving acts, in generosity.

Lois had also a tattoo of a tiny rose on her left breast ... this tiny rose signified something pure and life-giving about her, exuded from her a quality of love, though she said she'd gotten the rose tattoo on a bet with a man she said, who couldn't hold his own pss.

For Richards, this contrast between the flesh and the spirit, the outer and the inner, is everything. It's the mot of both his tragic vision and his comic insight. And this is what most critics miss -- it is a theme that is universal, a theme that has generated all great art since the beginning of the Christian era.

Far from being a bland land of desperate poverty and alienation, the Miramichi River area where Richards grew up is a world of almost surreal and operatic contrasts. It is a country of strange, haunting beauty, river and forest and mist-covered estuary, violated by abrupt, smoking mill plants and port towns.

... the quiet light under the snow-covered spruces, the frozen rock where Hudson Kopochus lay with a bear on his journey to kill a man in 1825, and the children catching the bus for school the next day, the dark-faced displaced French, the stubborn self-destructive Irish, the Celtic blood on one of the most violent rivers in the country, "Fuck ya, fuck ya," for "I love you, I love you," or "Help me, help me.

This is Richards's paysage moralisé, the country of his imagination. Richards's grandfather -- genes and history tell -- was a travelling musician from Wales. The Welsh connection is determinative -- music and bombast. Welsh bombast, e.g., Dylan Thomas, fuels Richards's intense hyperheterotic the way the tradition of Southern bombast fuelled Faulkner. And he sings. When he was younger, Richards would often preface readings with a cappella folk songs. His grandfather settled in whencas thee married Richards's grandmother, who worked as a violinist at the Newcastle Opera House. Together they purchased the opera house and played the music to accompany silent movies.

After Grandfather Richards died, Richards's grandmother made one of those intuitive decisions that define the

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This anecdote contains the three hallmarks of a David Adams Richards story: horror, violence, and comedy. Through fate or bad luck, the baby is damaged. Society jumps in with a glib assessment; the word retarded is value-loaded, welfare-worker, pseudomedical jargon that dismisses the child, pigeonholes him. It is a type of psychic violence. As Richards says, "It is prior assumption and contempt prior to investigation that destroys people."

The second half of the story, the hip to Montreal, is also exemplary. For it is the pattern of Richards's characters to react to the violence of prior assumption with violence, with drunkenness, or other forms of outrageous behaviour. It is a curious double sign: the violence Richards characters do to correct English, for example, is both an emblem of their debasement, of the place society has put them in, a way of behaving that society expects and allows, and it is also a badge of honour, a symbol of their revolt against "proper" forms of behaviour and speech.

And sometimes the violence is simply causeless and mysterious, at which point it connects with Richards's religious sense, his belief in the fundamental unpredictability, the absolute freedom, of the human spirit.

"Yer sorta religious or what Simon?" Rance said.

"Oh boy — I don't think so — very much."

"Well I just thought all the sties ya told me — about the bears, and running the river— always ended up with "God bless." Rance smiled and looked about.

Simon chuckled.

"I don't know sometimes. Once I bopped a man right over the head for no reason — no-one knows why — I don't know why — but there it is — that's what I'm like."

"Well I'm not going to bother you about it," Rance said.

For Richards's characters are not simply victims. His novels live because they boil with anger, revolt, and humour. His down-and-out working-class types seem always ready to perform the graceful, generous act, or to throw their lives away in some piece of mad, defiant theatre. The best of them have clear Ideas of correct behaviour that in many ways are truer than the more sophisticated compromises of middle-class society. They are doing things, when push comes to shove," says Richards, "that the best part of themselves offers to the world."
Passages

'Miss Poonegar was now a music teacher. Her speciality was singing: "And I teach religious songs and bhajans only, none of those silly Hindi movie songs."'

By Rohinton Mistry

One afternoon, into the Damania household walked Vera Poonegar, just turned 23 and bursting with life and charm and vivacity that sent Adi's 15-year-old heart aflutter. Her bright blue pleated skirt sheathed her with such sensual precision that none of the pleats unfolded till she sat down: than accordionlike, they waited to close on cue.

The Damania were not expecting this visit. In fact, this was the first time Adi had set eyes on her. But when Mrs. Damania was still single and living with her parents in Chikhalwadi, Vera was the neighbour's little daughter who called her Auntie. And when Auntie married and became Mrs. Damania, the little girl next door, perpetually in pigtails and tears, was just six.

Now, 17 years later, Miss Poonegar's blue skirt mercilessly peeled away the inchoate veneer of Adi's maturity. He wished he was wearing long pants. Suddenly feeling less grown-up than he wanted to, he found the childlike bareness of his knees too keen to hear.

"Seventeen years! How time goes!" exclaimed the two women, both happy that the acquaintance had been renewed. And Mrs. Damania sat back to listen to all the news of Chikhalwadi: the Pastas were still feuding with the Katraks as bitterly as the day when the first Pastakia had cursed the first Katrak and wished a string of illnesses upon future generations of Katraks for some matter which was now only dimly remembered. Vie Garda continued to walk her dog, Rexy, where the neighbours objected to his doing his business — this was a new Rexy, of course: the old one had died peacefully at the age of 14, but Villie Garda had suspected a neighbour of poisoning him. And everyone to this day relied on Saloo Fernandes, grey and bent double now, to bring their bottles of Aarey Colony milk from the blue government booth down the road: hi hump seemed to grow in size with the passing years, but he continued to be the gentle and obedient servant of all. The lanes leading in to Chikhalwadi were still dirt roads, and the monsoon rains transformed them each year into stretches of muck and ooze, the chikal whii gave the place its name.

"In short, Auntie," she said to Mrs. Damania, "nothing much has changed since you left 17 years ago."

By and by, it came out that Miss Poonegar was now a music teacher. Her speciality was singing: "And I teach religious songs and bhajans only, none of those silly Hindi movie songs." She admitted, though, that some of the playback singers bad beautiful voices and would be great successes at classical singing, if they would give up all the mbbiih.
Besides singing, Miss Poonegar taught the harmonium. To beginners only, she said, because she had never really learned the instrument beyond the basics, in order to conserve her time and energy for the voice with which she had been gifted: “If you can’t be a tree on the top of the hill, be a bush at the foot, in the valley; but be the best little bush you can be.”

Mrs. Damania paused to attempt a synthesis of the scoutmaster-father’s rhyme, harmonium-playing, and singing. Then, coaxingly, she asked Miss Poonegar to sing something for them. “In our family, we like all types of good music,” Mrs. Damania said. “Western classical, Indian classical, pop, film, everything. Even jazz. But you are right that there are a lot of rubbishy songs in Hindi movies. Whether it is Beethoven or Shankar-Jaikishen, Caruso or Saigal, we can enjoy and appreciate as long as it is good music.”

Miss Poonegar cleared her throat. She touched it at the spot where her Adam’s apple would have been if she were a man. “Last week I had a cold.” She coughed softly. “Next week I have a recital at Madam Blavatsky Lodge.” A short pause intervened before she added, “I am also a member of the Theosophical Society.”

Mrs. Damania nodded and said, “Oh.”

“That does not mean,” said Miss Poonegar, “that I do not wear my sudra and kusthi any more, or stop going to the fire-temple. You see, there is no contradiction at all between theosophy and our Avesta. You know what they say, that if Zarathustra was living today, he would also join the Theosophical Society.” She waited to see if this was going to be challenged, but Mrs. Damania would not be drawn into an argument. She took comfort in the thought that if her husband was home, he would soon straighten out all the nonsense in this girl’s head without even raising his voice—he knew much about the Avesta.

“You should come one day to our meeting. Listen to some of the lectures,” continued Miss Poonegar.

Mrs. Damania nodded again, prepared to humour the visitor. To change the subject, she repeated her request, “Don’t strain too much—just a short piece. I would love to hear your voice, that is all.”

Miss Poonegar rubbed her throat briskly. The throat: as those who became acquainted with her soon discovered, was an entity separate and distinct, needing pampering and readying, rather in the manner of a pet poodle before a show.

That done, she stared fixedly into space. With her head cocked to the left, she cleared her throat twice more, sang four lines of a bhajan caged into “Sita Ram Kaboe, Radhë Shyam Bhajo”, and stopped suddenly, as though having realized that she had sung more than was her original intention.

“Wonderful! Just wonderful!” exclaimed Mrs. Damania, clapping hard. “Sweet as honey your voice is. Like a bulbul,” she added, although she had never personally heard the song of that bii. “It is a gift from God.”

“Gift from God, it is true,” said Miss Poonegar. “But with proper training even your Adi could sing sweetly. He looks talented.”

Mrs. Damania turned to her son, who had sat quietly throughout Miss Poonegar’s unexpected visit. He had been studying her ankles and slim neck and her small but intriguing bosom. “Loved it no, Adi?” said his mother. “So beautiful!” Turning back to Miss Poonegar, she said, “He does sing a little,” and added apologetically, “Mainly English film songs. His favourite used to be Cliff Richard. Something about a summer vacation.”

“Summer Holiday,” Adi muttered under his breath, embarrassed that his mother had got the name wrong. But Miss Poonegar did not know any better. “It speaks!” she said teasingly, which surprised Adi and his mother: the professional throat of Miss Poonegar did not seem capable of permitting frivolities to proceed from its confines. “So quietly he has been sitting all this time. Shy boy!”

Adi kept up his end of the cloth, politely deaf. He had convinced himself that making his mother happy he would accept the lessons. And if the promise of pleasure in the proximity of those calves and ankles and knees, and a neck so slim, with such downy hair at the nape, and the movement of a bosom so compact and yet so perfectly shaped as it rose and fell with the cadences of “Sita Ram Kaboe, Radhë Shyam Bhajo” — if that promise of pleasure was fulfilled, it would be his good fortune.

Mother right now that Vera Poonegar’s type of music bored him. Two years ago he had joined the Boy Scouts because his best friend had. Six weeks later he stopped going because they quarrelled, and his almost-new uniform, along with half a year’s membership dues lay on his conscience till today. He did not want wasted singing lessons to add to that burden.

The fees were set at 15 rupees per lesson. It was a special rate for Mrs. Damania, said the teacher, out of respect for their Chikhalwati origins and ties.

After Vera Poonegar had left, Mrs. Damania became a little worried about the extra sum of money she would have to produce every week. Soaring ambitions for her son had propelled her blindly into the commitment. Now the weight of second thoughts grounded her.

“What do you think, Adi? Can we afford it?” she asked. “We should talk to Daddy when he comes home.” Panic set in momentarily. “Go, go, run after her, call her back, she will still be at the bus stop.” Here was his chance, thought Adi. But something stronger than conscience held him back. Meanwhile, route number 122 rumbled by the window, transporting the singing teacher back to Chikhalwadi.

Mrs. Damania’s doubts vanished with the bus, and the aspirations for her son were on the wing again. “It is not that much. We will manage. All I have to do is sew one more dress each week. And think what it means for your future.”

With a happy heart she picked up her sewing, cast aside when the singing teacher had arrived, and made Adi hold one end while she checked some measurements. “You know,” she said, “when you were very small, before you even started talking, if classical music was playing on the radio you would wave your arm up and down, and Daddy would joke that you were going to be a conductor when you grew up.” She let the tape measure drop to the table and inserted a pin in the fabric to mark the place. “But I knew that you really had a musical gift. If we had money we would have started your training long ago, from the age of three, like Mozart. Never mind, you will still make us proud.”

Adi kept up his end of the cloth, politely deaf. He had convinced himself that to make his mother happy he would accept the lessons. And if the promise of pleasure in the proximity of those calves and ankles and knees, and a neck so slim, with such downy hair at the nape, and the movement of a bosom so compact and yet so perfectly shaped as it rose and fell with the cadences of “Sita Ram Kaboe, Radhë Shyam Bhajo” — if that promise of pleasure was fulfilled, it would be his good fortune.

Mrs. Damania came home from work, and was well pleased with the events of
PROMPTLY AT FIVE, Miss Poonegar arrived, beaming professionally. Then she discovered that the Damanis did not have a harmonium. "How can I give singing lessons without a harmonium? A3 the singing, all the notes, will be inharmonious, especially for an untrained voice."

This discordant beginning did not augur well. Mrs. Damania listened anxiously in the next room where sk sat with needle and thread. Sk kd scheduled her sewing so that silence and hand stitching would coincide with the lesson, and not the whirr and clatter of the Singer spitting out its noisy rows.

Miss Poonegar asked Adi for an exercise book, and wrote down the scales: sa ray ga ma pa dha ni sa, and also in reverse: sa ni dha ma ga ray sa. Then she sang it. He discovered it was the same as the English do re mi, and was able to repeat it easily enough.

Miss Poonegar grumbled that to produce the notes correctly without a harmonium was impossible. She wrote different patterns in the exercise book: sa ray ga, ray ga ma, ma pa, ni pa dha, pa dha ni, dha ni sa and had him sing with her, interrupting often with: "No, no! You are b As poor again. Listen properly to my voice." Or: "Wait, wait! You are going too fast, listen to the cadence," and she rapped the teapot even more vigorously. Or: "It is hopeless without a harmonium. What can I do? Your mother is wasting her money like this."

At the end of the hour, when Mrs. Damania with some trepidation entered the room, the teacher held up her hands in a gesture of defeat. "Auntie, you might be feeling that I am being very fussy, but I am a professional. As an artiste, I must have my standards. If Adi gives a concert someday, and people ask, whose pupil, it will be your name of Vera Poonegar that will suffer. Without a harmonium it is impossible. I am sorry."

Mrs. Damania considered the ultimatum silently. She detected what she thought was ambition shining in Adi's face. And on his forehead she saw an imprint of the artistic life giving birth, which could be stillborn for the lack of a harmonium.

She had no way of knowing, but what she really saw was a *beam* in his eyes provoked by the nearness of Vera Poonegar, by the nearness of her supremely confident ankles graced by slim leather sandal straps, the enticing neck caressed by soft poplin. Her delicate wrists, one encircled by a watch and the other by a *chain* laden with Binaca toothpaste charms, and most of all, the neat bosom smuggled by tk same soft poplin that caressed kr neck.

And because Mrs. Damania had no way of knowing any of this, she asked, "A harmonium would cost how much? Nothing *fancy* - just a beginner's harmonium?"

Miss Poonegar did not answer immediately. Sk narrowed her eyes, pursed her lips, *furrowed* kr brow, and rubbed kr forehead with her *fingers*. Finally she spoke: "If you go to buy a harmonium just like that, it will be very expensive."

Mrs. Damania waited anxiously to hear a figure, but none was forthcoming just then.

"It is like this," said Miss Poonegar. "If you go to a music shop they will cheat you because you will not know how to check if the *dhamma* is blowing enough air into the keys, and if the *soor* is correct. Usually, they try to sell you an old one as new, after putting some nice shiny polish on it." And Mrs. Damania waited still to hear that which would decide whether her son was to be a star or not.

"Another of my students is selling kr harmonium," Miss Poonegar said, then added quickly, lest it be construed that she was losing a pupil, "She is buying a more advanced, professional model. Now I was thinking that hers would be perfect for Adi. It is a beginner's instrument, and in very good condition. I could get it for you for a nice price."

Mrs. Damania could wait no longer.

"How much?"

Miss Poonegar fingered her charm bracelet and *meticulously* removed the kinks. "Sk was saying that she was not going to let it go for less than 150 rupees," she replied, and watched as the other woman's face sank in disappointment. After a suitable pause, sk administered the antidote: "I think I could make her se5 it for 100. I could tell her that is the best she will get, and I know she will listen to me."

Mrs. Damania looked gratefully at the other, who said, with a small smile and the slightest trace of condescension, "I could do that for you, Auntie. Don't worry."

"But I will have to ask my husband. For bii purchases like this we always talk it over."

Miss Poonegar tried hard to appear unflustered. "If you think you can get one cheaper anywhere else, the same good quality, just go and try, Auntie. But then don't blame me if this one gets sold to someone else."

"No, no, no. Where am I saying that this is not a good price? You are doing so much for us. It is only..."

Miss Poonegar brought matters to a conclusion. "We will do it like this. Next Thursday I will come here with the harmonium. You have one week to decide. If you say no, I will leave straightaway from here, and you have to pay me only for today's lesson. We will forget everything else."

Mrs. Damania wondered what "everything else" meant as sk bade goodbye to the singing teacher. When Mrs. Damania came home from work, they deliberated. The decision was made to spend the money out of the 300 rupees saved in an envelope taped to the underside of the bottom-most shelf of the Godrej steel cupboard for an emergency.

Adi felt very uneasy. It would be a low-down thing not to confess now, before more harm was done. He had known about this envelope since reaching the age of understanding. The money had been used once when his father had fallen off a bus and fractured his hip. And more recently they paid some to tk specialist who came home and removed a fishbone lodged in his mother's throat. The agony was such that she could not wait tk less expensive treatment at his dispensary.

Next Thursday, Miss Poonegar said, as she counted away the 100 rupees into her purse, "I knew you would buy it.

Adi is too talented. It would be a sin to waste his gift." Sk snapped shut the purse, straightening the little tag with tk initials V.P. that dangled at tk clasp.

The lesson began in earnest, and Mrs. Damania rehned earnestly to her sewing. What had to be spent kd been spent, and now they could look forward to Adi's brilliant future. A mixture of pride and contentment warmed her as the scales ascended and descended in the next mom. Every now and then she tiptoe'd to the doorway and peeked around it.

When half the lesson was over, Miss Poonegar said, "Now we will learn a real song. Do you want a *Hindi bhajan* called 'Darshan doe Ghanshyam' or 'Asho Zarathost Paigamber,' about our prophet?" Adi just shrugged, but his mother heard in the next room, and stepped in. "I think it is better if we
So the Zarathostra song it was, and Adi made good progress. He rehearsed diligently during the week, seeking perfection, which he could lay at Miss Poonegar’s flawless feet the following Thursday. His mother was thrilled by his conscientious practicing. Her hours in the sewing room felt less weary and not as long. She felt gratified that the money was well spent.

In this same mood of joyous fulfilment, she agreed to mother five rupees per lesson when the singing teacher proclaimed that Adi must learn a little harmonium. “The idea is,” she explained, “that he must be able to accompany his own singing.” The extra five rupees would provide 15 minutes of training. This, too, was a special rate, emphasized the teacher, because of the Chikhawadi connection and the neighbourly bond that had survived 17 years of separation.

Adi was disappointed. Learning the harmonium would put an end to the accompaniment she was good with for him. How he enjoyed watching her fingers caressing the keys, caressing the very notes he was singing, and her foot tapping out the beat, the beat her fingers moved to while his throat responded, creating the tempo within which they worked as one.

But Miss Poonegar had a unique way of teaching the harmonium. Every time his hand faltered at the bellows, or did not work them quite the way she wanted, she grabbed his knee, now regretfully covered with long pants, and swung it inward towards the other, inward and outward, saying, “Dharmam, dharmam! Faster, faster!” The extra five rupees would provide 15 minutes of training. This, too, was a special rate, emphasized the teacher, because of the Chikhawadi connection and the neighbourly bond that had survived 17 years of separation.

From that day on, the teacher and her pupil scaled the so ray ga with her hand on his knee, ascending and descending together; they explored the Raag Bhopalas and Raag Piaa Mistra while sharing the metronomic beat of his swinging thigh: they experienced the climax of various devotional songs to the heady rhythm of knees pumping in ecstasy. And Adi’s short pants staged a temporary comeback.
Qualicum metaphysics

"I don't want to mortify the poor trout by calling them the best-dressed women in the world, but they're all transparent and they wear diamonds and they wear gold and they wear silver"

By Pleuke Boyce

Joe Rosenblatt is the author of many volumes of poetry, among them Bumblebee Dithyramb (Porcénic, 1973), Virgins & Vampires (McClelland & Stewart, 1975), and The Sleeping Lady (Exile, 1980). In 1976 he won the Governor General's Award for his collection Top Soil (Porcénic). Rosenblatt, who was born in 1933 in Toronto and spent most of his life there, moved to Vancouver Island in 1980. He subsequently published one more book of poetry, Brides of the Stream (Oolichan, 1984) and a book of prose, Escape from the Glue Factory, subtitled A Memoir of a Paranormal Toronto Childhood in the Late Forties (Exile, 1985). He has been writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario and at the Saskatoon Public Library and spent part of 1987 lecturing and reading in Italy (Rome and Bologna), Sweden, and Finland. He was interviewed at his home in Qualicum Beach by Pleuke Boyce:

Books in Canada: After you'd moved from Toronto to Vancouver Island, about eight years ago, did the change in locale influence your writing?

Joe Rosenblatt: Well, up till then, that is, till I moved to Vancouver Island, all those elements of the natural world that I had written about existed to a large extent only in my head and were therefore purely cerebral and imaginary. For example, the eggs I had written about were purely cerebral, although I was dealing with the physical realm, and the bees were cerebral too, although again I was dealing with the physical realm, but they existed only in my imagination. When I moved to the island, what happened was that all of a sudden I was rubbing elbows with Mother Nature. It was quite overwhelming.

So when I wrote about trout fishing, fly fishing, as I did in Brides of the Stream, in that particular volume it was no longer a cerebral thing. They were physical animals I was writing about, they were there and I could see them perfectly. I could see the mayfly and the trout, and to me the amazing thing about the mayfly and the trout was their total physicality. It was no longer a somewhat abstract or metaphysical concept I was writing about but a reality, which I desk with rather surrealistically, I guess. But that was the main change, at least the most obvious change, as far as my writing was concerned.

BiC: But surely Toronto isn't completely without any natural life. You must have observed things there too?

Rosenblatt: Not really. Although I did spend a lot of time in Allan Gardens at one point. But my bumble-bee poems, strangely enough, also came into being under the influence of the West Coast. I spent some time there in 1968. And I found myself in Kitsilano, in Vancouver, where I'd never been before, and there I saw a flight of bumble-bees attack a hollyhock. And there were a lot of tropical and semitropical plants blooming in Kitsilano at that particular time. I found it all quite amazing, and that's when it all struck home. When I moved back to Toronto, I had all these notes and fragments of poems that became the bumble-bee poems. They were quite symphonic because I'd tried to incorporate the movements of the bees.

But the only place in Toronto where I'd ever observed any natural life was Allan Gardens. It's a conservatory downtown with several tropical greenhouses, and I used to go there quite a lot. Only people at the margin go there, and I regarded it very much as my own domain. I thought I was Rousseau, sketching in Le Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Rousseau spent all his life in Paris — he never went to the Belgian Congo or Africa. Africa was all in his head, just as the bees were in my head.

But everything changed when I moved out here. All of a sudden I was right at the centre of the natural world. And I would be writing and fishing, writing and fishing. I've always been a loner, never belonged to any group, literary or otherwise. Here I found myself really isolated. Still, there were compensations. But other things changed as well.

BiC: What other things?

Rosenblatt: My drawing, for example. A lot of my drawings used to deal with city life. Drawings of statues and buildings, people, people's faces. In any case, city life stimulated my drawing. When I came out here, I couldn't draw the forest or the ocean or the mountains.
They just leave me cold. So that’s one element that changed right there. And unless I move back into a city, a large urban centre, my drawing is simply going to die. So there has been some good and some bad associated with this move.

**BiC:** But you’ve met your fish. Brides of the Stream is all about fish and fishing.

Rosenblatt: Oh, yes, it’s all about fish and fishing, but it’s about other things as well, of course. For example, there is the element of reincarnation. One dies, but life still goes on in other ways. Not that I have very strong beliefs about this, but when you look at a compost heap! it’s quite clear that nothing simply dies; it becomes something else. And there’s my uncle Nathan, who was a fishmonger in Toronto. He had a fish store there from 1928 to 1966, I believe. And he first introduced me to fish. He had a grotesque way of dealing with them: he’d club them to death and do all kinds of horrible things to them. This had nothing to do with fishing. Still, they were magic fish to me. And auras later my uncle Nathan reentered the stream of my subconscious in the Little Qualicum River. There he was among the trout, looking up at me.

**BiC:** What is it, though, that attracts you to write about the lives of small animals?

Rosenblatt: I couldn’t have answered that question a year ago, I don’t think. But I can answer it now. Mostly these animals are (a) vulnerable, vulnerable to ma’ and the grotesque nature of ma’, his mindless violation. So in a way I’m making a political and ecological statement. In a very off-centre way, I suppose. And (b) they’re social animals — they move either in schools, like fish, or in swarms, like bees. They’re very much collectivized. And they have a certain aesthetic quality. Fish, trout especially, I see as the representatives of the purely feminine principle — now this may be looking at it from a man’s point of view, but it could also be from a woman’s point of view, or a theologian’s point of view — it could be from the point of view of anyone who is interested in aesthetics. The way they are arrayed, these trout, they’re simply the best-dressed creatures I know. I don’t want to moralize the poor trout by calling them the best-dressed women in the world, but they’re all transparent and they wear diamonds and they wear gold and they wear silver. They’re just fascinating. And I’ve always been interested in detail, in my poetry, but in my drawings as well.

**BiC:** What made you decide to start writing prose?

Rosenblatt: I have always written prose, although it has never been my strong point. I don’t see myself ever writing a novel. But as a young ma’, a Trotskyite, I used to write for the Workers’ Vanguard. This was in the late 50s. And I’ve always written book reviews and short prose pieces, essays. I once wrote a piece about Milton Acorn in Stanley Park. And I’ve written nasty letters to Books in Canada.

**BiC:** But you’ve written a whole book of prose — Escape from the Glue Factory. It’s also a sort of autobiography. What is that all about?

Rosenblatt: I’d always wanted to write about growing up in British Toronto. It’s no longer British-dominated now, but it certainly was when I was growing up. It was horribly Anglo-Saxon and an excruciatingly boring place to be. Anglo-Saxons were disdainful of what they called “ethnics” — and you were “ethnics” if you happened to be a Pole or a Jew or an Italian. So I was raised under a British system and taught about the Battle of Hastings in 1066 endlessly, it seemed. All the teachers were Anglo-Saxon, really tight-assed individuals. God only knows what they thought about Jews — all the kids at my school were Jewish. And I couldn’t write about it until 40 years later. I can remember those teachers: they were failed British schoolmasters who had come to the colonies. Toronto, up to the 50s, up to the time the Italians immigrated there en masse, was a terrible Anglo-Saxon place with all those horrible rules, so you felt as if you couldn’t do anything. I decided to write about it, and it all came out in a big, long stream, with the most frightful images. It’s something I couldn’t have dealt with in poetry. The book I ended up with, Escape from the Glue Factory, does have some aspects of poetry to it. It has a piece about a lake, for example. It started out as a” autobiography, but in a sense it isn’t true enough — I’m just not a very good narrator. And eve’’ then I was writing about things like bullfrogs. But it’s still autobiographical in that it has all my general views about life.

And those experiences, those horrible experiences, were the basis for it. Siie the” everything has changed. But one remembers. I certainly remember.

**BiC:** And you are now working on a sequel?

Rosenblatt: Yes, I am. It’s nearly finished. It’s not about Toronto but about Pontypool, Ontario, where Jewish families would go for their summer vacations. It’s set in 1950 and is about a 17-year-old discovering sexuality. Falling in love with a pond. This is more poetic, I must say. The pond is a central metaphor and takes on different realities — a poetic pond, a subconscious pond.

**BiC:** Gwendolyn MacEwen died just recently and Milton Acorn about two years ago. You were closely associated with them when you started out as a poet.

Rosenblatt: I met them when they were married, in 1960 or thereabouts, although I bad actually met Milton earlier, in 1958, at a meeting of the League for Socialist Action, on Queen Street, and found him very sympathetic. But when I met them together I met them as poets, and they both became my mentors. They were very encouraging. I was influenced by both of them, but Gwen’s writing style has influenced me the most. It just happened to be more to my liking. When she died I was quite taken aback — it was a big shock, a great loss.
A native woman, Rebecca Belmore, sat for an afternoon behind a picture frame in a Thunder Bay shopping mall with a sign reading 'The Spirit Sings, Sponsored by Shell Canada, Artifact # 671B 1988'

By John Goddard

OLYMPIC GAMES usually begin after a young athlete runs into the stadium with a torch and ignites a giant flame, but organizers for the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary proposed to have native Indians in war-paint ride into the stadium on horses to ignite covered wagons, terrorizing white people posing as early settlers. The spectacle would have "lots of pizzazz," said Jim Sinchcombe, a member of the ideas committee.

The proposal was dropped after Lawrence Courtoreille, vice-president of the Indian Association of Alberta, said, "We'll agree only if the white guys inside the burning wagons are from the organizing committee." But his point — that Indians might feel cheated at having themselves and their accoutrements paraded about as "pizzazz" for ABC television cameras — was lost on the organizers. They constructed a giant tepee over the Olympic flame, and on opening day they paid a group of local Indians to ride into the stadium wearing feathers. They produced Olympic medals featuring an Indian in a headdress of skins, a ski pole, two types of sleds, a rifle, a speed-skate blade, and a hockey stick. And they staged, as the main attraction of the Olympic Arts Festival, an international exhibition of Indian artefacts called The Spirit Sings.

The exhibition, upon which the book of the same title is based, has been the focus of an international protest unlike any other ever mounted in Canada. Groups opposing the show include the (Canadian) Assembly of First Nations, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, the National Congress of American Indians, the Metis Association of Alberta, the Indian Association of Alberta, the (Quebec) Grand Council of the Cree, and 23 museums of ethnology in the United States and Europe.

The protest began two years ago, and the reaction of the staff at Calgary's Glenbow Museum, venue for the exhibition, was to mount the show exactly as planned. The reaction at McClelland & Stewart was to publish the book exactly as planned, pretending that almost everybody opposed to the show supported it. A section near the back thanks many of them for their help. The co-ordinator of The Spirit Sings is Julia Harrison, who says she got the idea for the exhibition during a trip to Europe in 1981. She noticed that North American Indian collections there are much older than those in Canada, dating to the time of first contact between native people and explorers. She had an urge to bring the best of the early works together, she says, but realized the cost would be extraordinary. When Calgary secured the 1988 Winter Olympics, money was suddenly available.

The Glenbow Museum announced the exhibition in the spring of 1986 under the title Forget Not My World, and the first person to object to it was Bernard Aminayak, chief of the Lubicon Lake Cree of northern Alberta, who have been saying "Forget not my world" for nearly 50 years. The band was promised a reserve in 1940, the promise was forgotten, and in the mid-1970s the Lubicon hunting-and-trapping grounds were found to be among the richest oil lands in the country. Beginning in 1930, the Alberta government permitted oil companies to invade the area, and implemented programs that sabotaged the band's attempts to assert land rights. At about the time Julia Harrison and six guest curators from across the country started work on the Olympics show, the federal Indian affairs minister of the day, John Munro, was pleading with the Alberta government to show some humanity for the Lubicon people. "The Governments of Canada and Alberta have the responsibility to ensure that every conscientious effort is made to relieve the Band's suffering," Munro wrote to Alberta's then native affairs minister, Mitt Pahl. "At the very least, we should be motivated by a sense of social justice and provide a land base for their reserve." Pahl refused.

The Glenbow people renamed the show, but Ominayak still objected and called for a boycott. He wrote to museums in Europe and the United States that had been asked to lend items. In his letters, he explained that the Glenbow Museum was founded by a Calgary oil family, that its board of directors is appointed mostly by the Alberta government, that its list of donors reads like a mini Petroleum Club, and that the official corporate sponsor of The Spirit Sings is Shell.

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The book is full of photographs of artefacts that don't appear in the show because of the boycott, and it includes as supporters and contributors every museum and ethnologist who pulled out. No editor's note was added before press time, no errata sheet slipped in.

Both Harrison and Cameron write about fulfilling the "social responsibility," and that they hope "to initiate a dialogue with... Canada's native peoples," but the photographs and text bear no apparent relation to any living people. The pictures and descriptions of exotic clothing, tools, and artwork tell of a past, not of a present or future. And in perhaps the most ironic passage of the book, Harrison writes that the native peoples of Canada were saved from genocide only through the signing of treaties and the granting of reserves. As artefacts began arriving in Calgary for the show, and as the book was going to press, the Lubicon Lake Cree band still had no reserve, and one-third of them were on medication for tuberculosis — a disease that has preceded the demise of aboriginal peoples the world over.

"This book is dedicated to the native people who created the magnificent objects... included in the exhibition," the last paragraph of the book reads, in final testimony to the curators' incomprehension. "It is their spirit which continues to sing among the native peoples of Canada today."
The art of conversation

'The blundering, homespun, know-nothing Canadian persona that some of our older writers enjoyed projecting in interviews is, thank heaven, a thing of the past'

By George Woodcock

is coming whom? And then, opening the last interview but one, I came to the words of Margaret Atwood: all that I had been thinking was encapsulated there. "Interviews," she says in response to Hancock's first question, "are an art form in themselves. As such, they are fictional and arranged. The illusion that what you are getting is the straight truth from the writer and accurate in every detail is false... Any memory of what you did at the moment of writing is just that, a memory. Like all memories, it's usually a revision, not the unadulterated experience itself... Let's just state at the beginning that interviews as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, are suspect. They're fictions.'

True enough. As an ardent Proustian, I recognize the shaping power of memory. As a writer of autobiography, I recognize how far apart, in the end, the arranged account of one's life stands from the real chaos of existence. And the main difference between autobiography and interview is that between monologue and dialogue. What we get from both — even if that is not what we are seeking — is a fictional arrangement of actuality. Which, in spite of Peggy Atwood, is truth of its own kind, even if it is not wholly literal. And, provided that we relate interviews to the actual writings of the authors involved, as another kind of literary creation, we can gain a great deal from reading them.

Considered in this way, interviews have been among the important documents of Canadian literature over the past 35 years; they have given us writers, who before the late 1960s were a distinctly neglected and submerged fraction of the community, a means to express themselves beyond the confines of their work and to project in public the persona of the creator as well as that of the creation — the fictional character or the poetic voice.

Already there have been a number of notable volumes of this kind: Graeme Gibson's Eleven Canadian Novelist in 1973, Donald Cameron's Interviews with Canadian novelist in 1975, and Alan Twigg's For Openers in 1981.

...
Falls the Shadow

by
Sharon Kay Penman

The bestselling author of "The Sunne in Splendor" returns with another rich historical novel about the divine right of kings' conflict between Henry II and Simon de Montford.

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22 BOOKS IN CANADA, May, 1988

Geoff Hancock's "Canadian Writers at Work" follows the example of Gibson and Cameron by sticking to fiction writers, though he includes storytellers as well as novelists. The other collection I am reviewing, "So to Speak," follows Twigg's example by recognizing that verse writers can be just as interestingly volatile as prose writers, and its editor, Peter O'Brien, has included a number of poets. The interviews he reproduces were conducted by various people, but all were included in "Rubicon," one of our best recently founded little magazines. Geoff Hancock's appeared in "The Canadian Fiction Magazine," which he has edited with great skill and discrimination for well over a decade.

If we are prepared to suspect what writers say about themselves and their work as much as in these fictional novels we are automatically suspicious of the narrator in a novel, what can we expect to gain from reading such interviews? How can they interest us if we are bound to distrust them as revelations of the creative process?

They can interest us precisely in the way Atwood reprints as an art form. Considered in this way they become fascinating for the sometimes evasive, sometimes exuberant, sometimes intensely charming, sometimes unexpectedly thoughtful, sometimes expectedly dull everyday personae of writers most of us know mainly through their work.

Here the fact that what one reads are dialogues rather than monologues becomes important, and so does the skill of the interviewer and the kind of rapport he or she establishes with the writer being interviewed. Geoff Hancock is not only a skilled interviewer, he is also a warm and engaging personality, and there are some occasions when the chemistry of minds coming together produces amazing results. His interview with Mavis Gallant is a perfect example of this. Mavis Gallant, a humorous, sophisticated, immensely intelligent and fast-ranging — is a master of conversation on both sides. She, in a less elegant way, is his talk with Jane Rule and Alice Munro. He draws from Josef Skvorecky not only a splendid statement of the thoughts of a writer in self-exile from Easter Bumps but also a fine justification of realism as a viable trend in modern fiction.

It was interesting to see the overlap between Hancock's and O'Brien's collections: Five writers were common to the two collections — Atwood, Skvorecky, Gallant, Leon Rooker, and Jack Hodgins — and this may say something about the way literary fashion has moved at the end of the 1980s. The rest of Hancock's interview subjects are already fairly well established — Rule, Munro, Robert Kroetsch, Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee — while, with the exception of Rudy Wiebe, the others in Peter O'Brien's So to Speak are lesser known but interesting writers, most of them poets.

If quality is anything to go by, we should in the near future be hearing a good deal more about Rod Borsor, Peter Van Toorn, Nicole Brosard, Christopher Dewdney, and Erin Mouré. These interviews are really the collection's strength.

For So to Speak it would be interesting to see Canadian Writers at Work, because there are several interviews of varying levels of skill. This especially affects the quality of interviews with the established writers, though all is not lost, for at times different interviewer and different circumstances bring out other aspects of the writer. Mavis Gallant, for example, who was so expansive and genial in her beloved Paris where Geoff Hancock interviewed her, becomes withdrawn and gloomy almost testy when she was interviewed during her period as writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, where she would have been very much at home and the surroundings unencumbered. Leon Rooker, on the other hand, adopts a much more interesting persona with Peter O'Brien than with Hancock, and this seems truer to his work.

Mavis Gallant, who was expansive and genial in her beloved Paris, became withdrawn and gloomy, almost testy, when she was interviewed in Toronto.

With some of the younger, newer writers, the less professional style of the So to Speak interviews seems to work admirably in bringing out their thoughts and natures. I found those with Rod Borsor, Peter Van Toorn, and Christopher Dewdney so illuminating in an intellectual way that I immediately took down their books and read them more attentively than I had at first. What impressed me was the broad thoughtfulness, the sensitivity to environment, and the restless though unpretentious erudition of these new poems. The blundering, homespun, know-nothing, Canadian persona that some of our older writers enjoyed projecting in interviews is, thank heaven, a thing of the past. Writers now are anxious to show that their art cannot be defended by the creator's pretence of ignorance and uncouthness in a world where knowledge is expanding in such extraordinary ways.

And so, even granting that interviews are no more to be taken literally than any other kind of fiction, and that the processes of writing are not so radically explainable as many writers like to pretend, these interviews are fascinating and immensely valuable for their informal insights they give us of creative minds at work, or were making their public images. As in their written works, so in these interviews — the way novelists and poets speak is always as important as what they say, and perhaps more revealing.
THE SILENT GAME:
THE REAL WORLD OF IMAGINARY SPIES
by David Stafford.

As Long as there has been organized warfare there have necessarily been spies, but until the 20th century espionage wasn’t a professional occupation. Spies were often gentleman amateurs, carrying on a tradition begun by authors like Duckworth Drew, a pipe-smoking bachelor who from time to time leaves his comfortable Bloomsbury flat to go to the Continent on secret missions for the Foreign Office. Out of this tradition came Richard Hannay and many others. And there remains a touch of it even among the professionals of John le Carré’s Circus and Anthony Price’s Department of Intelligence Research and Development. George Smiley, though perhaps not quite a gentleman, is essentially a scholar; a good deal of the time he is either actually or ostensibly engaged or retired. I, the Spy Who Came In from the Cold, Leamas is told that Smiley has retired, and anyway disapproves of the proposed operation. It takes an attentive reader to detect that in truth Smiley has devised and is running the whole thing.

There’s David Audley, the quiet and difficult hero of the novels of Anthony Price — a writer to whom Stafford, in my regret, gives only two sentences. Audley, like Smiley, has a lifelong rival in the KGB. In For the Good of the State (1986) this protagonist, Panin, has arendevous with Audley in a lonely spot on Exmoor. They have a long conversation, and in this exchange Audley encapsulates the English spy tradition:

“You are clever, David. But you are an amateur.”

“N.0. You’ve still got it bloody-wrong, Nikola — the word is ‘General’ not ‘Amateur’”.

Le Queux let it be understood that in the intervals of writing his 40 odd novels he himself went on glamorous secret missions. This was quite untrue. But the batch of spy writers who followed him on the heels of Le Queux and his contemporary E. Phillips Oppenheim, besides being readers of his books, were either in or closely linked with the intelligence services during the war with Germany that Le Queux and Oppenheim had predicted: John Buchan, A. E. W. Mason, Compton Mackenzie — who was later prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act — and Somerset Maugham — who was compelled to suppress parts of his Ashenden. What remained became standard reading for new recruits to the SIS. Just at the end of the war Valentine Williams, a former war correspondent and Guards officer, started a hugely successful series of novels featuring a villainous and repulsive German spy known as Clubfoot. Among his ardent readers was the boy Kim Philby — whose nickname, of course, was taken from Kipling’s boy spy.

And so on it goes, with art imitating life and life retaliating by imitating art right back. Former spies write books, active spies read them attentively. I find amusing that when The Spy Who Came In from the Cold was published to a chorus of praise there were two voices that raised strong objections to it. The dissenting critics were Kim Philby of the KGB and Richard Helms of the CIA.

No harp music

by Brian Fawcett

GYPSY GUITAR:
ONE HUNDRED POEMS OF ROMANCE AND BETRAYAL
by David McFadden.

DAVID MCFADDEN has always been a man more interested in earthly dragons than in the interpretation of heavenly logic. In his introduction to Gypsy Guitar, he remarks that the music of any half-drunk gypsy guitarist is “more likely to make your hair stand on end than a host of heavenly harpists.” And then he adds a hundred poems of romance and betrayal that flow out absolutely no harp music. Instead, he has gathered together a “astonishing array of the dragons of earthly love — a backbiting, treacherous, ungodly troupe — and has made them sing to his unique and wily inventive accompaniment.

The patron dragon of this book is Rabelais, a number of whose poems McFadden “translates” through the volume. The mate to this dragon is the absent lover to whom many of the poems are addressed. No doubt she is a real person, but the closest McFadden comes to describing her is as his litter-mate. Those who are interested in gossip will speculate about her identity. They will be missing the point and wasting their time.

Lesser dragons abound. D. H. Lawrence makes an appearance, as do Susan Muaghrave, a “number of Japanese haru artists, McFadden’s penates. An enormous number of friends and acquaintances, several additional lovers (to throw the gossips off the trail), and a selection of wild and domestic animals, including some recurring elephants. There were quite a few of those, actually. In “Elephants,” McFadden tells of a “encounter with an elephant at the Granby Zoo: when I held out a handful of nuts to the bull elephant he took only half, then slowly backed up so his mate could have the remainder. The eyes of these and other spiritual lovers is leg chains checked to see if I understood and appreciated their gentle gesture of kindness and love, and I felt I’d been blessed by the Pope. And people who live in the vicinity of the Granby Zoo when you get to know them will make sure only in you that late at night after they turn off the television they lie in bed listening to the earth and sky quivering and murmuring with the mammoth heartbeats and organs of the elephants.

I record this passage not to say that it is the book’s best, but that there are at least several hundred “lore — not necessarily about elephants either — that contain a similar, but unique intensity of perception.

Everything McFadden writes is first and finally unpredictable and interesting, from his recent novel, Canadian Sunset, to his bizarre pronouncements on coin-
Cush-cush
and casuarina

By Brent Ledger

PROUD EMPIRES

AUSTIN CLARKE has run for mayor of Toronto, been an adviser to a Barbadian prime minister, worked as a cultural attaché to the Barbadian embassy in Washington, and was until recently a censor for the Ontario Film Review Board, so it's not perhaps surprising that his newest novel, Proud Empires, should sketch the sticky web of power.

Nor even that he should do it with such cutting delicacy. Clarke has written 10 other books, one of which is his best. But more surprising is the philosophy of the common man — English "communism." And ha watches as the men heed the implied threat of the policeman's club.

But as the election heats up and tensions increase, Boy's horizons begin to expand and petty village rivalries give way to larger concerns. He watches as the prime minister, a political innocent, sits in a restaurant and orders one of the perquisites of his position, a steak dripping in blood.

And that perhaps is the biggest failing of the book, for that's all Boy does: be watches. Although

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memorable characters: his own
parent, Sarge the brutal
policeman, and Seabert the
foolish
tailor.
The sketchiness of Boy’s char-
ter and the novel’s shifting
point of view and the book of pas-
soon doesn’t affect Boy, why
should the reader care?
And yet that is probably, in part,
what Clarke intended. The dis-
tance between author and subject,
hero and events, is no accident but the result of a careful
calculation. Girded in concrete
detachment, Clarke dissects
desire and violence alike with a
deft, intellectual touch designed to
amuse, not passion.
By and large, he succeeds.
Some of the set pieces — nota-
ably Boy’s journey to meet his
uncle and a ride in the expensive
car — are models of small-scale
drama, and the prose, always
tense, dry, and witty, snaps tight
as a whip throughout. But it’s the
dialogue, with its distinctive
"Baja" rhythm and pronunciation,
that brings Clarke’s char-
ters to life and gives the book its
special stamp. Sharp, colourful
and pungent, it resembles (oddly
enough) the quirky dialogue
of Ronald Firbank, another master
of colloquial speech. Whom other-
wise Clarke does not at all
resemble.
From the rather tentative note
which Prelude Ends ends, one assumes Clarke intends a
sequel — sooner, perhaps, rather
than later, since the book, though
new to Canada, was published
two years ago in England. If so, it
should find a ready audience,
primed for more of Clarke’s sharp
criticism and observant
cynicism.

Events in the atmosphere
By Bruce Whitteman

**PERMUGENESIS: A**
**RECOMBINANT TEXT**
**by** Christopher Dewdney,
Nightwood, 48 pages, $13.95 paper
(ISBN 0 88802 103 5).

In 1974, Chris Dewdney has
been working on a long poem
prose entitled A Natural History
of Southerwestern Ontario. The first
book, which was rejected by a
number of Canadian publishers
before being accepted by Geoff
Young’s The Figures Press in
Berkeley, California, appeared
in 1978 as Spring Traxces in
The Control Emerald Night. Book
two, The Genocide Asylum, was
Permugenesis is book three of
this poetic project.
A favourite party game of
the Surrealists was the so-called
cadaver exquis, a kind of grand
collaborative drawing in which
each participant in turn con-
tributed to a" evolving image
without seeing the previous parts
of the whole. The result would
naturally be a surprising com-
posite of discontinuous pieces.

Dewdney has created the third
book of his long work in a some-
what analogous fashion from
the texts of books two and three,
though he alone is responsible for
the result. words, phrases, and
images from the two existing
texts have been recombined (in
a process parallel to a geneticist’s
work on DNA) to produce Per-
mugenesis, whose title one might
gloss as "creative reworking."

The book is a kind of collage,
then, and anyone familiar with the
erlier parts of the work will find
many familiar themes recontextu-
alyzed.

The language of the poem, like
its formal procedure, is reminis-
cent of surrealism (I think of Max
Ernst especially, who also knew
something about natural history).
The opening paragraph is charac-
teristic:

There is a second order of dark-
ness and lens of distance. Brick
walls radiating tangible heat at
night flowering in the inky strata
of fat storms. Limestone cor-
r ridors of stone, the miniature
jungle of a rainless summer
day in hot August. The fingers
on vacant F.M. patios at night.

The whole text is permeated
with a hothouse eroticism (and I
use the word hothouse without
disgust); the natural world of
insects, plants, and atmospheric
events is heavy with copulative
energy and presented on a time
scale that telescopes all of evolu-
tion into a radiant present.
"The source a distant thunder
in a weird remote control music of
the stars. Rain fragmentation of
stone within sky."

One has to give in to the mar-
vellous sexual power of Permu-
genesis’s language and not worry
too much over the ideological
content of sentences like "The body
a large yellow ochre terraced re-
gent command, a reconstruction
of the world" or "Staggered
walls of the distant low fountains
of synthetic envelopes."

The book’s magic works best if, as
readers, we accept Dewdney’s
contention in book one that "We
are all strangers here (nocturnal)
in the fiction (of absolute) our own
hearts."

It is difficult to imagine a poem
more dissonant to Permugenesis
than Peter Dale Scott’s Coming
to Jakarta. Scott’s is a book-
length autobiographical medita-
tion on the politics of violence. It
is "more than a little reminiscent
of both Pound and Williams,
the latter in its formal pattern
(pseudo-haedic stanzas) and the
former in its allusiveness (it
is replete with citations that are
identified in right-hand margins,
and a bibliography is provided).
The political material focuses on
U.S. involvement in Indonesia
(hence the title), but that particu-
lar episode in American imperial
history is made a’ emblem for the larger
view in which political manipula-
tion, violence, and economic
oppression, so to speak, are seen
to warp the lives of all of us.

Intervenw with this aspect of
the poem are details from Scott’s
own life (he is F.R. Scott’s son),
for be is too wise simply to write
an objective indictment. As be
puts it in section three:
"To have learnt from terror
not just to have seen
but to ease into the world
the unreal breathing within us
and in the closing lines of the
book:

"Let there be the courage
of wordsworth’s phrase intentionally,
Scott manages with remarka-
ble deftness to integrate the
world of international political
violence with his telling of the
growth of a poet’s mind. A use
Wordsworth’s phrase intentionally,
Scott’s memories of his
childhood have a kind of Words-
worthian aura about them."

This is so despite the opening image
in the poem of the three desks in
Scott’s office at which the vari-
ous parts of his life take place
(reading Virgil, investigating pol-
tical wrongdoings, and writing
poetry). A image of fragmenta-
tion, the poet’s life that the
book itself belies. It is Virgil’s
descent into the underworld that
Scott chooses to mention, an
appropriate image for the voyage
his poem takes through the con-
temporary world of political
assassination, totalitarian govern-
ments, secret police machina-
tions, and so on. This is material
that English-language poetry
can rarely deals with, and though
it has the potential to become a
catalogue in which the poetry
itself gets forgotten, Scott suc-
cedes remarkably in holding it
together by placing himself, ulti-
mately, at the centre. Coming
to Jakarta records one man’s life set
in the context of the realpolitik. It is
hard to think of another work like
it by a Canadian poet.

**Galactic drift**

By Bert Cowan

**Tesseracts**2
edhited by Phyllis Gotlieb and
Douglas Barbour.
Press Porch, 235 pages, $8.95
paper (ISBN 0 88802 270 3).

IT IS RIGHT that this anthology
should include a story by the win-
ner of the Arthur C. Clarke
Award for best science fiction in

May 1988, BOOKS IN CANADA 25
1987 — none other than Margaret Atwood for The Handmaid's Tale. Her story in this collection — "Freeoral" — is not in my view the best, but it may be the most representative of what is happening both in Canadian science fiction (or science fantasy), and in the genre at large.

In a literary field that is still so controversial, and still so unexplored, an orientation may be in order. Science fiction has changed a lot since I became so addicted, a good 80 years ago, of what was then a brashly literary Ifords (though with some respectable ancestors) to be found at its best in Hugh Gernsback's Amazing Stories. It seems in retrospect to have been concerned mainly with space flight and associated bug-eyed monsters, time travel (not very subtly), and scientific gimmickery, often about the fourth dimension of space. An imaginative story that I can recall was titled "John Jones's Dollar" (author's name forgotten, but doubt retrievable). It was an exposition of what could happen to one dollar left undisturbed on deposit at compound interest for decades and maybe centuries. Possibly there was something wrong with the analysis, and probably only an economist could explain what, but it was a costly addiction.

My addiction has become greatly attenuated. in step with the vast expansion and consequent dilution of the genre, but one facet has improved over the years: SF has become more human. if often in opaque ways.

Atwood's story is certainly human; like most of the best in the field, it extrapolates from current situations into the future, in this case the future of sexual diseases like AIDS and herpes and perhaps of others yet unknown. It is always best in this kind of story not to explain too much. Thus rubber body stockings and turkey basters are mentioned only in passing and without elaboration. Certain scenes are also put to good use, one of them an unnamed theme park north of Toronto. The ending is as chilling as they come.

As for the result of this collection, it's a mixture of excellent, good, passable, and some that I found quite unreadable. One mercurially short example of the last is titled "4179," with the subtitle "The Mikuro Cartha's Report from Margolux and Rahorux from the Files of Alyerie and Fonce." It has characters with such names as Dogan and Janu, and nouns like kennaz and alings and... But why go on?

William Gibson's contribution, "The Winter Market," with a glimpse of a century far in the future, is a fascinating look at the possibility of a kind of human survival in a computer and what it might cost. Kathryn A. Sinclair's "Raindance" demonstrates that you may not need to dance only for rain. This one, too, is chilling.

Two or three stories are about the end of the world, or some interim stage on the way there. Andrew Weiner's "Distant Signals" holds out the hope, or threat, that there may be a future for today's trashy television programmes long after the terrestrial reruns are over.

There are some examples of poetry, which — like most SF poetry — is best passed by with eyes averted.

The field is one in which individuals' tastes can vary so widely that there may be no point in seeing on one story in this volume as the best; but for me it is "Ashland, Kentucky," by Terence M. Green. Definitely not science fiction, though it does play with time, it is a fantasy, at once charming and unsettling, and something more — a ghost story. That kind of writing is becoming so much a lost art that this story alone is worth the price of the book.

Networking

By D. French

**TURN UP THE CONTRAST:**

CBC TELEVISION DRAMA SINCE 1952

by Mary Jane Miller

**CBC Press, 458 pages, $34.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7748 0278 2)**

In her analysis of CBC productions from 1952 to 1984, Mary Jane Mirr defines as drama "a story in progress" and includes "both the predictable 'black hat-white hat' formula action-adventure show and the most complex, intellectually challenging and aesthetically beautiful single television film." In short, everything on the box but the ephemera of sports and news.

A major difficulty with a project of this kind is that before VCRs came into widespread use in the '80s, all television was ephemeral. Even the CBC — and this is the book's most poignant note — had to file the chief chrysalis of its, and Canada's, history. At least a quarter of Turn Up the Contrast is devoted to syndepose and brief sketches of programmes, delivered by Miller, a professor of dramatic literature at Brock University, in a breezy, conversational style as readable as it is subjective. Her quick judgements are sure to provoke debate of the kind that "This How Has Seven Days" raised in the House of commons. (Were we ever so innocent a country? Are we still?)

From its beginning, the CBC refused to develop a "star" class of performers. Ostensibly, this was to prevent the commensurate salary demands, but one suspects a Canadian modesty at work, combined with a suspicious resentment of tall poppies. The policy may have led to the success of programmes such as "Wojecki," in which the dominant focus was allowed to be the script rather than the personality. Miller contends that this is the CBC's great strength, that it "anthropologizes" even the continuing series, creating a reflective and reflexive process for examining regions and issues — in effect, a national theatre.

By contrast, Miller presents the grueling American schedule as one reason "stars" must ride the wave with characters based on their most comfortable personas. Yet Miller notes that Bruno Gemssi in "The Beachcombers" does play a role approximating that of an America star: "If you don't like his particular acting presence, you don't like the series." Familiarity with that presence creates a fascinated disbelief as one examines the reproduced still of Gemssi as Peer Gynt (or reads a textual reference to his Hamlet.) The Beachcombers receives more attention than any other CBC effort. Miller devotes 18 pages to its mythology, from coming-of-age theme episodes to recurring motifs. More interesting is her invention, described by Miller in what one hopes is a parody of L. A. — speak: "From this general framework came a treatment... a concept is expected to be 'fresh' (but recognizable). have the potential for many stories lines, and be geared to a specific demographic cross-section..." She concludes that the CBC has yet to "find the television series ever made in Canada" and it's a good face to present to the world.

On reading that Miller watched 40 "Beachcombers" episodes in 10 days, one wonders if she succumbed to what psychologists call "reaction formation." Maybe Gemssi does a good lunch?}

Personalities, or a kind of Celebrity Pursuit, are a large part of the book's nonacademic. Why, one wonders, is Barbara Hamilton a "brilliant comedienne" but Rosemary Radcliffe a "delightful comic actress?" And why does she get no adjectives at all? Why is it mentioned that John Vernon achieved less stonnard in the U.S. after leaving "Wojecki," while no note of censure touches a reference to Al Waxman's work on "Cagney and Lacey?"

**Turn Up the Contrast** is the first of three planned books: the second and third are to be interviews with CBC personnel and accounts of decision-malting and the influence of technology. That may explain the exclusion from this volume of the supporting arguments some observations demand.

For example, it is to the CBC's credit that "Take 30" was developed at a time when afternoo viewers were assumed to be "only housewives"; such a farsighted concept is surely more important than the network's failure to produce a soap opera.

Miller's theory that Canadian series television is most successful when it plays against its own formula is interesting, and probably true, but not supported if "Sidestreets" is perceived as more enjoyable for being more "realistic" than "Harry-O" considering the latter's droll self-consciousness. Close-up shots deserve more attention than a dismissal as "standardized
From aleph to Merz

By Fred Wah

THE MERZBOOK: KURT SCHWITTERS

POEMS
by Colin Morton
Quarry Press, 65 pages, $10.56 paper
ISBN 0 915657 46 2

ABRAHAM
by Colin Browne
Brit. Books, 80 pages, $7.30 paper
ISBN 0 915652 59 6

NOTICE THESSONS. But these two books of poetry share something besides a numerical coincidence and their authors' first names. Both collections are powerful illustrations of the range of intellect that occasionally still operates in poetry. They document how the poem can still embody the act of knowing, the verb of it, the mind as it makes (poetry). Thus these two books are delightful in the sheer activity of their poetic sensibilities. They are well worth reading simply because the writers value formal risk, gauge mind-language perception, and incur the extent of current poetic composition.

The Merzbook is, accord to the jacket blur, 'an innovative, narrative poem loosely based on the life and art of the renowned modern German collage artist, Kurt Schwitters.' The book includes a Schwitters chronology and the poems are presented in chronological order. But it is not necessary to know much about Schwitters in order to read this book. (Morton points out that Schwitters's own 'novels and plays subvert the very notion of anyone's lifestyle.') Morton so successfully prophecies Schwitters's 'i' in these poems that the reader not only learns about the German artist's involvement in Dada and his and his son's flight from his Nazi homeland, but, more meaningfully, his apprehension of an artistic world.

In his appropriation of Schwitters's voice (and others), Morton dramatizes the history and aesthetics that surrounded Schwitters, we learn, for example, of the 'Bi of Men':

And in an instant what had span in my head for days
resolved.

"I call them all merzable,
Merz, not schmerz, is the core of my art."

We hear Schwitters picking up scraps of garbage for his collages, railing against his detractors, soulfully soliloquizing his "Merzing" of his house ("The Cathedral of Erotic Misery") is quite a beautifully crafted lyric poem. And the book is full of the particular of image-building, from a scene on a beach to an eggcup steaming in the sun.

This voicing seems most accessible in its CBC-poe tic-narrative style (selections won third prize in the CBC literary competition), but the book is more than that. The poems are accompanied by several Schwitters collages to help ground all the talk about art. Perhaps most outstanding, however, are Morton's adaptations of several Of Schwitters's sound poems and his translation of "Anna Bloom.

These resonate with the range of play and colour of the originals. Colin Browne's Abraham also plays off a persona. But the biblical Abraham is used here in some vast plot of the mind as a device through which a narrative poetic process poses and works out the right questions and maybe the right answers. Browne seeks to reconstruct his own, a family, story through the principle of known particulars. That is, he moves from concretion to conception and the connections get the mind into shape, into narrative—join the dots. What is intriguing about the way Browne does this is how, because it is an oblique process after all, his poetry becomes such a solid track for the imagination's fragmentations.

The estrangement of the connections in the book is slightly mollified by the glossary. There the reader can see early on the large poetic propositions Browne has chosen to work with. For example, there is the aleph on the cover, which begins a structural run actualized in the alphabetized titles of the poems, the semantic field and hierarchy of names out of Babel, and language as imprinted root of consciousness, to be written, written over, crossed out, even. Such poetry can be heavy going but delightful in its demands on the intellect. The scatter of allusions in the book is primarily Canadian-European, an alphabetizing of childhood, the Second World War, the father, boy scouts, cameras, and other "dots." "Jerusalem" gets to Tuzla, "Tuzla from porch:

Mount Tuzla from porch: no rabbit's feet. Wanting subtlety. What's grand

looms lost now, summer made.

Though the matrix of image and language is based on a compositional stance of negative capability, some of the strongest poems work keenly on a music. There's lots of rhythm in the line.

The ear gets tone led through some of the difficulties the mind encounters: "Trees & adj., noises' noises sequaciously reproduced I then cran ked. Hoos, whoops, the like. Local 'colour'."

The skill and intense arduous of the mind at work in both of these books is delightful. The least one can learn from poetry that makes sweet music of the intelligence is that we can still measure, have measure.

Scales of grandeur

By Ray Filip

COLLECTED POEMS
by Ralph Gustafson

RALPH GUSTAFSON'S Collected Poems consist of two handsome volumes, a life's work dedicated to the immensity of a moment. The Gustafson "moment" can be equally attuned to Hayden or hummingbirds, the sea or the key of C. The "all" can take place in Samarkand or on Mount Revelstoke, at William Shakespeare's grave or waiting for forsythia to blossom in March.

Volume 1 covers 30 years of growth from Flight Into Darkness (1944) to Fire On Stone (1974). The early Gustafson plays the reluctant romantic in Lyrics Unromantic, or the Wordsworth of Lake Massawippi in "Rebus"

Daffodils still against the amorous wind.

Poising the bee with sweet illusion —

Cost! how the damp earth smells
And March wind slaps the cheek
With cold.

British influences interweave with his Swedish roots.

"From Sweden" sounds reminiscent of the 19th-century visionary poet Gustaf Fröding:

Far is summer from these snows.
The earth of any need
Is distant now.
Still be thy striving. It is night.
Across the snow a man goes home —
Whose window burns its simple light.

May 1988, BOOKS IN CANADA 27
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UBC press

Fat-Back & Molasses is still going strong after 15 years! Nearly 100,000 sold!
Gustafson developed a more native sense of neoclassicism with the publication of *Rivers Aspin Rock and Rocky Mountain Poems* (1960). His language begins to reflect Canadian idles and quietude inventively. His concerns with harmony between the temporal and the eternal also find expression in lighter tones such as "Dr. Johnson Kiiks Bishop Berkeley's Shin": "This planet postulates its pun! God's becoming. The moment's made.

In "Quantum Wintereone," ho uses commas, dashes, enjambments, and a deliberate blank space to suggest fragmented solitudes, breaks in continuity between major and minor events, postal delivery and deliverance, suspense and resolution built into the minutest details of the landscape:

At night, night now pitch, the brain,
Hailed for nail-sacks at the strung
Lantern — the far horizontals
A moment,
A history happening
The hills — alongside, panis, numerous,
Pristine, bald
Then falls past.

Ralph Gustafson renders to caesura the things are a caesura's, and to God the things that are God's. "In the Yukon" employ the technique to achieve a contrapuntal tension between death and renewal, descending and ascending, the past end the flashing instant:

In Europe, you can't move without going down into history.
Here, all is a beginning.
I saw a salmon jump,
Again and again, against the current,
The timbered hill a background,
Avocado grown Untouched through; the salmon jumped, silver.

Such idyllic dialectics would be mere metaphysical mush were the author not political as well. *Thesauri and Variations* For *Sounding Brass* deals with social discord, written by a man turning 60. Not 20. Gustafson's "comes into subdue, ornamented with musical terms such as "Noc-" **"Ricercare: And Still These Deaths Are Ours,** "Aubade: Quebec 1970," and "Cod: I think of AU Soft Limbs," but since Gustafson's forte is being there, these poems suffer from safe distances, with a TV or newspaper-clipping feel to them — though his heart is in the right place. "The Old Moscow Woman," from *Sicilian Poems, or more syn- first-hand account:

The street will always be dirty. Mankind is imperfect. Politics and bad manners Learn his decorating on the perfect peace. . . No matter the labour.
Snow and death come. Do they not?
And yet this woman sweats, For a few keops,
Tennis for her soup,
And is happy.

Gustafson's senior years continue to be prolific and golden. Verse composed within the past decade, between 1977 and 1965, appears in Volume 2. (Selections from his most recent book, *Winter Prophecies, are not included.*) "Wednesday at North Hatley" is a virtuoso piece. Midweek. Gustafson observes the capricious balance between nature and survival, order and chaos, the silent and the tensile.

The grotto
Fights for seeds, the squirrel
Waits his slender wire.
There is a victory;
The heart endures, the house
Achieves its warmth and where
He needs to, man in woolen
Mits, in muffler, without
A deathless, northern
ears . . . Chance is against
him.
But softly the snow falls.
Touch wood.

*Québecois* poets refer to such states as "mysticisme alatoire.
" It happens in English too. Expert in the field, Gustafson conducts us through the euphonious glory of the finite and the infinite in "Country Walking," "The Son in the Garden," "Snow, White Birches, Bach," or "The Colour of the Crystal Day." His is a snowy and sunny gravity. His eye for the finest points of aesthetics can see divine fire still alive on the stone of Chartres, or discern earthly still in "Aspect of a Cut Peach."

"Rotten weather in Ontario raised the rarity of that peach. The skin pealed."

"Back like a non-past //<enderpleasure, What of the cry of children that runs off

The guilty blade of silver?
Heaven is doomed.
Here. Only in paradise are

Prized purely and is pith succulent.

Wallace Stevens appears repeatedly. Ghost notes. "Rondo in Triads" resembles Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" with lines such as: "Cézanne's apples. Who cares whether they are sweet or sour? I love! Appleness."

Gustafson's confessional love poems and "Rustico Beach" and "The Alcove" have been excluded from this collection for some reason. Love is certainly the grand feeling behind the suite of emotions with which he dignifies creation in all respects. Reading Ralph Gustafson is similar to watching a goldsmith at work, the poem as process, craft, exact. art. life. fullness, being. beauty moments. mastered.

It is a "Defence of Poetry" in the time-honoured terms of liberal humanism.

The book is trepaille, sonata form if you will, with the theme given in the minor key in part one. "On Poetry." modulating into a major key upon tempo in the middle section, "On Music." and returning more quietly, softened by nostalgia. in the last section. "On Circumstances." Although the last, frankly autobiographical, section will probably prove the most useful for literary historians, the middle section provides the best and the most interesting writing. If only the publisher had seen fit to publish a whole book of Gustafson's music criticism! In it, the author's erudition serves the subject under discussion rather than the subject doing the discourse. His enthusiasm is contagious and his knowledge useful. Not so the first section, which provides uplifting sermons on poetry as "The saving Grace."

By Susan Glickman

**PLUMMETS AND OTHER PARTIALITIES**

by Ralph Gustafson

*Sono Nis, $16.95 paper (ISBN 0 912203 53 1).

WINTER PROPHECIES

by Ralph Gustafson,

*McClintock & Stewart, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 3707 4)*

EVER SINCE his retirement from Bishop's University in 1977, Ralph Gustafson has been astonishingly productive. Issuing at least a book a year and revising yet again his *Penguin* anthology of Canadian poetry, the most complete volume of his short stories. The Vivid Air, was published in 1980; this past year we got his *Collected Poems from Sono Nis*, as well as his selected essays in *Plummet and Other Partialities, from* the same press.

There have also been two volumes of new work: something called *Manipulations on Greek Themes*, which I have yet to see, and the graceful *Winter Prophecies."

In his "Preamble" to *Plummet and Other Partialities, Gustafson states that "the urgency of the need to bring poetry back from deconstruction to verbal form and music determined the selection" of the essays included. This sets one up to expect a work of literary theory or criticism, something that would be very welcome from a craftsman like Gustafson. Als, except for some incidental comments in the collected preface to the Pelican/Penguin anthologies, and in the essays on Liszt and Wagner, nothing here remotely approaches analysis. Instead, Childe Ralph rides forth heroically to defend those beleaguered vestals, Civility and Grace, from the encroaching powers of darkness. (These powers keep changing their names and faces; I gather that Deconstruction is simply the current guise of the old enemy.) This book is a "Defence of Poetry" in the time-honoured terms of liberal humanism.

The book is trite, sonata form if you will, with the theme given in the minor key in part one. "On Poetry," modulating into a major key upon tempo in the middle section, "On Music," and returning more quietly, softened by nostalgia, in the last section. "On Circumstances." Although the last, frankly autobiographical, section will probably prove the most useful for literary historians, the middle section provides the best and the most interesting writing. If only the publisher had seen fit to publish a whole book of Gustafson's music criticism! In it, the author's erudition serves the subject under discussion rather than the subject doing the discourse. His enthusiasm is contagious and his knowledge useful. Not so the first section, which provides uplifting sermons on poetry as "The saving Grace."

"A Moral Procedure," "Wiz-
This poem is in the book’s last section, entitled “Apographe,” a musical term meaning that grace note placed just above or below the primary note — in this case, a playful turning aside from the “serious” themes expressed in the book's earlier sections. These are “Poems for the Times” (meditations on violence, themselves too often tortured and obscene). “Twelve Landscapes” (earlier published as a chapbook by Shaw Street Press, the best of these is the only one that isn’t a landscape: the exquisite love lyric, “Late February”), and the title section, containing the title poem. “Winter Prophecies.” This third section is the most domestic and personal of the group, and is the emotional core of the book. Quite a year for Richard Gustafson. Now how about a selection of critical essays? —

Her side of the story
By Myrna Kostash

QUEBEC WOMEN: A HISTORY
by the Clio Collective:
Micheline Dumont, Micheline Jean, Marie Lavigne, Jennifer Stoddart; translated by Roger Gannon and Rosalind Gill.

The contemporary women’s movement has achieved much: this history written only from the point of view of upper-class white males in battle and parliament will not do. This is history, and feminist historians, such as the Clio Collective of Montreal (Micheline Dumont, Micheline Jean, Marie Lavigne, Jennifer Stoddart), write to remind us that the “collective history of a whole population” entails a much broader project: the reconstruction of the lives of often nameless people by inquiring into the facts of everyday life.

In the case of Quebec women, this research is led by 500 years of research into housework, marriage, childbirth, and popular culture. What is women’s work? How do women give birth? How do they practice contraception? What is the effect of matrimonial property laws? What is the message of women’s magazines?

The Clio Collective has posed and answered these questions (among many others) as they relate to the women of Quebec. Here is fascinating material about household technology, sexual relations, girls’ education, convent life, factory work in the long history of Quebec’s history since its first settlers in 1617. The revisionist view of this project is obvious within the first 30 pages. The cult of the saintly Mohawk, Kateri Tekakwitha, for example, can now be seen as the “exaltation of a mythical virginity designed to weaken the resistance of Indians to Christian morality.” And the heroic adventurer of Madeleine de Verchères (she who held the Iroquois off at the fort) is now to be understood as the practical endorsement of the “law” concept of courage.

Because the exploitation of women at the hands of men and their institutions is hardly confined to one society, there is much in the history of Quebec women that echoes universal female experience. Maternity, for example, was a 19th-century Quebec, the death rate for women aged 30 to 40 was higher than that for men of the same age group because childbirth was so often fatal to the woman. Women were almost constantly pregnant, a reflection not only of the paucity of information about birth control (infanticide was employed at least as often as coitus interruptus to limit family size) but also of high infant mortality rates.

In the 1820s, for instance, born 14 children between 1724 and 1741, only three of whom survived her. By 1940, however, the average Quebec family had three children. And by the 1860s the women of Quebec, like women in all industrialized societies, were the beneficiaries of structural changes in education and the workplace that made large families less attractive and employment outside the home feasible if not imperative.

Everywhere in Christendom women have suffered the hostility of the Church to their sexual function and expression (a church-sponsored marriage preparation course in the 1940s advised husbands that a woman “may not seek or have her husband seek excitement for her if she has not experienced it” during coitus) and have endured the double whammy of state intervention into sexual relations — the distribution of birth control information, for example, became illegal in 1892 — a process culminating in what the authors refer to as “bio-power”: the control and exploitation of the female body by means of the professionalization of hygiene, childbirth, birth control and abortion.

That women everywhere have also been ingenious in subverting such control is revealed in the delightful note that, in its 1901 catalogue, Eaton’s announced the “Every Woman Marveling Shaving Kit” — a vaginal hygiene product that was also, incidentally, a contraceptive. And it is probable that, as far back as the 18th century, women made their own menstrual tampons.

Everywhere under capitalism women have worked outside the home: in 1825, 27 per cent of Montreal’s workforce was female (more than half as domestic servants. in conditions of terrible vulnerability to economic exploitation). And everywhere they have struck back at the employers who have refused fair wages and safe working conditions: the first important strike in the textile industry was led by 500 women at the Hudson mills just outside Montreal in 1880. Expressions of solidarity from male workers and male-dominated unions were not always forthcoming, however, and unions routinely negotiated lower wages for women workers. Women were considered unreliable unionists, and no wonder: at the end of the work day they did not hurry off to union meetings but home, to begin another work day.

Fie-haunted technological innovations were slow to appear in the home or were out of reach of working-class families. A coal-fired stove required five and a half bowels of maintenance a day com-
pared to the expensive gas stove’s one hour and 40 minutes. The transformation of women from rural producers into urban consumers (and, by extension, into housewives, economically dependent on a man’s wage) was another change experienced by Quebec women, and women throughout the industrialized world, at the turn of the century. But Quebec is also a specific society and in Quebec Women we read of the lives of Nuns, for example — by 1900, one woman in 100 over the age of 21 took final vows in Quebec — and how, in the long term, their strategy of an alternative female life freed of sexual and material obligation reflected them from the struggle for higher education and employment for women. We learn of the grip on girls’ education of the Church and the domestic science course; it was not until 1908 that girls had access to classical colleges (and through them to the universities) and only after 1961 that girls’ colleges were subsidized, although the state had been subsidizing boys’ colleges 1922.

The agricultural crisis that preceded the rebellion of 1837 forced farmers to change their diet and farm women to invent recipes for buckwheat and lentils in place of wheat — the celebrated pea soup dates from this period. As for the uprising itself, although women did not suffer military assault, hundreds lost homes and possessions to the British torch and were imprisoned for the British. Women’s rights to vote were also lost to the flood of women.”

right of the father! It wasn’t until 1975, when, according to the authors, Quebec feminists began to define their own political strategy independently of claims from unions, political parties and independentist groups, that feminism in Quebec took on the character of North American feminism in general: autonomous.

(The notorious Front de libération des femmes, which had denounced nation liberation projects that did not include women’s liberation, was born and died within a few months after the October Crisis.)

This is a very attractive book, beautifully laid out and larded with entertaining anecdotes, minibiographies and contemporary documents; as well, each section concludes with a bibliography of further reading, written with the synthesized voice of the four members of the Collective, it avoids the polyphony of the anthology (the all too typical text in Canadian women’s studies). Like the anthology, unfortunately, while long on analysis, it is short on theory of women’s history in the New World. Nevertheless, it may profitably and enjoyably be read by all who want to know what was going on back at the ranch while Champlain fiddled and Hochelaga burned. 

Tom and Mike

Tom Kent is a staunch advocate of having had access to Quebec too typical text of Gordon.”

The book is not witty or graceful, and Kent is not entirely an easy man to love. Intensely partisan and no stranger to vanity, he was a strong advocate of medicare without much good taste, a classic workaholic. But Medicare, the CF’s pioneering achievements in Saskatchewan, and went out of his way to contest a parliamentary seat against Tommy Douglas in B.C. in 1963. Many parts of his account are self-centred and self-serving, and some will smile at his portrayal of himself as a “radical.”

However, he builds a detailed, compelling case for the centrality of policy. Unlike John Turner’s surly and divided present-day party of drift, the Liberals of 1956-63 knew where they were headed and told the electorate what a Liberal government would do. Policy interested Kent and excited people. “Toronto workers and candidates generated campaign funds, and sparked participation. Carefully predetermined programs also led to very considerable accomplishments. Despite stumbling and scandals, the Pearson government delivered. “In a democracy,” says Kent, “prime ministers and their principal associates are not entitled to the luxury of learning on the job. They should come to office on the strength of having told the electorate what they aim to achieve.” And achieve they did, in live short years: national medicare, a pension plan, the flag, regional development schemes, and numerous initiatives of “co-operative federalism” or diplomatic federalism (in contrast to the confrontational style of Trudeau). It’s not an unimpressive record.

“I was all done, thanks, essentially, to one man: not I. B. Pearson, but Walter Gordon.” Gordon’s admirers will take great joy in this book, and find it an artful counterbalance to Pickersgill’s The Road Back and Pearson’s own charming Memoirs. Gordon is shown as a gentleman of honour and conviction and grace. It was a peculiar and base characteristic of Pearson that he was, at crucial times, loyal to his friends. This disloyalty, whether caused by weakness or by dithering or by an excessively diplomatic groping for the smooth way out, broke Gordon’s political career, killed the “great hearted” Favreau, and turned the gusy Judy LaMarsh to bitter resentment. The book is very revealing of Pearson, and might have been titled Mike and Me (if not Me and Mike). The Pearson that emerges is complex and by no means a hero to his intellectual valet.

Pearson’s reputation for weakness was a reflection of his unsuccessful parliamentary jousts with Diefenbaker, but Mike could be stubborn and prickly, very conscious of making his mark on history. There was the genially diplomatic Pearson, the chuckling self-deprecating Pearson, but also, “...contrary to a wide spread impression, Mike could times be unscrupulous, with his friends, and more than his enemies,” Kent recalls: “In style he had a disarming modesty... but underneath the pride was strong. He hated being bested by Diefenbaker, as he often was, and failing, as he often did, to impress an audience or to put his views across on television.” Of again:

The charm was indeed strong. One could become frustrated and angry, but he was so reasonably willing to listen, to join in criticism of himself or at least in half-recognition of a regrettable error, that it was difficult to be angry for long... Working with Mike Pearson was rather like the kind of love affair in which infection seems to be maintained, for a time, by quarrelling and making up.

A Public Purpose is a fine book, and a valuable one.
Joe's attempts to stay sober form the emotional centre of the book, even if at the beginning we are asked to identify more with Adele's struggles within a family in disarray. Whether the author has intended it or not, Joe Walsh takes on the role of the outsider. As he leaves alcohol behind, he discovers that it is the social glue without which his world cannot function. If you are on the wagon, and do not drink, you cannot have the friends you bad before. Even as those friends congratulate you for staying sober, they are underhandedly urging you to drink, because it's no fun having someone sober around. As a drunk, Joe mined his back carrying a truck engine across a yard: be went walking barefoot in January and stepped on a broken bottle. Sober, he begins to understand and simplify his endeavour is hostile to his small society and misunderstood by it.

Joe Walsh is not the hero of Nights below Station Street; if anyone or anything is, it is the neighbour's, the town, and the wasted nights lived out there. The book develop through juxtaposed portraits: the family, then each of the family members, then the friends and their interactions. That method can become irritating at points: just as we are warming up to Joe's struggles, symbolized by his constant back pain and fight for sobriety, the focus rapidly switches to another figure in the community. Sometimes the juxtapositions are informative; sometimes they are not. At one point a Russian freighter is stuck in the harbor, and an encounter between Myrrha, a Walsh family friend, and a Russian is described, but the effect does not go further than that of a vignette. The same goes for the episode of Joe at Alcohoholics Anonymous. The author is treading on potentially significant ground, but the juxtaposition technique he means uses must quickly abandon it. In the end, Richards is true to his title: he is recounting the nights of a street, one by one.

Richard's writing is in very simple, spare prose. Applied to Joe's quest to simplify his existence, the style is appropriate. When Richards writes, "his business of not drinking was horrible," the baldness of the statement sur-

prizes, then moves us. The scenes of understated jealousy (Rita can partake of a certain alcohol-based social life, whereas Joe cannot) are equally effective. Little by little, the novel shapes up as a story of a man trying to leave behind the only world he knows in a confused sort of fashion, and the people in that world who will not let him do it. And perhaps in the end, Joe triumphs, for the book's last scene is set in a snowstorm, in the woods, which is Joe Walsh's element.

Views of Rome

By Shelagh Conway

BELONGING: A BOOK FOR THE QUESTIONING CATHOLIC TODAY


ALWAYS ON SUNDAY


LUCINDA VARADY'S Belonging is subtitled A Book for the Questioning Catholic Today. The title and subtitle are apt for a Catholic who has explored ways of coming to terms with Catholicism in a changing world: Varady raises all the thorny issues - the ban on contraception, abortion, women priests, premarital sex, and the intolerance of homosexuality. She picks these questions out of the dirty laundry and holds them up for discussion. The voices emerging from the laundermat relate the experiences and feelings of many other Catholics from all walks of life and from around the world, as well as her own. These questions are not new. They have echoed throughout the past 20 years for Catholics who hope to balance their deep desire to belong with their doubts about a Church increasingly entrenched in the status quo of patriarchy and monarchy. Rome and its princes are as solid as the rock of Gibraltar. They refuse to budge. But still the question must be asked, insistently perhaps, since the passage of time has reduced their momentum and many Catholics have become refugees, renouncing the struggle and leaving the Church to seek dignity and justice elsewhere.

It is easy to be Catholic when one decides, finally, to obey, and obedience is essential to being a good Catholic, so said Pope John Paul II when he spoke to the American people in 1987. How then does the questioning Catholic still survive? I believe that one has to define one's personal faith and then try to fit that definition into the institution, instead of trying to adopt a preconceived notion of what the Church perceives as a good practicing Catholic or, alternatively, leaving the Church altogether. Sorry, Ms. Varady, that's not the way Rome sees it.

Still, Varady is pursuing "a sort of Catholic excellence," which she is not finding in the old rigid Church. Later in the book she claims that most Catholics she has spoken with feel that in observing the basic rules of Christianity they must come to terms with the old ways of tradition, and even that the discipline and authority are essential. This reader is confused. But, in all fairness, confusion is inevitable.

As the questions are carefully explored, with the notable exception Varady has done little to explain the disillusionment of feminists with the Catholic Church. She sprinkles words like sexism and patriarchy here and there but the issues are not adequately explored. The only reference to feminism is in relation to abortion and a woman's right to choose. Varady sums up feminism as a movement concerned with self-development and self-sufficiency and chides that there is a fine line between self-sufficiency and selfishness! There is no chapter devoted to the questions of feminists, as one might expect. Instead, approximately one-third of the book is devoted to this pivot issue, which many feminists believe will
finally bring the Catholic Church to its knees. The only viable way of coming to terms with the patriarchal oppression of the Church for must questioning women is to walk out and exchange “belonging” for dignity and justice. It's a pity Varley ignored that option.

Tom Harpur's Always on Sunday is a potpourri of issues, which he explores with insight and in many cases, insight. This book came out of a need to convey to ordinary people spiritual realities in terms they could understand. It is a compilation of the best of Harpur's columns that appeared in the Toronto Star over the past three years.

The essays cover a broad spectrum. They include a discussion of faith, bias in the Bible, the redemption of churches, consumerism, celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church, AIDS and the communion cup, and naturally, the explosive question of the role of women in the church. The reader is anxious to see what he has to say about whether organized religion can redeem itself from irrelevancy and a general lack of vitality in relation to its flock. He dismisses the Bible-thumpers; they are not the answer. We are relieved. He calls for “outreach” to respond to the spiritual hunger of people today, for the letting go of religious differences in the spirit of ecumenism, and for more meaningful sermons and satisfying experiences at the temple, church, or synagogue. The argument that through such actions religion “light heal the divisions in society is plausible on the surface, but loses force when one considers that it is organized religion that creates a climate of discrimination and alienation in society. Although there are laws in society to prevent discrimination against minorities, organized religion actively perpetuates such discrimination and gets away with it in the name of God and the Bible. Discrimination against women is an example: Harpur appears to habe some insight into women's battle for equality and dignity in organized religion, but his thoughts on male divorce-payment defaulters are disappoiiting. Many of them have been treated unjustly by the courts, he says. If he talked to any woman who is a single parent living on welfare about that issue he might gain more insight; if he looked at the statistics on the feminization of poverty he might be shocked. And Harpur lauds the movement of some organized religions towards inclusive language, but throughout his book he refers to God in the Generic He.

Enter the players
By John Gilbert

ENGLISH CANADIAN THEATRE
by Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly,

This neat little book appears in the new “Perspectives on Canadian Culture” series. The format is clearly dictated by the series: little more than a hundred pages long, it nonetheless has large ambitions: to be “the first single study to draw the various discoveries and insights of [recent] scholarship into a single comprehensive survey” and “to combine dramatic criticism and theatre history in such a way as to provide the reader with an evaluation of Canadian dramatic literature in English as it emerged [...] within the context of performance.” This is a tall order. Which the book’s highly qualified authors make a good stab at fulfilling, but which remains somewhat unmet in the end.

The authors of the book have traced the events and achievements of Canadian theatre along broad “political” lines. The three parts of the survey relate English-Canadian theatre’s slow emancipation from the hold of cultural colonialism, its struggle for an identity, and its final emergence into the Elysian fields of self-determination.

Part one, “Colonialism and Theatre in Canada,” tells us how in spite of a rich and vigorous indigenous drama the steady encroachment of foreign invaders kept Canada in thrall. This took the form of “occupation” theatre.

The literary event of the year from the Pulitzer Prize-winner of Ironweed. Quinn’s book is the narration by Daniel Quinn, orphan, of his adventure-ridden quest for true love and the answer to the elusive riddle of his own fate. The plot is magical and William Kennedy’s language brilliant in this mesmerizing tale.

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Muriel Spark’s delectable, funny and stylish new novel perfectly evokes London in the ’50s, and in particular the world of the vanished Kensington bed-sitters. It also takes a sly and immensely entertaining dig at the publishing scene. Concise, elegant and ironic, it is classic Muriel Spark.

$22.95 A Viking Canada Book
and drama; plays imported and performed (sometimes written) by British garrisons in the Maritime provinces, Ontario, and the West. Both the work and the ideas were imported from London, with occasional local forays into satire or personal or political.

Even at this early stage, theatrical activity in Canada was bedevilled by difficulties that are not uncommon in our own time: fervent moral earnestness on the part of audiences, which had an inhibiting effect on the repertoire, and the invasion of foreign professionals, especially Americans, who were here to make money. "Plus ça change . . ." the authors seem to be telling us, as we continue to combat the same bogeymen in our times.

Play-writing activity, while suggesting the growth of indigenous drama was, with the exception of comedy and farce, largely prolix and unpromising. Audiences too, after their early rambunctious and even violent response to theatre, seem to have undergone a progressive taming at the hands of middle-class morality.

Part two, on the emerging Canadian theatrical identity, gives much useful information about the growth of the "little theatre movement" and the crucial role of the Dominion Drama Festival in providing some cohesion to the disparate efforts of early heroes such as Herman Voaden, John Coulter, and Robertson Davies. But as the authors point out, much of the activity remained theatrically conservative and middle class. A fascinating but frustratingly brief section is devoted to the Worked Theatre and the upsurge of political theatre in the '30s; plays dealing with immediate political issues (Eight Men Speak, for example, unauthorised by four writers and dealing with the imprisonment of some Canadian Communists) and influenced by Brechtian anti-illusionist techniques, one wonders where the political theatre has disappeared to in our own time.

Part three, which deals with the growth and development of Canadian professional theatre, proves to be something of a tour de force in combining information and at least some attempt at brief analyses of the work of major Canadian playwrights like Herbert, Ryga, Reaney, Freeman, Walker, and French. Inevitably it becomes something of a compendium of names, titles, and theatres, and not much depth is reached. How could it be otherwise?

This brief survey, then, remains essentially ending with an extremely useful as a quick source of information and as an introduction. It seeks to do too much. Its political subtext, while rightly denouncing "colonization" and the failure of the Stratford and Shaw Festivals to foster Canadian drama, for example, also lapses into liberal nationalism and clichéd assessments (why is the adjective "strident" so often applied to Marat/Sade, drama, like Fenner's Joe Beef?) that seem at times to be part of the very Canadian self-denial the authors complain about.

Screen time

By Gerald Pratley

CANADIAN FILM

by David Clandfield


It cannot be argued that this slim comprehensive paperback on Canadian films by David Clandfield is of great value to the small library of works on the history of our cinema. It conveys the impression that it was written by someone who has no great interest in Canadian film history, little enthusiasm for it, and not much first-hand knowledge of it either.

This could be explained in part by two factors: first, the book is written as a survey, and like most of such, tends to be rather dry; and second, the subject is viewed from an academic point of view - detached, didactic, sometimes ponderous.

Throughout, it seems, motion pictures are not to be enjoyed along with an understanding of their form and substance; they

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are there to be analysed, dissected, interpreted, and done.

their life is systematically

drawn from them under the

relentless demands of

structural, polemics, empiricalism, feminism, constructivism, activism, and more. Not that these elements, fortunately, are carried to the extremes that prevail in must academic books on film.

As a survey, it is also written from within the walls of the classroom. The author seldom steps outside, and his knowledge of the real world of filmmaking is obviously limited. This means that while his facts may at times be correct, the interpretation of them is misleading.

One example of this is his description of the British government placing “a quota on foreign films.” The quota law was not a restriction as such on foreign films, but a requirement that British cinemas show an annual percentage of British Empire films. When the production of Canadian films made to help fill the quota (by American companies here) came to an end, he says, making of such films had “hindered the development of the Canadian film industry and culture,” which, in view of the absence of any significant filmmaking before quota films, was hardly likely. Clandfield is inclined to generalize over other areas in which he is reinterpreting previously written histories.

The book deals separately with almost every kind of filmmaking, from the silents to Grierson to television documentaries, with the feature-length films and the experimentalists in between. Trying to put them all into separate compartments creates problems, as the author admits, but on the whole he has brought it off without the seams coming apart.

As the author is an associate professor in the Department of French at New College, University of Toronto, it is not surprising that the emphasis is placed on the cinema of Quebec. While the importance of Quebec films and their superiority over most of our English-language films is not to be denied, it is obvious that he has seen them many times over, with the result that he tends to read the deepest meanings into them. Politically, his sympathies appear to lie entirely with Quebec, and those English-language films that are major achievements receive the same depth of analysis. Here a “there,” he authorizes a quick flash of his personality to appear. We could have done with more.

The most passionately awaited book on both the political and literary scenes in this country is one that in all likelihood will never appear — namely, the memoirs of Pierre Trudeau. After all, as well as holding the eminence as the dominant figure in Canadian politics for the past quarter-century, Trudeau has long been advertised as that rarest of figures: the intellectual in politics. One can only regret that the first-person accounts of his governments will be limited to those of Jean Chrétien, Gérard Pelletier, Keith Davey, and miscellaneous lesser lights, entertaining though they may be. At this point, Trudeau may understandably feel that he owes posterity exactly nothing; still, he has missed an opportunity to bequeath a human record of the higher politics that might have rivaled those of Ulysses Grant, Henry A. dams, or André Malraux.

In the meantime, Lifting the Shadow of War is not so much a dramatic return to the printed page by the impassioned essayist of Cité Libre as a documentary record of some of the international political battles of a man of action. In his foreword, Trudeau himself warns that this collection of “old prose” — interviews and speeches, mainly concerning his peace initiative of 1983 — is not the sort of writing that “leaps out at you from the page,” but may constitute a “useful reference to scholars.” Dry as that sounds, Lifting the Shadow of War is a book of profound importance.

As Trudeau points out, invocations of the nuclear threat to the human race have become so commonplace as to be boring. Nonetheless, in the early 1980s, he perceived that the renewed Cold War conducted by Ronald Reagan and the successive gesture politicians who shuttled back and forth from their hospital beds to the Kremlin was making that uninteresting apocalypse much more likely to take place. Canadians who take an interest in the issue of planetary survival — not nearly as interesting a topic as real-estate values or gourmet cookery, I know — can glean many pertinent lessons, some fairly disturbing, from this book.

The speeches and interviews in Lifting the Shadow of War do not contain a ready play of ideas: they are, however, the work of an exceptionally thoughtful politician. Although Trudeau’s initiative was dismissed at the time as a cynical electoral ploy to draw attention away from the country’s economic problems resulting from the 1981-1982 recession, his statements on the prevention of thermonuclear disaster are impressive in the balance they strike between realism and optimism — a balance rare in a debate that is understandably tinged with hysteria on both sides.

Trudeau is no garden-variety antinuke activist; he threads a very practical way through the maddening complexities of the nuclear arms issue. Although he has removed the nuclear capacity of the Canadian NATO troops in Europe, Trudeau continues to test the cruise missile, in the interests of living up to Canada’s responsibilities to the alliance. Repelled by the Reaganite rhetoric of “survivability” and “first strike scenarios,” he nonetheless declares the policy of unilateral disarmament suicidal. “If the nuclear threat is to be removed, he realizes that it will be accomplished not in the theatre of street demonstrations but in the councils of state.

Typically, Trudeau seeks to convince in his speeches not through barn-burning rhetoric but through the power of his logic, insight, and historical perspective. (Still, his oratorical skills are considerable; as an interview subject he is a kind of spontaneous dramatist who invents dialogue as he goes.) All the same, there was a definite element of the didactic in Trudeau’s peace initiative; the reaction, in Washington especially, was one of “cynical amusement” or “amused intolerance.” This type of response testifies most disturbingly to the waning influence that a middle power such as Canada can have in a world dominated by twin superpowers.

Trudeau’s peace initiative was clearly prophetic of the lessening of Cold War tensions, beginning with the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. Coming from a Canadian prime minister, similar proposals had little effect.

What is singular about Trudeau’s statements and communications is that they are couched in a quality found in international politics: in a universe of discourse where the empty pieties of bad faith prevail, they preserve an ironic and sceptical sensibility. For that reason alone, one can only exhort Trudeau to face up to the challenge of leaving a personal record of his public life.
Where the truth lies

By Linda Leith

TIME PRESSURE
by Spider Robinson

time travel. The first-person narrator, Sam Meade, is a time traveler from the city, living a solitary existence on the North Mountain of Nova Scotia in 1973 when he happens upon a winter evening, to witness the arrival in a blue bobble of a gorgeous naked female time-traveller called Rachel. The fact that Sam, as an avid reader of SF, is fully aware of the hazards of time travel, allows Robinson to toy with his readers' expectations.

Sam's ready acceptance of a time-traveller as his guest (and soon his lover) is explained partly by his hippie tolerance and partly by his familiarity with science fiction — there are references to the work of SF writers from Arthur C. Clarke to Poul Anderson and Samuel Delany. But does the narrator — or Robinson — really care whether we believe the story? If a cavalier prologue to the novel that harks back to so ancient precursor of science fiction, Robinson writes, “I guarantee that every word of this story is a lie.”

The appalling risks of changing the course of history that are always created by time travel allow Robinson to place the whole future of the human race in the balance when Sam wrongheadededly decides he has to kill Rachel. By the time Sam's best friend (from Sunrise, the neighbouring vegetarian hippie commune) has shot him dead, sod him emerges from his own blue bobble just in time to see the shot, and not at all surprised to find him attending his own funeral. And why the “balk at his robbing his own grave?” order to salvage a superfluous pair of Frye boots? These are literary salami tactics — slice after slice — and they work.

Robinson asks us to “keep living as though it matters — because it does.” And if you’ve ever wondered where all the hippos went, he’ll tell you: they just changed their appearance, spread out over the planet, and have steadily bee” dismantling people’s “defensive intolerance of anything new or different. This utopian view of a ‘60s paradise not lost — the novel ends with the hippos all living “happily ever after” — insists finally, in an epilogue, on Susan Charendoff, the best introduction to the subject yet available. He examines the issue from a legal and ethical point of view, sketches in some historical background, describes the politics that stirred around the commission's inquiries, and assesses its findings and the government’s response.

It is not an edifying tale, from anyone’s point of view. The crimes in question are appalling, defining the very frontiers of human evil. The indifference, or worse, of official Ottawa over the years to screening out such criminals is a poor reflection indeed upon the political and bureaucratic conscience. Yet the commission “ever answered the question of why suspected war criminals were allowed entry, contenting itself with recommending mopping-up operations long after the fact. Some of the answers lay in a 'excellent historical study done for the commission by Ali Rodal, which was never officially released. Finally declassified in censored form in response to Access to Information requests, the Rodal report informs the early chapters of Justice Delayed.

When the official inquiry finally did get underway in early 1965, after 40 years of inaction and obstruction, a new and highly volatile factor was added to the political mix. Suggestions were made that some war criminals might be collaborators from countries occupied by the Nazis, (an environably reasonable proposition based on the facts of history). A “unmilitary group of organizations representing ethnic communities from Eastern Europe took this as constituting an attack on their communities. When the possibility was raised of gathering evidence from the Soviet Union or other East bloc nations, shrill voices were raised suggesting that this was nothing less than a KGB-inspired plot — despite the fact that Reagan’s America had gathered such evidence and even deported some individuals to face trial in the Soviet bloc. Ancient tensions between Jews and Ukrainians were once again aired, to everyone’s discomfort.

Obsessive anti-communism was a major reason why war criminals found it easy to get into the country, since the security officials were too busy hunting Reds to pay much attention to Nazis. Now in the late 1980s, anti-communism was again being invoked as an excuse to continue inaction. Matas deals realistically and reasonably with these issues. Sometimes he seems to be bending over backward, as with his treatment of the Jewish-Ukrainian controversy. Not wishing to exacerbate the conflict that grew up around the commission, Matas may have pulled his punches regarding some of the extreme expressions of opposition to the inquiry.

As a lawyer, Matas is at his best presenting reasoned legal opinions on the various thorny questions surrounding prosecution for crimes committed long ago: extradition, revocation of citizenship, criteria for accepting evidence, retroactivity, and so on. Not every lawyer may occasionally find these arguments heavy going, but they are worth the reader’s attention. Matas himself comes down on the side of prosecutions in Canada. By early 1966, only a single charge has been laid, against a Hungarian collaborator.

Beneath the lawyer’s careful hand there is a burning sense of justice unfilled. The memory of the victims of Nazi genocide demands that those responsible be brought to court. The interests of humanity demand that such crimes not be seen to go unpunished, as a lesson to the future. Against these claims, so ably presented by Matas, petty bureaucratic excuses and self-interested ethnic attitudes seem “men and narrow indeed.”

35 BOOKS IN CANADA, May, 1988
Adrift
These three new novels seem unsure of what they want to be
By Douglas Hill

BRIAN MOON'S Seeds (Oberon, 160 pages, paper), presents a slight puzzle to the reviewer. The front cover calls the book "Part One of The Grapefruit Tree, A Novel in Four Parts"; the publisher's press release calls it a "first novel, ... the first part of a quartet of novels." Make up your mind, Oberon. At the risk of offending everyone connected with the venture, I'll discuss Seeds now, and deal with the whole project when it's finished (the remaining three parts are promised for 1988).

The novel is set in the small town of Union, in grain elevator country. There, some 20 years ago, 12-year-old Jonathan Cornung spends the summer with his maternal grandparents. The spring just previous, "in the city," marked what Jonathan calls "the beginning of the end of my innocence." Grandfather Caldwell and a few of the more unusual inhabitants of Union complete the boy's initiation into adult experience.

Each of the book's half-dozen episodes is narrated retrospectively; an adult Jonathan interprets the events of that long-ago summer; draws conclusions; speculates about the mysteries that confronted the child. This distance, consistently maintained, gives the novel its ironic flavour and allows Moon to present carefully detailed scenes that are often extremely funny. It also sets up the book's themes, which have to do with the ways we create the past, and provide ourselves with memories, by telling stories. This is a territory a Canadian reader has visited before, and Seeds is on the edge of being a bit too sugary-sweet, but its humour and the sharpness of its insights save it from tinitness.

Moon's writing is polished, though some of his dialogue is pretty stiff. (There are a few typographical errors -- let us hope that's what they are -- that an editor should have caught.) The grandfather, a winty eccentric who does routines and talks nonstop, is a memorable character, and Jonathan himself is generally appealing.

My main reservation about Seeds is that there isn't a lot to it; not much happens. What's there is pleasant enough, but I wish I could be a trifle more enthusiastic about three more volumes of the same.

The Restoration: The B & m-aim Years, by Keith Henderson (DC Books, 200 pages, $12.95), is also a civilized, literate novel, and also not exactly gripping, not exactly earth-shaking. The year is 1980, the Place is Montreal. The action is politics on the eve of Lesage's referendum. Henderson's hero, Gilbert Rollins, "pushing thirty, $380 in the bank and waiting on the Canada council for the next installment," baa moved back to his native Montreal from Toronto to work on his Ph.D. thesis, so architectural history of the city. What he really wants to do is find some meaning for his life, "get involved" satisfyingly with something, with anything.

Gilbert is quickly enmeshed in the political and emotional snarls of his family and friends, and discovers rather more meaning than he needs. Henderson is adept at satirizing ideologues of every persuasion, domestic or public. Various young radicals are fools, bureaucrats are crooks, Gill family are Bureaucratic bigots. The skewing is often savagely funny, though at times heavy-handed. There's a conspiracy plot to hold everything together, but it's creaky; there are some slow stretches in the action, chiefly when topicalness obstructs the flow of the action.

Henderson writes gracefully, except for some gory dialogue, and gets off some lines that should draw chuckles. The Restoration is intelligent and firmly opinionated, a civilized novel of ideas. There's a potentially rich subject here, which the story does justice to, but it doesn't do much more than that. Like Seeds, this is a competent and reasonably attractive book, but it doesn't seem to me a very important one.

That's pretty much my reaction to Max Layton's Some Kind of Hero (Mosaic, 260 pages, $10.95 paper). The novel has plenty of energy, but it loses its focus hum time to time, seems unsure of what it wants to be, and in the end fails to realize its ambitions.

The story takes place in a Vancouver Island logging camp perhaps 10 years ago. Graham Walker, 33, has dropped out of a couple of careers, seen his marriage dissolve, and generally lost hack of himself. He hopes a spell of hard work in the woods will give him direction, allow him to make a fresh start. He becomes involved with his co-workers and their problems, stumbles into a criminal plot, finds a reserve of honour and heroism, survives but just barely.

Layton is good with the surfaces of this rugged world; he makes sure the reader doesn't miss key details of the back-breaking and dangerous work, and he doesn't hold back on the horror or the violence either. His attempts at social comment, however, are perfunctory, and his philosophizing fairly shallow. The narrative voice is uncertain; the prose is short, choppy sentences, is often quite laboured; the production of the book itself is sloppy. Some Kind of Hero doesn't, despite its pretensions, rise much above the level of the comic book. There's a better novel in this material than the one Layton has written.

DEATH IN PRAGUE

John Reeves

"The claustrophobia of the closed circle of suspects symbolizes the larger claustrophobia of a society where crime can be patriotism and patriotism can be crime. A thrilling and unusual novel from one of Canada's most unusual crime writers."

Josef Skvoecsky

"John Reeves has written a gripping and entertaining book...a cracking good tale."

Peter C. Newman
$19.95
Doubleday Canada

May 1988, Books in Canada 37
NOT QUITE THAT ANCIENT

ALTHOUGH Mark Czarnecki quoted me correctly in his article “The Inputting of Wisdom,” I'm not entirely happy with the context in which my deathless words were revived. Czarnecki divided writers into Ancients and Moderns, according to whether he thinks they consider computers a source of inspiration or not, and quoted me immediately after introducing the Ancients category.

As a writer who most often uses computers to compose, and is now working on a book about how computers can help writers, I feel a bit anachronistic among the “Ancients.” For the sake of clarification: I feel that word-processing technology is a tool that can make the writer — after overcoming the initial “learning hump” of struggling with often badly written documentation and imperfect programs — more productive. Those who invest the time and expense to get the equipment and learn a program generally find they can spend more time on writing and less on “secretarial” tasks like retyping, indicating revisions, proofing, etc.

Computers can’t make one a better writer; hence my remark about Yeats vs. computer-generated poetry. I do, however, anticipate that talented experimental writers will find new ways to combine writing with typographical effects and other computer-assisted forms like graphics and music.

This was written using clumsy old Wordstar via a networked TeleVideo terminal and an Epson printer. So does that make me an Ancient? Modern, or a Cybernetic Antique?

John Oughton
Kentville, N.S.

ROLL OVER PUCCINI

I WAS APPALLED by Bert Cowan’s inane review of John Murrell’s West and New World in your March issue. Cowan worries which genre he can slot the plays into, congratulates himself for noticing a couple of references to Puccini, mistakenly chides the playwright for his use of “livid,” and puzzles over Murrell’s expressive use of punctuation, consistently avoiding any temptation to interpret and evaluate the subject, style, success and meaning of the work.

Puccini, or open, may be the key to understanding these find plays: Bert Cowan isn’t.

—Nigel Hunt
Toronto

Bert Cowan replies:
THINK the translation of Mr. Hunt’s somewhat intemperate outburst must be that his opinion of in his words “these fine plays” is higher than he perceives mine to be. He may be right, although I suspect that they received kinder treatment from me than they would from many other critical readers.

I stand by my review, and my objection to the word “livid”, which may properly be applied to a Bruce. But hardly to a burn. Also, I did not “puzzle over” Murrell’s punctuation; I merely expressed astonishment at its pointless exuberance, which could scarcely influence the delivery of any actor worthy of his craft.

POLS APART

AFTER READING Bob Blackburn’s farewell column encouraging readers to object to improper usage of English (March, 1988), I feel inspired to do just that.

The source of my complaint is the same issue of Books in Canada. The review of C.E.S. Franks’s Parliament of Canada claim that conducting elections with single transferable voting “would at least ensure that each constituency would be represented by the least unwanted of its candidates.”

To put it kindly, this is a huge overstatement. It is quite possible for a candidate to win a seat under single transferable voting while being the most unwanted. In an extreme case, a candidate in a particular riding could win 51 per cent of the first and second preferences, be completely despised by 49 per cent of voters, and still beat several candidates who would each be acceptable to perhaps 90 per cent of the electorate. Is this riding won by the “least unwanted”? (The writer might have bad the approval voting system in mind.)

This mistake would be irritating from anyone reviewing a book about politics.

But there is no excuse at all when the error is made by someone who should be particularly alert to this sort of detail. The guilty author in this case, I.M. Owen, is your magazine’s new columnist on English usage.

This only underlines Bob Blackburn’s concern about declining standards.

Christopher Page
Port Moody, B.C.

1. I. M. Owen replies; SO FAR AS this is a point, it is rather an explanation of the Voter Zahn government — I suppose it turns on the meaning of “want” in an electoral context. I think it’s legitimate to use it to mean the voter’s preference as expressed on the ballot. The other candidates Christopher Page postulates may well be acceptable to 90 per cent of the electorate, but if the 90 per cent don’t vote for them, who’s to know?

PROSPERO’S BOOK

MR. WAYNE GRADY’S generous appreciation of Dany Laferrière’s novel (March, 1988) concludes with a search for the author’s intellectual godfathers. Thus I find myself included in the company of Pierre Vallières, Jacques Renaud, and even James Baldwin.

I would like to decline the role Mr. Grady is eager to have me perform. My 1974 book, a study of themes in Black American and Quebec literatures, Mr. Laferrière’s novel is a fantasy on interracial liaisons in Montreal.

The only connection I can therefore perceive between Mr. Laferrière’s book and mine is drawn from their authors’ accidental bktb on the same island.

Max Dorisville
Montreal

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

HEAR, HKAR for Ray Filp’s rejoinder to blinkered critics. I may not agree with everything he says, but I could die laughing whenever he defends his right to say it.

Colin Morton
Ottawa
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IN 1911, E. V. Lucas and George Morrow used hardly 500 words to write an exhaustive autobiography of an upper-class gentleman. They did it by supplementing their prose with pictures clipped from a department store catalogue. The upshot was a minor comic classic called What a Life! which was first published by Methuen and reissued last year by Collins.

The sample page reproduced here is eloquent testimony to the trite but currently acted truth that one picture is worth 6,000 processed words. So this month we are asking you to get out your scissors and paste and contrive a simple, one-page collage that, with a very brief text, forms a passage from the autobiography of a well-known Canadian literary lady or gent. You are, of course, free to select illustrations from sources other than department store catalogues. Send entries to CanWit No. 129, Books in Canada, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9. The prize is $25. Deadline, August 1.

RESULTS OF CANWIT No. 127

There were 110 results of CanWit no. 127. We received not one letter in response to our call for snippets of prose that might help fill in the gaps in Canada's official literary history. The contriver of no. 127 has lapsed into a funk from which he shows no signs of emerging.

May 1988, BOOKS IN CANADA
**CanLit acrostic no. 15  By Mary D. Trainer**

When properly filled, the letters in the box form a quotation from a Canadian book. Find the letters by solving the clues below and writing the answers in the numbered spaces provided. Then transfer the letters from the spaces to the appropriate squares in the box. The first letters of each answered clue form the name of the author and the title of the book. (Solution next month.)

The solution to Acrostic No. 14 appears below.

| A. Literary journalist and historian | 77 216 130 186 102 6 139 159 |
| B. Cabinet minister's area of responsibility | 185 175 100 11 63 25 77 43 119 |
| C. N.W.T. district | 122 97 195 60 230 185 60 226 |
| D. Hamilton's —— Wynne Stadium | 195 104 47 25 |
| E. Required | 30 179 26 13 146 226 |
| F. Opposition party questioners: 2 wds. | 264 104 105 217 54 2 76 68 129 |
| G. Equivocal | 205 114 239 18 68 191 123 |
| H. Buoyancy, lightness of weight | 115 81 145 1 237 68 |
| I. Tremblay work: 3 wds. | 55 187 161 28 57 127 229 156 |
| J. Adapt | 55 160 282 237 74 183 |
| K. asbestos production centre (hyph. wd.) | 169 144 231 121 135 65 157 199 |
| L. Basketball move: 2 wds. | 233 189 89 166 231 191 41 |
| M. Excited | 224 210 172 88 105 155 34 188 22 |

**SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC NO. 14**

Granted there might be missiles exploding out there, or trouble of some kind or a chemical leak, but it had to be gone by now and how on earth could anybody object, ever, to the inhabitants of Parkview joining each other for some card games or movies or something.

Paulette Jiles, *The Late Great Human Road Show*, Talonbooks
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New Art Books from the National Gallery

Degas
"A spectacular confrontation with the artist in the way art historian Richard Kendall recently described the massive Degas exhibition now showing at the Grand Palais in Paris and opening at Ottawa's National Gallery June 16. Fresh from the publishers for the Ottawa opening is a full-colour catalogue of some 730 photographs of the work of this great French artist. Organized jointly by the National Gallery of Canada, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Réunion des Musées nationaux, Paris, the exhibition is the work of a team of curators (and authors of the book) headed by Canadian scholar and former director of the National Gallery, Jean Sutherland Boggs. 640 pp. $88.95 cl, ed (ISBN 0-88804-361-8) French edition (ISBN 2-7110-2-166-3)

Degas Pastels
Edgar Degas was one of the most innovative artists of modern times, and his pastel "cuisine", as some critics described his complex technique in this medium, resulted in dazzling and expressive images. Graphic arts conservators Anne F. Maheux and Peter Zegers make a detailed study of Degas's pastels and Maheux has prepared this report of their findings. *Degas Pastels* contains 43 photographs, half in full colour. The text abounds in descriptions of how Degas built up layer after layer of colour, used a secret fixative formula (still unknown), stumped the pastel with a blunt instrument, burned the surface, even (according to Renoir) put a board over the work and jumped on it to force the colour into the paper. 96 pp. $19.95 ps (ISBN 0-88804-547-4) French edition (ISBN 0-88804-549-0)

Canadian Art

Rideau Chapel
"One of the most beautiful chapels in the land," wrote an anonymous sister of the order of Grey Nuns of the Cross in Ottawa in 1887, and provided the National Gallery with the title of this book on the preservation and recent installation in the Gallery of the interior of her convent chapel. The story of the 11th-hour rescue from demolition of this architectural masterwork, by Canadian architect-priest Georges Bourque, is told with verve by Laval University art historian Luc Noppen. Beautifully illustrated, the book contains eight full-colour plates and more than 60 other photographs and architectural drawings. 122 pp. $15.95 ps (ISBN 0-88804-579-8) French edition (ISBN 0-88804-580-1)

Retail: Available at your local bookstore

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