

A National Review

April 1992 \$2.95



ROHINTON MISTRY Is the Winner of the 1991
Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award

The Truths of Fiction: An Interview with L. R. **WRIGHT**

JOYCE MARSHALL Remembers **Gérald Godin** and **Hubert Aquin**

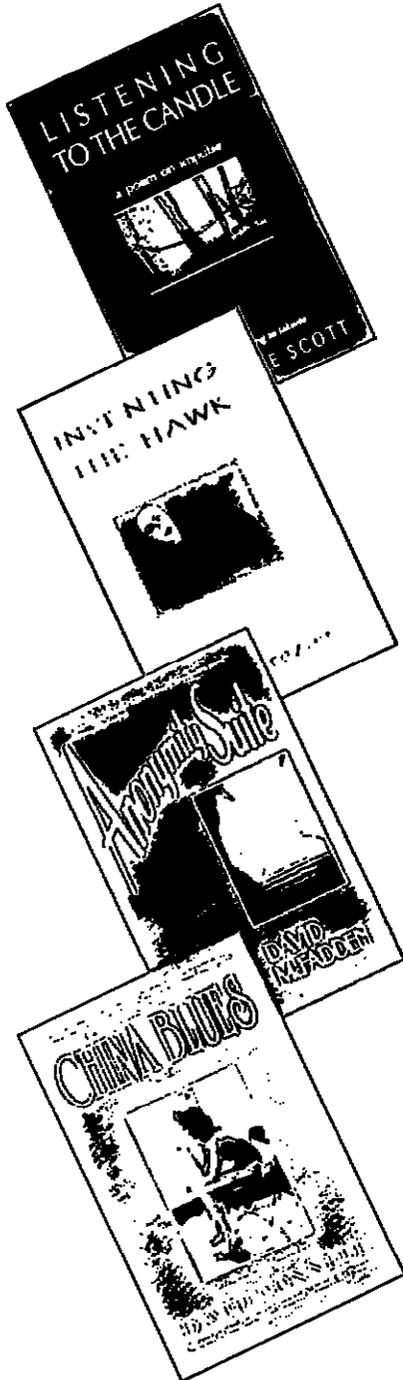
CRIMES OF FASHION: Anne Dandurand amid
Montreal's Literary Underworld





Poetry speaks in many voices...

THIS SPRING FROM McCLELLAND & STEWART  THE CANADIAN ^{Poetry} PUBLISHERS



LISTENING TO THE CANDLE PETER DALE SCOTT

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Arnold Ages is a professor of French at the University of Waterloo. Pat Barclay is a frequent contributor to these pages. Drawings throughout the issue are by Julia Blushak, a Toronto artist. Sharon Butala's latest novel is *The Fourth Archangel* (HarperCollins). Cyril Dabydeen's latest book is *Coastland: Selected Poems* (Mosaic). Ann Diamond's poetry collection *Terrorist Letters* will be published by Véhicule Press. Rita Donovan's most recent book is *Daisy Circus* (Cormorant). Donna Dunlop is a Toronto writer and musician whose new album is *Blue Highway*. Stan Fogel teaches in the English department at the University of St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, Ont. Helen Fogwill Porter's most recent book is *A Long and Lonely Ride* (Breakwater). Wayne Grady is the editor of *Treasures of the Place: Three Centuries of Canadian Nature Writing*, which is forthcoming from Douglas & McIntyre. David Homel's latest novel, *Rat Palms* (HarperCollins), is reviewed on page 36. Catherine Hunter teaches in the English department of the



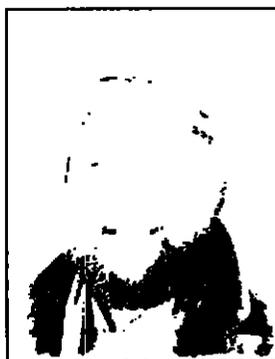
Sharon Butala



Wayne Grady

University of Winnipeg. Janice Kulyk Keefer's latest book is *Travelling Ladies* (Random House). Eric LaDelpha is a Toronto artist. Mary Lasovich is the co-author, with Anne Kershaw, of *Rock-A-Bye Baby: A Death Behind Bars* (McClelland & Stewart). Becky Liddell is a Toronto writer. Joyce Marshall is a writer and translator living in Toronto. Eric McCormack's novel *The Mysterium* will be published by Penguin this fall. Alec McEwen is a professor of surveying engineering at the University of Calgary. Christopher Moore is the co-author, with Janet Lunn, of *The Story of Canada*, a history book for young readers that is forthcoming from Lester Publishing/Key Porter. Kenneth Radu's latest book is *A Private Performance* (Véhicule). Ellen

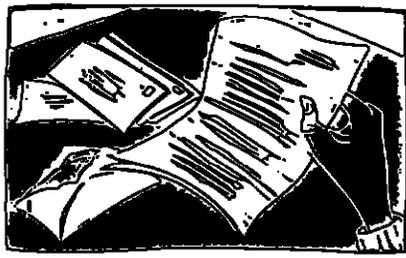
Roseman is money editor for the Report on Business section of the *Globe and Mail*. Catherine Sheldrick Ross's biography *Alice Munro: A Double Life* is forthcoming from ECW Press. Fred Sharpe is a Toronto puzzle addict. ♦



Kenneth Radu



Catherine Sheldrick Ross



We Is Us

I FOUND Ann Diamond's diatribe regarding my recent book, *In the House of No* (Poets' Corner, February), pretty dizzy (I can't call it a "review" since it rarely touches down anywhere in the proximity of the book). I suppose I take a certain pride and pleasure in having made her feel that aggressive. That Louis Dudek has called me "the most important poet writing on the North American continent today" seems to have especially pissed her off. Hopefully, true lovers of poetry will go out and read the book for themselves. And hopefully they'll also go out and read *The New Long Poem Anthology*, some Christopher Dewdney and some Louis Dudek as well (all subjected to irrational attack in the same article).

I would like to correct a factual error. Ann says that I employ the royal "we" in the poem "The Drama of the Heart's Debate with Actuality." No, I don't. I'm not a big fan of the royal we, though I kind of like the way Nelson Mandela uses it. The clear-minded reader will easily recognize that the poem is about humanity and its foibles, and the "we" in it means "us." All of us. Including you, Ann.

Ken Norris
Orono, Maine

I PURCHASE *Books in Canada* faithfully, but I now question whether I should continue to do so. How am I to take seriously a magazine that misses the significance of a groundbreaking new book such as J. E. Sorrell's *In Broad Daylight*?

Ann Diamond's bare mention of *In Broad Daylight* (February) is grossly inadequate. Aside from noting that the work is gripping, she entirely misses this book's importance. The power of these poems defies easy categorization, but, in both form and substance, this book easily transcends Ms. Diamond's rather vague, inaccurate comments about "dramatic tradi-

tion... tied to an earlier era" and "rigid stanzaic structure suggestive of 19th-century narrative verse." Sorrell's prosody is not, indeed, the chopped-up prose of most contemporary poetry, but its fluid solidity makes these poems simultaneously modern and timeless — as befits work that, wherever it weaves in time and place, so movingly plumbs what it is to be human that the experience of each character in this book becomes abidingly our own.

I look forward to your giving us the kind of fuller, more insightful review that will do justice to *In Broad Daylight* and to the readers of *Books in Canada*.

Robert Aiken
White Rock, B.C.

Life after Cohen?

THE MIND boggles that anyone would want to write a life of Leonard Cohen. He can't sing, he can't play a guitar, he can't write poetry. Your critic's critique of Lorraine Dorman and Clive Rawlins's biography ("Not Our Man," February), that it is "rambling, poorly structured and often less than literate," could be applied to their subject's work. The *Times Literary Supplement* observed several years ago that Cohen's poetry was the sort that appealed to persons who don't like poetry. How true.

John H. Wilde
Greenwood, South Carolina

Look at the Data

BRIAN FAWCETT has done a great disservice to the readers of *Books in Canada* by dismissing Mel Hurtig's *The Betrayal of Canada* as a mere "partisan tract" ("What Needs to be Read," February).

The only partisanship it is guilty of is being pro-Canada. If that is wrong-headed then we are in truly serious trouble. Among other things, the book includes a multitude of statistical tables featuring significant economic indicators, based on current data obtained from Statistics Canada and the department of finance.

Due to extraordinary demand, the book has already been reprinted five times.

K. J. Cottam
Ottawa

New Spring Fiction from COACHE HOUSE PUBLISHING



Property

MARC DIAMOND

When a real-estate deal goes sour, the reclusive narrator finds himself on a bizarre journey through his past. 'Property is chatty, funny, friendly, scolding, and self-deprecating, the work of a jacked-up conversationalist, definitely on a roll.'—David Gilmour 160 pp. • \$12.95 pb



The Dragonfly Fling

JEAN MCKAY

McKay is back with her cool, scientific intelligence and spare, playful, impeccably rendered observations of people and events, in short fictions suffused with the flora and fauna of small-town restaurants, full moons, rogue elephants, women athletes, the religious ecstasy of dragonflies. 'Jean McKay is one of North America's finest writers.'—Annie Dillard 128 pp. • \$12.95 pb

Unparallel Bodies

I TAKE absolute exception to a statement in David Homel's article "Architects and Termites" (Field Notes, February).

This is: "...people like Philippe Sauvageau of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, the parallel body to the National Library of Canada."

As the author of two biographies, *Robert Gourlay, Gadfly* and *Bright Land/A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer*, and a historical novel, *Four Went to the Civil War*, I know the difference. The Ontario Archives in Toronto and the Quebec Archives in Quebec City are provincial in nature. The archives in Ottawa are the National Archives of Canada that serves the country from sea to sea.

Lois E. Darroch
Willowdale, Ont.

What about Kafka?

BRAVO, Kenneth McGoogan, for his cutting satire on the Calgary literary scene ("Cross-Country Check-up," February). Never one to shy away from controversy, he makes observations that are both trenchant and hilarious. In particular, his comments on Rohinton Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* are clearly to be taken as absurd. In saying that Mistry's novel is not Canadian, he is obviously sticking it to the literary jingoists, the same crowd who ignored Josef Skvorecky until he was nominated for the Nobel prize and who regard Mavis Gallant as a traitor because she lives in France.

McGoogan focuses his attack on Rudy Wiebe, one of Canada's leading nationalists, whom he quotes as saying "Place and history are more important than race or gender." You can almost see the twinkle in McGoogan's eye (it is not for nothing they call him the H. L. Mencken of the West). He knows as well as everybody else in Alberta writing circles that Wiebe, aside from his well-known difficulty with the English language, always evokes loud guffaws with his mind-numbing manifestos. So subtle is McGoogan's approach that he does not ask but prompts the reader to ask, "But what about Kafka, Jane Austen, Chekhov, Anita Brookner?"

Obviously, McGoogan is not the parochial little crawler that a literal reading of his article would lead you to believe. With razor-sharp wit and suppressed savagery he sends up the entire literary scene in Calgary: "Calgary has become the intellectual heartland of English-speaking Canada"; "Calgary is home to the best science-fiction writer, Dave Duncan... the best oil-patch thriller writer, John Ballem"; "Splits the Heard; *Blue Buffalo*!" Ha Ha Ha Ha.

That he lumps in genuinely first-rate writers like Sam Selvon, Karen Connelly, and Christopher Wiseman with Aritha van Herk, Darlene Quaipe, and Fred Wah only fine-tunes his oblique attack on the literary *apparatchiks* and theory-ridden cranks who make up the Calgary writing establishment. The beauty of McGoogan's article is that it's all inversion, all subtext. The servile façade is a blind, and Eastern readers ought not to be taken in by McGoogan's wickedly artless writing style.

Would that there were more literary editors like McGoogan, people who fearlessly dissent, topple the tin gods from their thrones, and thumb their noses at the poseurs and third-raters. Alas there is only one. So, bravo, Kenneth McGoogan. Will we ever see your like again?

J. L. Bell
Kelowna, B.C.

A Disarming Intervention

MAY A VOICE from the past intervene between Alec McEwen and Wayne Jones? Jones's letter (March) pours scorn on McEwen for objecting to Michael Bliss's use of *ostracization* instead of *ostracism*, and for insisting on the distinction between *precipitate* (hasty) and *precipitous* (steep). In both cases, I as usual share McEwen's preferences, but in the first one Jones is right that he slipped in saying "there's really no such word" as *ostracization*: even though it hasn't as far as I know found its way into any dictionary yet, there it is in plain view on the page, and it's as legitimately formed as *crystallization*. The objection to it is that it's a graceless polysyllabic substitute for a perfectly good word. Would Jones willingly submit to *hypnotization*?

As for *precipitate* and *precipitous*, their meanings have been separate for some

three centuries, and the distinction must be familiar to anyone who has read much literature in English. To switch their meanings is an offence against clarity. Words do shift in meaning; it's already possible to misunderstand 19th-century writers if you don't realize that such common words as *candid*, *discover*, *wonderful* meant then almost the opposite to what they do now. There's much to be said for retarding the process where we can. In my former column *The Written Word* the criteria I used for English prose were clarity, grace, and correctness, in that order of importance. I think they are possibly more durable than Jones's "hip and progressive."

I. M. Owen
Toronto

Other Voices

AFTER READING M. Nourbese Philip's rejoinder to Eleanor Parkes (February), I am afraid that the very last thing I felt like doing was purchasing a copy of her book. Instead, I turned to the November issue to have a look at Ms. Parkes's "rant" — "a more polite, less exciting, albeit more articulate version of 'Nigger go home!'" as Nourbese Philip describes it. There, in a style considerably less inflated than Nourbese Philip's own, I found (a) a succinct summary of the many rights and opportunities that well-educated Canadians like Nourbese Philip enjoy; and (b) a perhaps naive two-sentence defence of David Livingstone from a white Christian standpoint.

That someone who has herself suffered racism and exclusion at the hands of Canadian publishers should now call on the editors of *Books in Canada* to suppress such letters for reasons of "bad taste" is a sad irony. One wonders if Nourbese Philip is interested in hearing any voices other than her own.

Richard Sanger
Toronto

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



Saving by the Book

by ELLEN ROSEMAN

PERSONAL FINANCE BOOKS will always be with us. They're a staple of publishers' lists, since sales peak in early spring when people are buying RRSPs and doing their tax returns, a time when few other books are published or sold. But there has been a fundamental change in the kind of personal finance books we're buying. The stuff on the shelves now is more relevant in content and approach to the average Canadian — you and me — than to the upper-income elite who used to make up the market before. Previous books, written by tax lawyers or accountants, were aimed at high-salaried executives, self-employed professionals, and owner-operators of small businesses. They had wives who didn't work outside the home, a situation that yielded attractive tax-planning opportunities.

Typical of this genre is *Are You Paying Too Much Tax?* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$16.95), by Wayne Beach and Lyle R. Hepburn, first published in 1977 and updated annually since then. The authors, partners in a Toronto law firm, look at the tried and true ways to save tax and a few offbeat tactics, such as barter and do it yourself. This is good as far as it goes, but there's more to life and financial success than keeping money out of Revenue Canada's hands. The more complicated strategies simply don't apply to the average family, where both spouses work at salaried jobs and there are few ways to avoid tax, aside from RRSPs if you have a little money left over each year.

Moreover, the people who can afford to follow this advice often get trapped in silly, sometimes disastrous tax shelters, such as real estate MURBs (multiple unit residential buildings) and flow-through oil and gas shares. Driven only by tax sav-

ings, they wade into risky, ill-conceived investments that don't suit their needs or comfort level. Then when the government changes the rules in mid-stream, a not uncommon occurrence, they are forced to swallow big losses.

Tax-planning guides are still a business-book staple. Every large accounting firm puts out one, usually written in a dry and academic style, heavy on jargon and acronyms (AMT, CNIL, CCA, etc.). Don't ask what the initials mean; I'd have to write a book to explain them all. An exception is *The Canadian Price Waterhouse Personal Tax Advisor* (Seal, \$6.99 paper). Though he doesn't get credit, the author is Richard Birch, a Toronto journalist with a string of personal finance books to his name. The latest is *Tackling Tough Times* (Seal, \$4.99), a slim guide to surviving the recession, co-authored by his wife, Betsy Mathews. He's a pro at making hard concepts easy to understand.

The first truly innovative book to break through the mould was *The Wealthy Barber* (Stoddart, \$14.95) by David Chilton. Appearing in 1988 when its author, a former stockbroker, was in his 20s, this is a publishing phenomenon, with sales of 250,000 copies in Canada and a fixed spot on the best-seller list. A US edition came out last fall and seems to be catching on there, too. Chilton has an attention-grabbing way of presenting his material. Dropping the usual self-help format, he has written a novel about a few young friends in small-town Ontario who learn lessons about money from the smartest saver in town, the local barber. The book is irreverent and full of jokes and banter, and its lighthearted tone has since been adopted by other authors.

In addition, Chilton promoted the book with a punishing schedule of per-

sonal appearances, giving 200 talks a year across Canada. In person, he's sincere and wickedly funny, much funnier than in the book, which I found heavy going (but then I'm not the typical audience). Obviously, the gimmick of using fictional characters to give advice demystifies the subject for people who would never pick up a more conventional book. Also refreshing is the emphasis on financial planning, not just avoiding tax. Chilton goes back to basics, telling readers to save a small amount each month and invest it in mutual funds for long-term steady growth. He denounces the trickier strategies, including market timing, as foolish and not worthwhile.

The Money Doctor (Macmillan, \$14.95) by Ken Wharram, reads a lot like *The Wealthy Barber*, except it has an index (Thank goodness! Every financial book needs one, except if it's pretending to be a novel). Like Chilton, Wharram also frames his narrative around a wise teacher, a tightwad neighbour called Hoskins.

Gordon Pape is also bringing down-to-earth realism to money management and investing. A Toronto journalist who was laid off in the early 1980s, he built a new career from the ground up as a self-taught financial expert and millionaire. His first book, *Building Wealth*, came out in 1988. This was part of a trilogy, followed by *Low-Risk Investing* in 1989 and *Retiring Wealthy* (Prentice-Hall, \$16.95) last fall. All are sensible, crisply written, and sprinkled with personal stories and examples. Pape also publishes annual guides to mutual funds and RRSPs, using the excellent idea of rating the top brands (\$\$\$\$ is superior, \$ is below average). With 600 mutual funds sold in Canada and almost as many retirement products, buyers need a helping hand, a way to sort

the winners from the also-rans. Thanks to Pape, they now have one.

Another book, written in the same folksy and personable style, is *The Kitchen Table Money Plan* (HarperCollins, \$14.95), by Barbara McNeill and Robert Collins. McNeill, a corporate executive who retired at 59 and went into personal financial consulting, uses case histories of former clients (heavily disguised, of course, but still interesting) to illustrate her points. The device here is food. Collins, a Toronto journalist who wrote about McNeill in *Moneywise* magazine (the germ of this book), discovered that she called her money-management rules the Chicken Soup School. Urged by the publisher to play up this theme, he throws in chicken-soup jokes with such a heavy hand that you're alternately hungry and nauseated by the end of the book.

What I liked, though, was the practical advice, leavened by the knowledge of human nature that a financial planner acquires. McNeill recognizes that our hang ups about money often prevent us from doing what's in our best interests. Our emotions, our upbringing, our relationships with spouses, parents, and children — all this weighty baggage influences, and distorts, our spending and saving decisions.

The book tells the story of Joy and Herbie, whose dog bit a neighbour. They had no liability insurance, were sued, lost everything, and had to declare bankruptcy. When another crisis hit 10 years later (Joy had surgery and took time off work), they were frightened into another bankruptcy. But with McNeill's help, they got a bank loan to tide them over.

"They phoned me, brimming with gratitude and relief," McNeill relates. "With sudden sixth sense I asked, 'Have you got liability insurance now?' They had not — and they had another dog. I sent them to their insurance man that very day." This recognition of human frailty is a more true-to-life jumping-off point than the strictly rational approach of the tax planners, who assume we always do what's best for us. It's a sign that personal finance books have come of age in Canada, and a portent of more readable, intelligent, and useful books to come.

Truth and Consequences

by HELEN FOGWILL PORTER

A FEW MONTHS ago I was at a gathering for a very dear friend who was moving to another city. Grace, a playwright and poet, had been a mentor of mine for years. When we finally got a chance to have a private chat she sat me down next to her on the chesterfield, looked me in the eye, and asked "When are you going to finish that TB project of yours and get back to your creative work?"

The word "creative" pierced my soul. I had thought that what I was doing was creative. The project Grace referred to is my book about tuberculosis in Newfoundland and Labrador in the recent past, based on interviews with people who had TB or whose lives were altered because of it. As a child I narrowly escaped TB myself; the disease has horrified and fascinated me for years. I have had few mystical experiences in my life, but I recognized one the day I decided to begin the tuberculosis research. I was standing outside the graveyard in Trepassey, a fishing community about two hours' drive from St. John's, when I was suddenly obsessed with a question: How many young people in this cemetery died of TB? That was four years ago: the obsession is still with me.

Like most writers, I have always wanted to be known for my fiction. Over the years I've written and published a bit of everything: poetry, humour, drama, reviews, short stories, articles, and a book-length memoir-history. Finally, in 1988, I published a novel and, in 1991, a short-story collection. After 25 years of writing professionally I at last began to receive solid recognition. The message is clear: real writers are writers of fiction.

Perhaps it would help if there existed a more positive word for non-fiction. Who

wants to write non-anything? Growing up, I always winced when my Catholic friends called me a non-Catholic. If I had to be described in denominational terms, why couldn't I have been called a Protestant? At least that word has a positive ring to it.

In the early days of the Writers' Union one body of potential members visualized it as an organization for writers of fiction exclusively. Only recently have Canada Council touring opportunities been open to non-fiction writers. Here in St. John's I ran up against opposition a couple of years ago when I suggested that we invite two newly published writers to participate in the regular public readings series of the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador. "But they're non-fiction writers!" was the shocked response. They eventually read and were received enthusiastically.

I've read and written fiction that involved the raking of an actual happening and fitting it inside a fictional framework. Many novels and short-story collections bear the disclaimer: "All of the characters in this book are fictitious; any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental," or words to that effect. I can't speak for other writers, but I know that in some of my work such a statement would be a lie. In my novel *January, February, June or July*, a totally fictional story, there is at least one character who is immediately recognizable to many residents of St. John's. Of course I changed his name. In spite of our insistence that our characters are patchworks, creatures of imagination, or fantasy people, I'd be willing to bet a good sum that most other fiction writers have also done this kind of thing. Why do we keep denying it? I suppose there's always the danger of a lawsuit, but is that the only reason?

A few years ago a gifted and honoured Canadian novelist read in St. John's. He is particularly well known for using people from our country's history in his works of fiction. A woman in the audience, a great fan of this writer, challenged him. She asked if it wouldn't have been braver of him to write biographies of those people. I don't remember his reply, but I'm sure this author knows as well as the rest of us that non-fiction writers are often looked upon as prosaic plodders in the literary star system, while novelists and short-story writers gather the acclaim — if not always the cash.

At a recent annual general meeting of the Writers' Union, I took part in a workshop. The question of the thin line between fiction and fact was already bothering me. I told the others about my short story, "And Put Him in a Box," which was written as a direct result of the murder of a friend's son. "Why do we do this?" I asked the group, and myself. "Why do we use other people's lives this way? We're supposed to be fiction writers; why

don't we make everything up or write non-fiction?" I could feel the shock of recognition that ran through the room.

That story of mine was scheduled to be part of my 1991 collection, *A Long and Lonely Ride*. After several sleepless nights, I realized I had to show the story to my friend. I couldn't bear the thought of her seeing it in print without having some knowledge of it beforehand. In the story I tried hard to be fair to my friend and her family, but the fact remains that I plagiarized their lives for a piece of fiction. If I had to write it, why couldn't I have done a factual account of what happened, and published it as such? Then, of course, it wouldn't belong in a short-story collection. Would that be a tragedy?

Lately I've been hearing a lot about "creative non-fiction." That phrase is an improvement over the unembellished "non-fiction," but it still has a negative ring to it. And then there's the "non-fiction novel," invented by Truman Capote. To fall into that category the writer apparently has to recreate the lives of

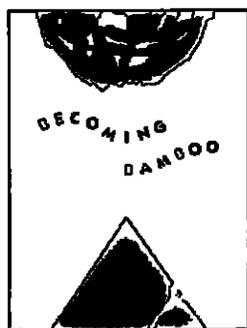
real people who are either famous or infamous.

After hearing my friend's reaction to the story about her son, it was obvious to me that it bothered her. I pulled it out of the collection. No doubt my decision will irritate some writers. To tell the truth, it sometimes irritates me. Perhaps I will publish the story some day. Or maybe I'll rework it as a factual piece.

Good non-fiction writers have found a way to draw the reader in, to make the truth sparkle and live. For years I've been writing from the top, or perhaps the middle, of my mind. Now, for my TB book, I must take the thoughts and memories of others and interweave them with records of health-care services, social conditions, and attitudes of 30 to 60 years ago. I've never been so intimidated in my life.

I suppose fiction will always be my first love, but my admiration for those creative writers who deal with reality has increased tremendously. They possess a very special talent. Now if only we could find a strong, positive word to describe what they do.... ♦

Spring pickings from McGill-Queen's



BECOMING BAMBOO

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Robert E. Carter

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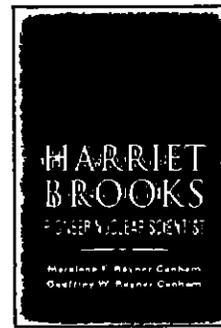
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Teeming with Life

Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey is the winner of the Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award

ROHINTON MISTRY'S *Such a Long Journey*, published by McClelland & Stewart, is the winner of the Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award for 1991. The novel, which also won the 1991 Governor General's Award for Fiction in English, was rated first by two of our three judges, although there was significant support for other short-listed titles in what was clearly a strong field.

Such a Long Journey takes place in Bombay, India, in 1971, during a period when the country's already delicate social fabric was being further strained by internal and international political crises. The protagonist, Gustad Noble, lives at the center of a complex network of family and social relationships, and it is the progressive unravelling of his seemingly secure existence that constitutes the core of Mistry's chronicle. Noble's story is accompanied by a vivid profusion of other narratives, which are related with a humane, sympathetic touch that brings them into fully realized focus. The result is a rich, fascinating, and affecting novel of remarkably wide appeal.

"I decided to write a novel to see if I could write one," Mistry explains. "After having written a dozen or more short stories, I was curious to see if I could put out that kind of sustained effort, the stamina to keep inventing details over the long haul. I also wanted to make sure that the novel would be a complete world unto itself, and so I wrote about what I know best — Bombay, the family, human relations."

Here are the judge's comments on *Such a Long Journey* and the four other novels selected for the short list:



Rohinton Mistry

SHARON BUTALA: I thought of Dickens as I read Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*. The evocation of a time and a place is as complete, and the major characters approach Dickensian fullness. Bombay opened up and came alive as a place where human beings who are a lot like Canadians make their lives; in fact, after reading this book no reader could ever again think of Bombay (or any other unknown place), as merely incomprehensibly foreign. The detail was so exhaustive that at times I grew restive, thought, For God's sake let's get on with it, which is also what I think whenever I read Dickens.

Such a Long Journey is a traditional novel, to my mind still the most fully satisfying kind. It is steeped in place, it moves forward in time, it never sinks to cuteness, its central characters are fully developed, its peripheral characters interesting and lively — sometimes of a sort North America could never spawn — and all of it in a setting so lavish and exotic that the mind boggles.

The basic story is that of Gustad Noble and his family. It is set against the shadowy world of Indian politics — even Indira Gandhi plays a role here — and thrown in for good measure there is also the smaller, and only slightly less influential, world of Bombay politics. But the degree of success with which Mistry handles the three elements varies. The daily lives of the Nobles are beautifully, fully drawn, and though I didn't find them a family I could love, I could strongly sympathize; I believed in them and could see their world in all its colour and contradiction.

But I felt that Mistry failed in his attempt to set the story of the Khodadad Building and its tenants' lives against the backdrop of Indian federal politics. The machinations of Jimmy Bilimoria and G. Mohammed and Indira Gandhi seemed a little too cops-and-robbers, a little too clearly malevolent; further, it seemed to me that *Such a Long Journey* didn't need them, would have been a better novel without them. Municipal politics is much more believably and coherently handled, but it seems to me that the author's decision to include all these elements ensured some degree of failure.

Mistry has a real gift for narrative and an excellent ear for dialogue. He also has a clear sense of what a novel is and the craft to execute it, and if I sometimes felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of it all, I am grateful to him for reiterating — and in such a context — the shared humanity of all people. Rohinton Mistry is a writer of large talent, and *Such a Long Journey* is my choice for best first novel.

When I first read Alberto Manguel's *News from a Foreign Country Came*, I was struck by how careful it was. Manguel makes none of the mistakes made by most writers of first novels. The themes are universal, the structure is carefully designed, and the plot is set out in time to best advantage; he tries hard to develop the main characters and provides us with plenty of metaphor and descriptive passages. So why does it fail? I didn't sense a teeming, thriving world waiting to be given artistic shape, but one built mechanistically after much careful thought and serious decision-making. The lack of artistic spontaneity resulted in a novel that lacks a soul, a sense of being genuinely alive.

Despite all his efforts, Manguel's characters somehow do not live and breathe. His conception of Marianne, whose story this is,

struck no chords of recognition in me as a woman, and neither she as a child nor her daughter Ana think or sound like any children I know. And the novel seems to me startlingly 19th century in its evocation of the lives of women and children and the role of the male. And although Manguel tells us, through Antoine Berence, that evil wears a clinician's face, I remain unconvinced. These are characters it is almost impossible to empathize with.

But there is an admirable tightness to this novel. It is beautifully put together, and its author has allowed nothing to intrude that might divert attention from the story. His sense, too, of how a novel should work is clear. This is essentially an able book, and its attempt to deal with one of the greatest evils is deeply admirable.

In *Generation X*, by Douglas Coupland, three twenty-something types live side by side in Palm Springs, California, working at low-level service-industry jobs and telling each other stories during their off-hours. These stories are meant by the characters to act as metaphors concerning their lives, and as a magical counterpoint to what they see as the ugliness and stupidity of daily life in the 20th century. The infinite variety and wonder of the planet is reduced to a boring, dusty sameness by this generation, and Coupland's characters feel powerless and hopeless except when they are telling stories. There isn't a lot more in terms of plot to this book, and that is its chief failing and the source of the dissatisfaction I ultimately felt. It is often terrifically witty, there are some startling and acute epigrams, but eventually I was reminded that wit is a poor substitute for wisdom.

Despite its shortcomings, this book comes closest to fully achieving its more reasonable aims. Its failures, which keep it from getting my vote for the prize, are its lack of plot and its refusal — or inability — to come to grips with its characters' disaffection, which comes perilously close to self-pity and which the author seems to applaud. But *Generation X* is exceptionally gracefully written. Even if I sometimes thought the characters deserved the fate they most fear, which turns out to be the engine that drives the world — to be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust — I enjoyed and admired this first novel.

Woyzeck's Head, by Ekbert Faas, is a confusingly complex novel that requires the reader to concentrate hard, and to keep searching back and forth in order to keep track of the story. I've no objection to this *per se*, but giving all these different versions or fragments of versions of the same story, till the reader finally has a muddy idea of what might actually have happened, can make for pretty heavy going in practice even though it's extremely interesting in theory.

This is primarily an intellectual novel of argument or discourse, whose purpose is to illuminate a specific time and place in history, in this case the roots of Hitler's maddest idea and society's understanding of madness itself. I can't judge the validity of Faas's arguments and the statement of them is too heavy-handed for me to be convinced by art, although the historical research seems thorough and accurate. *Woyzeck*, whose life is the subject of this novel, needs to come alive as a human being; although he undergoes much suffering, somehow Faas is unable to make us feel his pain. Hence, we don't care enough about it, and thus the brutality described merely horrifies without illuminating. Faas seems unable to give us that extra, necessary dimension.

This novel never manages to leave the level of discourse and argumentation, a plane on which I don't believe a novel should rest. Despite my admiration for the deeply serious intent of this work, I think that if Faas could add — to his gifts for intellection and clear, if dull, prose — the ability to transcend his own material through a sense of the novel as casting a light on something bigger than history itself, I would read him with eagerness and pleasure.

Michael Kenyon's *Kleinberg* is an interesting attempt to capture the life of a small town by snapping scenes, as it were, of what is happening in various places at a particular moment. There is a multitude of characters; even with the help of a list of characters at the beginning the reader is frequently lost as to who is who. Since there is a shifting in time as well, keeping track of everything is difficult. In this regard, Kenyon asks too much of his readers.

In fact, it isn't that the story is naïve or silly or that the characters aren't believable, or that the novel fails in its initial vision. All of these elements are in conception first-rate. But somehow Kenyon never managed to catch my interest. It's as though he painted his portrait of an entire town in pastels and the colours are so faded that everything looks much the same. The major climactic event is drawn with the same pale hand as the early-morning street crossing of a bum; no event looks more important than any other. This may well have been Kenyon's point, that life is random and essentially meaningless, but in this case it makes for dull reading.

But Michael Kenyon is very talented; his prose is more than merely smooth and competent, at times it is downright brilliant, and some of his descriptive passages are unrivalled among these novels.

I couldn't help but notice that these books were all written by men, and was sorry not to see a woman's novel among them. Despite their shortcomings they are all to a large degree successful, and all deserve to be contenders for the Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award.

W

WAYNE GRADY: To my mind, two of the five novels under consideration deserve the award. They are *Such a Long Journey*, by Rohinton Mistry, and *News from a Foreign Country Came*, by Alberto Manguel. I will save these for the last, and speak briefly about the other three.

Though *Generation X*, by Douglas Coupland, has attracted a lot of heat, it left me cold. The subtitle — *Tales for an Accelerated Culture* — ought to have been a give-away, for this loosely strung series of incidents does not add up to a novel, and the principal voices in the book never really become characters. One can say yes, that's the point, those of this accelerated culture do not conform to any traditional definition of the word "culture," and so the ideal book to convey that ought not to conform to any traditional definition of the novel. There is some merit in this argument. But however you define the form that the writing takes, the writing itself has to work — it has to sing as well as zing — and the reader has to be engaged in whatever is going on. The writing in *Generation X* is almost unbelievably sloppy, and in the end I just

didn't care what happened to the characters, which turned out to be not much anyway. The book has a lot of energy and flash — so did Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, and who remembers that? And as for the really *nouveau* turn-plugs in the margins, Marshall McLuhan invented them, and included them in his own analyses of an accelerated generation (mine), especially *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (1967). And who remembers that?

Not that I automatically plump for traditional definitions of the novel. My thumbs down to *Woyzeck's Head*, by Ekbert Faas, and to *Kleinberg*, by Michael Kenyon, attest to that. *Woyzeck's Head* gets off to such a leaden start that watching the rest of it trying to get off the ground is a bit like watching a pelican trying to fly after swallowing a boulder. The novel simply does not move. "You cannot find Nothingness without killing your passions," father used to tell Johann." Yes, you can. *Kleinberg* is less turgid than *Woyzeck's Head*. The prose moves along, but it is not distinguished by very much style. The *vox populi* technique — "His mother'll do the fine. Boy, was she hopping. The kid looked stoned" — is on the one hand too close to the real thing to achieve grace, and on the other hand too stilted and forced to ring true. The result is a pedestrian novel, with predictable insights into the minds and motives of two-dimensional characters.

Which brings me to my two finalists. In a sense, it is a pity that one has to choose between them, for they are both, in very different ways, superb novels. Each is a perfect reflection of the characters and events it embodies, and that is entirely as it should be.

News from a Foreign Country Came is a quiet, intense novel, carefully written and intellectually satisfying. Manguel's manipulation of opposites — the violence of Argentina and Algeria and the calmness of Percé, Quebec, for example, or the parallel double life of Antoine Berence, torturer and lover — gives the novel a tension that does not let up. There are, however, some questions of point of view that disturb me. Having the framework of the novel seen through the eyes of Ana and Rebecca doesn't work for me; Ana's ability to impart alarm is not convincing — she is too much the uncomprehending observer. We are too aware of Ana and Rebecca as vehicles rather than as characters. At the end of the novel, when Ana is left on the side of a darkened highway, we do not know whether she has made a choice or simply not understood the question. And her mother's catatonia is also never fully explained or explored. In one section she is youthful and vital; in the next she is not. We are told what happens to her; we are never shown it. These criticisms bespeak a certain bloodlessness in the characters, a sense that this novel of the heart is taking place too much in the head. Though it deals in gruesome reality, *News from a Foreign Country Came* seems to have intellectualized horror, as if our safest response to it is one of numbness rather than rage.

By contrast, *Such a Long Journey* teems with life, as does Bombay, the city in which it takes place. It is a controlled babble of life histories, vital statistics, crushing victories, and glorious defeats. It is a passionate embracing of life in all its manifestations. I tagged along breathless as I read it, and when I had finished, I felt drained and invigorated at the same time, as after a 50-kilometre cycle on a perfectly contoured road. It is a big, ambitious novel.

It is not without faults, mind you. Its ending is uncomfortably pat. All the threads seem neatly tied, but are they? What do the

major symbols symbolize? The wall around Khodadad, Gustad's apartment building, for instance, takes on enormous but ambiguous significance as the plot progresses: at first it ensures the tenants' privacy; then it becomes an object of scorn as passers-by use it as a urinal; then the sidewalk artist turns it into a thing of beauty, a kind of national shrine; then the government tears it down; then a brick from it heaved by a marching protester kills the idiot Tehmul. What is going on here? Similarly, the huge doll, won at school by Gustad's daughter, is a vaguely disturbing device; disturbing largely because I never knew quite what it represented.

But the writing in *Such a Long Journey* is wonderful, and the plot carries the day. Mistry is entirely engaged in his characters' lives, and engages us with his enthusiasm and compassion. Perhaps that is the difference: where Manguel manipulates his characters to make them illustrate a problem, like a chess master, Mistry allows himself to fall in love with them, gives them their freedom, then follows them around to point out their qualities and their foibles, a puppet master whose marionettes have suddenly turned into real people with lives of their own, thank you very much. If *News from a Foreign Country Came* is an exercise in control, *Such a Long Journey* is a long, exciting, barely controlled skid. In the end, I have to opt for the skid.

KENNETH RADU: Of the five novels under consideration, I was especially impressed with Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, Ekbert Faas's *Woyzeck's Head*, and Alberto Manguel's *News from a Foreign Country Came*. Although Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is filled with exotic local colour, memorable, quasi-Dickensian characters, and the occasional vividly realized scene, much of the story is so hampered by an antiquated prose style that the virtues of this particular novel are, in fact, undermined by the nature of the writing itself:

Over time, her carapace of spinsterhood had accreted in isolation. And there was no way for a person to tell if, under that hard shell, fate's cruelly inflicted gashes were still raw or had scarred over.

[...]

They tried to fill in for each other the lacunae in the scanty outlines exchanged earlier at Crawford Market. But to reclaim suddenly the gaping abyss which had swallowed up time was well-nigh impossible. They had to be content with wisps and strands that came to hand as they groped or stumbled their way through the vaults of memory.

These are only two examples from many equally problematic passages in a novel consisting of laboured prose, hoary metaphors, and Edwardian phrasings that ring hollow to the modern ear.

The crowd scene at the end of the novel, to illustrate this further, is supposed to move the reader, to arouse both imagination and moral indignation. A crowd gathers to protest the plan of city authorities to tear down a wall outside the compound where most of the major characters of the novel live. Once a latrine, the wall has been transformed into a work of art by a vagrant artist, depict-

ing various images and deities of world religions. Within the context of Mistry's vision, the wall is a "symbol" of community, universal faith, and tolerance. Unfortunately, the entire lengthy scene is sabotaged by an inflated prose style straining for dramatic effect:

Wall destroyed! The words percolated through the *morcha* and trickled through the crowds of bystanders. Wall destroyed!! Disbelief turned to indignation, then to outrage that surged through the congregation and swelled into a tidal wave, making the ground tremble as it galloped for the shore.

The municipality! That loathsome name again! The *morcha*, like a maddened monster sprawling in the road, seethed with renewed anger and hatred.

To be fair to the novel, not all of *Such a Long Journey* is written in this overheated manner, but enough of it is to deflate the humour, render several scenes unconvincing, and set this reader's teeth on edge.

Michael Kenyon's *Kleinberg* risks banality and often succeeds. Despite some fine, poetic perceptions and the serious ideas informing the novel about traditional attitudes towards women, however, it did not rise off the pages for me. It's a subtle work, to be sure, written by a writer who has fallen in love with subtlety, a dangerous passion for a novelist. Perhaps the clutter of characters engaged in pedestrian activities that, I suppose, mean something, saps the narrative of its energy. Some scenes are very well done indeed, which only leads me to believe that *Kleinberg* is a novel that really wants to be a prose poem but is afraid to come out of the closet.

Woyzeck's Head, by Ekbert Faas, is the most philosophically ambitious and dense of all the novels here. If it weren't for the utterly persuasive and eerie portrayal of Woyzeck, "veteran" of the Napoleonic Wars, murderer, and, ostensibly, the first modern psychiatric patient, one could call this a novel of ideas. Faas, however, dramatizes the ideas through incident and characters who emerge as real people — however distant and historical — engaged in scientific and moral speculation. Faas's writing is often perfunctory, his narrative turgid with significance, but running through the entire work is a powerful, insistent line of enquiry. What is the connection between the ideas of Schopenhauer, who corresponds with Dr. Bergck, one of the specialists examining the "criminal" Woyzeck, and 20th-century Nazism? The question is tantalizing.

One Hans Marten, a modern researcher into this particular aspect of Germany's intellectual history and the man responsible for saving historical documents about Woyzeck, attempts to find the answer. Comprising letters, broken narratives, autobiographical fragments, eyewitness accounts, scholarly investigations, medical papers, and a novella within the novel, *Woyzeck's Head* makes for heavy and heady reading, if you'll excuse the pun.

Structurally, the novel is unnecessarily complicated, and the sections dealing with Martens in the 20th century are often the most plodding in the book and — curiously — the least interesting. Moreover, the question posed by the narrative is not satisfactorily answered within the context of the work.

Beautifully written in measured, musical prose, Alberto Manguel's *News from a Foreign Country Came* attempts to depict the nature of evil in modern times in its portrayal of Antoine Berence, a retired military man living in the Gaspé with his ailing wife and young daughter. I admire this book very much. Intelligent in concept, discreet in its handling of dramatic incident, subtle but not distant, and deeply sensitive to the contradictions and complications of the human heart and mind, *News from a Foreign Country Came* should have left me completely satisfied, disturbed, and enlightened.

It did all three, partially. I think the difficulty here, as in the Faas book, is structural. The central section of the novel, given over to Berence's wife and her eventual discovery that her respectable husband was a torturer, is too long and too slow. The last section wherein Berence himself speaks to his daughter after the death of his wife in a monologue revealing his past, his beliefs, and morality, is too short. Nor is the reader given any indication that the man is even capable of such insight and self-awareness. It's a question of balance and narrative inevitability that seduces the reader into believing what the author chooses to depict.

I think Douglas Coupland's *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* is a brilliant success. Racy, colloquial, as contemporary as the depletion of the ozone layer and Benetton ads, original in voice and metaphor, this book literally zings. A group of young people who don't seem to belong anywhere in particular, members of the downwardly mobile generation for whom the promises of the collective, commercial North American dream have fizzled, lives in the Nevada desert, working at non-jobs, surviving anonymity and anomie by telling stories. A kind of latter-day *Decameron* where the plague is information-overload and brand-named everything, *Generation X* deserves considerable credit for dealing with the world we actually inhabit: shot through with white noise, deodorants, false heroes, and many idols, designer this or that, and a pointless freneticism:

Dag's roadside diner smells, no doubt, like a stale bar carpet. Ugly people with eleven fingers are playing computer slots built into the counter and eating greasy meat by-products slathered in cheerfully tinted condiments. There's a cold, humid mist, smelling of cheap floor cleaner, mongrel dog, cigarettes, mashed potato, and failure. And the patrons are staring at Dag, watching him contort and die romantically into the phone with his tales of tragedy and probably wondering as they view his dirty white shirt, askew tie, and jittery cigarette, whether a posse of robust, clean-suited Mormons will burst in the door at any moment, rope him with a long white lasso, and wrestle him back across the Utah state line.

Perhaps the characters don't emerge as strongly as they do in either Faas's or Manguel's novels, but the writing is remarkably fresh and energetic here: witty, surprising, wickedly satiric, superimposed upon feelings of desperation and spiritual dismay, social alienation and personal irrelevance. Despite stiff competition from Faas and Manguel, *Generation X* wins my vote for best first novel. ♦

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Alice Munro: A Double Life

An excerpt from a new biography of one of Canada's finest writers

by CATHERINE SHELDRIK ROSS

We're delighted to offer our readers a sneak preview of Catherine Sheldrick Ross's new book on Alice Munro. It's a fine piece of work in itself, and also the first in ECW Press's "Canadian Biography Series," titles that are aimed at the intelligent general reader and feature subjects of wide interest — just the sorts of books and readers we want to encourage. Our story begins in the early 1930s...

THE AREA OF Huron County around Wingham is known internationally as Alice Munro country. With its horror of disclosure, this is the last place to want to celebrate itself or have its secrets exposed. Nevertheless, as the setting for many Munro stories, and variously called Jubilee, Hanratty, and Dalgleish, the town of Wingham has passed into art along with some other Ontario towns: Sara Jeannette Duncan's Elgin, Stephen Leacock's Mariposa, James Reaney's Stratford, and Robertson Davies's Deptford. This small town of about 3,000 people is only approximately 125 miles from Toronto, 70 miles from London, and 25 miles from the lake-port town of Goderich. Despite being at the junction of two highways and having its own CBC radio station, Wingham seems somehow remote. As the narrator put it in Munro's "The Peace of Utrecht," "there is no easy way to get to Jubilee from anywhere on earth."

This is the town in which Alice was born on 10 July 1931, as announced in the *Wingham Advance-Times*: "Born. Laidlaw. In Wingham General Hospital on Friday, July 10th, to Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Laidlaw, a daughter Alice Ann." The weekly *Wingham Advance-Times*, published each Thursday, has recorded the life of this community for more than a century — conservative, conscious of decorum, yet apparently prone to violent injury and sudden death. In the week of Alice's birth, the paper reports road building ("The connecting link in the Provincial pavement from Clinton to London was opened a week ago"), a wedding ("An exceeding pretty July wedding was solemnified"), an accident ("Fall down Cellar Stairway"), obituaries ("It was with deep regret that the community learned of the sudden death..."), and agricultural news ("Turkey breeding is not the difficult undertaking that is generally supposed"). This is the community in which Alice grew up, the community she knows in her bones and has made her own in her fiction.



Alice about three years old

The Laidlaw family didn't live in Wingham itself, but a mile or so west, in a "legendary non-part of town called Lower Town (pronounced Loretown)." Until around 1873, Lower Town was more important than Wingham. Then Wingham got the railway and expanded, while Lower Town went downhill to become a rural slum. As Munro told Alan Twigg (and was forthwith sternly taken to task for the following disclosures by the Wingham paper), "We lived outside the whole social structure.... We lived in this kind of little ghetto where all the bootleggers and prostitutes and hangers-on lived. Those were the people I knew. It was a community of outcasts. I had that feeling about myself."

The Laidlaws lived in a red-brick Ontario farmhouse on a nine-acre farm. A photograph taken at the side of this house in the fall of 1931 shows a smiling Alice, about three months old, held in her mother's lap. This house is described, as remembered from childhood, in the uncollected story "Home": "All the rooms are small.... The wallpaper in the front rooms was palely splotted by a leaky chimney. The floors were of wide boards which my mother painted green or brown or yellow every spring; in the middle was a square of linoleum...." When the leaves were off the trees, the view eastward included church spires and the square, brick tower of the Wingham town hall. The area behind the farmhouse is now filled with wrecked cars — the house has been sold, and the current owners have rented it to people with a wrecking business. But when Alice was growing up, the view behind the house was of a wide field and flats that sloped down to the curve of the river.

This river flowed past the foot of the Laidlaw property on its way from Wingham to Lake Huron at Goderich. Indians had called it Menesetsung before it was renamed the Maitland. With its spring floods, the river took on a legendary quality for Alice as she grew up. This little stretch of river, she says, "will provide whatever myths you want, whatever adventures.... This ordinary place is sufficient, everything here touchable and mysterious."

Downstream to the west, and visible from our place, a wide curve of the river had broadened the flats, and to the north, it had undercut a high steep bank covered with trees.... To the south.... the village of Zetland once thrived — remembered my father, but in my time utterly vanished.... This scene... was my first access to the countryside of southern Ontario, which was and has remained magical.

The farm, the mile or so of river, Wingham, and the nearby towns of Goderich and Blyth provided the geography of Alice's childhood world, later celebrated in her stories. Munro has summed up the culture of her area of Huron County as a

rural culture with strong Scots-Irish background.... that had become fairly stagnant. With a big sense of righteousness. But with big bustings-out and grotesque crime. And ferocious sexual humour and the habit of getting drunk and killing each other off on the roads.... I always think the country I was born and brought up in is full of event and emotions and amazing things going on all the time.



Wedding picture

[...] Munro's grandparents were prosperous enough to have provided their only child, Robert, with a university education. But at the Continuation School in Blyth he lacked self-assertion: "He felt a danger too, of competition, of ridicule. The family wisdom came to him then. Stay out of it." He dropped out of school to pursue the solitary life of hunting and trapping in the bush, which he saw through the romantic lens of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking* books. Initially he sold pelts of wild marten, muskrat, and mink, and the red foxes caught in his trapline. In 1925, he bought his first pair of Norwegian silver foxes and started breeding them in pens he built on his father's farm.

To this farm came a visitor, a good-looking schoolteacher named Anne Clarke Chamney. She was Robert's third cousin, related through his mother on the Irish side. She was brave, prim, energetic, and single-minded, with a forceful personality. Her early experience was the model for Del's mother's story in *Lives of Girls and Women*: "In the beginning... dark captivity, suffering, then daring and defiance and escape." Anne had come from a much poorer Ottawa Valley farm, in Scotch Corners, not far from Carleton Place. With thin soil barely covering granite outcrops of the Precambrian Shield, farms in this area were never prosperous. The original Scots settlers had moved on to better land, and were

replaced, within a generation, by Protestant Irish. The Irish moved in, settled down, established the Anglican Church and the Orangeman's Lodge, and tried to eke out a living. To escape this poverty, Anne Clarke Chamney literally ran away from home to go to high school. [...]

Anne and Robert became engaged, and they married in 1927. Money saved from Anne's teaching career helped buy the nine-acre farm in Turnberry Township, the location for the new Laidlaw Fur Farm enterprise. In the twenties, a married woman could not



Alice working in the bookstore

continue teaching, but it must have seemed to Anne that she was exchanging her teaching career for a share in an expanding new industry. She may not have thought then of pens of barking foxes, the need to slaughter horses and grind horsemeat for fox food, the chloroform of the fox-killing box, and the stench and the blood of the pelting operation. Nor could anyone know that, with the Great Depression just two years ahead, they had embarked upon fox farming too late and with too little capital. [...]

FOR HER FIRST five years, Alice lived the life of a sheltered, cherished only child. Then came changes. A brother, Bill, was born in 1936; a sister, Sheila, in 1937. In 1937, Alice started grade one at Lower Town School. Life in that school was shaming, vulgar, unintelligible, and frightening, but it taught her to build up her defences. She learned not to confide in people — "you'd be crushed and beaten down if you did." She learned how to survive random violence and squalor:

People got beaten up. I got beaten up. Before I went to school, life was cozy and protected. Then at the Lower Town school, no one liked me. And there was the violence and the unpleasantness of things like the outhouse, which I never went into. Since my home was sheltered, things like that would make me feel sick. So those were a tumultuous two years. I can't remember a single class or book from those years.

In "Privilege," which Alice has called "an autobiographical piece, not fiction at all," she describes Rose's schooling at a place very much like Lower Town School, with its outhouse smells, lunchpail robbing, and coar slashing: "Her schooling seemed deplorable....But she was not miserable....Learning to survive, no matter with what cravenness and caution, what shocks and forebodings, is not the same as being miserable. It is too interesting."

For two years, Alice learned survival skills at Lower Town School, taking grade one, skipping grade two, and taking grade three. But this schooling experience, so useful to the writer, was not the one Alice's mother had in mind. She finagled to get her daughter into Wingham Public School in town, attended by children of a more genteel class. There Alice felt socially dislocated, neither town nor country. She wasn't among the social leaders automatically elected as captains of the war savings-stamp drive or officers of the Junior Red Cross or the Literary Society — these posts went to children of dentists, doctors, and store owners. Being a year younger than others in the class made her feel physically clumsy. She says, "I was always being made to feel like a dimwit. I was klutzy at things." Grade five was the year to

start writing with straight pens, which stabbed the paper and dribbled ink. "It seemed to have been far worse for a girl to make a mess than for a boy. So grade five was traumatic." But, in retrospect, Alice says,

In this way I got this look at a big range of society. I was always an outsider and you just couldn't ask for a better beginning for a writer....see[ing] such a big range of people and attitudes and even language by the time I was seven. This is something that you absorb. You use it for your survival when you're a child....I think this is very important, very useful, for a writer. Mind you, it's fairly difficult for a person.

Some of Alice's own ambitions coincided with her mother's goals for her. She consistently brought home top marks and prizes for scholastic achievement. She got parts in the operetta performed each spring in the town hall by the senior students at Wingham Public School. [...] In other ways, Alice strongly resisted her mother's program. She chose friends her mother dis-

approved of. As a teenager, she rebelled against doing recitations at Sunday school. She repudiated a gift from her mother — a book called *Beautiful Girlhood*:

I still remember the verse in the front of the book by Charles Kingsley: "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever." [laughter] I immediately knew this was a book that I was not going to be pleased with. Of course I read it anyway, in a horrible state of anger — not an anger I could communicate to anybody — with a solid recognition that beautiful girlhood was not going to be for me.... This book was very heavily into the joys of motherhood — not the joys of sex — motherhood.

Alice was embarrassed by her mother's theatrical personality. She recalls that her mother used to

come to the school and make her presence felt. I just died, even hearing her voice in the corridor, I died. I got the message that she was so at variance with the community. I must have got this message partly through my father's mother — my grandmother — and my aunt. And maybe my father, in some very subliminal way, I don't know. We were

all embarrassed by my mother, *before* she got sick. When she got sick, that put the cap on it.

Nevertheless, her mother's individuality, however strongly resisted at the time, was a model of confident self-assertion in an environment that otherwise counselled conformity. Alice speculated in 1975, "I never doubted for a minute that my way of seeing [the world] was important, and I really don't know why that is. I think I got a lot of strength from my mother who also never doubted."

By 1939, Canada entered the war, and lives changed. Wingham boys enlisted and were written up in the *Wingham Advance-Times* — going overseas, being cited for bravery, or going missing. A school for air-force pilots opened at Centralia, south of Wingham in Huron County. By 1942, the list of rationed goods included butter, tea and coffee, gasoline, meat (two pounds a person per week), sugar (one half-pound a person), and newsprint. Large advertisements urged readers to get behind the war effort: "Stop this Menace. Come On Canada! Buy the New Victory Bonds"; "Join the Farm Commandos and Help Harvest Food for Victory." When Alice was in grade six, a Doctor Redmond told the Wingham Public School assembly on Empire Day that boys would in future be named Franklin and Winston, "while Adolph and Benito will become household names for our dogs."

The war brought prosperity, but not to the fur-farming industry. By Christmas of 1940, Alice's father was thinking of pelting all his fox and mink, getting out of the fur business for good, and maybe even joining the army as a tradesman. Instead, Alice's mother drew on her managerial talents and practical shrewdness. She suggested not selling the best fox pelts at the Montreal auctions — they should make them into fox scarves and capes to sell themselves. In the summer of 1941, Alice's mother went north to the Pine Tree Hotel in Muskoka, where her refined demeanour helped her to sell furs to rich American tourists. Later, she looked back fondly on this summer when her bold intervention staved off financial disaster [...]

With opportunities opening up at the war's end, Alice's mother should have become a great businesswoman. Alice speculates

She might have gone into some kind of antiques business. I would have had a classic mother-daughter conflict with her, because I would have despised



Alice in West Vancouver

all her values. We would have fought. But there wouldn't have been this enormously peculiar relationship, with all its guilt. And then eventually we would have made friends, one hopes.

Instead, when Alice was about 12, her mother developed Parkinson's disease — an incurable, slowly debilitating illness with bizarre and evasive symptoms that are initially hard to diagnose [...] Practical responses to her mother's illness were required of Alice. By 1944, when she entered the Wingham and District High School, Alice, as older daughter, had taken over the mother's role in the house. Male and female roles were then very clearly defined, as they are depicted as being in "Boys and Girls," with men outside doing heavy and dangerous work and women inside doing housework. So Alice relinquished to her brother the adventurous job of helping with the foxes, and she started making meals, ironing, and bossing around her younger brother and sister. She said, "I thought if I kept house well, then these other disasters, like the failure of the fox farm and my mother's illness, wouldn't completely overwhelm us. It was like a rearguard action." In 1944, Alice's paternal grandmother and her sister, now both widows, moved to Wingham to keep house and help the family. Alice has described them as "these two healthy, hearty, and *charming* old women living in Wingham, when my mother was this incompetent invalid." Very much as portrayed in "Winter Wind," the grandmother and great-aunt represented traditional femininity and conventional values. They were nurturers — great makers of quilts and preserves. They mended Robert Laidlaw's socks and made pies for the family, but were also a source of reproach, making it clear how far short the household had fallen from proper decency and order: "They urged conventionality to a degree that you couldn't deny....they tried desperately to turn me into the right kind of woman. Sewing was the chief thing they urged on me. And they made me embarrassed about the situation at home."

Alice's energy might just as well have gone into housekeeping when she was a teenager, she says, since it certainly wasn't going into dating boys, "because no one was going to ask me." And why not?

I suppose because of my innate oddity. Because I was a pretty girl. But the oddity completely overwhelmed the sexual appeal. And the oddity I was trying to suppress. But they were smart; they figured it out! [Which was fortunate] because I was so sexually vulnerable. I was sexually interested, to the point where I would easily have married any of half a dozen people, if they had shown interest in me. I really liked men. I really liked boys, and they were so callow. It's just lucky that no one ever made a move. And meanwhile I was trying to get the wash done. And ironing.

KNITTING AND SEWING were strongly promoted by her grandmother as a necessary preparation for being a good farmer's wife. So Alice tried to knit, but not very hard. Her mother wanted her to learn to play tennis as a way of attracting suitable men and moving up in the world — a notion she felt bound to reject, along

with most of her mother's ideas. Instead, she read and she thought about stories. Growing up in a community where feelings were hidden and reading was subject to ridicule, Munro was a secret addict, rereading certain favourite books in "a desire for possession." Reading, and later writing, became a way of organizing the jumble of experience. She says,

I would even wash the dishes with a book propped up in front of me....I remember being told about someone named Hessie Scott, who read to such an extent that the fluffballs under her bed were practically as big as footballs....I was constantly warned about the feckless future that was probably in store for me if I didn't give up on reading. This promoted reading a lot with me because, I think, children often want to do what they're being warned against.

Five milestones stood out in her childhood reading: Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," Charles Dickens's *A Child's History of England*, L. M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*, the poems of Tennyson, and, of course, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. She read Andersen when she was about seven, and remembers not being able to bear the sad ending of "The Little Mermaid."

So I started making up a happy ending and I made up an ending that I liked a lot better. I remember walking around and around in the yard, when I was very small, making up that ending. With a story that I loved, I would go back and read it over and over again. It was a desire for possession. I guess it was like being in love. I could not possess it *enough*, so I made up my own story that was like it.

The summer she was eight and recovering from whooping cough, she read her first real book, Dickens's *A Child's History of England*, which she later described in an article entitled "Remember Roger Mortimer" as a shamelessly anecdotal history of intrigues and executions, love stories and villainies. She found out in adulthood that this book, which belonged to her father, had been the first book he had ever read, too — a coincidence not remarked upon at the time, since reading was not anything anyone ever discussed.

All the more reason why Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*, about a young girl with a vocation to be a writer, would come as a revelation. Munro says that it was "the watershed book of my life." Unlike the sunny Anne books, *Emily* was disturbing, with complexity and an underlying menace. As Munro noted in the afterword to the New Canadian Library edition,

what's central to the story...is the development of a child — and a girl child, at that — into a writer....we have been shown not only how she learned to write, but how she discovered writing as a way of surviving as herself in the world....At the very end of the book, Emily writes...a statement that calmly sums up her naïve egotism, cool presumption, and rapturous submission to the demands of her chosen life: *I am going to write a diary, that it may be published when I die.*

Montgomery's book shows Emily choosing the black life of the writer and, as Munro puts it, "exultant about the choice." The next big book that she read was a collection of Tennyson's poetry that she found in an old, abandoned house when picnicking with some girlfriends. By this time, she was twelve, and she was writing poetry and reading it almost exclusively. She responded to Tennyson's sad lyrics and long narrative poems such as *The Princess*, *Enoch Arden*, *Idylls of the King*, and *In Memoriam*, and tried to imitate lines such as "The moan of doves in immemorial elms." After that, when she was 14, came *Wuthering Heights*: "*Wuthering Heights* really excited me beyond anything that was happening in my real life. I think I probably read it thereafter constantly for four or five years. I was really reading it all the time."

Reading itself was not enough, and Alice turned to writing as a way of achieving complete possession. In explanation, she has said, "It's hard for me to understand how people, who love reading as much as I did, stop with reading. I would think everybody would then start making up their own stories." From the age of 11, Alice made up stories in her head on the long walks to and from school, but she didn't write them down. Some, such as the stories the narrator tells herself in "Boys and Girls," were daydreams. At first, the dreamer plays the hero's role of rescuing others; later, due to her beauty and charm, heroes rescue her. Parallel to these daydreams were imitation stories invented with a real understanding of what fiction is. After "The Little Mermaid" imitation, Alice did imitations in public school of girls' adventure stories and Zane Grey Westerns. The first things she put on paper were poems, which she wrote from ages 12 to 15. Then, all through high school, she worked on "Charlotte Muir," [her *Wuthering Heights* imitation]. And what impelled her to keep writing? She told Thomas Tausky, [...] "I think there was just an enormous feeling of excitement and wanting to find a place to put it. Fiction was a way of being able to translate a kind of rapture that I think everybody feels. The thing is to find a way of expressing it. And I really felt able to do that then." Writing provided a tremendous sense of joy and power. The idea of publishing stories came to her when she was 15, convalescing from having her appendix out: "I had already planned that I was going to write the great novel pretty soon but thought prudently that I wasn't perhaps ready to begin so I would write a short story in the meantime." Commenting on the story "An Ounce of Cure," Munro described how the character gets out of a hopelessly messy situation "by looking at the way things happen — by changing from a participant into an observer." This is what she was able to do herself with her writing: "I made the glorious leap from being a victim of my own ineptness and self-conscious miseries to being a godlike arranger of patterns and destinies, even if they were all in my head; I have never leapt back." ♦

This is an excerpt from Catherine Sheldrick Ross's biography Alice Munro: A Double Life, which is forthcoming from ECW Press.



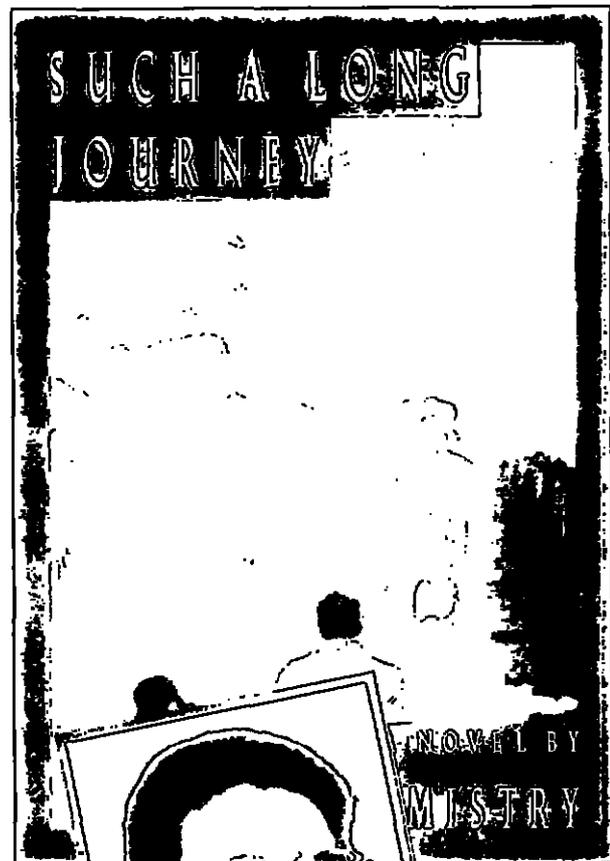
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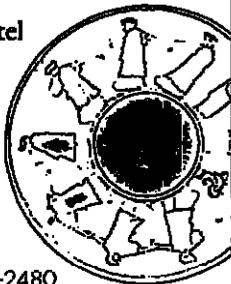
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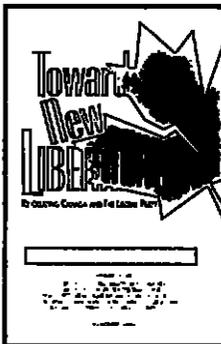
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The Truths of Fiction

For L. R. Wright, writing is who she is as well as what she does

by PAT BARCLAY

LAURALI ROSE ("Bunny") Wright is a crime writer with a difference. Though she's published four mystery novels and is currently working on a fifth, Wright has also written four "mainstream" novels, beginning in 1979 with *Neighbours* (Macmillan), which won first prize in the "Search-for-an-Alberta-Novelist" competition. The gripping story of a suburban housewife whose loneliness slowly drives her insane, *Neighbours* introduced the steel-nerved flair for exploring disturbed human psychology that has led some reviewers to compare Wright with P. D. James and Ruth Rendell. Indeed, Wright made her debut as a crime writer with *The Suspect* (Viking Penguin), which won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for 1985 in competition with the British novelists Simon Brett and Rendell herself. More recently, Wright received the Arthur Ellis Award for 1990 from the Crime Writers of Canada for her third mystery novel, *A Chill Rain in January* (Macmillan).

L. R. Wright worked as a newspaper reporter and columnist in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta before turning to novel-writing full time. She makes her home in Maple Ridge, B.C., where Pat Barclay caught up with her between mysteries.

BiC: *When did you first discover that you might be a writer?*

L. R. Wright: When I was about 12. I was reading an L. M. Montgomery book, *Emily of New Moon*, who as I recall was writing letters to her dead father as a way of dealing with her grief. For some reason, I found that an absolutely galvanizing idea. I stopped reading and asked my father for something to write in; he found me a book and I



PHOTO COURTESY OF L. R. WRIGHT

L. R. Wright

started to write, and I have ever since. It's what I am, rather than what I do. And at some point I knew that I would very much like to be able to earn my living doing this; but I also knew that although some people have stories to tell at a young age, I didn't, and I knew that it would be quite a while before I did. Then I discovered that there was such a thing as journalism, and that's what I decided to do, and that's what I did.

BiC: *You studied both theatre and journalism?*

Wright: I went to the summer school of theatre at the University of British Columbia, but that's the only theatre course I ever took, and the only writing course I've ever stuck with was the Banff School's creative-writing course one summer with W. O. Mitchell. I tried to take cre-

ative-writing courses on several occasions, in several places. And I always dropped out of them; they were very depressing because I didn't seem to be able to make them work for me. And what I learned in Banff that summer was that the most important thing for you to learn is a way of working. When you have found that, you can find your voice as a writer.

BiC: *How did the door suddenly open? Because it's an individual discovery, isn't it?*

Wright: Yes, it is. And what works for some people doesn't work for others. W. O. Mitchell has a way of teaching that he calls "freefall." It's stream of consciousness: you sit at the typewriter and just kind of write. And I found that very freeing. But everything that I wrote about, during this period

at Banff, was my own life, which was fine because it was very useful, but it wasn't helping me to write fiction. So I remember calling home to Calgary during the week and saying to John, my husband, "There's this problem. This is going really well but I already write non-fiction. I want to learn to write fiction and I can't seem to do it." And he suggested that I try to do it as one does when one is acting, and that is, you have to pretend to be somebody else. So that's what I did. I did the same stream-of-consciousness stuff, but I put myself into somebody else's shoes and mind and created the char-

Wright: I haven't got any idea. I know it's not any of them, yet, because I know them well enough to know they wouldn't have done it.

BiC: *This must be exciting for you.*

Wright: Sure it is. It's why I write. It's the exploration of character, or human behaviour, and that's what fascinates me about writing.

BiC: *You didn't realize *The Suspect* was going to be a mystery when you started it, did you? How did you find out?*

Wright: Since I begin with a character, I began *The Suspect* with an image of one old man swacking another old man over the head. I started to write, knowing only that. And because I write in a disorganized fashion, I assumed that this chapter would actually turn out to be the last chapter of the book, and that I would write about how we got to this stage, where this person could be doing this thing. And for some reason, that

first chapter created enough momentum that it just kept on going, and I was astonished to find myself proceeding in chronological order, which is a thing I rarely do.

BiC: *But you knew it was working.*

Wright: Yes, so why should I stop? But I did get to the point where the next logical step was that somebody was going to find this body and therefore, there had to be a police person involved. And I, in all my years as a reporter, never covered police or courts. There was no police person among any of the people of my acquaintance. So I thought, Oh dear, I can't do this. Then I stopped and thought, What if I were to do this; this would turn into a different kind of book. It'd be a mystery novel, which I don't write. But then I thought, I'm enjoying myself so much, I really should go on, and I decided to create, not a policeman, but just a man, and then make him into a policeman later, because I could always fix any police errors that I made, after I finished the book. So I decided not to worry about that then. It took me a couple of weeks, though, to create this man that I liked. I put him at funerals and doing all sorts of things, but it wasn't until I got him outside, whacking away at the greenery, that he felt real to me. And then I just kept on going.

BiC: *You've had a couple of rather nasty reviews: one for *A Chill Rain* in January and one for *Love in the Temperate Zone*. I admired *A Chill Rain*, but it made me uneasy because *Zoe* was such a powerful character and unpleasant to be around. And I think the big difference between it and *The Suspect* is that the reader likes the latter's protagonist, but is uneasy around *Zoe*. Is that a problem for you?*

Wright: It might be a problem but it's not one that I pay any attention to, because I can't write for anybody except myself. And when I do that, when I write the best book I possibly can write — which I do, every time — then that book will find its own readership, and if it's a small readership, then that's fine.

'What I had been doing as a reporter wasn't necessarily the truth. It was facts, but truth is something different...'

acter that way. That was what I learned at Banff, and I have been using it ever since.

BiC: *Is it enough? Do you need to go on to something else now, or is that going to last you?*

Wright: Well, it's a technique is all it is. For instance, I used it when I was writing *The Suspect* and had to have a policeman. I pretend that I'm somebody else for a while. And after that person is firmly established in my mind, or that character, then I don't need to do that any more. I can move him or her from place to place and put them with various characters and know how they'll behave. So it's getting to know them, it's creating something that you are then so familiar with that you can deal with it in a more traditional manner.

BiC: *Do you have a plot all mapped out when you start?*

Wright: No, I don't work that way. I don't know very much about anything when I start to write. I usually have a character in mind and I go through the process that I've just described. The whole first draft is that kind of concentrated work. I also do a great deal of rewriting, and the book goes through several drafts.

BiC: *It sounds like an unusual way of writing a mystery. Do you think many people work that way?*

Wright: No, most people whom I've spoken to know a little more about what they're doing. I've written 60 pages of a new book now, for instance, and I don't know who committed the crime or why; but I've got the characters who are affected by it, and I'm really enjoying myself.

BiC: *Do you know if the murderer is going to be one of these characters, or are you going to bring in somebody else?*

BiC: *Why did you want to write fiction?*

Wright: Because you can tell more truths in fiction.

BiC: *When did you find that out?*

Wright: I think I found it out as a reader, a long time ago; maybe when I was a kid, even.

BiC: *You probably found it out from reading L. M. Montgomery.*

Wright: Probably. I was very lucky when I was a kid, because the first book I remember reading was *The Wizard of Oz*. And the next books that I remember becoming really absorbed in were the L. M. Montgomery books. And all of these books have as their central heroic characters female people. And I took it as a given that girls could have adventures, and girls could be heroes.

BiC: *Speaking of girls as heroes, are you on your own now? Are you still separated from your husband?*

Wright: Yes.

BiC: *Have you found that you're stronger than you thought you were, as a writer? I've read that he was such a help and support when you were getting started. But you've done all this crime writing since...*

Wright: Oh no, we continue to work together. But, as a matter of fact, with each book I do more before I show it to him. Not for any particular reason, just that I want to get to a certain point and I want to get to where I need a certain kind of assistance before I show it to him. And with each book, I've been further through the process before I've needed to do that.

BiC: *Do you think someone like that is really essential?*

Wright: Absolutely. Perhaps if I lived in New York or Toronto, that person would be my editor. But they are so far away that it's just too inconvenient, and John is very, very good; he's extremely adept at telling me what I already know, but am not admitting to myself yet.

BiC: *For new writers starting out, what would be the best advice you could give them?*

Wright: Write. Just write. All the time. It doesn't matter for whom, you don't have to show anything to anyone, but if that's what you want to do then that's what you will do. And there's a certain point at which you feel the need to have somebody else read something that you've written, and that's the time to take a course, or join a writing group, or call up some other people who are writers and get together regularly to read each other's things.

BiC: *What about this right brain, left brain thing? You must have used your left brain most of the time when you were a journalist. But in fiction, you had to learn to integrate the two of them more; did you find a way of doing this?*

Wright: Yes, that's what I learned at Banff. That was the big problem: how do I get away from telling the truth? And then I discovered that summer that what I had been doing as a reporter wasn't necessarily the truth. It was facts, but truth is something different. And it was a breakthrough for me, that summer, to learn how to do that, and I can feel myself getting more free all the time.

BiC: *You once said something about a switch going on in your head, and it's easier now, because when you've done it right, you recognize what you've done.*

Wright: That happens after I've written something that I know is right. But I never know before. Usually, when I sit down to write, after the first few days I have a list. My list consists of scenes in which I see these characters doing something. And I look at the list and I write the one that feels like I would enjoy writing it most. And I see what happens with that. And then sometimes that leads to something else, and sometimes I go back to the list and do another one. I have looked at the list later and said, "Well, that didn't work; that did." But when I make the list, I have no idea what's going to work and what isn't.

BiC: *That's a nice, loose kind of thing, a list.*

Wright: Yes. It's terrifying, though, when you're trying to create the first draft of a novel. It would be much more comforting if I had an outline.

BiC: *You couldn't write like that though, could you?*

Wright: No, I couldn't, and every time I have some pages to send to my publisher, saying that this is a new book coming up, she always says, "Yes, and we need an outline." And I say, "Yes, right." And I do this outline, but it isn't an outline, it's a description of what's in the pages, and she always says, "Okay, fine."

BiC: *I wonder if most fiction writers have problems like that.*

Wright: My agent always says to me, "Look, you don't have to do what's in the outline, you just have to..." But I simply can't do it. This is not morality we're talking here. I just cannot imagine what's going to happen here beyond these 60 pages.

BiC: *And if you could, you wouldn't enjoy writing it.*

Wright: Probably.

BiC: *Somewhere you've said, "I've had the most fun doing this." Is that still true? Is it still as much fun as it used to be?*

Wright: Oh yes. I can't imagine doing anything else. I don't know that I'd call it fun; it's completely absorbing and sometimes very exciting and sometimes frustrating. But I need to do it. If I weren't being published, I'd be doing it anyway. ♦

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Next Episodes

Encounters with Gérald Godin and Hubert Aquin brought home the reality of the two solitudes to this concerned Anglo Quebecker

by
JOYCE
MARSHALL

THE TRIP WASN'T a success. I didn't find any stories by Québécois writers that could be translated for broadcast on the CBC program "Anthology" as Bob Weaver, the executive producer of the program and my employer, had hoped I'd be able to do. It was 1965, bombs had exploded in Montreal mailboxes two years previously, and we were all anxious to do something about our poor threatened Canadian unity. Translation, we believed, would be at the very least a start. So I went down to Montreal, rather proud of myself because for the first and, as it has proved, only time in my life I possessed the sort of expense account that would enable me to dispense hospitality without cost to myself.

I must have met and talked with six or seven writers but I remember only two. One of these was Gérald Godin, a charming young man whose poetry had delighted me by its freshness and lack of bitterness when I reviewed his first two books — *Chansons très naïves* and *Poèmes et cantos* — for *Tamarack Review* during the late 1950s. We lunched at a basement place called Le Bistro, chosen by him, a lively café with noisy waiters who wrote our orders on a corner of the sheet of wrapping paper that served as tablecloth. (I wondered what the CBC accountants would do when presented with a torn bit of paper but the waiters, it turned out, could provide a proper receipt when required.)

I was a bit dashed to discover that Godin had no recollection of my enthusiastic reviews of his poetry, though he'd thanked the magazine for the first of them when he sent in his second book — which, to my pride and pleasure, is inscribed to me. Was this forgetfulness political? This didn't occur to me at the time, but I wonder.

I'd always got on well with separatists — Godin preferred to be called an "independentist," he told me — because I always explained that as one who has had ancestors in the province since early in the last century, I consider myself a born and bred Quebecker, and as such every bit as entitled to hold opinions and to have those opinions listened to as they are. I'd found that they respected my frankness and even my disagreement; most of them were amused, I'd often felt, by the sort of Anglo who pretended or wanted or tried to be a separatist.

How long ago this seems! I was so sure that if minds could meet — and on many occasions I believed, or at least had the illusion, that they did — the problem would begin to be solved. Godin accepted my views with good humour — the same relaxed good



Hubert Aquin

humour I'd admired in his poetry. I liked him and we talked easily. Our minds met.

Or did they? I'd returned two years before from a 27-month stay in Europe, travelling in a Norwegian freighter upriver to Montreal, and there'd been a moment, soon after we reached the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, when I'd looked over the rail and seen the colour of the river water, that unmistakable green — dullish? lightish? I've never troubled to find the right modifier. To me it's simply river colour and it meant, suddenly and unequivocally, home. "Look, look, it's green!" I'd cried, and the other passengers, Norwegians all, glanced down without much interest. (Their own rivers, glacier-fed, are a much more vivid copper-green.)

I was watching Godin as I described the way my heart had leaped at the sight of the river water and for the first time, on the face of this courteous and friendly young man, was an expression — of what?, slight amusement? — a suggestion that no matter what I might say or try to say, though he would allow me a lesser sort of tie, as far as he was concerned, the St. Lawrence wasn't my river.

He promised to send some prose pieces that might be suitable for "Anthology." He didn't, and I never saw him again, though I remembered his charm and good nature five years later when I read that he'd been one of those arrested during the indiscriminate round-up of "separatists" at the time of the October crisis. He



Gérald Godin

was of course never accused of complicity in the murder of Pierre Laporte, and he went on to defeat Bourassa in the PQ election sweep of 1976 and to become a minister in the Lévesque government. He is still a member of the Quebec National Assembly.

MY OTHER MEMORABLE meeting was with Hubert Aquin. His extraordinary first novel, *Prochain Épisode* (later translated somewhat lamely into English with the same title), had just been published and received a wildly enthusiastic response — more wild and enthusiastic than any book has ever received on our side of the line. “God be thanked!” wrote Jean-Ethier Blais in one of the reviews I saw. “Our great writer at last!”

I'd bought the book the previous day and sat up late to finish it, impressed by its nervous, obsessed style, at once so erudite and so emotional, and the intricate many-layered story that recounts, within the framework of a conventional espionage novel, the tragedy of a revolutionary who is finally unable to act because he cannot distinguish his enemy from himself.

I knew that he'd been arrested for suspected terrorism and had written the book while held in a psychiatric institution. I'd also been told that he didn't want to meet Anglos. However, he was quite willing to get together with me and suggested that we have lunch at the Beaver Club restaurant in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, a choice that caused some amusement later since nothing could more recall the detested hold of the Anglo (and Scottish) establishment. Whether there was irony in this choice I can't say. I'm inclined to believe he simply selected it as an elegant and quiet place for us to eat and talk. As indeed it was. Aquin himself selected the food — Dover sole with a small green salad and coffee to follow — and despite my assurance that the meal was entirely courtesy of the CBC, he insisted that he must contribute the wine. The food was delicious, the service stylish — a perfect Montreal meal.

I was impressed from the first by Aquin's simplicity and gentleness. He was slender and not very tall, with sensitive, even features. I can still see his face quite clearly; it's the face of many thoughtful and sensitive young men, not in the least driven or fanatical, it seemed to me. Yet this young man had been arrested in a stolen car with a gun.

He wasn't talk about politics, he told me; this was one of the conditions of his pre-trial release. (He was brought to trial later and was acquitted.) So we didn't talk about politics, except in general terms at the last. I wanted to. The Montreal mailbox bombs had made page one of the newspaper in the little Norwegian town of Lillehammer where I was living, and I'd imagined bombs popping off all over my native city, killing everyone I knew. I wanted to learn and, if possible, understand. But all I could do was look at this quiet young man, trying to imagine him driving — where? on what errand? — in that stolen car with that gun.

We talked about his book. I was genuinely enthusiastic and could say so. He told me how he'd written it, after requesting a room where he could work alone. I see it as a large room, unfurnished except for a table, which faces a window overlooking the St. Lawrence, but I'm probably making that up; I always see peo-

ple doing the things they tell me about in surroundings I invent for myself.

He was overwhelmed and a bit frightened by the response to the book. I wish I could remember the word he used to describe his feelings; all I can recall is the troubled look on his face and a gesture of the hand as he searched for and finally uttered a word that he (and I too) knew couldn't begin to compass the full complexity of what he felt. That's how memory goes — it gives back everything that precedes and accompanies the word but not the word itself, and unless it comes of itself when my mind is occupied with other things, I'll have to leave it at that.

He asked me whether I thought the message of the book was entirely political or — another gesture, another attempt to pull from his mind an appropriate English word — or “global,” he said finally.

“Global,” I said, for I knew he was using the word in the French sense of “universal, general,” not as we tend to use it to mean “all over the globe.”

“Yes, that's right,” he said.

I know it's risky to try to compose a whole character from the memory of a few words, gestures, and facial expressions. But perhaps impressions received during a single meeting, when that meeting occurs at a crucial moment in a life, have not only a certain purity but a certain truth. I've always felt that seeing Aquin as I did, just when he was about to become a public figure and was finding it difficult to express the way this made him feel, I also saw his tragedy.

Much of our conversation, it's true, was the talk of two people who are trying to place one another. Our ages. He was 36, I a few years older. Where and how we grew up. I reeled off the names of streets I'd lived on, making a point of explaining how hard up my family had become during the Depression. Silly, really — the anxiety I always felt that separatists should realize that I wasn't one of the “rich Anglos.” And when he said that he was separated from his wife but couldn't get a divorce because “Ottawa” wouldn't permit Quebec to have a divorce court of its own, I didn't point out that this had more to do with the attitude of the Catholic Church to divorce than with “Ottawa,” which is at odds, I admit, with my claim that I'm always honest with separatists. But we were getting along so well; I let his mistake slip by.

Then towards the end of that lunch I turned our talk to politics. I knew I couldn't ask a direct question because he wouldn't have answered it, so I made a general comment. I couldn't approve of the sort of terrorism practised by the FLQ, I said — its randomness, its destruction more often than not of the innocent. Direct action against a perceived enemy I could accept in certain circumstances — I was thinking of the Russian pre-Revolution terrorists, and of Gavrilo Princip shooting the Austro-Hungarian Archduke in 1914. I could see some point in that.

Aquin stared into space.

“Yes,” he said dreamily, “selective assassination,” and I thought, My God, what have I been saying, I don't approve of assassination either, not here in Canada where people have a vote, our country.

He sent me some pages from *Trou de mémoire* (*Blackout*), his second novel, which weren't strong enough to stand alone, and photocopies of reviews of *Prochain Épisode*. And when I reviewed

the book for a CBC program called "Critically Speaking," emphasizing the universal as well as the political aspects of the theme, he wrote to say he "felt understood," signing himself "Yours friendly, Hubert Aquin."

We never spoke to one another again, though I saw him several years later as he was being awarded the Montreal literary prize. He'd just returned from a southern holiday and his face and hands were that queer orangey colour characteristic of many winter tans. He looked heavier, more ponderous, no longer the quick, light-moving young man with whom I'd conversed so easily. He was surrounded by well-wishers so I didn't try to fight my way through them, and in 1977 I read that he'd taken a gun into the grounds of the Villa Maria, a posh boarding-school for English-speaking Catholic girls, and shot himself to death. So much of his life was symbolic, in his own and others' eyes, that I've tried to find symbolism in this choice, but perhaps it was just a secluded spot convenient to where he lived. His suicide note said that he was unable to write. His most recent, somewhat incongruous venture — the editorship of the daily newspaper *La Presse* — had not been a success. I've always felt that he died, to some extent at least, from being listened to too carefully, obliged always to be a spokesman for his people, the embodiment of its history.

And he's still being listened to. Sheila Fischman tells me that his photograph is appearing in Montreal bookstore windows again these days, because an early rejected novel has been discovered and published. I hope to read it soon, perhaps finding traces of the thoughtful young man I seemed to know that day.

A POSTSCRIPT: The bill for that simple, friendly lunch at the Beaver Club in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel came to \$35, an exorbitant sum in 1965. The CBC would never accept such extravagance, Bob Weaver told me; I'd have to juggle my expense account to include another lunch. After some discussion, we decided that my non-guest should be Naim Kattan, then in one of his earlier incarnations and still living in Montreal. I wonder whether he'd be amused to know that he once had a free non-lunch with me, courtesy of the CBC. ♦

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Crimes of Fashion

'Got to run,' says Anne Dandurand, 'I'm late for my morgue appointment'

by
ANN
DIAMOND



Anne Dandurand

WHAT I LIKE about Anne Dandurand, what drew me to her in the beginning, is the fact that she kills people. I've always wanted to do that, myself. Not literally, of course. But imaginatively, figuratively, metaphorically, *on the page*. Not only does she kill them but she shows you the bloodstains, the peculiar marks, smells, and contortions that Death leaves on those She honours with a kiss. And somehow she makes it all seem funny.

I've been watching Anne Dandurand for over a year. I know her patterns, her habits of dress, her comings and goings. I wasn't surprised when her book, *L'Assassin de l'intérieur*, was translated into English. You could say I saw it coming.

First I caught on to her wardrobe: all black. Hats? She's got plenty, to set off that wild hair of hers on cooler days. And check her nails: three-inch-long, deep crimson jobs — false, of course. I saw that right away.

We were talking, Anne and I, during the postal strike. It was late August, 33° in the shade, business was paralysed, and there was a street festival in progress outside the café where we were sitting. Anne's poodle, Paradox, lay drooped across her arm and ratified all her statements with limp and bobbing head.

"The mechanism of short stories is so cruel," she told me, and Paradox nodded assent. "Short stories are like small, cramped rooms in which everything must happen. I can't stand it any more." She was describing her trips to the municipal morgue where she researched her latest collection of stories, *Petites Ames sans ultimatum*.

A former actress, she struck me as brooding, almost baroque, in her sexy widow's costume, with Paradox providing a welcome splash of white. I groped for hidden motives as she described her former career on Quebec television, acting in dramatic series like "Les Forges de St-Maurice." "I always played weirdos, crazies, unwed mothers, anorexics, outsiders, women of the shadows." Until the age of 25, she was always working, too busy to think about anything but the next role. Then, she stopped.

Dandurand the actress had other fish to fry. Like her twin sister, Claire Dé, she'd been a compulsive writer since childhood. "Claire and I were born with a defect in our feet. We couldn't be as active as other children. So we wrote: poems, stories, songs, plays. We wrote our way through adolescence."

Could this biographical detail explain an aspect of her stories: their atmosphere of extreme confinement, of obsession fully inhabited and worn like a glove? Or the fact that Dandurand does not apologize for the terrible acts her characters commit, usually in the name of revenge?

She shrugged her slim shoulders and casually lit a cigarette. "It's true," she says, "that when I wrote my second collection, *L'Assassin de l'intérieur*, I wanted to kill. I was very unhappy. Someone was torturing me. It was the opening of a dark side of myself: an obsessive love. So I had no choice — I had to write about it. It was a way

With a kind of relentless rhythm, as night follows day — or death, life. In contrast to normal people, and here of course I'm talking about us happy-go-lucky anglophones, her passionate, trapped souls seem inverted and self-obsessed, strangled by grief and guilt, as well as startlingly uninhibited. Living in tiny east-end apartments, starved for space, light, love, they survive by staying in touch with their inner rage. What's more, they are forever on the move, as if propelled by some dark secret buried in the past.

"My characters are always walking," says Dandurand. "That's because I walk all the time, myself. I find the rhythms of my stories while I'm walking."

One could add that her characters walk because they feel pursued, because something drives them forward into the unknown. That her city-scapes are distillations of what seems a collective dream: the spiral labyrinth in which we conduct the snake-and-ladder rituals of our lives.

But where Dandurand has exploited the cliché of Montreal as Subterranean City, she has also transformed it. Hers is a weary underworld of passion, intrigue, murder, in which the crimes themselves seem exhausted, metaphysical. In that sense, she's a post-nationalist writer, concerned more with patterning than content. These days Quebec writers seem tired of ideology, and seek to understand the structures, the compulsive repetitions that underlie the world of ideas. This is what Dandurand reveals when she writes about love: its origins in something we need to outgrow, but can't survive without. Unlike some feminists who have turned against Romanticism, she plunders that tradition in search of signs and fatal keys. Her truncated characters can seem like symbols, walking billboards of neurosis. Cartoons that satirize and illuminate our compulsions.

One story, "Les feux inutiles," takes place in west-end Montreal — "côté des Anglais." In a bar called La Dépendance, a lovelorn police inspector meets a mysterious dark-haired woman, and after a few drinks they go walking. In a park, under an imposing statue of the hero Norman Bethune, he hears the woman's tortuous confession, which she delivers

in the form of a short story set during the Great Depression. But Inspector Mongeau isn't intimidated or thrown off the case — not for a minute. Underneath his cop-suit, he's a cultured fellow, fully up to deciphering any subtext.

The Fourth Night

IEMERGE FROM the Spectre at two o'clock in the morning. In the street a howling white squall is sculpting ephemeral phantoms. Right in front of me there's a van painted with fleshy ferns, a thicket of mangrove and Mbura trees — it could have been painted by Douanier Rousseau, a tropical oasis in the middle of winter. Suddenly, a woman wrapped in blue furs calls out, "Hedgehog?"

Shit. Someone else who knows. It's incredible. Does every secret have holes in its pockets over here?

She gives me a smile that would send me to hell if I weren't already there.

"Did Aléa send you?"

"Yes, I'm Jeanne Couteau, a friend of hers. She just said I had to contact you. Get inside."

She slides the door open and climbs in after me. It's like in *A Thousand-and-One Nights*, all richly coloured rugs, and embroidered cushions. I stretch out. It's soft, silky, and torrid. The woman knocks on the glass separating us from the driver, and Baghdad sets off. Where to?

"Is this Aléa's van?"

"Yes, but she never goes out."

"What does she want with me?"

"That's up to you. Be careful."

Jeanne Couteau kneels down at my feet. She's undone her furs and her fair skin gleams underneath. She removes my heavy boots and my socks, and strokes my ankles with her plump hands.

"I'm thirsty."

"There's some champagne in a bucket behind you and an engraved silver flute glass."

I take a drink. I feel as though I'm in the centre of a torrent and stop Jeanne Couteau who's already caressing my thighs.

"Why are you supposed to contact me?"

"She never explains. It's all so delicate."

Jeanne Couteau reaches for me greedily, her succubine lips all over my face, but I don't want to kiss her, I want to know.

From "Aléa," in Deathly Delights (Véhicule), by Anne Dandurand, translated by Luise von Flotow

of allowing the situation to explode, and then evolve."

Varied as they are, Dandurand's characters share certain traits: they pine and suffer, they become obsessed, they *explode* and *evolve*.

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Typical of Dandurand to have this story-within-a-story evoke a symbolic landscape, where human neurosis is enshrined and parodied in peculiar place-names: "Le rang Croche du village de Saintes-Plaies" (which translates as "the crooked road in the village of Holy Wounds," approximately). It's a minimalist strategy, relatively rare in Quebec literature, but in a few words Dandurand succeeds in convincing us that life is really a beauty parlour, "Le Salon des Coeurs Battus" (the lost-hearts salon), where betrayed and abandoned women go for rejuvenation and revenge.

You'd have to be crazy to live in Dandurand's spiritual catacombs, where crimes of passion expand and solidify into forms of expressionist architecture. A Gaudi cathedral of the heart. And yet people do live there. How else to explain her army of readers, several thousand in Quebec alone? How to account for the fact that so many of them actually write to thank her: more than 50 letters in response to her novel, *Un Coeur qui craque*, which haunted the Quebec best-seller list for months. There are writers who would *kill* for that kind of popularity....

AS I SAY, I've been watching her. I've learned how she operates. Like any good actress, or decent detective, she's absolutely committed, as well as strangely detached and professional. Far from being posed or artificial, her masks seem to bring her closer to the mysteries.

But what actually tipped me off was the umbrella.

She carries it on rainy days when Paradox stays home. It's black, of course, but check the handle, in the shape of a human hand. The hand of an elegant lady of the night, sheathed to the elbow in a long silk glove. A naïve person — which I'm not — might be taken aback. Was I fooled into thinking she was carrying around a severed human arm? In broad daylight? You must be kidding.

"Got to run," she says, waving her umbrella like a third, dead hand. "I'm late for my morgue appointment."

After she left, I felt shaken. I looked at my notes: practically illegible. Nothing left of our interview but idiot scratchings. Was I her latest victim? Or just an accomplice? I had the sense that, like the sado-masochistic lovers, homicidal hair-dressers, and jaded detectives of her stories, Dandurand habitually strews clues around for others to unravel. I felt a little pang as I realized that, deep down, she probably wants to be caught. Don't we all?

But then I looked in the mirror to check my lipstick, and saw a person for whom the electric chair would be too good. I can't describe the exhilaration, the thrill! Suddenly I felt naked and alive. Or rather, dead.

I think Dandurand's trying to tell us something. That life is a métro station, with escalators leaving from Heaven to Hell. That the real mystery is the attraction that draws strangers together, then splits them apart, irrevocably. That love demands that we all learn to kill and be killed.

Or is she merely whispering: "Read my books, so I can afford to heat my house this winter.

"And never mind who done it. We've all done it." ♦

The Political and the Correct

In the current uproar over who's allowed to say what, some of the really important issues are being overlooked

by BECKY LIDDELL

YOU MAY HAVE noticed, if you pay any attention to the various media, that there's a new scourge sweeping North America. No, it's not the recession or rising unemployment, and I'll leave discussion of Camille Paglia, the intellectual set's Madonna, for another time; it is "political correctness," and it's apparently taken up where Communism left off in assaulting the core values of liberal democracy. Even George Bush has held forth on the scariness of the political correctness thing; here in Canada, TV Ontario's "Imprint" ran an April Fool's Day item last year suggesting that the provincial NDP government was pushing "WorldPerfect," a computer program designed to eliminate politically incorrect language, and the terms "totalitarianism" and "thought police" are being flung about as if the grim world of Orwell's 1984 is only a disintegrating ozone-layer away. The expression "PC," which was coined by the left to describe the attitude of any overly dogmatic individual, has become the facile buzz-word for a *Zeitgeist*: thus Seth Feldman, writing in the *Globe and Mail* recently, commented that "Our current politically correct sensibility has woven a blanket prohibition over an ever-increasing list of words, gestures and attitudes."

But the media operate a lot like advertising, and their version of product recognition depends heavily on catch phrases. Put simply, labels stick, context doesn't, especially when news is delivered in five-second hits and capsule summaries that could be written on the surface of a Styrofoam packing peanut. What's happening, I think, is that the expression of dissent, once a legitimate part of the democratic process, is now being tarred and feathered with the broad brush of "political correctness," and thus discredited, the issues at stake trivialized. We seem to have moved from a reformist social model (remember Trudeau's "just society"?) to a rigidly conformist one in which dissenters are, in the words of our prime minister, "vulgar crackpots." As Susan Crean points out in a recent *This Magazine* article, "...it turns out that we are the thought police in question — critics, advocacy groups and spokespeople for the poor, the old, the exploited, the female and the discriminated against." You may notice that this list of PC types doesn't include members of the Empire Club; the Bronfman and Reichmann clans are also conspicuously absent. The point is that while com-



mentators are whinging about an undefined "list of words, gestures and attitudes" being stomped by PC zeal (all of which continue to thrive in the less structured environment of streets, offices, and homes), members of the corporate élite are raking advantage of our user-friendly legal system to smother whole manuscripts they deem offensive. In Sechelt, British Columbia, the local of the International Woodworkers of America recently waged a campaign to axe *Maxine's Tree*, a children's book by Diane Leger, from the shelves of school libraries because it depicts the logging industry from the "environmental point of view." (On March 3, the school board decided that *Maxine's Tree* would remain on the shelves, but librarians would be encouraged to also display material with a pro-logging bent). Meanwhile, in the United States, powerful right-wing forces are campaigning to revive the Hays Production Code, a set of highly restrictive guidelines for filmmaking (including a ban on all nudity and on words such as "pansy" and "SOB") that will be coming soon to a theatre near you, if they get their way. These pressure groups have clout; in comparison, the activists and social critics branded "PC" are simply thorns pricking the well-armoured hide of authority.

There's more sting to the controversy in the literary community, where — according to some writers — the aesthetic authoritarianism of postmodernism and the ideological rigidity of feminism are menacing freedom of imagination. In "Against Postmodernism," an essay in *Poetry Canada Review* (Spring 1989), Susan Ioannou sounds an elegiac note that suggests she's lashing herself to the

most of "standards and craft" and going down, if necessary, with the shipwrecked values of Western civilization. But is the situation really so desperate? Doctoral students may be churning out theses under the aegis of deconstruction and poststructuralism (and their feminist refinements) faster than you can say "floating signifier," but the literary mainstream is still solidly locked in the grip of modernism, if not the 19th century (don't forget Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*). In fact, take a look at the Governor General's Award short lists for the past few years: with the exception of a few poetry collections, the books are decipherable by anyone who can read a newspaper. Among the small magazines, for every journal of avant-garde tendencies, such as *Writing* or *CV2*, there's a gaggle of more traditional stalwarts along the lines of *Fiddlehead*, *Quarry*, or *Malahat*. The best-seller lists are dominated by books with less narrative tilt than the washing instructions on clothing labels.

Market share aside, some writers are griping that now, as well as filing GST reports and having to watch for dangling modifiers, they are being forced to keep an eye peeled for, say, misogynist expressions and binary oppositions. Thus Sharon Thesen, in the *Vancouver Review* (Summer 1991), tells us "Why Women Won't Write": they're cowed by "literary theory's dark shadow" and "feel stifled by 'thought police' or pressured to toe an ideological line." (To be fair to Thesen, her essay is a response to getting called on the carpet for being "resistant to theory" by Smaro Kamboureli in *Open Letter*, so she was provoked).

I have a certain sympathy for the resentment of arbitrary rules: English grammar, for instance, is nothing but a long list of don'ts, most of which come down to us from the 18th century, an era of "humdrum correctitude," as the scholar S. A. Leonard put it in *Doctrines of Correctness in English Usage*, with "an elaborate critical apparatus for inhibiting expressions [based] upon false theories of the nature of thought and of communication." And expecting writers to be aware of all those nasty *isms* — racism, sexism, classism, etc. — is almost like real life, which is depressing enough for most of us. On the other hand, given that the imagination isn't a divine implant magically insulated from social conditions (and conditioning), it seems possible that such issues may seep into what we write or may even be part of what we want to examine. The Irish poet Eavan Boland points out that "who the poet is, what he or she nominates as a proper theme for poetry, what self they discover and confirm through this subject matter — all of this involves an ethical choice. The more volatile the material — and a wounded history, public or private, is always volatile — the more intensely ethical the choice."

Of course it's annoying to a writer to be told what and how to write; it's like facing some zealot who wants to convert you to a religion or sell you life insurance. (And critics, no matter what their theoretical affiliation, do it all the time.) But why, I wonder, feel threatened by it? Unless it's your boss who's doing the proselytizing, in which case the pressure comes from the position of the messenger, not the message itself. The notion of conformity to an ideological line summons the spectre of 1950s McCarthyism — but in that case, people's careers and freedoms really were on the line, because the high priests of the anti-Communist inquisition were powerful people. In this case, there may indeed be individual

writers turning the beam of their own enlightenment into a searchlight to spy out non-converts. But to conclude that ideological intolerance is programmed into feminist and postmodernist theories is like classifying baseballs as lethal weapons because one has come winging its way through your front window.

Many writers are nervous about analysing their creative process, I suppose because inspiration fades in and out, like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and we're superstitiously afraid that it will disappear for good or go stale if subjected to rational examination. The urging of contemporary theory for "self-consciousness" may thus seem like prying or, worse, *Robert's Rules of Order* for the imagination. But there's a distinction between the process of writing a text (a blend of conscious intention and unconscious intuition) and the text itself (which exists independently) — one that writers have difficulty making and critics of all persuasions take for granted. As a result, the relationship between the producers of literature and the interpreters of it has long been uneasy. Years before the word "*jouissance*" wafted over from French shores, Flannery O'Connor said that "Even if there are no genuine schools in American letters today, there is always some critic who has just invented one and who is ready to put you into it."

Undoubtedly there is a power struggle going on, but it has more to do with the university as an institution than with postmodern or feminist theories of representation *per se*. The academy is as highly competitive, hierarchical, and hooked on evaluation as any of the *Fortune* 500 companies. In effect, it's an industry. Postmodernism's various theories are "in," so I can well believe that to get ahead in the academic milieu you have to be able to deconstruct with the best of them. But is this a recent development? New Criticism had its own jargon and cheerleading journals; as Gayle Green notes in *Changing the Story*, F. R. Leavis's influential school of criticism "began as a revolution against an effete postwar critical establishment but soon turned doctrinaire." What *has* changed is that more writers are working in the university than ever before; inevitably they get drawn into the struggle between the traditionalists, who are defending their turf, and the new kids on the block, who are expanding theirs. And for writers, the conflict isn't just a question of professional advancement as instructors — literary reputation is mainly dependent, in the long term, on the embalming process of academic study. So if the type of writing you do is ignored or denigrated by contemporary theorists, a little anxiety of non-influence (even if it operates subconsciously) seems understandable.

It might be more peaceful in the literary community if writers were all tolerant and supportive of each other, but that kind of communal niceness exists only in the vapid *tableaux* of soft-drink commercials. Let's be realistic: with feminist and postmodernist theories challenging our assumptions about the production and reception of literature, friction and resistance are inevitable. And healthy. If we're not open to new ideas and challenges to established ways of thinking, if we're not willing to be a bit uncomfortable and self-questioning, how do we develop as writers? Orthodoxy, whether of traditionalist or postmodernist cloth, is a strait-jacket for a writer. As Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*: "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out, and I thought how it is much worse perhaps to be locked in." ♦

A Celebration of Difference

Multicultural policies that abet rather than eradicate racism are the focus of Joy Kogawa's new novel

by JANICE KULYK KEEFER



ITSUKA

by Joy Kogawa
Penguin, 294 pages, \$24.99 cloth
(ISBN 0 670 84472 1)

WE'LL DISAPPEAR IF we don't care. We can't care if we don't know our stories," remarks a character in Joy Kogawa's new novel, *Itsuka* (the title translates as "Someday"). One of the stories that *Itsuka* tells continues the history of Naomi Nakane and her family, with whom Kogawa's first novel, *Obasan*, is centrally concerned. While *Obasan* ends with the breaking of the stone of silence that has virtually entombed Naomi as a child and a young woman, *Itsuka* opens with the middle-aged Naomi taking the first tentative steps towards freeing herself from a prison of emotional, physical, and spiritual homelessness. Having lived through the slow and painful dying of the aunt who raised her after her mother's disappearance, Naomi is commanded by her other aunt, the activist Emily, to leave the prairies for Toronto, where she goes to work for a multicultural journal run by the man who becomes her first lover, a maverick Anglican priest. With him, she becomes involved in the movement to win meaningful redress for victims of those wartime policies of internment and deportation whose traumatic consequences *Obasan* so poignantly evokes. The erotic and political plots of *Itsuka* are made to intertwine under the influence of something that can only be called mystical: a vision of love that survives and indeed transcends the death of individu-

als, and yet also becomes the moving force behind the kind of people-power politics that the novel so engagingly depicts.

For of all the stories offered us by *Itsuka*, it is the political, rather than the erotic, mystic, or familial, that compels this reader's attention. Naomi's involvement with Father Cedric seems to me a rather unconvincing substitute for what might have been at the heart of the novel — the failure of Naomi's relationship with her brother Stephen, and the crucial questions raised by his abdication from any involvement with family or community due to his absolute commitment to his art. I must admit to a certain disappointment, too, at the absence in *Itsuka* of the kind of poetically charged language and intensity of perception that give *Obasan* its extraordinary beauty and power.

Yet it would be wrong to fault *Itsuka* for not being *Obasan Revisited*. What Kogawa has done in her new novel is to move into a different kind of imaginative territory, exposing the politics of a multiculturalism that has in many ways abetted rather than eradicated the racism that she presents as an institutionalized aspect of Canadian life. Her account of the formation of the Japanese-Canadian redress movement and its bitter and protracted struggle against a succession of obstructive ministers of multiculturalism makes absorbing reading. So, too, does Kogawa's depiction of how the powers-that-be (including the supposedly arm's-length CBC) attempted to manipulate and coerce the redress movement, and of how officially sanctioned multiculturalism presses ethnic and racial minorities to

stick to singing "pretty songs" instead of allowing them "access to power."

If *Obasan* helped to effect a transformation of the Canadian sense of self, a transition from the notion of this country as a bi- to a multicultural society, *Itsuka* forces us to confront the serious obstacles that prevent this society from becoming truly just, and its members equal. Though the novel stresses the power of love to "extinguish the night," it argues that action as well as words, political as well as aesthetic energies are needed in order to transform established ways of perceiving "the other," and to create a celebratory rather than punitive response to racial and ethno-cultural difference. Kogawa's inclusion in her novel of the text of the government's formal apology to those whose lives were torn apart for "the public good," an apology containing the pledge that "such events will not happen again," takes on special significance at a time when Canadians are debating the conditions for our very survival as a nation. For no amount of insistence on the need for national unity should make us forget or silence the stories of any group of Canadians unjustly treated in their "home and native land." Only if we continue to remember and relate such stories can we approach that vital crossroads where, as Kogawa suggests, "the beginning of an altogether new story touches a turning point in the old." And as *Itsuka* shows, it is the storytellers who can help us hear "the breath of life" in a country where so much of what we should most value seems to be in danger of demise.



David Homel

ALL HITS, NO ERRORS

by Eric McCormack

RAT PALMS

by David Homel

HarperCollins, 224 pages, \$22.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 00 223756 3)

PLEASURES ABOUND in David Homel's new novel (his last, *Electrical Storms*, was short-listed for the 1989 W. H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award). His characters convincingly inhabit that perilous no man's land that lies between the grotesque and the all-too-real. His prose is totally appropriate — sometimes precise, sometimes adorned with memorable images ("the sorry state of our immortal souls, that heavy, loathsome, invisible package we carry around inside us like a piece of shrapnel"). Through his young narrator, he offers us, in an oblique manner, wise insights into the world and its human fauna. And if you relish subtle humour in fiction, you'll enjoy the way it creeps unexpectedly into *Rat Palms*.

The novel fits loosely into the Southern Gothic mode. Like me, you'll probably think you've read enough of that stuff to be able to predict the ingredients. And to an extent, you'll be right: the novel does have its run-down mansions, its decadent former slave-owning families, its sultry, Spanish-mossed backdrop. You'll expect violence and sex too, and you'll find it, together with insanity, incest, inbred corruption, and at least one beauti-

ful, available mulatta.

Yes, you'll find these things — but done so well that even the expected elements somehow become unexpected! And anyway, there's much more that's odd and unusual. The explanation of the title gives an alluring foretaste:

This is the legend of the rat palm: the palm trees that grace the streets of Los Angeles, all planted by man's beautifying hand, none native, are home to

thousands of rats nests. At times a rat, or two, will fall from the top of a bushy-headed palm into a passing convertible car, altering the consciousness of the driver.

Homel has either invented or discovered all kinds of weirdnesses — for example, the techniques for baiting alligators (all I'll say here is — dog lovers, remember it's only fiction).

The story itself ("story" is a key word in the novel, as is its inescapable relation to "history") contains the obligatory echoes of Faulkner and the South, but of Salinger, too: it's about a young man, Timothy Marster, and his rite of passage — his "period of reflection" (the unravelling of that irony I leave to each reader). His odyssey from rootedness to rootlessness and back involves a criss-crossing of the United States during which he learns a lot about himself (the failed schoolboy), his father Zeke (the failed pro baseball player), and his mother Evangeline (the failed Southern belle).

I ought to mention the dialogue; it's cryptic and evocative, never boring — and that's quite an accomplishment. In fact, there are so many good things in *Rat Palms*, it may seem captious of me to end on a critical note. But here goes. In a word: *baseball*. Homel, like Robert Coover and a number of other distinguished North American writers over the years, uses the game of baseball (its history, personalities, traditions, etc.) as though it constitutes some sort of universal myth. Nothing makes the Scottish-Canadian reader feel more alien, even after a quarter century here. I protest!

CLASS IS IN SESSION

by Stan Fogel

CANADIAN CANONS: ESSAYS IN LITERARY VALUE

edited by Robert Lecker

University of Toronto Press, 251 pages.

\$35 cloth. \$16.95 paper

(ISBN 0 8020 5826 cloth, 0 8020 6700 X paper)

IF A UNIVERSITY student in the 1960s or 1970s had come across the term "canon" at all, it would probably have been in reference to a minor cleric in a major Victorian novel. Since Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* was published in 1983, however, it is the categories "major" and "Victorian" that have become cannon-fodder. A book's status and importance to an era or a nation are being ruthlessly interrogated. As Robert Lecker states in his introduction to *Canadian Canons*, scrutiny has shifted from the purported intrinsic worth of literature to how it "is the product of ideological forces" and how "these forces have created the values aligned with works called good or pronounced to be worthy of study."

Masterpieces that have been the cornerstones of our literary culture are, in short, being revalued as institutional constructs. According to Lecker, the questions one must then ask are, "How did those works get chosen," "How have



they been shored up by governments, universities, publishers, the market, etc.," and "What books are excluded from the list of enshrined books and why?"

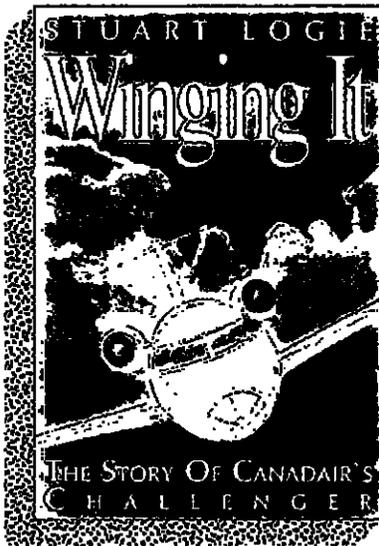
Specific to *Canadian Canons* is the question of "CanLit" and core Canadian texts. One of the contributors, Leon Surette, states succinctly that he wishes "to try to identify some of the principles that have governed canon-formation in English-Canadian literature." He and eight others embark on that project, while three of the contributors to this volume set themselves the task of examining the making of French-Canadian literary history.

Despite the occasional bit of repetition, necessitated by the need for the contributors to locate themselves, and a concluding essay by Lorraine Weir that is too hermetic for the volume's broad sweep, this is a wonderful collection. It is, I think, accessible to nonspecialists as well as to those who beef up their CanLit c.v.'s by arguing CanLit out of existence. This is an irony not lost on several of the contributors.

Some interesting aspects of Canadian canon-formation scrutinized here are its locus in literature departments; the inflation involved in forcing a group of books into a metaphor for the Canadian identity; the limitations and the ideologies of our literary history-makers; and "the marginalization of women in the prevailing canon of Canadian writers from the first half of this century." Other topics examined are England's cultural hold on Canadian theatre, the preponderance of realistic plays in the Canadian canon, and the treatment of avant-garde Québécois art by the academy and the cultural mainstream.

Toss in discussions of the CBC and conservatism and you've got a salmagundi of issues that Robert Lecker marshals lucidly in both his introduction and the collection as a whole. Like it or not, *Canadian Canons* is symptomatic of much academic writing about literature: instead of a forging ahead — onwards and upwards — with the construction of artistic edifices, there is a deconstruction of those buildings. That is not equivalent to razing...razing, perhaps.

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CANADA

A CHORUS OF PAIN

by Mary Lasovich

WITHOUT RESERVE: STORIES FROM URBAN NATIVES

by Lynda Shorten
NeWest, 294 pages, \$16.95 paper
(ISBN 0 920897 01 0)

THESE ARE stories that speak of the lives of a small group of Natives living in Innerscity, as seen through Native eyes and told by Native voices. They tell of wretched bad fortune and recklessness, the self-destructive legacy of alcoholic parents and the children who become, in

turn, more distanced from the traditions and beliefs of their aboriginal culture.

"I am a reporter," writes the author, Linda Shorten, in the introduction to this collection of autobiographical snapshots.

More accurately here, I am a walking tape recorder. I did not, in any sense, "write" this book. Rather, I served as the conduit through which these Native people could make their stories known.

Meet. Talk. Turn on the microphone. Transcribe. An instant book, yet by design rather than as the consequence of pressing deadlines. Shorten, then working at the *Edmonton Journal*, spent three years on this project. She witnessed (or participated in) several of the incidents related in *Without Reserve*, and her involvement is both the strength and the weakness of this collection of personal



BOOKS IN CANADA

accounts as told by 11 distinct Native voices.

Several of the contributors belong to a loose family network whose members migrate between the city and the reserve, the streets and the jails. In brief passages that move the reader from one voice to another, Shorten contributes evocative details of time and place — and the uniquely intimate perceptions of an outsider who has bridged the chasm that separates most Natives and non-Natives in urban communities.

Shorten edited these stories “down from hundreds of hours of tapes and hundreds and hundreds of transcribed pages.” The book’s chapters recount whatever their tellers volunteered about their lives and nothing more. These stories are not based on interviews or other journalistic techniques: details are not verified by other sources, and are not meant to — and don’t — exhibit a coherent style.

Shorten sees herself as the vehicle through which those she spoke to

show us what should be self-evident: that to talk about “Native people,” as though that were in any way an ade-

quate description, is laughable. These people compel us to see them, to listen to them, and to respect them in all their diversity.

Unfortunately, the authenticity of these voices does not create the diversity that Shorten intends. Their stories, with a few exceptions, reiterate the anguish of being outcasts in white society, the struggle to survive despair and self-destructive rage. They are moving stories of the pain of alcoholism, unemployment, parental neglect, abusive foster homes, and an appalling propensity for settling scores with fists and knives.

In the end, the diversity of voices is nearly overwhelmed by the chorus of pain that resounds throughout this collection. The reader must work hard to differentiate between individual narrators, and harder still to make connections between the grim circumstances of the storytellers’ lives and their isolation from Native identity. *Without Reserve* is worth the effort, but more because of the intrinsic value of what it sets out to do than what it actually accomplishes.

CLASH OF CULTURES

by Cyril Dabydeen

ARCHDEACON ON HORSEBACK

by Cyril E. H. Williams and Pixie McGeachie
Sonnetek, 112 pages, \$9.95 paper
(ISBN 0 929069 05 6)

THE BURIAL GROUND

by Pauline Holdstock
New Star, 96 pages, \$9.95 paper
(ISBN 0 921586 25 6)

CHRISTIAN missionary zeal has been a fundamental driving force in transforming the lives of whole races. It has also been the instrument for rudimentary infrastructural change, as manifested in institutions such as schools and hospitals. Missionary zeal is often grounded in the uncompromising absoluteness of God’s word; in 19th-century England this was palpably evident in the attitude towards the so-called heathens in

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Canada and elsewhere. *Archdeacon on Horseback*, which documents the life of the Anglican missionary Richard Small, is a book set in this context.

During the 1880s and 1890s, Archdeacon Small was peripatetically on horseback, doing the rounds in the British Columbia interior to save Native souls, sometimes riding 40 or 50 miles a day over rugged, mountainous terrain. The image of him on stained glass in the Church of St. Mary and St. Paul in Lytton, B.C., inspired the cleric-archivist Cyril Williams and the writer Pixie McGeachie to work on this volume. However, it is a book that does not tell of resistance or cultural conflict. All seems virtually idyllic, romanticized: "The sight that met the eyes of the clergy was one of comradeship and contentment as families cooked, ate, sang or just rested as they enjoyed the end of the day." This is a far cry from the stereotype of the Natives as wild and savage or as a stubborn and proud race. *Archdeacon on Horseback* might well be categorized as hagiography, the aim being simply to spread the name of Archdeacon Small far and wide among those still excited by missionary zeal and committed to the "sacred duty." But this period also saw the gold rush on the Fraser River, heavy drinking, and smallpox. Archdeacon Small's observations, culled from newspaper reports and elsewhere, do suggest "the irreverence and evil habits of the white population...injuring the Indian converts." This simple, very linear book, never objectively far-sighted, merely acknowledges the role played by the missionary in making the world a strongly Christian place.

Pauline Holdstock's short novel *The Burial Ground* is an entirely different matter. At times haunting and confusing, it depicts the clash of cultures between whites and Natives. The setting is not unlike that of Archdeacon Small's; again the white man's burden, if you will, is seen through the efforts of a Priest (we know him first as Father Lawrence), bent on his redoubtably "sacred cause."

Here there is opposition to the missionary's message from an already very spiritual people, these same Natives. We meet the Old Woman, sinewy, strong, matriarchal, determined that her people will survive and longing for heirs, yet menaced by foreboding tragedy. These are people of the Eagle clan,

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The Burial Ground

Pauline Holdstock

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and Holdstock is less concerned about the paraphernalia of culture than with the residues of spirit expressed through a series of voices also reflecting embers of the mind and emotions. In this narrative too there is the gold rush, drunkenness, and a ravaging smallpox. The Priest's journalistic entries, which form the backbone of the narrative, express his dismay and cynicism; he speaks of giving civilized England what it wants to hear: "a record for their edification, perhaps for their entertainment," adding, "so I told them...how the men dress like wolves for the dance, how the women paint themselves for the birth." This is a not unfamiliar phenomenon in some missionary work in Africa, Asia, South America.

The Burial Ground is related in many changing voices. Everything occurs only in the minds of the characters, without dialogue. Soliloquies or monologues are all: the Old Woman's, the Girl's, the Beautiful Boy's, always the Priest's. The narrative line is obscure, yet all these stories seem to embroider a plot: we learn about a brother-in-law who goes to jail because of a crime judged by the Priest to reclaim a wife; an idiot infant; a "monstrous man" with a hor-

rible skin disease who is shunned. The Old Woman's story is particularly poignant (perhaps superior to anything W. P. Kinsella has written), and may reflect the English-born Holdstock's unconsciously stronger imaginative identification with her in this bare-thread narration. Throughout the book, an omniscient observer suddenly fades, then reappears; the cross-cultural elements sharpen as the Priest himself changes, although he resolves to carry on in order to build a church and to change the Natives' rituals, weddings, births — to the Christian way.

The Priest is perceived as having the power to effect cures through faith in Christ, but — Holdstock hints — the Natives' own inner resources must be tapped before real miracles can occur. Finally, a church is established on the "Rock," but it subsequently founders, burnt to the ground; the Priest dies; the Old Woman dies. The burial ground becomes the enduring image; nothing is suggested of an afterlife in either the Christian or shamanic sense. What prevails is the image of the earth: the process of birth and death, natural seasonal forces, wind, trees, storm, bleached bone.

A FINE ROMANCE

by Rita Donovan

THE REPUBLIC OF LOVE

by Carol Shields

Random House, 366 pages, \$25.50 cloth
(ISBN 0 394 22218 0)

CAROL SHIELDS a romance writer? In her latest novel, *The Republic of Love*, Shields takes the reader on a foray into the cold landscape of the late 20th century. Her two protagonists, Fay McLeod and Tom Avery, personally document their respective states: Fay, a recently involved, now single folklorist who is studying the mermaid myth, and Tom, a lonely late-night talk-show host with three failed marriages under his belt. That they will meet and fall in love is inevitable; it is the stuff of romance novels. And, indeed, it is one of the devices Shields purposely adopts from the genre.

Technically, the book is crisply divided into parallel chapters alternating the narratives of Fay and Tom. Their stories progress separately, although minor characters familiar to them both pass from narrative to narrative. Roughly halfway through the book, Fay and Tom meet and fall immediately in love. Interestingly, although their lives now interweave, the narrative threads of their stories are kept separate, presumably to allow the reader to assess Fay through Tom's eyes and Tom through Fay's. This very successfully gives Shields ample room for irony.

Because of these structural decisions, the essential isolation of each character is underlined. Indeed, loneliness is one of the predominant themes in the novel. It contrasts with the longing for independence that several characters exhibit (Fay's father among them), and Shields also explores this duality — the consolatory woman figure and the impenetrable female, the essentially contradictory nature of the psyche — in describing Fay's mermaid research.

We see the loneliness. Tom is afraid of Friday nights. Fay is afraid to go home to



Carol Shields

an empty apartment. As Tom notes: "Misery does not love company. The lonely can do very little for each other. Emptiness does not serve emptiness."

Is romance possible under these circumstances? And what is romance, anyway? And what is love? These questions plague the citizens of *The Republic of Love*, and they are the basis for what surrounds the bare-boned story of Tom and Fay. No one seems to have definitive answers to these simple questions (simple if you live in a romance novel). Fay asks, "What does it mean to be a romantic in the last decade of the twentieth century?" Her brother Clyde answers "To believe anything can happen to us." Later Fay's father says almost the same thing: "You never know what's going to happen. What's just around the corner." This nicely complements a thought Tom has as he ponders that, despite his problems, "he wakes up most mornings believing that he is about to enter a period of good fortune."

Is this *naïveté*? As if Fay's and Tom's own existences aren't enough to convince them, all around they witness the wreckage of love, the compromises that have been made. Fay looks to her parents' settled life and finds it suffocating (yet, ironically, will later be distraught when her father leaves her mother). Fay says, "No one should settle for being half-happy."

And her friend answers, "Really?" As Fay later observes: "The lives of others baffle her, especially the lives of couples." Yet despite the evidence of disastrous manifestations of love, Fay and Tom believe. This is underlined in Fay's folklore studies, for example, when she describes folk credulity: "Believers...develop an aptitude for belief, a willed innocence."

This optimism is certainly part of most "romances," and Fay and Tom fall as completely in love as any couple in a romance novel. The *naïveté* seems somehow necessary in order for the couple to begin to love at all. Both characters talk about being "alive" when love comes to them. Fay speaks of "the ballooning sensation of being intensely alive," and Tom notes: "So this is what it feels like. To be coming awake."

They try their best to live up to the old-fashioned versions of love. But Fay and Tom don't live on the pages of a Harlequin romance, and Fay observes that while everyone seems to be searching for love, love itself is not taken seriously: "It's not respected." And the world intrudes, as it always will.

Theirs, then, must be an "open-eyed" romanticism; they must choose to love, just as they must choose to believe. Contrary to the cynical world around them, and contrary also to the naive vision in old movies and romance novels, they must create a life that does not deny dead marriages and dying friends, while also not denying the liberating "coming to life" that their love inspires.

Without these qualifications, Shields would have given us a charming tale with little direct bearing on the times. But Fay and Tom earn their right to love. They know the stakes, and they know the odds. So when Shields allows them to honeymoon in Tom's apartment and the storm outside "maroons" them there, the reader feels that they are entitled to their brief stay on their "island," before the world lays claim to them.

Carol Shields has created a sophisticated story in the romance of Fay and Tom. And the "happy ending," so traditional to the romance novel, is here refurbished, updated, and — most happily — earned.

STYLISH PROCEDURES

by Pat Barclay

ACCIDENTAL DEATHS

by Laurence Gough
 Viking Penguin, 224 pages, \$25.99 cloth
 (ISBN 0 670 84469 1)

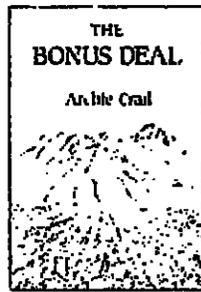
LISTENING to three pundits on "Morningside" the other day, I could hardly believe my ears. It wasn't what they said but what they neglected to say, like that scene in an old Danny Kaye movie when a woman suddenly announces, "The clock didn't strike! I distinctly heard it not strike!" Asked to list the current biggies among Canadian writers of mystery fiction, not one of these pundits thought to mention Laurence Gough. How this could happen, after four crime novels — two of them prize-winners — and one international thriller, is a mystery in itself. And now, with *Accidental Deaths*, his fifth novel featuring the Vancouver detective team of Jack Willows and Claire Parker, Gough once again proves the seriousness of his claim on our attention.

In the beginning (which was only 1987, the year he managed to publish his first novel, *The Goldfish Bowl*, in Britain after being rejected by every publisher of mystery novels in North America), reviewers compared Laurence Gough with Ed McBain. Now, we should be comparing him with Raymond Chandler. Granted, Gough writes "police procedurals," not private-eye adventures. But if style makes the man, it makes the writer even more, and the writing style of Laurence Gough has become, like Chandler's, the most compelling reason for reading his books.

Here's how Gough describes the impact of Frank, his anti-hero, on a hotel's swimming pool:

[The pool]... was deserted except for a guy doing laps with his girlfriend,

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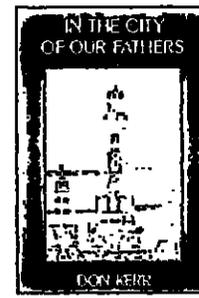


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who hauled her out of there the minute he got a look at Frank's shoulder span, his washboard belly and narrow hips, the rosy veins and hard bulge of muscle on his arms and thighs, the puck and whorl of scar tissue left by the few large-calibre bullets that hadn't bounced off him and, most of all, those bright uncaring killer's eyes.

If anyone learns to appreciate Frank more than the reader, it's Lulu, the sexy albino in the skin-tight bodysuits who worms her way into his bed and his life, and no wonder:

Her movements were fluid and graceful, almost boneless. She was as agile as a snake. As she wriggled out of the blue and pink lycra it made a kind of slurping sound, like someone in the far distance using a straw on the bottom of a milkshake.

Gough tells his story in alternating

chapters, setting the warp of Frank and Lulu against the weft of Willows and Parker like someone weaving a blanket, adding here and there the zany motif of Newt and Rikki, two thugs from California with murder on their minds. Despite their powerhouse competition, Willows and Parker hold up their end very well. They wisecrack, circle cautiously around each other's private lives, and show convincing professionalism on the job as they look for motives behind three violent and related deaths. There's even the hint of a shared holiday coming up, off-stage, to suggest that a police officer's lot could actually turn out to be a happy one. Don't bet on it, though. When it comes to the novels of Laurence Gough, after the reader, it's the villains who have the most fun.



CONGENIAL SUBJECTS

by Christopher Moore

THE STRANGERS NEXT DOOR

by Edith Iglauer

Harbour, 303 pages, \$26.95 cloth
(ISBN 1 55017 054 6)



Edith Iglauer

LATELY SOME pretty talented writers have hoisted up the term "creative documentary" as a replacement for "non-fiction," as they find the latter inadequate for a field coming into its own as a substantial literary genre. Edith Iglauer's collection *The Strangers Next Door*, a record of work from a 50-year career, testifies to how the genre has been loosening its bonds and expanding its ambitions.

Iglauer, who now lives in Garden Bay, British Columbia, began as a New York journalist. In a 1947 piece on the construction of the UN Building, one expects to hear a teletype clacking in the background as the data of 5W journalism (who, what, when, where, and why) roll

forth. Her prose then was like the architecture of the day: utilitarian, unadorned, controlling.

A decade later, the *New Yorker* sent her to the Canadian Arctic, and her articles on that subject established her as an observer of Canada. The excerpts offered here are reports on the spectacular emergence of Inuit art and Inuit-run art co-ops, and precious as such, though perhaps she gave too much attention to federal bureaucrats and too little to the artists. Her prose was still as stripped down as the northern landscape, but without its surprises.

Paragraph after paragraph opened with a big declarative sentence, and a reader skipping from first sentence to first sentence could précis the whole thing.

It's past the midpoint of this collection, in a *New Yorker* profile of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, that Iglauer's gifts become evident. Trudeau's character has inspired a lot of good writing over the years, but Iglauer's essay makes most of the competition seem merely a gloss on what she discerned in 1969, near the start of his public career. By this time, her prose had

begun to open up. She let anecdotes and comments lead where they might, and offset her expository sections with Trudeau's own distinctive voice in direct quotation.

By then, Canada had become Iglauer's beat. (The "strangers" in her title turn out to be us, next door to the Americans, even though the book is published here and seems to be addressed mostly to Canadians.) She settled on the West Coast in the mid-1970s and bestowed some of her best writing on British Columbia subjects, who include the architect Arthur Erickson, the artist Bill Reid, and the writer Hubert Evans.

Iglauer's most congenial subject has long been capable people and the skills

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6

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they have mastered, and by her B.C. phase her command of her own tool-kit equalled theirs. She did not try the range of techniques or the formal inventions of, say, her *New Yorker* stablemate John McPhee; but whether writing about a good friend or someone she never met, she found forms and voices to fit the subject.

Iglauer's best work came in *Fishing with John*, the book inspired by John Daly, the salmon fisherman she met and married in B.C. She wrote it purely for herself, she says, assuming no one else would care. And with no motive but memory she shaped it from inspired indirection, letting her narrative drift across his life and character in a way that may or may not be documentary — but is surely creative.

Without having read much of her work, I had an impression of Edith Iglauer as someone who went to interesting places to meet interesting people, and who wrote about the experience for well-paying, widely read journals. *The Strangers Next Door* is a good introduction both to her impressive career and to the evolution of the genre she has practised since the 1930s. And it leaves me thinking I will go read *Fishing with John*. ♦

FICTION

In J. A. Hamilton's *July Nights and Other Stories* (Douglas & McIntyre, 160 pages, \$16.95 paper), a collection of first-person narratives from both sexes — though predominantly the female — and from various age groups and circumstances, there is a recurring sense of the erratic and casual nature of mistreatment and betrayal. At the same time, these abuses do have histories. Most often characters suffer from the kind of self-centredness that makes it impossible for them to appreciate the individuality, needs, or pain of others. Hamilton's careful observation and crafting of dialogue make this point. Estranged parents, for example, exploit their children to meet their own needs; sometimes with dubious charm, like the handsome father in "The Names of the Constellations," who eroticizes the heavens, seduces his daughter, and finally abandons his family. Years later he dies and is eaten by his cats.

Thematically speaking, madness enters on little cat feet. Some of the stories are also vaguely suggestive of symbolic or fabulist tales, but are too conservative to succeed as such. Instead, the attempt to mix fabulist elements with realism tends to undermine the imaginative credibility of the work.

DONNA DUNLOP

THE FRENCH FEMINIST writer Hélène Cixous has written of "...a text that can produce anguish and resistance in the reader because it is governed by a different order." Janice Williamson's *Tell Tale Signs: Fictions* (Turnstone, 155 pages, \$12.95 paper) defies narrative conventions in favour of (as one cover blurb puts it) "the turbulence of a woman's inner narrative." Some readers may well be thrown by the turbulence, for Williamson's fragmented fictions jump-cut from mock-sociological or psychoanalytic editorializing to lyricism or fantasy, and from straight anecdote to loose stream of consciousness, with quotations from other texts, ironic subheadings, lists, and (in some sections) illustrations liberally mixed in. What a jumble!

Or is it? As Williamson writes in the title piece, "Her mind scurries

along... looks for clues, collects debris." The fictions in *Tell Tale Signs* are the literary equivalent of potshards except that, instead of piecing the elements together tidily, the author is engaged in a kind of undoing: a disruptive reading of the "signs" — cultural and personal — that have shaped her. In this, she accompanies writers such as Cixous and, in Canada, France Théoret among others, whose work has been called "writing in the feminine" because of its concern with gender identity and its formal innovations.

There were times when Williamson's leaps and cryptic witticisms lost me, and in truth I was always scrambling to keep up with her "different order." But the title fiction and the final piece in the book, "Lucrece," a powerful meditation on rape and women's internalization of shame (and blame), are well worth the scramble.

BECKY LIDDELL

READING *Dry Land Tourist* (Sister Vision, 123 pages, \$12.95 paper), Dianne Maguire's collection of 12 deceptively simple short stories set in her native Jamaica, is like being an armchair tourist oneself. The book's atmosphere reeks of tropical heat; the eerie presence of voodoo lurks about, and the music of island speech plays throughout. This is a Jamaica that ordinary tourists don't get to see: a man so lovesick he buys a "love powder" to sprinkle on the object of his desire, who unexpectedly responds even though the magic dust is only powdered lime; a woman mourning her lost child, which poverty forced her to abort; a moneylender tormenting a woman whose man has gone to Canada, where money proves hard to come by. Social comment abounds in this book — some of it shrewd, all of it caring — and the adaptations and inventions of women in a man's world are never far from Maguire's mind. Her stories range from nostalgic evocations of country life to contemporary dilemmas of life in the city. Through them all runs the sturdy thread of their author's respect and affection for a people and a place that she once called home. If you'd like to know what is really meant by the term "a distinct society," reading *Dry Land Tourist* should give you a pretty good idea.

PAT BARCLAY

NON-FICTION

CANADA HAS a lot more racist skeletons rattling around in its closet than one might have believed. That's one of the conclusions derived from Martin Robin's *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada 1920-1940* (University of Toronto Press, 372 pages, \$60 cloth, \$16.95 paper), an excursion into extremist politics in this country in the two decades preceding the Second World War.

Robin, a political science professor at Simon Fraser University, has documented the activities of more than half a dozen Canadian nativist and Fascist groups, including those used by German and Italian consular officials in the major metropolitan centres.

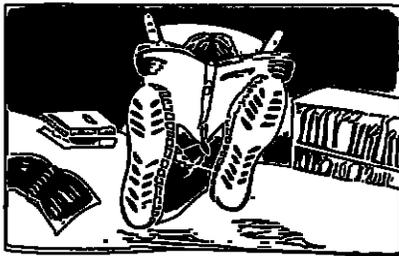
Demographics and economics were responsible, to some degree, for the hostility displayed towards immigrants to Canada by a Canadian version of the Ku Klux Klan, which was transplanted with moderate success in the 1920s in parts of eastern Canada and as far west as Saskatchewan.

The Canadian incarnation of the Klan, which promoted a Protestant fundamentalist triumphalism, broadened the original mandate of its American progenitor (which, in the wake of the American Civil War, had originally been only anti-Black) to include as targets Catholics, Jews, Asians, and other minorities thought to be interlopers on the Protestant white Anglo-Saxon turf of Canada. The KKK did not do well in Quebec, however, because of the province's majority Catholic population. Its place was taken by Adrien Arcand, a journalist whose Coglu (Bobolink) organization attracted the support of thousands of Quebecers who warmed to Arcand's spellbinding if incendiary rhetoric and to his obsessive anti-Semitism.

Robin's essay is a dispassionate study of an unsavoury subject.

ARNOLD AGES





Read It Yourself, Dad!

by DAVID HOMEL

I OPENED MY shipment of books for review under the critical eye of my eight-year-old. "Hey, Gabriel," I offered, "want to help me review these things? All the other reviewers do it that way." Gabriel glanced up from the book he was reading, whose title I won't mention. "No way, Dad," he said. "Do it yourself. If you don't have any ideas of your own, you shouldn't have taken the job."

So much for quality time! But I reminded myself again that, after all, I am a grown-up. I should be able to do it on my own. Anyway, do adult-book reviewers ask other adults what *they* think before they write their reviews?

This latest crop features some local-hero productions, one children's book for adults, a few sure things, and ends with an astounding cow-dung pie. Let's take it from the top.

Tantalus Books of Gander, Newfoundland, is a brand new house that's planning to specialize in children's books. Its inaugural volume, *The Spider in the Woodpile* (unpaginated, \$6.95 paper), by Terry Morrison, with illustrations by Len Walbourne, must have begun as a classroom project, judging from the copious acknowledgements. One day, Webster the spider pops out of a bright purple egg pod with several hundred of his fellows and begins a series of adventures. His log gets carried into a nearby house, bound for the fireplace. Life for Webster in the house is harrowing: he almost gets squashed flat and is nearly washed into the septic tank. He finally escapes to the safety of the outdoor woodpile, only to have his new log brought into the house, bound for the same fireplace. Webster's body resembles a cheerful purple jujube, and the book can't make up its mind whether it wants to entertain or instruct. The publishers of Tantalus are obviously learning on the job,

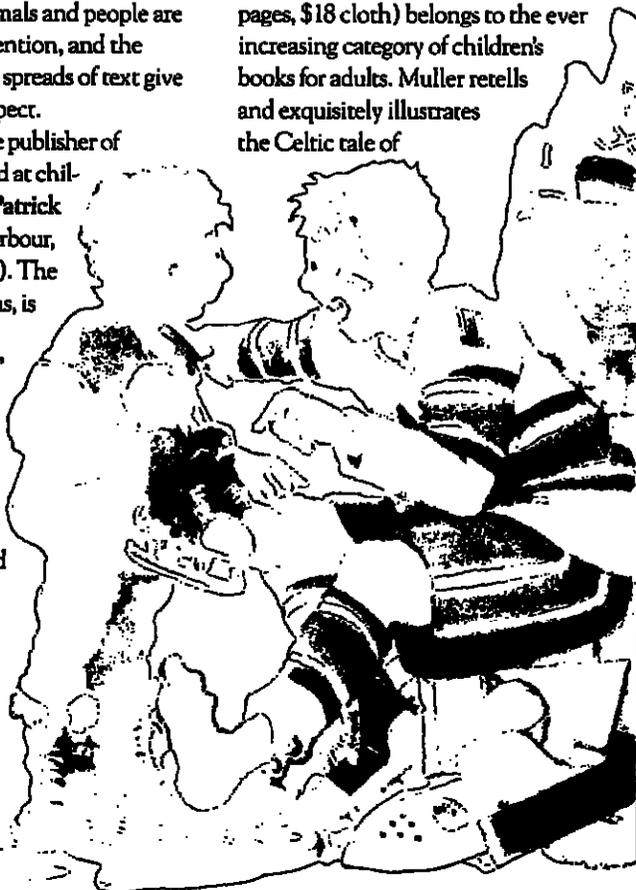
which is probably the only way to go.

The tale of Timmy the Tugboat is continued in Jeremy Moray's *Timmy Ties Up* (Harbour, unpaginated, \$9.95 paper), with illustrations by Dee Gale. Timmy is a 70-year-old tugboat on its last run when a fuel line breaks and a fire starts. A brigade of octopi puts out the blaze and the boat is saved, and Timmy earns a well-deserved retirement party with all manner of animals and humans in attendance. The theme of retirement and the loss of one's usefulness in society is given the briefest of treatments here. Instead, there is a great deal of time spent rescuing a cat, symptomatic of the amount of random action in the book. The animals and people are too perfect to bear mention, and the repeated double-page spreads of text give the book a solemn aspect.

Howard White, the publisher of Harbour, tries his hand at children's literature with *Patrick and the Backhoe* (Harbour, 24 pages, \$14.95 cloth). The illustrator, Bus Griffiths, is identified in the press release as a "folk hero." He is capable of some attractive visual compositions, and he knows his backhoes. But he seems to have changed techniques on every page, and his hero Patrick is a different age on every spread. Patrick loves to tinker and, of

course, he gets into all sorts of mischief, including crashing into nasty, starchy-looking Mrs. McCracken's house with the backhoe and alienating the village policeman, the fat Mr. Pie. But Patrick and his grandfather, proprietor of the backhoe, are vindicated in the end when they save the town from a flood, proving that authority can be defied if it's done for the right reason.

These three books are worthy productions by local concerns, and give a good sense of the places from which they spring. Yet they hardly reach the levels set by many of this country's children's authors and illustrators. On the other hand, Robin Muller's *The Nightwood* (Doubleday, 32 pages, \$18 cloth) belongs to the ever increasing category of children's books for adults. Muller retells and exquisitely illustrates the Celtic tale of



From *The Magic Hockey Skates*

Tamlynnne. Elaine, daughter of the Earl of March, is seduced by the magic and challenge of the enchanted forest, the Nightwood, and against all advice ventures into it. There she meets the handsome knight Tamlynnne, who has been captured, like so many others, by the evil elfin queen's black magic. But Elaine is unafraid, and her love saves Tamlynnne from the evil spell. *The Nightwood* bristles with grotesque faces glaring out at the reader, a level of language that will have some adult readers reaching for their dictionaries, and eerie moonlit scenes in which characters are frozen like figures in a wax museum — in short, it has all the elements of the classic Gothic fairy tale. It's impossible to assign an age group to this title; it is an art book that uses the fairy tale as a vehicle to take us to the underworld of dreams.

And then there are the sure things, and there's no surer thing in children's book illustration than Michael Martchenko. Add his illustrations to Allen Morgan's *The Magic Hockey Skates* (Oxford, 32 pages, \$14.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper), and you've got an irresistibly mainstream combination. Kids will gravitate toward the book because of the hockey, though parents who believe that reading should be a challenge might find all this *déjà vu*. With its you-can-be-all-you-want-to-be moral, no wonder it was tops on the NHL's Young Fan Book List. The book tells of the triumph of Joey. Joey's older brother, Zach, wants as little to do with him as possible, and won't have him on the hockey team. But it so happens that the second-hand skates Joey has been forced into by his parents are magic — if you rub them you can have your wish, according to the salesman at the store. Joey tries out the trick, and goes from triumph to triumph despite his small size. He ends up saving the day for his team by playing goalie, and even scores the winning goal — with time running out, of course.

Kim LaFave's pastel, puffy, cartoonish seagulls are appealing in Patricia Lines's *Cyril the Seagull* (Harbour, unpaginated, \$14.95 cloth). Cyril has a problem: he's seasick. After being the butt of many cruel seagull jokes, he gathers his courage and flies off into a storm to save the birds' favourite ferryboat by fixing the foghorn that warns of dangerous rocks. The ferry is

safe and so is Joe the cook, who distributes such tempting table scraps to the birds. The story is absolutely simple — from out-cast and butt of jokes to hero — but LaFave's illustrations give it a lightness and whimsy that carry the day.

Laszlo Gal's *Prince Ivan and the Firebird* (McClelland & Stewart, 40 pages, \$17.95 cloth) is another retelling of

\$6.95 paper), is based on a 1984 NFB short. It is a most unlikely and intriguing story. Citified Elena, quite German, hates her clodhopping neighbour Mary, who is very Ukrainian. They quarrel over Mary's cow; Elena thinks it stinks, while Mary loves all things of this earth. Bitterness sets in, especially after Elena ends up face-down in the dung heap. Elena devises her

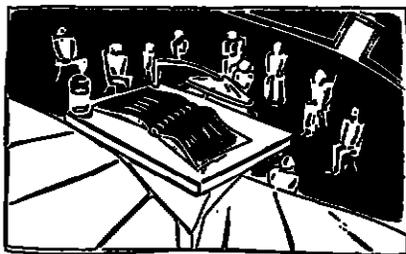


From *Pies*

a traditional tale. One of the mainstays of Canadian illustration, Gal presents his medieval Russia in gentle nostalgic tones, with portraits of villages and forest, serfs and nobles. The illustrations tend to be tableaux rather than depictions of action. Those who know the firebird story will have to decide whether this version adds anything to it. Young Prince Ivan is sent by his father in search of the firebird that has been plundering his golden apples. Ivan is hindered by his own clumsiness, but is helped by a wolf and a raven. The animals conspire with the young prince to first conquer a horse with a golden mane, then the beautiful Elena, and finally the firebird. With triumph close at hand, Ivan's two evil brothers murder him and steal Elena, but the water of life provided by the raven restores Ivan to his rightful place.

Wilma Riley's *Pies* (Coteau, 32 pages,

revenge, which is to serve Mary a pie made with her own cow's manure. But in the end, and quite suddenly, Elena discovers that she and Mary have much in common: religion, children, their day-to-day worries. Elena feels so bad about her successful revenge that she eats a big slice of the pie herself. Gulp! With the fateful dessert on the end of her fork, Elena prays to the Holy Mother, "Help me swallow this pie." And down it goes! In Sheldon Cohen's illustrations, the pie in question takes on a larger-than-life, glistening, malevolent quality. Coupled with his astonishing pictures, the business of eating the dung pie is so compelling that we forget just how preachy the text is. I suspect not all readers will accept this feast, and the untoward combination of the Holy Mother and a pie made of bovine faeces. But what turns the parents green, I'm willing to bet, will be the children's delight. As ever it is so. ♦



Vision and Flight

by CATHERINE HUNTER

THE PROVINCES OF Canada, it seems, have been visited of late by large numbers of angels, though some say these are nothing but unusually wise and luminous birds. The angel alert was first sounded by the poets of the land, who have an uncanny ability to recognize an angel, whatever its disguise.

The nine poets in the seven books considered here offer nine visions of the world, all oddly true. Other than that, they have little in common, except for those eerie, winged things.

The first poem in Ken Cathers's *Sanctuary* (Thisledown, 64 pages, \$11 paper) is the rare "Blue Heron," which begins like this:

*thin boned thing
from the grey world
I grew out of*

*poised
in some dark
part of me*

These delicate, haunting lines have stayed with me since I first read them in the *Malahat Review* some 14 years ago. Cathers is a fine, exacting writer. The poems in this collection are obsessively clean, with all the clean words: bone, dark, stone, tongue, water.

The most remarkable piece in *Sanctuary* is "Coal," in which minimalism works powerfully to tell of four Chinese miners stranded when a B.C. mine shaft collapses. They are left to die, "the labour cheap / readily available / elsewhere." Cathers's compact language mirrors his theme of compressed energy, for the poem deals with all that lies underground: terror, failure, guilt, the "trashed drafts" of the poet, "how much / had to be erased / covered up." The weight of the words, each one painstakingly chosen, becomes the weight that keeps down all buried things. Finally the poem

crammed back

*becomes black
becomes coal*

element of fire.

It burns in the black hole of memory.

Hometown (Véhicule, 88 pages, \$8.95 paper), by Laura Lush, is appropriately titled. Though the book occasionally ranges as far afield as Asia, this poet's vision rarely leaves home. Lush sees the same things we see. Her gift is her ability to describe them in

quick, bright metaphor. In suburbia, fathers have "buckled / their lawns up / neat as alphabets" ("Camphor"). On the beach, young women laze with "bodies pink as fresh-cut melon" ("The Late Brides"). Lush's tone is guarded and controlled. Perhaps it is sheer greed on my part, but I want more. I can't help wishing that she would take a few more risks, give voice more often to the transcending heart suggested in this description of winter:

*when bushes are bound with burlap,
when birds fasten their wings to ice,
wing-pick after wing-pick
tearing away at the sky.*

("The World Traveller")

Sandra Nicholls brings emotional intensity to her first book, *The Untidy Bride* (Quarry, 68 pages, \$11.95 paper). The first section, "Writing about the Dead," consists of a moving series of elegies, most of them for a beloved father. With fragile clarity, Nicholls explores the mystical realm where the living and the dead speak to each other:

*I wonder from what place,
father, you hear me calling.*

*I long to tell
from the other side:
the sound of thin paper
a white rustle
the breath of flowers.*

(The King of Paper Cups")

Most of the book, however, deals with the living. The middle section, "Accuracies," displays much insight into modern urban life. But the people in the poems are so strangled by contemporary culture that the effect is sometimes suffocating. Occasionally, too, the poems rely heavily on symbolic objects. In "Poisoned," a tiny mousetrap, made to bear too heavy a burden of significance, throws the poem off balance.

The structure of the book brings us a wedding at the end, but the fairy tale is ironic. The title poem speaks of a longing for impossible purity, comparing the wedding ritual with the new paper and "fresh pencils" of the first day of school: "we need another chance to begin." Nicholls is a thoughtful, intelligent poet, with her eyes wide open.

Gravity and Light (Cacanadadada, 164 pages, \$12.95 paper)

collects the work of three poets between two covers. Margaret Blackwood, Anne M. Kelly, and Kerry Slavens combine to make a rich and enjoyable volume.

Margaret Blackwood is capable of very effective lines. In "Falling Icicles," a park in winter comes to life with her description of icicles "like glass spears, / sliding bluntly / into the drifts" and snowflakes like "silent, flying angels." In "Laundry Day in the Neighbourhood," Blackwood engages the imagination of the senses; you can smell the "wind-billowed sheets" and "love-worn flannelette" flapping on the line: "The backyards swell with importance, / flaunting diapers and pillowslips; / the flags of domesticity in frantic semaphore." This is good writing. It captures the nuances of real life with grace and accuracy.

Anne M. Kelly's work is surrealistic and shot through with a wild streak of humour. She is visited frequently by angels. Sometimes they're held captive at the zoo, where the zookeepers are less than understanding, and the "tourists clap / and throw coins through the bars" ("Descent"). Sometimes they breathe on the trees at night, leaving "intricate / geometrics of ice / that glitter, blinding / the morning eye" ("Graveyard Walk"). In Kelly's words, anything seems possible:

*I am not insatiable, I whisper to the ghost of Rilke, to you,
as I slip out of bed and into a silk kimono,
but I too wish to be a poet of experiences — a yea-sayer
to every terrible angel...*

("Afterwards, Lying in Bed")

Kerry Slavens's work reveals an awake and questioning mind. In "Whaling Section Bay," whales refuse to show themselves to the poet, who searches the water with binoculars. The cliff on which she walks above the ocean marks "the edge of what is real," the edge over which the poet longs to see, but cannot. All that is visible are "dark shapes that could be whales / moving swiftly beneath the surface." Such imperfect glimpses illuminate many of Slavens's pieces. These are poems that seek revelation from another world, that listen for answers:

*these voices from angels
murmuring against my belly
these sopranos of gods coming to me
through the dark, these obscene
phone calls from heaven. I am healed.
("My Heroes Speak in Tongues")*

Alan Safarik's *On the Way to Ethiopia* (Polestar, 76 pages, \$11.95 paper) is refreshingly cynical, if that is possible. Safarik's twisted sense of humour seems appropriate, given his vision of the world as a kind of madhouse populated by hateful lovers, paranoid border guards, robots who run amok, and murders at the local Burger King. The presiding "angel" in this world is none other than Jimmy Swaggart, "speaking in tongues / or jerking off / in a motel," either of which "makes / for good tv" ("Fallen Angel").

Yet Safarik's vision is not bleak. These poems liberate us from the monotony of evil with their wild exaggeration, outrageous social satire, and occasional moments of magic: "Opened my

mouth and in went the stars / burning various holes / in the bottoms of my shoes" ("Winter Midnight").

Black Markets, White Boyfriends (TSAR, 56 pages, \$9.95 paper), the first collection by Ian Iqbal Rashid, struggles with culture and language in poems that are raw and awkward in places, but always vital. When the "necessary angel" appears, telling tales of history, the poet refuses to listen passively:

*I find his late mouth
and contain it so now there is only
one storyteller
the story mine to tell
("Raw, flawed and asking more than we could bear...")*

One mouth swallows the other in order to tell the *other* story. It tells the dynamics of difference: brown skin, white boyfriends, the lure and the lie of the "exotic." Rashid writes of difficult, complex relationships of power and desire. The closing poems document the ravages of the AIDS virus and the exhaustion of friends who have been forced into mourning too early and too often. The living approach the dying with desperate measures: "your body as dry as anger / I cover you with my hands, / I will become your sweat" ("Hospital Visit"). These are strong poems, deeply grounded in history and its sorrow.

I fell in love with Judith Pond's *Dance of Death* (Oberon, 88 pages, \$15.95 paper). It is a radiant, tightly written sequence of meditations on our final end, with a shocking absence of morbid thought. The book is also a gorgeous object, with thick, soft pages, beautiful typesetting and design (by Michael Macklem), and eight reproductions of 16th-century woodcuts depicting Death as a grisly yet comic skeleton, who beckons everyone to join the dance. The poems seem to speak from a place beyond time, where contemporary and medieval sensibilities meet and mingle in ironic harmony. How does Death enter the world? Pond's poem "Apples" explains: "it's the same / old story: the man's got his head / in the clouds and she's bored." In the facing illustration, the skeleton fiddles while Adam and Eve are banished from the garden.

The book ends "In Paradisum," describing the angels of the glorious Florentine woodcut reproduced in colour on the cover:

*Though their eyes are benign and side-
ways and slightly crazed from so much
beatitude, they have rain-
bows on their gowns and ways
of getting around even
God.*

The final stanzas offer heaven instead of the grave:

*Whenever anyone dies the angels
welcome them with jokes and rose-
petal wine and a general good
time.*

*In saecula saeculorum.
Amen. ♦*

WRITING READER-FRIENDLY POEMS: over 50 rules of thumb for clearer communication, by Susan Ioannou. \$5.95 from Wordwrights Canada, Box 456, Str. O, Toronto, Ont. M4A 2P1

EXISTS THERE A CanLit classic suitable for summary in a limerick? Why ever not, given how rapidly we generated this abridgement of a Tolstoy masterpiece:

*There was a young man named Pierre,
Whom Natasha gave only the air.
First came war, then came peace;
And eventually, blessed release.
As the two made a fine married pair.*

The prize is \$25, and entries should be sent to Can Wit no. 164, Books in Canada, 33 Draper St., Second Floor, Toronto, Ont M5V 2M3. Deadline is April 30.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 162

OUR REQUEST for Canadian knock-knock jokes obviously struck a nerve among readers — we were delighted with the deluge of entries, many of them eminently chuckleworthy. First prize goes to Roger Burford Mason of Toronto, two of whose entries had our office in stitches:

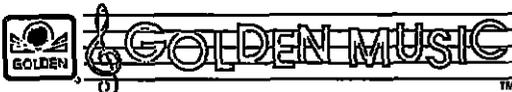
Knock, knock.	Knock, knock.
Who's there?	Who's there?
Govier.	Avison.
Govier who?	Avison who?
Govier rosebuds while ye may.	Avison me, you can buy the next round.



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31 D	32 O	33 F	34 J	35 T		36 U	37 F	38 N	39 K	40 D	41 R	42 P	43 A	44 G		45 G	46 T	47 J	48 V
	49 O	50 O	51 L	52 N	53 R	54 P		55 G	56 P	57 Q	58 R		59 B	60 M		61 O	62 G	63 F	64 U
65 I		66 C	67 D	68 L	69 H	70 F	71 H		72 P	73 K	74 G		75 T	76 H	77 E	78 H		79 G	80 J
81 S		82 Q	83 A	84 R	85 O	86 O	87 C	88 M	89 V	90 P	91 N		92 V	93 G	94 T	95 R		96 D	97 J
98 H	99 O	100 U	101 T	102 F		103 C	104 B	105 O	106 V	107 E	108 T		109 M	110 V		111 M	112 A	113 C	114 R
115 N	116 H	117 B		118 U	119 R	120 P	121 S		122 L	123 P		124 D	125 C	126 A	127 O	128 D	129 I		130 H
131 O	132 R	133 S		134 D	135 R	136 O	137 L	138 V		139 M	140 S		141 O	142 M	143 R	144 T		145 O	146 V
147 E		148 E	149 L	150 U		151 L	152 V	153 M	154 R		155 B	156 L		157 I	158 O	159 E		160 I	161 A
162 O	163 G	164 F		165 K	166 E		167 H	168 N	169 D	170 F	171 A	172 S	173 D	174 R	175 C				

When properly filled in, 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 title of the book (solution next month).

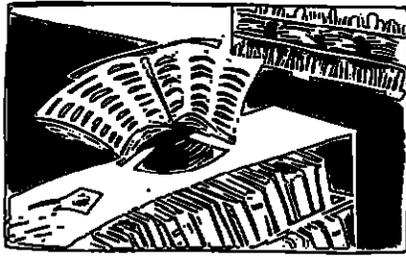
- A. Member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 83 112 43 126 161 171
- B. Parts of an agenda 59 165 3 104 117
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131
- D. What, followed by "and drawers of water," Canadians should refuse to be (3 wds.) 40 173 26 67 124 14 85 134
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45
- H. Raymond _____, author of *White Narcissus* 167 7 76 71 130 154 116
- I. Wife of Ahasuerus 29 160 157 11 129 65
- J. More recent than 80 34 6 47 97
- K. Middle English letter 58 165 39 73
- L. *Madeira Park, B.C. publisher* 122 156 151 24 51 149 66 137
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23
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- R. Instrument for measuring the concentration of a suspension 30 53 84 114 95 17 135 143
132 41 119 174
- S. Janice _____, author of *Wombs and Alien Subjects* 172 140 81 121 133
- T. Ionian Greek city 101 75 48 144 35 94 108
- U. Freed or relieved 13 64 118 36 150 100
- V. *The _____*, Leon Rooke novel (2 wds.) 106 27 146 138 89 152 92 48

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC #44

"Anyone who wants to be a writer and goes to university for four years instead of working at twenty different jobs is wasting their time... writers need a basic education, but otherwise it's all reading and living."

Hugh Garner quoted in
The Storms Below: The Turbulent Life and Times of Hugh Garner,
by Paul Stuewe
(Lorimer)



Bases for Comparison

by ALEC McEWEN

BY WISELY POINTING out that the opinions expressed in their jointly produced magazine *Development* are not necessarily their own, the Canadian International Development Agency and the National Film Board may have also hoped to disclaim responsibility for its grammatical infelicities. The 62 pages of plodding prose that form the English component of a bilingual January 1991 issue devoted entirely to Asia combine sloppy writing with an unimaginative style. Replete with superlative and comparative claims, the self-described research review offers mistaken or misleading information, such as the assertions that Asia contains the world's "longest rivers" and that "More than half of the world's largest cities are located in Asia." *Longest* and *largest* are meaningless adjectives unless the basis of comparison is clear. Neither of the world's two longest rivers is in Asia, while that continent is drained by only seven of the 14 watercourses that exceed 4,000 kilometres in length. Although up-to-date population figures are often elusive, the eighth edition of the *Times Atlas of the World*, 1990, lists but two Asian cities among the nine metropolitan areas with more than 10 million inhabitants. The justifiable eagerness to demonstrate an increasing involvement by women in Asian political leadership prompted the inexcusable description of Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto as former "heads of state," instead of heads of government, a constitutional distinction with which Canadians ought to be familiar. Apart from its factual misstatements, *Development* offers some outstanding examples of appalling English usage. Canada, it boasts, "has more economic interests in Asia than most western countries, except the United States." If the United States is the sole exception, then *most* should be replaced by *any of the*. If the

United States is just one of the nations with greater economic interests than Canada's, then *except* should be replaced by *not including*. Dangled tormentingly before the reader's eyes is "As the world's largest continent, Asia's climates range from tropical to subarctic." A confusion of tenses pervades: "In the past decade, China has begun to make a notable impact on the international scene, while India yearns to play the role of a superpower." The statement that of the three Pacific Island groups, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, the "former is closest to the South-east Asian archipelagos," ignores the simple rule that *former* applies only to the first of two things, not to a greater number. A reference to adult literacy makes the singular observation that "The situation in Nepal, Bhutan and Laos exhibit common features." And if it is correctly speculated that "Japanese net overseas investments may *topple* US\$1 trillion" by the end of this century, the result could be an unbalanced account. This well-intentioned, well-illustrated, and probably expensive publication loses appeal and credibility through the lamentable quality of its authorship.

GOURMAND, GOURMET. The May/June 1991 issue of *Singles Connection*, made available to unattached Calgarians as a redundant "Free Complimentary Copy," contains an advertisement for a culinary club in which prospective diners are invited to share the company of other single *gourmands*. Dangerously ambiguous, *gourmand* can mean either a glutton or a person of discriminating taste for table delicacies. The culinary club should make it clear whether its invitation is for pigging out or for palate tickling. Curiously, the verb *gormandize*

carries no such uncertainty, for its sole meaning is to eat or drink excessively. Part of the problem is that *gourmand*, a word of French origin, does not translate easily into English. *Gourmet* was expanded from an early French word for a wine taster or a wine merchant's assistant to describe a person who can judge discerningly all kinds of food and drink, especially wine. *Connoisseur* is now largely, if not exclusively, preferred in popular usage to signify an expert in sampling the vintner's produce. Indeed, the expression *gourmet meal* has become debased almost to the point of meaning any repast that is individually prepared from basic ingredients, to distinguish it from the mass production of a fast-food outlet.

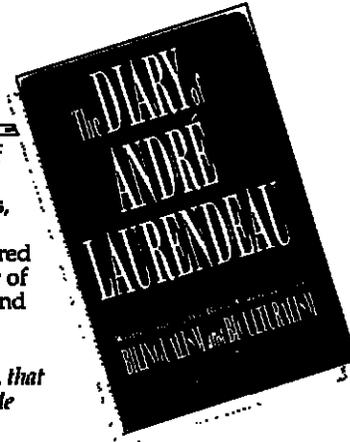
GIRLS AND BOYS. A columnist writing on "What is Sexism?" in *The Other*, a lively new Ottawa newspaper, complains that although a "woman well into her twenties will still be called a 'girl,'" men are rarely called boys past the age of 18. This practice is seen as both a "throwback to ancient times when women never came of age," and a perpetuation of their discriminatory treatment. The reference to ancient times is interesting, for in Middle English the word *girl* applied equally to male and female children. To distinguish one sex from the other, boys and maidens were sometimes respectively known as *knave girls* and *gay girls*, two expressions that, perhaps fortunately, have long since disappeared from the language. In a somewhat similar vein, a modern male need not fear the appellation *lech-man*, another obsolete word that at first sight might appear to indicate some people's worst suspicions, for it simply meant the ring finger, whether on the male or the female hand. ♦

Information

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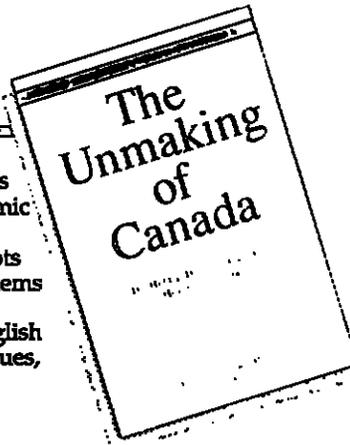


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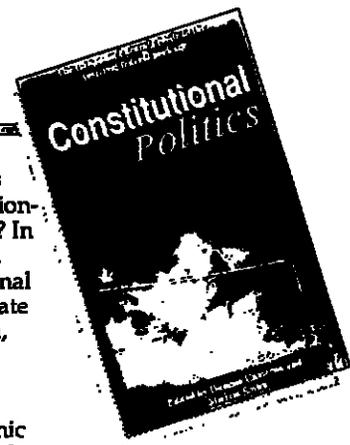


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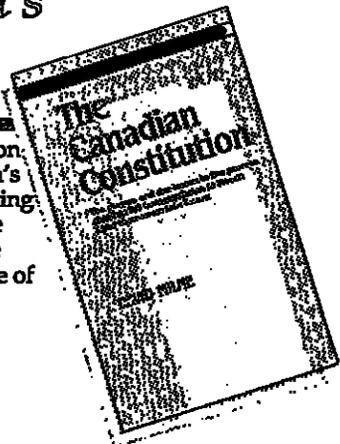


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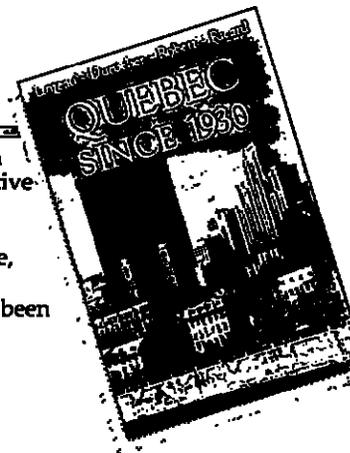


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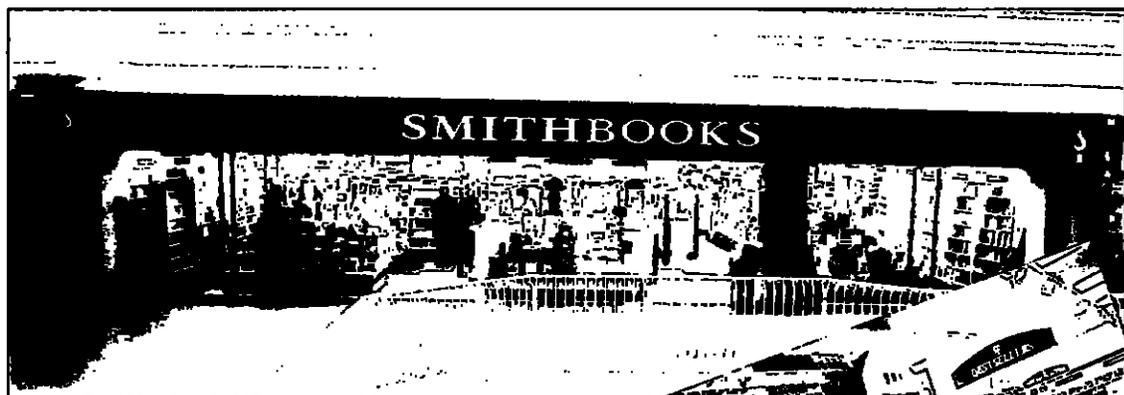
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