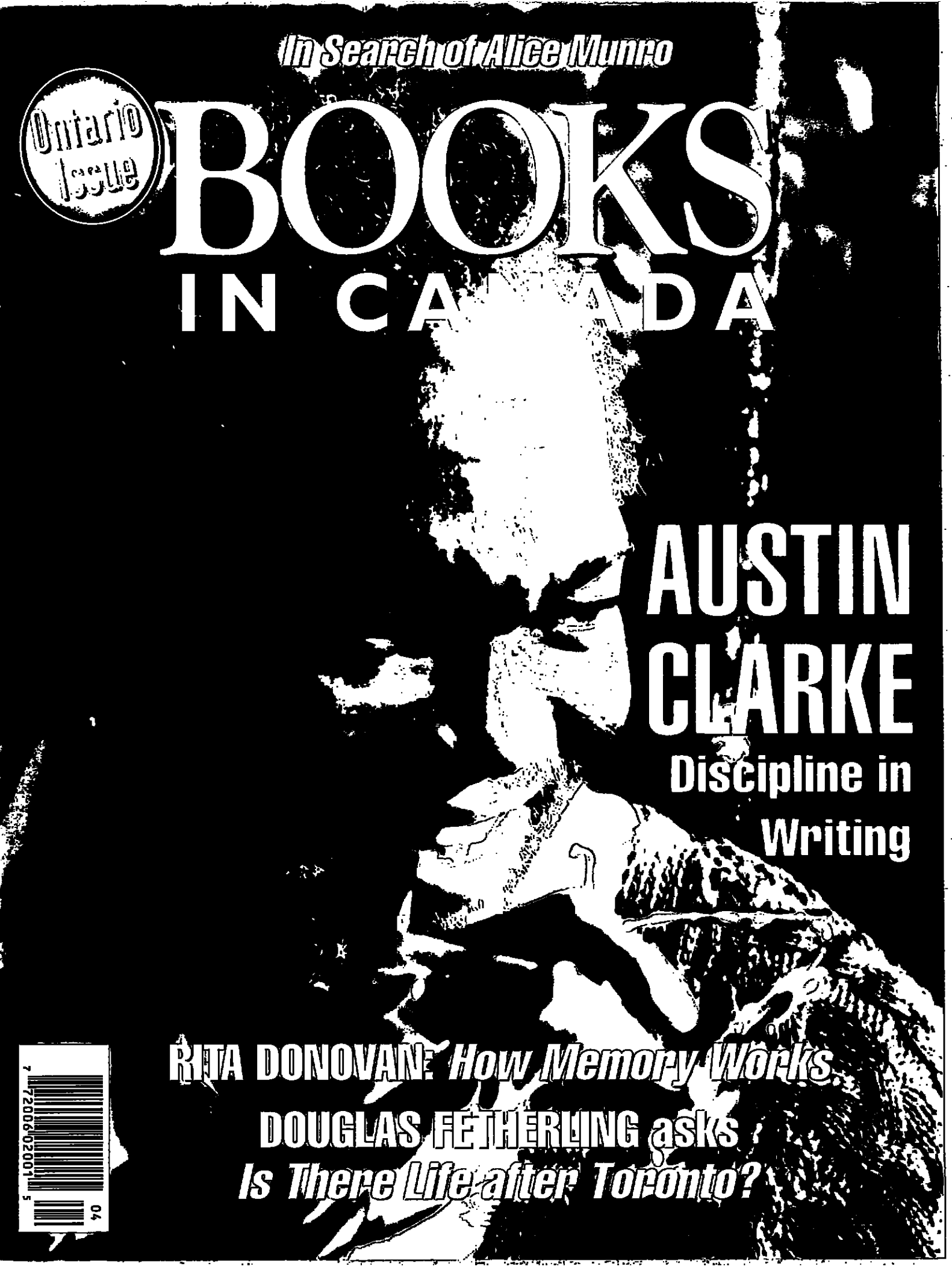
In Search of Alice Munro

Ontario Issue

BOOKS IN CANADA



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DOUGLAS FETHERLING asks

Is There Life after Toronto?

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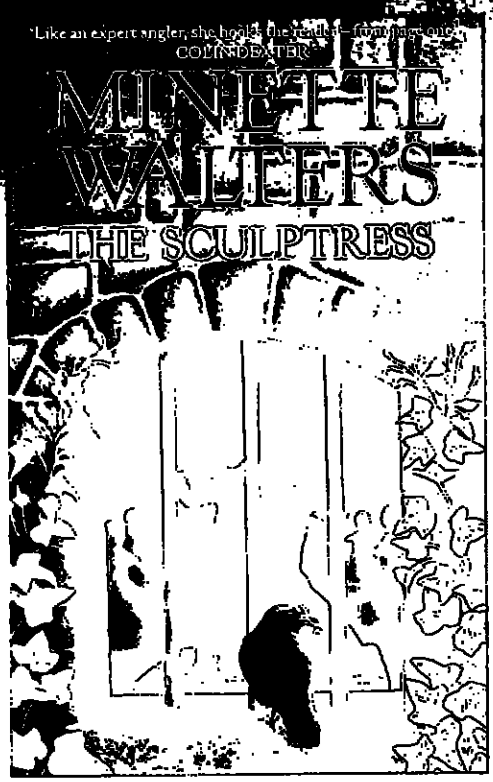
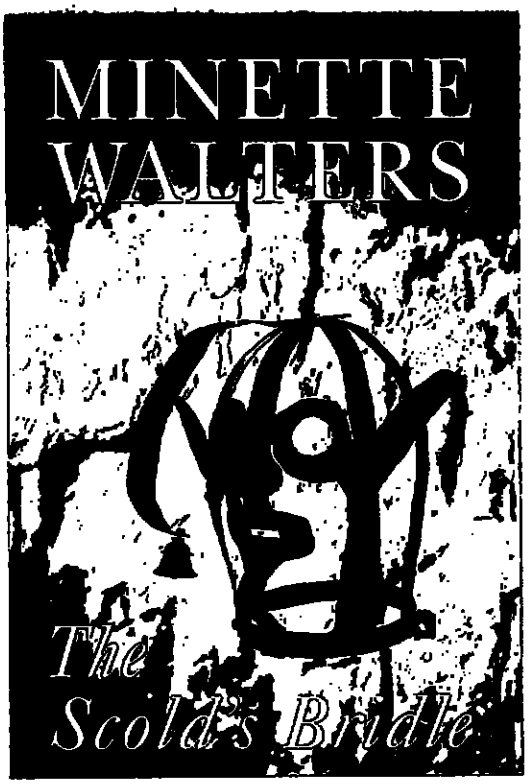
MINETTE WALTERS

Winner of the 1992 Crime Writers' Association John Creasey Award for *The Ice House*

THE SCULPTRESS — THE SCOLD'S BRIDLE





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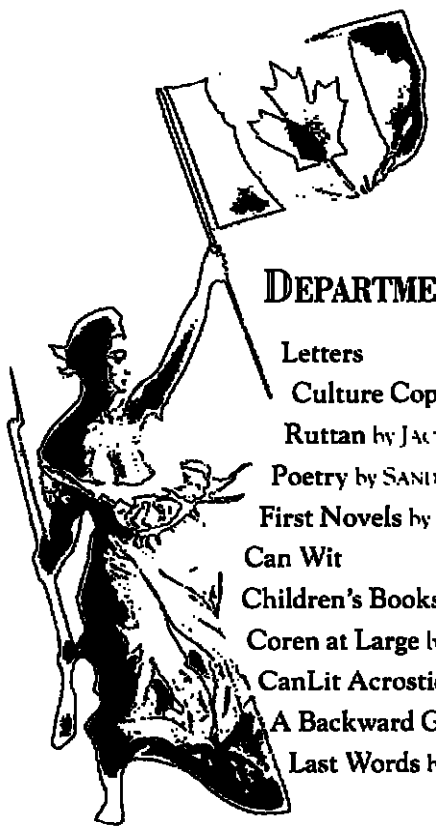

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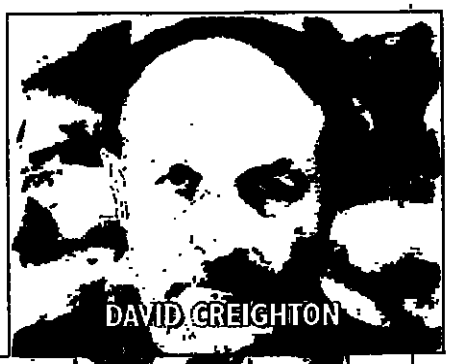
THE ASSISTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, TOURISM AND RECREATION IS ACKNOWLEDGED


DAVID CREIGHTON


DOUGLAS FETHERLING


SANDRA NICHOLLS


JOHN OUGHTON

Rob Allen is a Toronto photographer. **Catherine Austen** is a writer living in Aylmer, Que. **Pat Barclay** is a Victoria writer. **Anne Cimon**'s latest book is *No Country for Women* (Mosaic), a collection of poetry. **Michael Coren**'s most recent book is *Aesthete* (Random House). **David Creighton**'s latest book is *Myths Within* (Macmillan). **John Doyle** is a Toronto journalist. **Brian Fawcett**'s *Gender Wars: A Novel and Some Conversation about Sex and Gender* is forthcoming from Somerville House. **Douglas Fetherling**'s novella *The File on Arthur Moss* (Lester) and his *Selected Poems* (Arsenal Pulp) are both coming out this autumn. **Maureen McCallum Garvie** is a freelance writer who lives in Kingston, Ont. **Phil Hall**'s latest book of poetry is *The Unsaid* (Brick). **Douglas Hill** is a Toronto writer. **Mary Frances Hill** is a writer living in Vancouver. **George Kaufman** teaches high school in Oshawa, Ont. **Matthew Kudelka** is a Toronto writer and editor. The Montreal writer **Linda Leith** is the publisher of *Matrix* and author of the novel *Birds of Passage* (Nuage Editions). **Becky Liddell** is a Toronto writer and editor. **Eileen Manion** is a Montreal writer. Drawings throughout this issue are by **Steve McCabe**, a Toronto artist. **Alec McEwen** is a professor of surveying engineering at the University of Calgary. **Christopher Moore**'s *The Loyalists* has recently been published in paperback by McClelland & Stewart. **Sandra Nicholls** is a poet and critic living in Antigonish, N.S.; her latest poetry collection is *The Untidy Bride* (Quarry). **Keith Nickson** is a Toronto writer. **John Oughton** is a Toronto poet and community-college teacher. **Laura Byrne Paquet** is an Ottawa writer. **David Prosser** is a writer living in Kingston, Ont. **Jack Ruttan** is a Montreal cartoonist and writer. **Fred Sharpe** is a Toronto puzzle enthusiast. **Glenn Sumi** is a writer living in Toronto. **Lynne Van Luven** teaches in the journalism department of Carleton University in Ottawa. **Martin Waxman** is a Toronto writer. ✤

Other Voices

IN "Get That Grin Off Your Face!" (February), Victoria Branden quotes "the dangerous iconoclast," one Bonnie Malleck, as saying "I recall feeling morose and drained after reading most of her [Margaret Laurence's] books."

"Brave Bonnie Malleck's is the first dissenting voice I've heard raised against this Canadian icon," Ms. Branden informs us, and continues naïvely, "Margaret Laurence makes me wonder why we bother living, when life's so dismal."

Throughout the article Ms. Branden implies that some person or persons — reviewers? CanLit teachers? — raised Laurence to a state of apotheosis for some presumably unsound reason, and once they had done this, were sufficiently sheeplike to follow one another in uncritical adulation.

I would like to draw attention to a review of *The Stone Angel* in the *Canadian Forum* of August 1964 (perhaps before Victoria Branden's or Bonnie Malleck's time) by H. T. K. and headed "A Bleak Soul." This book, the reviewer says, "is devastatingly and uncompromisingly Canadian....This story is rugged and ungracious....It could only have been written by one who understands the Canadian version of the Scots Presbyterian soul."

The reviewer, unlike Branden, does not confuse Laurence with her subject matter. She explains Hagar's lack of humour: "There was little enough occasion for humour in the life of a prairie farmer or small-town dweller of her era....This novel gives us a truthful, unflattering, comfortless picture of the kind of life thousands of Canadian women on pioneer farms have led in different parts of Canada...."

It is the subject matter that is humourless, not necessarily Margaret Laurence, whose African stories, H. T. K. points out, have colour, humour, and grace.

H. T. K.'s is not a "dissenting voice raised against this Canadian icon." It is a voice of understanding of how the bleakness has entered Hagar's soul, and an appreciation of and admiration for Laurence's ability to depict this "representative prairie woman, monolithic in her strength, hard and unyielding as stone..." and the circumstances moulding her character.

Sylvia Boorman
Toronto

Blunting Coren

IF MICHAEL COREN hasn't written a novel only because he wasn't beaten as a child ("Letters," February), I hereby volunteer, for the good of Canadian literature, to try to make up for this deprivation with the blunt instrument of Mr. Coren's choice. This country deserves no less.

Richard Bingham
Toronto

Flagrant Insensitivity

WE SUBSCRIBE to *Books in Canada* and use your reviews to assist us in selecting Canadian books for our lending collections of audio and braille books, descriptive videos for the blind, and braille music scores. We are one of the largest producers of alternate-format materials in the world. Like any public library, we serve a clientele that includes children and students, homemakers and seniors, and professionals in the work force — lawyers, engineers, psychiatrists, and authors. The only difference between the CNIB Library and a public library is that our readers are blind and visually impaired; and rather than being in print, our materials are formatted so that they can be read by these blind Canadians. You may imagine our dismay to discover, on reading George Galt's review of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's book ("Among My Souvenirs," February), that any enlightened individual would speak so disparagingly of our audio books, of the CNIB, and of the blind community in general.

The offending paragraphs state in reference to Mr. Trudeau's *Memoirs*:

> But maybe all this literary judgement should be suspended since this really is an unbook. It should be committed back to tape and sold as a one-way conversation, like the cassettes the CNIB produces for the blind....
>
> And blind many of us are in Trudeau's estimation....

Our audiobooks are not unbooks because they are transcribed to tape, nor are they a one-way conversation for a reader any more than literary works in print! Our books on tape are produced to the highest professional standards. Highly trained professional broadcasters, including several well-known Canadian authors, audition and volunteer their considerable talents to narrate talking books in our studios. Frequent surveys of our clientele, which not only includes our registered library users but also patrons of most Canadian public libraries, confirm their satisfaction. They tell us that our product competes equally with other commercially produced audio books.

Our books, however, do not attempt to embellish or edit an author's work but offer the same opportunity as printed books present to the sighted reader; that is, to enjoy an author's work within a personal context.

We are confident that Mr. Galt is not "blind," for he would not have elected to

use the word either metaphorically or otherwise to imply a condition of ignorance or mental limitation. Blindness is not the greatest problem faced by those who are blind. It is attitude and ignorance displayed often where least expected.

We have selected *Memoirs* for addition to our collection. Mr. Trudeau has not only granted permission for its production in audio format, he has also consented to narrate it for us in our Montreal studio. We are pleased that our book selection committee ignored Mr. Galt's review in making its decision. Our confidence in using *Books in Canada* as a selection tool in future has been severely shaken. We cannot trust an instrument that demonstrates flagrant insensitivity and prejudice towards our product, our organization, and our clientele.

Rosemary Kavanagh
Executive Director, CNIB Library
Toronto

George Galt replies: Before Rosemary Kavanagh climbs on her steamroller to kill any more ants — and imaginary ants at that — let me first say that I am sorry she was offended by my remarks. I respect the CNIB and all the good work they do for the visually impaired, and I would never intentionally slight them or their Talking Books.

But I'd like to point out that what I was disparaging was Pierre Trudeau's memoirs, not the CNIB, not their audio books, and certainly not "the blind community in general"! I called the Trudeau volume an unbook because that's what I thought of it, and I do believe it will work better as a monologue on tape. It certainly does not follow that I think every audio book is an inferior literary work. That's Ms. Kavanagh's illogical leap, not mine.

In one of those ironic moments that delight writers, the same day I first saw Ms. Kavanagh's letter, another one arrived that began: "Dear Mr. Galt: Because of your most generous support of the CNIB, I must inform you of the serious shortage of operating funds...." As I'm sure many writers have, I've given some thought to the value of sight and the penalty paid by the sightless, and so I include the CNIB among the causes to which I give a modest sum every year. I'm mentioning this only as an illustration of Ms. Kavanagh's exaggerated sense of injury and insult. She has apparently caught the dreadful and increasingly common terminology-illness that creates delusions of malice everywhere and impels the afflicted to police and sanitize all spoken and written words. I hope she recovers soon.

For my part, I'll continue to use the word "blind" metaphorically and literally however I wish — and whether or not it contravenes Ms. Kavanagh's regulations. I'll also continue to support the very worthwhile work of the CNIB.

Credibility Problem

I WAS INCENSED by Clint Burnham's review of Robert J. Sawyer's most recent novel *Foreigner* (Brief Reviews, March).

I have no qualms about Mr. Burnham's opinions about the book — they are his to express even if they put him in the minority concerning *Foreigner* and Sawyer's other novels, which have been called everything from "fascinating" to "brilliant" in a wide variety of publications, including *Books in Canada*.

What I do have a problem with is the fact that Mr. Burnham is absolutely unfamiliar with both science and science fiction, a point that hurts the credibility of his review and that of the magazine.

First he calls Sawyer's Sal-Afsan — the hero of the first novel and a recurring character in the entire Quintaglio trilogy — a saurian Copernicus, when in fact Sal-Afsan is the Quintaglio equivalent of our Galileo.

Second, the use of the term sci-fi is a dead giveaway that Mr. Burnham hasn't got a clue about what he's talking about. Sci-fi is a term that connotes bug-eyed monsters, laser beams, and rocket ships, things from the by-gone pulp era in SF's long and rich history. The current term is SF. And in the case of Sawyer's work it's "hard SF" because the sciences of archaeology, astronomy, psychology, and paleontology are integral to the plots of his novels.

Perhaps future SF novels written by Canadians might be more objectively reviewed by someone who has an appreciation for the genre, or at the very least an opinion that remains unbiased after a look at the book's label and packaging.

Perhaps then we won't have a reviewer who cites a "fully developed dinosaur civilization" — the mark of well-crafted hard SF — as being "way too strange."

Edo van Belkom
Brampton, Ont.

Wyndham Up

THANK you to Douglas Fetherling for his considered article on Wyndham Lewis ("Canadian by Default," February).

I must say that the last thing Lewis must have been was "self-pitying." His bold and scrupulous attacks on the established men of literature, such as Joyce and Hemingway, attest to his unwavering conviction in himself. Further, if "Wyndham Lewis is universally acknowledged as one of the most important figures in the history of the avant-garde," why then were there only 10 people (two at my invitation) in attendance at the lecture by B. W. Powe highlighting the exhibit "The Talented Intruder," of which Mr. Fetherling writes?

In this regard, I would like to direct Mr. Fetherling's attention to the most comprehensive analysis of Lewis's art work, *Paintings and Drawings*, by Walter Michel, and to the accounts of consistent and poignantly bitter disappointments suffered during his North American stay.

Lastly, there is no disputing Lewis's assessment of Toronto as a "bourgeois backwater." As a resident of Toronto for 24 years (since the time of my birth), I would say there's more than a hint of truth to his observation.

Anthony Zarb
Toronto

Inappropriate Tone

I FOUND Jack Batten's essay "Homicidally Yours" (March) distasteful in two respects: firstly, in its presentation of Paul Bernardo-Teale and his crimes as the answer to "What Canada needs, what Canadian true-crime writers need"; secondly, in its flippant description of Bernardo-Teale himself as perhaps the "major monster" and "unspeakable fiend" to fill the bill. The accompanying illustration supported this inappropriate tone.

At a time when the ethical implications of profiting from crimes such as Bernardo-Teale's are being seriously considered by many people within the publishing industry and without, Batten's playful approach seems shallow at best. Yes, writers need subjects and publishers need books, but are the tragic consequences of Bernardo-Teale's crimes really something to gloat about?

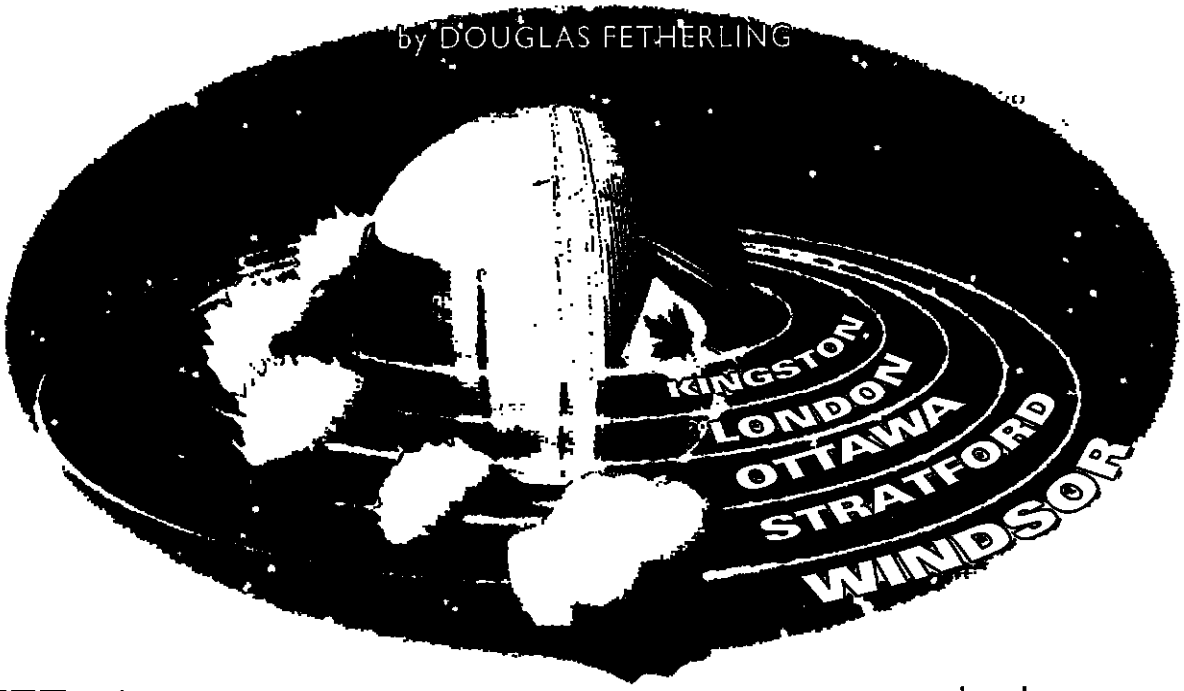
Anne Erickson
Scarborough, Ont.

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

Is There Life after Toronto?

Hogtown's satellite cities have distinctive literary traditions of their own

by DOUGLAS FETHERLING



WHEN ALAN TWIGG, the founder and editor of B.C. *Book World*, was asked to write an introduction to a special British Columbia issue of *Books in Canada*, he agreed to do so if the editors would promise to publish "a special issue devoted to the region of Ontario." From the vantage point of Vancouver, this naturally seemed a delightfully levelling idea: treating Ontario as just another region. But I find that when people in other parts of the country condemn Ontario, they usually mean Toronto (and by extension perhaps also Ottawa, at least in the metaphorical sense) and that they misunderstand the connection, in terms of culture and writing, between the metropolis and the province's other cities.

Almost anything unfriendly one could ever say about Toronto is likely to be true; it's simply such a place. Yes, book and magazine publishing are still concentrated there and, yes, the individuals in these industries are still insensitive to — indeed even ignorant of — how folks in the rest of Canada live. But it's also one of the most polyglot, multicultural, and multiracial cities anywhere, where one in four was born outside Canada and some 140 different languages and dialects are spoken: almost as many as there are member states in the United Nations. It's become the hotbed of all manner of multicultural and Native writing (one of the good things you can say for it).

Yet it seems to me that to take the pulse of the province you must ignore Toronto to look at some of the less populous centres. Ontario is home to 36 per cent of all Canadians, but of course most of the people live in smaller cities and towns. Ranked in descending order, the biggest ones after Toronto are Ottawa, Hamilton, St. Catharines–Niagara Falls, Windsor, Oshawa, Sudbury, and Thunder Bay. Clearly, not all of these are bookish spots. Some day someone may formulate a theory about the difference between service economies and industrial economies as it applies to the ability to attract or sustain writers.

Historically, writers from these other places have usually wound up in Toronto eventually, for the lesser cities empty into the big one as streams empty into rivers. Yet some of the most distinctively Ontarian writers are those who have either stayed where they were or at least always continued to be informed by the particular localities they came from. One thinks immediately of Alice Munro and Al Purdy as writers whose imagina-

tive geography is rural and semi-rural Ontario; their voices are unmistakably of that kind. What I propose to do here, then, is to bypass Toronto entirely and survey several of Ontario's other cities, looking at them as freestanding centres of writing and publishing, not merely as satellites of Toronto.

These other places often have an ambivalent, not to say mutually antagonistic, relationship with Toronto, just as the rest of the country does. They seem to thrive as literary outposts in direct proportion to the extent to which they succeed in setting themselves up as self-supporting cantons. That is, their virtue is their localness, with each contributing something to the whole while retaining something distinctly its own. But the localness, a sense of themselves as viable arts communities if not miniature city states, is dependent not only on infrastructure but also on human energy. The latter resource waxes and wanes as individuals arrive, do work, get old, or move on. This process may sometimes lead to cultural warlordism, but it keeps all the activity from being sucked into the soulless central repository that is Toronto.


Peter Stevens

If one can show the workings easily enough by looking briefly at several such places that quite conspicuously offer themselves as saner alternatives to the metropolis and have accents of their own, then Windsor is, in its way, the perfect example of how transient energy must come together with permanent institutions. For a number of years beginning in 1967, the American writer Joyce Carol Oates taught at the University of Windsor (called Hillbury University in one of her novels, *The Hungry Ghost*).


Eugene McNamara

While there, she edited the *Ontario Review* (later taking it with her to Princeton in the United States), and by the force of her personality and the example of her own astoundingly prolific output, she seemed to will a lot of writing and publishing to happen. Peter Stevens, Eugene McNamara, and Leonard Gasparini were just a few of the writers associated with the scene there. Since Oates's departure, but no doubt due to a long list of other reasons as well, Windsor's *ch'i*, so to call it, seems to have diminished considerably, part of the inevitable lop-sided cycle of such things. Yet some factors have remained constant. Black Moss Press, founded in 1969, bravely continues to pursue its traditional small-press literary mandate in a time when most other small presses its age have grown commercial or ceased altogether and been replaced by others of more recent origin. The publisher of Black Moss, the poet C. H. Gervais, is also the long-time book columnist of the *Windsor Star*.


C. H. Gervais

London, Ontario, has always been a fundamentally different kind of literary centre from Windsor. Beginning with Richard Maurice Bucke, the pioneer psychologist and friend of Walt Whitman, and embracing the remarkable Dewdney family of writers and scientists, it has been a city whose local culture has taken pride in being interdisciplinary. Even its purely literary figures — pre-eminently, since 1960, the husband-and-wife poets James Reaney and Colleen Thibaudeau — spill over into more than one area. Consider Reaney's work in typography and the graphic arts or his enormous popular success as a playwright.


Richard M. Bucke

In the early 1960s, of course, London became famous not only nationally but internationally for its visual art eruption, which coincided with Greg Curnoe's inheritance of Jack Chambers's mantle as the leading local painter. For it was significant that Curnoe was not only a musician and visual artist, but also a writer's kind of artist (and a painter's kind of writer) who explored the interaction of text and image, collaborating with people such as David McFadden and blurring the distinctions between creation and performance.


James Reaney

Several magazines came out of London at the time. They were later followed by *Brick*, founded by Stan Dragland in the 1970s. *Brick* has since been taken over by Michael Ondaatje (a one-time Londoner) and Linda Spalding, and moved to Toronto. But Brick Books, the publishing house that sprang from it, has remained behind, and has thrived. Dragland (who is the poetry consultant to McClelland & Stewart) is one of the writers connected with the University of Western Ontario. A list of others would have to include D. M. R. Bentley, who publishes the historical and critical journal *Canadian Poetry*, and the novelist Lawrence Garber. Recently, Dragland has put so much of his energy into Brick Books as to make it one of Ontario's three important non-commercial poetry publishers (the others being ECW Press in Toronto, whose relevant series is edited by Bruce Whiteman from Montreal, and The Porcupine's Quill in Erin, whose literary director is John Metcalf in faraway Ottawa). Brick Books, which produces first collections as important as Julie Bruck's *The Woman Downstairs* alongside works such as Dennis Lee's *Riffs*, isn't the only press in London. But unlike, say, Ergo Productions, whose titles are best known within a small radius of the city, it makes the rest of the Canadian writing scene conscious of its aesthetic while remaining under local control. In that way — in its give and take — it's very characteristic of its locale.


Stan Dragland

But like all other literary centres, in fact like all of Canada's cities *qua* cities, London is looking somewhat ragged and enervated these days, because of persistently dismal economic conditions. When the Canada Council was forced to give up its subvention program for writers in residence, London was one of the clients hardest hit, because of the imaginative use UWO had long made of the scheme, with writers as different as Gwendolyn MacEwen, Susan Musgrave, and bill bissett enlivening the scene as long-term visitors who really got deeply involved.


Gay Allison

East of London, Stratford, which lacks a university and is culturally dominated by the Stratford Festival, has come to be seen as a writing centre only recently, at least insofar as genres other than drama are concerned. The change has been due mainly to the resettlement there of refugees from Toronto. The editor and anthologist Geoff Hancock and his mate, the poet Gay Allison, moved there and bought a bed-and-breakfast operation to subsidize their other work (its advertisements promise a literary atmosphere). Also, Beverley Daurio moved to Stratford with her ever-more-ambitious publishing house Mercury Press and a sister venture, the fiction magazine *Paragraph*. Though published in Stratford, *Paragraph* was edited by Daniel Jones of Toronto until his death last February. (In somewhat the same way, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, edited by Hancock from Stratford, is actually published in Kingston. This process represents either healthy cross-pollination or the breaking down of the city walls that formerly distinguished the culture of these places. I'm not sure which. Interpretation depends much on mood.)


Charles Sangster

Because it is the oldest of Ontario's literary centres, Kingston, as far east of Toronto as London is west, is perhaps the best developed. The city has a strong institutional economy— military and educational as well as governmental. It also has a certain architectural and imaginative grandeur, some of it traceable to the fact that the city was briefly, in the 1840s, the capital of the Province of Canada. Like Windsor and a number of other spots in what's now Ontario, it was once home to Major John Richardson, the author of *Wacousta* and the first Canadian-born novelist. Since then, it has had an almost unbroken line of literary associations. Any list of 19th-century figures would have to include the cosmopolitan scientist-novelist Grant Allen as well as the


George M. Grant

regional poet Charles Sangster, not to mention George Munro Grant, Canada's most important literary intellectual of the 19th century. Mary Alice Downie and M.-A. Thompson caught the spirit of the continuum quite well in their recent anthology, *Written in Stone: A Kingston Reader* (Quarry). The significance of Richardson's Kingston interlude, however, is that he edited a local newspaper and fought a duel there. Until recently, much of Kingston's writing activity was connected with its newspaper, the Kingston *Whig-Standard*. Also, duelling, in the figurative sense, is deeply ingrained in the local character, a fact that Robertson Davies drew on in *Leaven of Malice* and other works.


Matt Cohen

Kingston is close enough to Quebec that it has always had a toe in francophone culture. It's home to the prize-winning translator Wayne Grady, for example. The novelist Gérard Bessette taught at Queen's for years and is the answer to a trick question that involves naming all the Kingston writers who have won the Governor General's Award. In Kingston, which also has a small but solid theatrical community, it's even possible to attend French-language stage performances (they're put on by the cadets of the Royal Military College).

The back country in a *demi-lune* around Kingston is home to many authors, including Matt Cohen, who's used it so effectively as a setting. A lot of writers and commentators live on the various islands scattered in Lake Ontario or else (the latest fashion) have second homes in nearby Prince Edward County.

Down through the decades there have been strong links between Kingston's writers and Oberon Press in Ottawa, from Michael Ondaatje and Tom Marshall in the 1960s and 1970s to Bronwen Wallace in the 1980s and Amy Friedman in the '90s. David Helwig remains closely associated with Oberon (though like Ondaatje he no longer lives in Kingston, a place he's written about so well so often). In recent years, however, Quarry Press has become the primary broker of Kingston writing, though it's increasingly, and additionally, an imprint of national outlook and importance, both in its magazine and its book-publishing arms. In addition to *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, Quarry produces *Poetry Canada Review* and of course *Quarry*, one of the most rewarding of the broad-spectrum literary periodicals. As for Queen's University, it has *Queen's Quarterly*, now a livelier journal than at any time in the past, and half of McGill-Queen's University Press.


Tom Marshall


David Helwig

One way or another, then, there is a strong community of poets, fiction writers, and critics, as well as a large pool of free-lance editors and writers — surprisingly large, in fact, when you take into account all the loners tucked away in surrounding villages or on outlying farms. Kingston-area authors and readers feel themselves superior to the big-city pop culture that inundates them, so they rub together, making sparks and giving one another energy. In some way having to do with the quality of this process, Kingston writing has a feel similar to anglophone writing in Montreal and the Eastern Townships.

A new generation of Kingston writers has come along (the poets Joanne Page and Judith Pond, the novelist Kate Sterns, the short-fiction writer Diane Schoemperlen, the all-rounder Steven Heighton) but as yet no single mover-and-shaker has arisen to take the place once held by Helwig or Marshall — or that held currently by John Metcalf in Ottawa. The capital has always attracted writers, because there are always ways for writers to eke out a living there, as in the civil service, which has sheltered poets as far apart in time as Archibald Lampman and John Newlove. Carleton University and the University of Ottawa (where Seymour Mayne and others teach and where the *Journal of Canadian Poetry* is published) are other centres of activity. So of course is the Canada Council. But one shouldn't overlook those twin institutions, the National Library and the National Archives, for their place in the local bookscape. Lorna Knight, curator of literary manuscripts at the former, also runs the long-lived Arc Readings, one of several regularly scheduled series in the area. And yet curiously for a city almost totally devoted to government, there has always been a strong streak of independence in Ottawa's writers. In fact, there's a group called the Ottawa Independent Writers. But like all these other places, Ottawa, which has been home at one time or another to Elizabeth Brewster, George Johnston, Norman Levine, and Robin Mathews, has seen its principals come and go. There may, in fact, be something that could be called the Ontario circuit, with writers (and the balls of almost protoplasmic energy that surround them) moving on a circuit from one city to the next.


John Metcalf


John Newlove

Readers can get some sense of this between the lines in such reference works as Albert and Theresa Moritz's work *The Oxford Illustrated Literary Guide to Canada* (Oxford, 1987) or, on a much more populist plane, in John Robert Colombo's *Canadian Literary Landmarks* (Hounslow, 1984). Recently, the ever-industrious Colombo has published not only road-map-sized charts entitled *Writers' Map of Toronto* and *Writers' Map of Canada* but, much more significantly, a *Writers' Map of Ontario*. It tries to show that a coherent culture in fact exists in the very place where so many people doubt that one is possible. ✤

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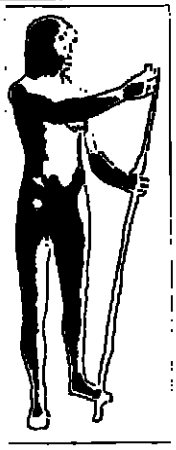

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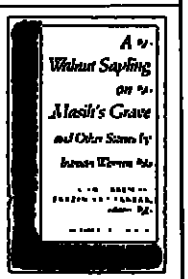

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Discipline in Writing

While other authors wait for inspiration, Austin Clarke goes out and finds it

AUSTIN CHESTERFIELD CLARKE spent his first 20 years in Barbados before coming to Canada in 1955. The Toronto writer has worked as a journalist, broadcaster, creative-writing teacher, and writer in residence, and also served his native country as cultural attaché to the Washington embassy (1974–75) and general manager of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (1975–76). The latter experience inspired Clarke to write his novel *The Prime Minister* (General, 1977). In Toronto, he ran unsuccessfully for election as a Progressive Conservative MPP. His publications include the short-story collections *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks* (Anansi, 1971), *When Women Rule* (McClelland & Stewart, 1985), *Nine Men Who Laughed* (Penguin, 1986), and *There Are No Elders* (Exile Editions, 1993), the novels *The Meeting Point* (Macmillan, 1967) and *Proud Empires* (Penguin, 1988), and the first volume of his autobiography, *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* (McClelland & Stewart, 1980). Clarke spoke with John Oughton in Toronto.

BiC: *Many writers who move from one country to another find that they feel for a while that they have a foot in both countries, and not really a home in either. But it seems as though you've been able to participate in the political and cultural life of two countries at once without feeling especially torn by it.*

Clarke: Yes, that is true. You see, when I was at school in Barbados I used to go every Tuesday into the House of Assembly and listen to the debates, and I knew Errol Barrow at the time, who had just formed the Barbados Labour Party. He was leader of the opposition, and he knew I was going abroad to study, and he gave me private tutoring in economics. He studied at the London School of Economics himself. And then another man in the party, who's now Sir James Tudor, coached me in political science. So I always had that connection. My intention was to come here and do economics and then go to England and do law, and go back home and be a politician. So it's in my blood. It wasn't strange that I would seek a seat in Toronto, and I've kept up my attachment to Barbados in the sense of having written the campaign strategy and certain papers for two elections. Of course, politics in Barbados is quite different from politics here. In Barbados, it is like a culture, and people take part in it with more gusto and enthusiasm and passion. So I have never found it distracting or even a matter that would cause me to separate my political interests in this country from my political interests in Barbados, but I wouldn't run in Barbados.

BiC: *You've also worked in journalism. Do you think the various things you've done to make a living have influenced your writing?*

Clarke: I had no intention of being a writer, really. When it occurred to me that I could not pursue law, because of marriage and little funds, etc., I thought that perhaps I could be a journalist. But I must say that I stumbled into journalism. It was the Christmas season and I was working part-time at the post office. I did not like the attitude of the supervisor, so I took him at his word and left. I went home expecting to have some sympathy from my wife, who is Canadian-born, and so her attitude to things is different from mine. She suggested that I should probably go back out and look for a job, because Christmas was coming and we had one child, a daughter. So I went down to the Thomson Building, and a man interviewed me. He asked me one question. He said, "If there was a fire in this building, and you were sent to cover it, how would you write it?" All I knew about journalism was that the lead paragraph must satisfy the three or four W's and an H, and that I could not put myself too personally into the story, an idea that is changing nowadays. So I told him that, and he gave me a one-way ticket to Timmins [Ontario], and the promise of the grand salary of $35 a week. My first assignment was covering a Kiwanis Club meeting, at which I was embraced and given a lot to eat and drink, and I went back to the office the same night. I was a very efficient cub reporter and I wrote five of the best pages reporting has seen, and left it at the desk. The next morning, the managing editor called me up. And he wore his glasses at the tip of the nose, so he looked over them to look at me, and counted the pages. Five pages. And then he said, "Simms" — that was the name of another reporter — "Would you please translate this into journalese!" And the managing editor's advice to me was, "I suggest that you spend the rest of the week reading the *Globe and Mail* to see how a news story goes." So Simms put my five pages into three paragraphs, and I tried to understand that. I was never good at news reporting, but I thought I mastered feature writing. And that's what I did when I went from Timmins to Kirkland Lake. I used to string

for the *Globe*, the *Star*, and the *Telegram* at the same time. And then the *Globe* hired me. But the benefits of being a journalist in my past are very clear in my mind. It has taught me discipline in writing. I know now that one cannot wait for something called "inspiration," but one should be at the desk for the same time every day, even if nothing comes. If it is possible, one should remain in the same room, perhaps at the same chair until....You can't be running around, in and out of the house and expect to be writing. You sit down for eight hours or four hours, and what comes, comes. That is it. The other discipline would be revising. In journalism, you don't have enough time to revise as often as you have to revise in fiction. I usually revise about five times. If it's a short story, sometimes it may be six times. But very few things I've written have been revised only twice. And, from journalism, I learned to type. I still prefer the typewriter to the computer.

BiC: *In the past you've said that you're very grateful for the classical education you had in Barbados, that it had taught you discipline. Did you mean it in the same sense as the discipline that you learned from journalism?*

Clarke: The classical education taught me discipline in the sense of tackling things that are unpalatable or not exciting, providing a pretty strong foundation in understanding language, and also providing the curiosity to go look at a book, or people, or situations. I feel that it more or less prepared me for any profession that I wanted to take up. Another aspect of the education, too, was the system of prefects. In my time the prefects functioned as vice-principals function in Toronto — they were in charge of administration. At an early age we were put into classrooms, if not to take the class, at least to keep the boys quiet until the masters had come from their meetings or whatever. So that would be one of the benefits that accrued from that kind of education. Now, the other thing is, as you said, teaching...I would have to describe the teaching as very exciting because it was during the time of civil rights, when the Americans thought they should succumb to some of the demands made by the more radical Black leaders, and when Black Studies was introduced. I came in at the beginning of that. I was exposed to some of the best minds in America, Black and white, and the possibility of sitting down at lunch with a man like Robert Penn Warren and hearing him talk about his poetry, or C. Van Woodward, the critic/historian. In the college, guests would be present; if you were invited to dinner you might sit beside this man, or sit pretty close to him, and he had written a book. And you had him there to discuss the book, so you didn't have to read the book. I feel it is very necessary for the fiction writer to be exposed to this kind of intellectual stimulation, which may not be directly connected to what he's doing, but gives the mind an opportunity for expansion. I suppose I thought of leaving Yale in '71 because a certain jealousy developed within me. I would be lecturing

and giving seminars on books written by friends of mine, and then all of a sudden I would say, "Well, why am I not writing? Am I going to be known as a professor or am I going to be known as a writer? Do I want to be known as a professor?" You can't teach and write at the same time. I think you have to be very organized to do both, unless you teach during the term and you write in the summer. I like teaching as much, if not better, than writing. So I found myself spending quite a lot of time with my students. I made a point of having the seminars in my house so that my students would come, and I'd cook for them, and listen to music, and talk...give them complete exposure, which I think is so important to young people. So those are the benefits from the three aspects of my former life.

BiC: *You obviously have a great regard for poetry. You wrote it early on. Is there a secret Austin Clarke poetry book waiting somewhere? Do you occasionally feel like venturing into poetry?*

Clarke: I write poetry, yes. I probably could have been a poet, but I don't like dabbling in all aspects of writing at the same time. I think one should specialize. The reason that I did not continue writing poetry seriously could be blamed on a very harsh letter Robert Weaver wrote me. I had submitted some poetry to *Tamarack Review*, and Robert Weaver replied that he did not see any semblance of merit in it, and that I was wasting my time. We laugh about this now, but some reviewers and critics have commented about the poetic quality of my prose. I take that very seriously. I do have a bound book, like a journal, where I put down some poetry. And I do think that as I get older I will probably spend more time writing it. I love poetry because I was exposed to the best poetry when I was going to school. So my good friends are brilliant poets, like Derek Walcott, Dionne Brand, Edward Braithwaite, and LeRoi Jones, and more recently a young Guyanese, Fred D'Aguiar, and of course Andrew Salkey, the Jamaican chap who now teaches at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. I feel that when I need nourishment, I have to get it in poetry, and I have learned a lot about writing from poetry. I mentioned Robert Penn Warren; and I would say that my models, in the sense of influencing my writing fiction, would be Eliot, Keats, John Milton, Dylan Thomas, Braithwaite, and some others. There's a certain magic that the poet is capable of producing on a page that very few fiction writers come close to. The music of poetry and music itself are two great influences on my work. I have always felt that there's a place for music in fiction if you are forthright enough and successful in describing a character against the impact of some piece of music. When I was working on *The Meeting Point*, I was quite impressed by certain pieces of classical music. And I played them, my favourites, day after day. At that time, I was listening to lots of Beethoven. And from listening to Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, I could see the possibility of weaving that into the fabric of the book I was writing. Now, I'm not saying

that I succeeded, but I know that I attempted to relate sections of that novel to the movements in Beethoven.

BiC: *Something that Anthony Burgess tried about 20 years later in his novel* Napoleon Symphony.

Clarke: I'm aware of that book. But I wasn't doing it so deliberately. I was allowing the idea that the music put in my head to coincide with some aspects of the characterization and the movement and tempo and structure of the novel.

BiC: *You were, I think, one of the first writers in Canada to really write about racism here, as if it wasn't something that only happened south of the border. You made it an important issue in your fiction. Do you think racism conditioned how you were accepted here as a writer?*

Clarke: I tried to ignore that years ago, because it was not important to me as a person, and it was certainly no indication of the value of my work if it was seen in those terms. Nowadays I am becoming a bit angrier about that aspect of my life. It is perhaps an arrogant thing for any writer to say, regardless of his colour or ethnicity, that he has not been treated by the literary establishment in such a way as reflects what he considers to be the value of his contribution. But as you get older, I think you become more outspoken and, as a writer, more radical. So I'm prepared to say that I don't think that my work has been subjected to the critical scrutiny it deserves. And I don't think, therefore, that I have derived from this output the benefits that I ought to have. But then, even though I am a writer by profession, since it's all I can do, I think it is the best thing I can do. So, even if my whole work is mediocre, it is certainly the best I can do. In other words, I can't be a carpenter, or a pimp, or a lawyer, or a doctor. So, if that's the case, then as a serious writer I'm in a position to know when I'm bullshitting the reader and the public. I'm also in a position to know whether my work is mediocre. And, even if it is mediocre, I can still feel that there could have been, and ought to have been, more attention paid. But then it becomes absurd, because when you look at the Canadian attitude to writing, every writer could make that claim. I came along at a time when the thing was, "Well, why are there not writers in Canada?" And, to tell the truth, it must have been a strong-headed decision on my part as a young man, as my family and friends said, "Why waste your time sitting down writing?" I mean, it had to be a weird decision, and then to be the only Black writer for many years. We, meaning the writers of that generation, tried to solve this problem, and in the late '60s and '70s, there was the fantastic renaissance in Toronto and other parts of the country concerning writing. And all that energy and activity helped form the Writers' Union, of which I was a part during the planning sessions. So, to answer your question, I never regarded myself, as a writer, as an élite person. I consider a writer to be in the same category as a labourer, and I always use the analogy of laying bricks. You get accustomed to laying bricks every day, and then you become expert with the little patterns and things like this. And I never regarded writing, my writing, as something that was going to change people or society. I've always been lucky to write what I want to write and, within reason, not having to suffer because of what I've written and therefore not being able to make a living. I've always been able to have things ancillary to the writing that could continue to pay bills. So my attitude has always been that, even though I said what I did to you about recognition and such things, the books will talk for themselves. And I feel the books will last, even though some of them are out of print. I think somebody will come along, some years from now, dig them up again, and publish them.

BiC: *Do you feel that you've had much influence on the wave of writers in Canada now who are dealing with coming to Canada from another culture? I recently read a short story by Neil Bissoondath called "Dancing," and it was almost exactly like an Austin Clarke story. It's about West Indian people having a very noisy party and these cold white people come to the door and ask them to turn it down. Now, I'm not saying he deliberately patterned it from you, but it's certainly an example of what you made possible in Canadian writing.*

Clarke: I would not like to project myself as a model, but I would say that the writer is a bit like a scavenger or sponge. And there's nothing new to be written about; everything you can think of has been written about. It is your point of view that counts. Bissoondath is fortunate in the sense that he came to the factory at the time when a lot of the workers in this factory were West Indian, and he could look at this assemblage and see characters. In my time, there were not so many, and I suppose my work must have been shocking, because I can imagine a Canadian opening my book in 1963 and seeing these things. He'd probably never heard, or didn't know, that they took place in Toronto. So that is the advantage that people like Bissoondath and Cecil Foster have, that there is a society or world of characters from whom they can pick the ones they want. But of course I would have to agree with the historical reality, and say, "Well, since I was here first and did it first, they are coming after me and perhaps they might see something of value in what I was doing and try to improve on it. You could say that now there is a school of immigrant writing. Once upon a time it didn't exist. Our problem is to try to fashion — the sophisticated term is "canon," but I don't want to use that — with all the examples we have around us, something that you could define as the West Indian novel, the model, so far as structure, point of view, language, slang, and so on. I think it is here for anyone who wants to look. And the fact that we're being taught and read in academic circles should convince us that all of the work has not been in vain. ❖

In Search of Alice Munro

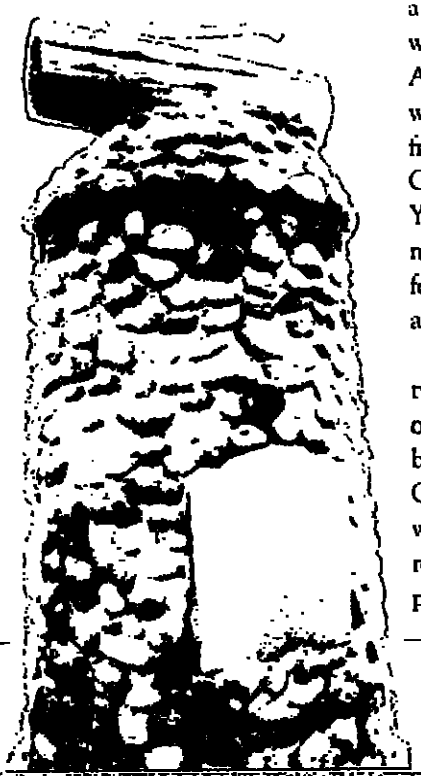
Finding out where fact and fiction combine to create "Munrovia"

by DAVID CREIGHTON

I always think the country I was born and brought up in is full of events and emotions and amazing things going on all the time.
Alice Munro, 1982 interview

EVER SINCE falling in love with the fiction of Alice Munro, I have wanted to visit her native Wingham. Finally, consulting my map of Ontario, I set out to do just that.

Highway 8, my route into "Munrovia," is marked by cairns that were unveiled a century after the surveying of this road through the great Huron Tract. One, just after Sebringville, is crowned by a log-cleaving axe. "With only the rags on their backs" — as Munro recounts it in the story "Chaddeleys and Flemings" — poor folk thus claimed a chunk of wilderness for themselves. Munro's own great-grandfather came here in the 1850s with a brother who, while clearing the land, was killed by a falling tree. Such tales adorn the Tract's rich mythology.



Another pioneer cairn past Seaforth, on a shabby site off the main road, bears a whitewashed inscription: Colonel Anthony van Egmond here "grew the first wheat in the Huron Tract." A champion of freedom, like his celebrated ancestor Count Egmont, he led the rebel troops at York in 1837. But with only 200 armed men under his command, the colonel suffered a quick defeat and died shortly thereafter in jail.

Liberation from Family Compact tyranny was van Egmond's aim; Munro tells of liberation in a modern sense. After the break-up of her first marriage, in British Columbia, she returned to her roots by wedding a man from nearby Clinton. This revived old memories, told in her accomplished and psychologically rich fiction.

In "Chaddeleys and Flemings," large-scale mechanized farming erases a tombstone's very site: "the corner of a field then was not necessarily the corner of a field now." The modern world of consumerism and sexual liberation, similarly, obscures an older one of bare survival in which women often died in childbirth.

I pass the supermarket in Clinton where Munro buys her groceries. Here one day a checkout boy discovered, to Munro's dismay, that his customer was the same great writer they were studying at school.

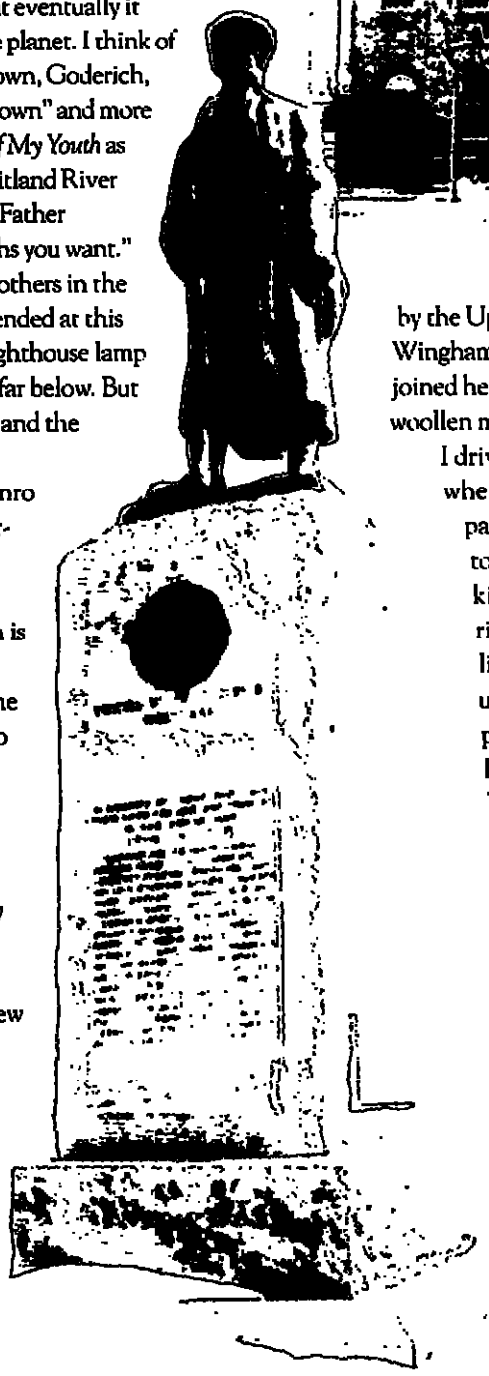
In *Dance of the Happy Shades*, "Walker Brothers Cowboy" begins with the father's suggestion of a trip to Lake Huron to see if it's still there, the idea being that eventually it won't be, as lava and glacier reshape the planet. I think of this while driving to the Tract's major town, Goderich, described in that collection as "Tuppertown" and more extensively in several stories in *Friend of My Youth* as "Walley." It lies at the mouth of the Maitland River — for Munro the "Wawanash" or "Old Father Maitland," which offers "whatever myths you want."

On a cliff above Lake Huron, I join others in the rite of sunset-watching. Lives are suspended at this juncture of light and dark, while the lighthouse lamp rotates and powerboats swirl restlessly far below. But the sun disappears, breaking the hush, and the watchers quickly disperse.

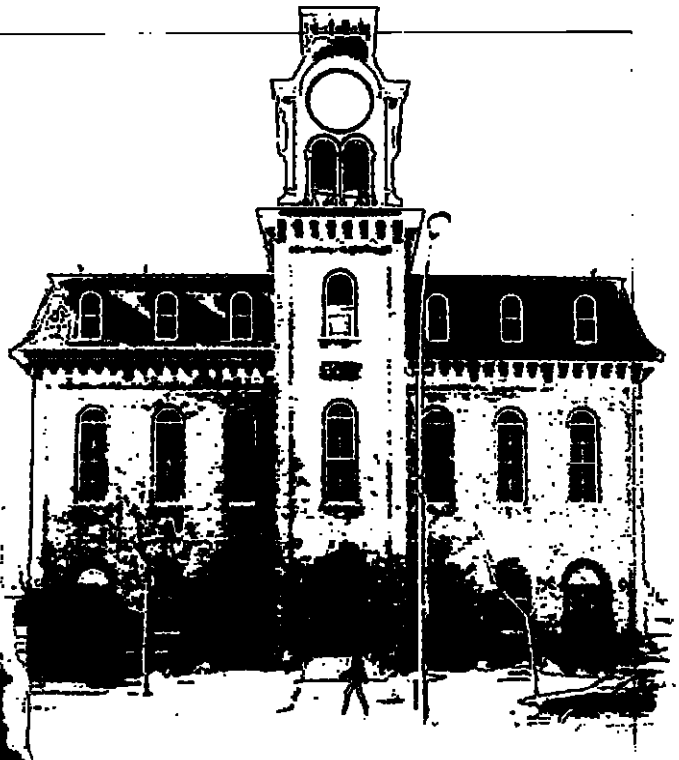
In "Walker Brothers Cowboy," Munro describes a young girl at a similar overlook anxiously responding to her father's account of the origin of the Great Lakes: "'All where Lake Huron is now,' he says, 'used to be flat land'....The tiny share we have of time appalls me, though my father seems to regard it with tranquillity."

I was conscious of...the shape of people's lives, the shape of their stories, the whole business of how life is made into a story by the people who live it, and then the whole town sort of makes its own story.

1983 interview



THE NEXT MORNING, I take Highway 4 to Wingham, which lies beyond the "prairie" — the lowlands embracing the Maitland River. Only by dint of heroic effort, it is said, did the first settler arrive at the site in 1858. On my left is the Lower Town; vulnerable to flooding, it was superseded by the Upper Town, which lies straight ahead. Wingham came into its own when two railways joined here, giving rise to a furniture factory and woollen mill.



I drive up the main street, Josephine, to where two grandfatherly towers keep company: they are the post office and the town hall. In the town hall, a clerk kindly takes me upstairs to the auditorium, altered since Munro's youth by a lightbulb-rimmed stage extension now used mostly by country-music groups. A precocious and talented girl performing here at mid-century figures in "The Time of Death" as Patricia Parry — "the Little Sweetheart of Maitland Valley, the Baby Blonde, the Pint-Size Kiddie with the Great Big Voice." Wingham was then known as the "country music capital," and interest in this genre has revived since "Primetime Country" began its first season here in 1991.

This is the site of the school operetta in the novel *Lives of Girls and Women*, the stage seemingly "bright as a bonfire, lit by such fanatical devotion." Also held here is the revival meeting that forges Del Jordan's first love, to fervent hymn accompaniment:

I love to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in Glory,
To tell the old, old story —

I look in on the council chambers, where the doomed Miss Farris painted faces for the operettas — sent up "like bubbles, shaped with quivering, exhausting effort, then almost casually set free." Here also is the weekly Great Books discussion enjoyed by Del's mother, whose life is viewed by her daughter as something out of a novel.

When Munro was growing up, the library was in the town hall ("PUBL C RE DING ROOM," everybody having deciphered the notice by mentally filling in the missing letters); the new one stands just to the north. The Alice Munro file is dismayingly thin, and I begin to wonder if she has forfeited esteem in her home town by describing it so acutely. Thus it often is, whether the community be Wingham or the Dublin of James Joyce.

What might have been offensive? Later I would hear Winghamites express wonder that this "prim and proper" girl could have written graphic accounts of sexual encounter ("a flash of insanity, a dreamlike, ruthless, contemptuous breakthrough in a world of decent appearance"). Some townspeople also asserted that her work contained identifiable references to local people.

These long light evenings we visited every part of town. We loitered past the Lyceum Theatre, the Blue Owl Cafe, the poolroom. We sat on the benches by the cenotaph, and if any car honked at us we waved. Dismayed by our greenness, our leggy foolishness, they drive on by; they laughed out their windows.

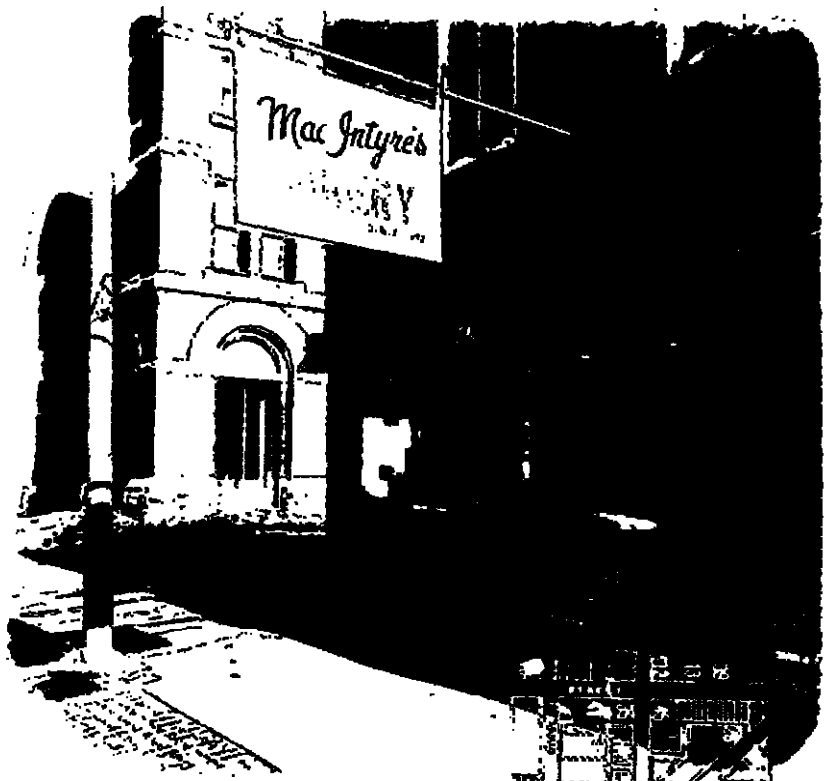
Lives of Girls and Women

North of the town hall I spot the sign for the Lyceum Theatre, the picture show of Munro's youth, still in operation. I encounter the owner in its minuscule lobby, and learn that the theatre uses projectors bought in 1946. A poolroom was once alongside at No. 292, which adjoins the teenagers' hangout of today: Home Video.

The Blue Owl Cafe? I can easily summon up the 1940s at Good's Coffee Shop, No. 342, a living museum — and also a cosy home for the proprietor, Betty Good, with dozens of plants in the curtained windows. Photos of her great-great-grandparents and her own offspring flank the cash register and its image of the Virgin Mary. Customers enter to buy copies of the *London Free Press* piled atop the refrigerator, then sit at the counter's ancient stools to read and chat as the radio intersperses Elvis-era tunes with price quotes for farm produce.

Good's, with its dated menu and mismatched chairs, faces stiff competition from a generic doughnut shop in a strip mall up the street. Beyond the crumbling CN station and a bend of the Maitland River, a convenience store takes the name and site of an old dance hall, the Royal T.

Once sporting a rooftop dot-dot-dot-dash V-for-victory sign for air-force pilots to see, the Royal T is Munro's "Gay-La," where Del glimpses the males' "belt buckles or bottles glinting in the dark." Terry, the Royal T's ebullient clerk, produces a commemorative mug picked up at a garage sale — "The Royal T 1939-1978" — and gives me a Royal T key chain as a souvenir.



I return to town. The former post office, still with the moonlike clock where Del noted the time, is now the local museum. One entire room is devoted to the saga of how "Doc" Cruickshank made Wingham the only Canadian town of its size to have a commercial radio station. I enquire about Alice Munro, and hear of vague intentions to have her work honoured. Greg Gatenby, artistic director of Harbourfront's literary events, once told me that this Winghamite is admired internationally more than any other Canadian writer; you wouldn't know that from the museum.

Toothsome baked goods are offered next door at MacIntyre's, the basis for McArter's Bakery in *Lives of Girls and Women*. In the novel, Del comes here in the "big cream-and-chocolate, clean-smelling car" — owned by her American aunt and uncle — "nosing along between the snowbanks almost silently, like an impudent fish," on an outing that briefly makes the town appear "not unique and permanent as I had thought, but almost makeshift, and shabby; it would barely do."

I ask the woman waiting on me, "Back in the 1940s when Alice Munro was growing up, was this bakery located here?" She tallies up the years her parents had worked in it, consults others on this point, and ascertains that, yes, this was the spot. I marvel at how slightly Wingham has changed.

Orillia long repudiated its own literary genius, Stephen Leacock, before capitalizing on his fame with "Sunshine Sidewalk Sales" and the like. I weigh the possibility of this occurring on Wingham's still-pristine streets. But such self-conscious myth-making would be out of place here, where people are still engrossed in day-to-day drama.

Despite drastic change in the rural economy and the loss of nearly all industry, Wingham remains very much itself. Perhaps the town is destined some day to acquire a "Del Jordan Bake Shoppe" or a "Lives of Girls and Women Boutique," but I hope I will never see it so transformed; this would only confirm that something very important had disappeared.

And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together — radiant, everlasting.

Lives of Girls and Women

When Del's first passion concludes and she "repossesses the world," hunger for the town of Jubilee makes her compile many lists, including one of the names on the cenotaph, just down the street. I drop in to the *Advance-Times* office next door, hoping that my keenness about Munrovia might be shared by someone here. At once I meet the advertising manager, Audrey Currey. "My older sister walked to school with Alice," she cries, "me following behind!" It isn't difficult for me to imagine this charming person as the teenager she had then been. Time, eerily, is being folded back.

Audrey produces a map showing every building in Wingham. With a felt pen, she draws red crosses on the exact spot of important Munrovian events, fictional and otherwise. Then along comes Audrey's husband, Jim, a past chair of the "Primetime Country" board, and I am taken to lunch. In the Riverboat Restaurant (with facilities aptly marked "Buoy" and "Gull") we discuss various Munro stories. Jim emphasizes the intonation of one title: "Who do you think *you* are?" Anyone transcending accepted norms may expect this rebuke today, he points out, and yet both Jim and Audrey affirm, "We've got great people in this town."

AFTER THANKING my newfound friends for their hospitality, I go back up the street, enquiring about this place and that. "I was in Alice's class," the genial hardware-store owner remarks, as I mull over possible models for a Selrite store in *Lives of Girls and Women*. Such "country manners" are described in "The Progress of Love": "Even if somebody phones up to tell you your house is burning down, they ask first how you are."

Map in hand, I go westward one block to the Baptist Church ("a Bible-believing, soul-winning church"). Here the infatuated Del attends Young Peoples: "never getting used to it, always amazed and lonely as somebody thrown up in a shipwreck."

I continue along "the quiet, decaying streets where old maids live, and have birdbaths and delphiniums in their gardens" to 284 Leopold, once the home of Munro's grandmother. A character based on her in "The Peace of Utrecht" gives away clothes that had belonged to her daughter-in-law: "Everything must be used up, saved and mended and made into something else and used again; clothes were to be worn."

The Legion hall, now on Victoria Street, succeeds the one where, in "Who Do You Think You Are?" Rose meets a male *alter ego* from her youth. This is Ralph Gillespie, possessed of a gift for character imitation that she much admires. Learning afterwards of his death from head injuries caused by a fall down the Legion's basement stairs, Rose suddenly feels "his life, close, closer than the lives of men she'd loved, one slot over from her own."

We lived at the end of a road running west from Dagleish over some scrubby land where there were small wooden houses and flocks of chickens and children. The land rose to a decent height where we were and then sloped in wide fields and pastures, decorated with elm trees, down to the curve of the river.

"Connection"

I CONTINUE westward on Victoria, along the route taken by Munro to and from the town high school (now entirely rebuilt). She was lucky to have been taught there by Audrey Tiffen, once lauded by Northrop Frye during her Victoria College days for a "Devil in *Paradise Lost*" essay. (Visiting this zestful woman later in her apartment in Don Mills, Ont., I was flabbergasted to be shown a sepia class photo and told that Munro can recall the colour of each garment worn by everyone in the shot.)

I cross the Maitland, whose silvery willows sometimes inspired Del to dream "a nineteenth-century sort of life, walks and studying, rectitude, courtesy, maidenhood, peacefulness." But there is also the flooding, which cast 20 families from their homes in 1948. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, it transforms Uncle Craig's huge town-history manuscript into "a big wad of soaking paper."

Ahead is Lower Town — the fictional Dagleish or West Hanratty — which rose around the first sawmill. The road zigzags past fairgrounds into "a kind of little ghetto where all the bootleggers and prostitutes and hangers-on lived." West Hanratty, however, "got itself spruced up with paint and aluminum siding." In "Images" a child meets Old Joe Phippen, who lives in a cellar hereabouts (actually the home of such a man, I am told); she promises her father not to mention the episode, "like the children in fairy stories who have seen their parents make pacts with terrifying strangers."

The fox pens set up by Munro's father, Bill Laidlaw, lie directly ahead. When the Depression killed fur-farming, these were adapted for turkeys, which inhabit them today. "I was used to things being killed," says Del. In "Boys and Girls," we're told that decrepit horses were periodically slaughtered for the foxes' food. Work was heavy, and Munro once emphasized this by quoting Margaret Laurence on "people who feel guilty at the drop of a hat, for whom virtue only arises from work."

Beyond the pens I find the Laidlaws' former home, now housing a skin-and-nail-care clinic called Total Indulgence. Here the youthful Munro indulged herself by reading *Wuthering Heights* – which led her also to write a Bronte-style romance — and a Tennyson verse collection salvaged from an abandoned house. But "the watershed book of my life," as Munro described it, was Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*.

Her marriage to James Munro was celebrated at this house in 1951. After its break-up she wrote *Who Do You Think You Are?*, where, in "Simon's Luck," Rose avows that never since the separation had she been "the free person, the one with all that power; maybe she had used it all up, all that was coming to her."

I lie in bed beside my little sister, listening to the singing in the yard. Life is transformed, by these voices, by these presences, by their high spirits and grand esteem, for themselves and each other.

"Connection"

I DEPART from Wingham on Highway 4, turning down the first concession to where Kepple Disney established a farm in 1857 near Bluevale. Here was born a son, Elias, destined to become a Bible-reading optimist fond of saying "God will provide." Confidently, Elias bought a farm in Missouri, which soon failed, but its animal life and the main street of nearby Marceline charmed his son, Walt.

Walt Disney revisited his grandpa's Bluevale farm in the 1940s, delighting the Wingham of Munro's adolescence. But his sentimentally viewed animals do not belong in the natural world she portrays. On an early summer day when nature appears "debased, maddeningly erotic," Del is driven down this same concession road by the local radio station's news reader, who masturbates in front of her. Where Disney presents moral absolutes, Munro explores multiple meanings and refuses to take sides.

I RETURN to Highway 4 in the late afternoon, and continue on to Blyth. Its Memorial Hall has an upstairs theatre, the scene of "cantatas" remembered by Munro's grandmother as splendid affairs (blackface minstrel shows, actually). When an innovative theatre company came here in 1975, there were qualms about "no-goods from Toronto doing dirty plays," although the outcome, of course, was the Blyth Festival.

When picking up my ticket for the evening's drama, I ask about a local treat: suppers at the United Church, with real country cooking. "That's prepaid, actually," I am told, "but perhaps some seats will be left." I am able to gain admittance to the supper, which takes place in a basement hung with framed embroideries spelling out the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. At long tables are busloads of Torontonians here for theatre and food — a buffet of beef, corn, peas, potatoes-and-gravy, delicious pies.

I enquire about Alice Munro's father, who attended the Continuation School in Blyth, and am introduced to Shirley Rutledge, a pleasant middle-aged woman. "Bill Laidlaw!" she exclaims. "Why, my father stood up for Bill at his wedding!" Shirley tells of growing up here — warbling Scottish songs at the Hall on Scots Night — then moving away, but ultimately returning to home turf, just as Alice Munro has done.

I ask about Laidlaw's boyhood home. Shirley identifies this as the house "made of upright bricks" a block away at 210 Drummond. Here he would read James Fenimore Cooper's romantic depictions of trapping in the bush, and adopt this pursuit in adult life to become, ultimately, a breeder of foxes.

Viewing the willow-lined stream below, no doubt the scene of Bill Laidlaw's boyhood adventures, I am struck by the enigmas of personal myth. The father, fascinated by the wildness from which the Huron Tract was carved, later struggles to keep his family above the poverty line. The daughter, sustaining her free spirit, enters a new wilderness that threatens to smother the cairns of an older morality. During the lives of both — as in all generations — the imagined somehow must connect with the real.

I didn't see that I was the same one, embracing, repudiating. I thought I could turn myself inside out, over and over again, and tumble through the world scot free.

"Jesse and Meribeth"

How Memory Works

Rita Donovan sees 'from A to C, and how I got there is mysterious'

by
LYNNE VAN LUVEN

RITA DONOVAN and the poet Blaine Marchand are huddled around a table at the back of the Vienna Cafe, just off Sussex Drive in downtown Ottawa, conducting a post mortem on their performance on CHUO FM radio's "The Burning Page," a once-monthly literary talk show.

This afternoon's program explored the differences between Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* and its film version, starring Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins.

"Actually, I liked the film more than I expected to," Donovan says. "Usually, I prefer novels to their film treatments, but that's not the case this time.

"Of course," she frets, "probably it doesn't really matter because I don't think anyone ever listens to us. Do you think we have an audience?" she asks Marchand, who is pretty sure they do. Quick to take refuge in wisecracks, Donovan is still high from the show, so she throws out more of her trademark one-liners than usual, partly as a defence against our impending interview.

An intensely private, introspective person, Donovan loathes talking about herself, offering to give a definitive interview on behalf of "some other writer," and insisting that she becomes "hopelessly inarticulate" when she tries to discuss her own work.

Of course, at 39, with a B.A. from Concordia University in Montreal and an M.A. from the University of Alberta, Donovan is the antithesis of inarticulate, but her feeling of being so may stem from her fiction itself, which is often complex, imagistic, and far easier to experience than to analyse.

Donovan's first novel, published in 1990, was *Dark Jewels* (Ragweed), which won the Ottawa-Carleton book award and was short-listed for the SmithBooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award. Set in Cape Breton *circa* 1920, *Dark Jewels* was an

intricate exploration of the Macfarland family, whose life revolved around the coal-mining industry. Critics called Donovan's debut impressive, describing the novel as "a book of breath-taking beauty," and "compelling, anything but an easy read."

However, when it came to Donovan's 1991 novel, *Daisy Circus*, reviews were mixed — several of them shot with a vein of perplexed annoyance. Donovan's publisher, Cormorant Books, called *Daisy Circus* "a difficult book to categorize," but it, too, won an Ottawa-Carleton book award.

Even more than *Dark Jewels*, *Daisy Circus* is a haunting novel; ostensibly the story of a questing young narrator named Daisy and her convoluted relationship with her physically handicapped brother Drake, the novel reads like an image-scape embroidered with the poetry of e.e. cummings and a stream of jokes and puns that are quintessentially Donovanesque.

Daisy pursues impassioned interior monologues with an imaginary poet/friend and her former stand-up comedy partner, Elsie,while her memory teems with images of her childhood. As part of her research for the novel, Donovan studied cummings's unpublished papers at Harvard University, drawing her title from the name of the poet's childhood rocking horse. The novel moves between a number of locations, including Montreal, Donovan's birthplace, as well as Edmonton and Ottawa. The prose is laden with compelling images; my favourite is that of Samuel de Champlain, frozen forever in time in his Nepean Point statue near Parliament Hill. Donovan writes:

> Samuel de Champlain squints bronze eyes in the late cool sky; the moon is upon the river. The Indian crouching by his side is asleep or oblivious to the amazement on the water, for the river is alive with astrolabes, wheeling, plunging, jumping as fish leaping round now in circles....

Donovan expresses a restrained sort of exasperation with critics' reactions to her writing. "I've always been able to see the story within the story, and that's the way I write," she observed in an interview with the *Edmonton Journal* in 1992. "We're fooling ourselves if we think we're writing in a linear fashion, anyway. Even if we are telling an anecdote, we bring in all sorts of different scenes."

Donovan's third novel, *Land o' Lakes*, a family chronicle set in Canada and the state of Minnesota, is "looking for a publisher," while its author is already one-third of the way into a new book, *The Plague Saint*, set in a futuristic Canada, around 2010, and in Florence, *circa* 1630.

Over the past two years, Donovan and her husband, John Buschek, a scientist and teacher, undertook a project of a different sort, which culminated in the birth of their

Putting Brush to Paper

ONE BY ONE Daisy saw them all succumb to their natural deaths. Mr. Morse, from Algebra, was squashed between two subsets. Mrs. Ames, History, was the only recorded case of a history teacher entombed in Ancient Egypt, and she passed into the Underworld with a gusto that surprised Akenaton. Mr. Taisir, Geography, was stampeded by a herd of reindeer in Lapland. Or perhaps by a herd of Lapps, this last remained unclear. And Miss George, dear Miss George, of Religion and Civics, died of exhaustion after a particularly taxing Roman orgy.

Which left Daisy without the benefit of ritualized instruction. In Art class there was a truce between Daisy and the instructor, which enabled her to spend long hours drawing urns and chipped china plates. The truce was only due to the strange notes the instructor appended to Daisy's library permissions, odd stuff she didn't understand. She ripped the notes up in the washroom and took her chances with the usual diseases. And she never spoke to him about the notes and she never answered them, either, but he smiled at her as if she had understood them, anyway, and he let her stay for a double-period, to finish up her drawing of a spoon in a bowl.

"This is okay, but isn't there something else...?"

So the art instructor encouraged her to express herself freely. Always, though, with a certain look on his face. Daisy thought he was coming dangerously close to his own natural death, but she closed her eyes and waited and then put the brush to paper. It was just shapes, just a shape; it grew and curved.

"An elephant? Why are you drawing an elephant?" her teacher asked. "Interesting. Sensual trunk."

And he winked, and suddenly he was up to his neck in poisonous paint, gurgling: help me, help me.

Why *had* she drawn the elephant?

"Why not?" she decided. And made it trumpet into the sky. She drew eggs and elephants and hills, and things that could only be described as maracas with hair, dogs and camels, beaked birds and bearded ladies, and her brother's crooked neck and a large round sphere.

"What's the circle?"

"Three hundred and sixty degrees," Daisy said. Damn. Wrong class.

And the art teacher drowned in a vat of sienna red.

From Daisy Circus, *by Rita Donovan, published by Cormorant Books © 1991, reprinted with permission.*

daughter Eleanor, now 18 months old, already an enthusiastic book lover whom her dark, petite mother describes as "blonde and blue-eyed. And tall. Go figure." Donovan suspects that the parenting experience is probably influencing her writing somehow, making her "aware of things from a new perspective," but so far she has felt no urge to write children's books.

One of five siblings raised by a Cape Breton mother and a Québécois father, Donovan grew up on Montreal's south shore, in the Chambly area. "There were a lot of divisions," she recalls. "We had our French friends and our English friends; there was the Catholic school board and the Protestant school board, but it was a rural lifestyle, so we had lots of community."

Despite the postmodern shifts in her novels, Donovan is practically Victorian when it comes to her writing methods: she writes longhand, in a series of three-hole scribblers. "I like to see the writing coming out of my pen, feel that connection," she observes. "Working on a computer, it's so easy to eliminate a word, lose the way the idea started....I like to see a lot of words, see them crossed out. I see the scribbles and I know thought is anything but clear. I think better when it's just me and the page.

"I hate the clicks of the computer keys, too," she adds. "With my pen and my copy book, I'm completely portable. I like that feeling."

After finishing university, Donovan moved to Ottawa; then she and and her husband travelled to Germany in 1984, where Donovan worked on yet another novel, still unpublished. Coming back to Ottawa, she says, "brought me back home, closer to my childhood."

This month, Donovan is off to Italy to soak up atmosphere for *The Plague Saint*, which promises at least a double narrative, and will leap to connections between two divergent eras.

The novel's focus "stems partly from the books I was reading around the period when I was giving birth," Donovan notes. "Everything seemed so heightened then: it must have been the extra blood — pregnant women develop 40 per cent more blood, you know, to sustain the fetus."

Questioned as to the implications of writing a novel about plagues during the time of AIDS, Donovan quips, "I'm prepared for all misreadings," adding that she has no explanation for the pleasure she derived from "wallowing in plague literature."

Despite her disparate and sometimes arcane interests, Donovan insists that characterization, not data, plot, or political message, drives her narratives. "When I look at characters I choose, they are people who would not have told their narratives in a straightforward way. It isn't me telling the story, it's them; but it's not automatic writing either."

At this stage of her life, Donovan seems to have three orchestrated demands upon her time: family life, her own

writing, and teaching. Periodically, she teaches writing workshops for University of Ottawa continuing-education students. "There was a time when I said I wouldn't be caught dead teaching a writing workshop," she admits. "But the U of O attracts a good core group of young writers...and all writing workshops can do is save you a bit of time, give you a community where you can express ideas. I hate the notion of a few teachers who shape students in their own image. Being a creative reader is the subversive part of what I try to teach in any writing course. Most of it is up to the students themselves....Writing something for yourself is really the only satisfaction."

Back in 1980, when I first met Donovan, she was in Rudy Wiebe's creative-writing class at the University of Alberta. Each student was allegedly writing a novel, parts of which we read aloud to each other every second Friday, amid occasional emotional outbursts and many ironic exchanges. Some of the worst cynics, including Donovan and me, dubbed the group "The Wiebettes," and imagined ourselves as a literary chorus line, executing polished, convoluted sentences for our mentor, who had won the Governor General's Award for his 1973 masterpiece, *The Temptations of Big Bear*.

The promising comedic novel (there were many references to the perverse and heartless "vaudeville gods," as I recall) Donovan was writing during that period has since been confined to "the abyss" with other abandoned writing projects, but over the years she has sharpened her critical skills just as she has broadened the base of her material.

Her intricate approach to storytelling, she speculates, comes from growing up in a gregarious family, "from a lot of years listening to people talk; they'd come over, tell their story and go home. I'd usually be one of the last people there sitting around, listening."

As for the fragmented, non-linear style of her novels, Donovan says, "That's how memory works; very few people recall things entire. I don't see the world in a linear fashion. I see from A to C, and how I got there is mysterious. True, there are people who see things in direct connections, but I don't hold that against them...."

In a way, Donovan's approach to writing reminds me of the magpies we used to watch outside the seminar-room windows in Wiebe's writing class: the swooping black-and-white birds would whirl and dip from the pine trees to the ground and back again, sometimes scooping up treasures — the shiny cap of a pen, a bit of abandoned sandwich — other times just dipping and diving for the sheer joy of it, their feathers glistening in the bright Prairie sunlight.

Reading a Donovan novel is a little like that: you never know quite what you will find when you dive into the prose, but the journey itself is always fascinating. ✤

The Defence of Canada

Who's helping and who's hindering our ability to cope with the future by BRIAN FAWCETT

SINCE THE ELECTION of the Mulroney government in 1984, it has become increasingly apparent that Canada's politicians aren't capable of thinking further than the narrow interests of their ideological supporters and the need to stay in power. At the same time, the bureaucrats who operate Canadian governmental infrastructure have been too busy defending their budgetary allotments and job security to see much beyond the ends of their noses. As a result, the defence of Canada and its institutions has been left to the nation's citizens.

Meanwhile, wave after wave of political and cultural crisis has engulfed the country: the revival of Quebec separatism; government-induced constitutional wrangling that produced several years of sterile and divisive debate; the Canada–US free-trade jamboree and the consequent shrinking of our industrial base (and of our ability to fund our social net); the threat of absorption into the United States (or the NAFTA Village); and the possibility that we might soon disintegrate into a retribalized Babel of racial, ethnic, or consumer enclaves clawing at one another's

throats under the supervision of a corporate sector interested only in selling us the appropriate weapons and body armour.

Even the most wide-eyed optimist will agree that thus far, the defence of Canada hasn't been very coherent or effective. It isn't only that Canada is being dismantled and doesn't realize it, or even that Canadians are indulging the longstanding national vice of making the best of a bad situation. Nearly everyone is aware that life is getting nastier, and everyone is whining about whatever element of the dismantling impinges on their fun or their disposable income. But we're not making the slightest attempt to interrogate the metaphors upon which the alterations to our way of life are based, and we're not questioning the agenda that will eventually land us — each in a different way, but nonetheless absolutely — in the future with (and as) quite a lot less than now.

An important component of the defence of Canada ought to come from academe and from our writers. In some cases, it has. But the specific characteristics of their efforts reveal both Canada's general diffidence about maintaining itself as a viable political entity, and the primary problem facing all of Canada's cultural industries. In different ways, they all pay too little attention to their position and stature within the initiatives and debates that concern them, and still less attention to whether those they address are listening or are merely measuring them for the next round of, er, alterations. All too often what has been written in defence of the country turns out to be something that the enemy doesn't even bother to contest — as was the case with nearly everything written concerning NAFTA. At least as frequently, the writers — generally university academics — are writing texts so opaque, specialized, or myopic that their authors might be accused of merely giving moral comfort to their own illusions.

Having lodged those sweeping criticisms, I should elucidate the up side of the situation: if we lose this country in the coming decade, it isn't going to be for lack of intelligent Canadians having thought and written about it.

Interestingly, the best piece of metaphor/agenda hunting is to be found in a book that isn't directly concerned with culture. It is Linda McQuaig's brilliant backgrounder to the 1988 free-trade negotiations, *The Quick and the Dead: Brian Mulroney, Big Business, and the Seduction of Canada*, published a couple of years ago by Viking. It is one of those rare non-fiction volumes that fulfils the promise of its subtitle. McQuaig revealed, among other things, our then-prime minister's irrational sycophancy toward things corporate and American. Her book made other seemingly inexplicable aspects of the Mulroney government — including its Americanized need for constitutional literality — suddenly begin to make sense. When the Canadian media played both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown fiascos as if the lead actors were an updated version of the fathers of Confederation, McQuaig's book showed how distorting that

media metaphor was. In reality, our leaders were disguised corporate captains trying to write a Canadian Declaration of Independence from one another, and from Canada's history and heritage.

Since then, Canada's publishers have brought out a wealth of books that have analysed parts of the Canadian malaise. *False Promises: The Failure of Conservative Economics*, edited by Robert Allen and Gideon Rosenbluth, Ross V. G. Dobson's *Bringing the Economy Home for the Market*, and Stephen McBride and John Shields's *Dismantling a Nation: Canada and the New World Order* have each, in different ways, tried to elucidate what is wrong and going more wrong in Canada. I mention those three not just because they're particularly good books, but because few readers are likely to have heard of them. Intellectual merit, in this public non-debate, seems to have little or no purchase, particularly when it comes from socially committed presses such as Black Rose, New Star, and Fernwood. I could name a dozen more books from these presses that cover similarly important topics and have suffered the same fate. It isn't clear to me whether this is a result of publishing overkill or a conscious media conspiracy to disregard such books. Aside from coverage in a few politically factional (and politically ineffectual) journals, these kinds of books are being ignored.

Americans...may be even more helpless victims of the cultural crisis than Canadians are. The real enemy? The corporate communications and banking empires that have emerged in California and New York....

Perhaps because publishers have failed to find a receptive audience for their comprehensive books on the subject, we've seen the emergence of several series of small, issue-related, in-your-face chapbooks. HarperCollins began a promising series that unfortunately degenerated into factional complaining and then into hiatus, while Coach House started its more ambitious "Hooligans" series, which was launched with Senator Royce Frith's partisan *Hoods on the Hill*, and last summer gave us Bruce Powe's light-headed but interesting *A Tremendous Canada of Light*. The little-known but well-connected Robert Davies Publishing began its "Food for Thought" series with Pierre Trudeau's diatribe against the Charlottetown constitutional accord and last year added Deborah Coyne's *Seven Fateful Challenges for Canada*. Any engagement with Trudeau's incisive mind is worth our time, but Coyne's chapbook reads like something meant for a high-school inspirational (read "conventional thinking") essay contest. Even though I found myself agreeing with most of Coyne's generalities, her turgid prose left me thinking that she ought to be required to spend a couple of weeks handcuffed to someone like Douglas Coupland so she can find out what life at the end of the 20th century is like for those of us who didn't grow up underfoot at the Bank of Canada offices in Ottawa.

Another book in the Davies series, *Zen and the Art of Post-Modern Canada*, by Stephen Schecter, asks "does the trans-Canada Highway always lead to Charlottetown?" without seeming to realize that this isn't a rhetorical question. Aside from demonstrating that he has listened to so much CBC Radio that he could ghost-write for Peter Gzowski, Schecter's book has the virtue of displaying an anxiety that not enough Canadians feel: that this is a great country filled with remarkable landscapes and some extremely decent ideas about how people can live together.

For all the various faults of these issue-driven monographs, I'd like to see more of them. I'd prefer them to be a little less academic, sure, and maybe a little louder and brassier than the prototypes. My reasons will be apparent to anyone who comes across two books that have recently been launched into the cultural-crisis void by a couple of our university presses.

The better of the two is **Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films** (327 pages, $50 cloth, $28 paper), by Ted Magder, head of York University's mass communication program; it's part of the University of Toronto's portentously named (and otherwise unelucidated) "The State and Economic Life" series. Magder asks himself two questions: why Canada didn't produce feature films until the mid-1960s, and whether we're likely to — or ought to — in the future. His rather tortured answer to the first question is to provide a history of Canadian filmmaking — and to conclude that there were no feature films because a) John Grierson was running the National Film Board, and b) Hollywood deluged us with high-gloss feature films at a fraction of what it would cost us to make our own. Magder's second question lands him in deeper and occasionally hotter water. He wants to be cosmopolitan, which means that he's tempted to think of Canadian nationalism as, well, let's be sensible and admit that the global economy can't be stopped. But he also knows that the images of Canada Hollywood has provided us with either don't exist, or aren't much more accurate than the vision of Howard Keel (dressed as a mountie) singing "Rose Marie" to Ann Blyth (dressed as an Indian princess) was in 1954.

Magder's solution, alas, is merely politically correct: he abjures cultural nationalism ("We do not need public support of cultural production in Canada to express a national identity") but wants government to continue supporting cultural production ("...we need public support for cultural production to explore the manifold and contradictory ways in which we exist as social beings in our everyday lives"). For all his talk of common sense, he seems blissfully unaware of how politicians actually think. Imagine where the sympathies of a cash-

starved federal government would be in adjudicating competing budget claims for "keeping the starving from dying on the streets" and "exploring the manifold and contradictory ways in which we exist as social beings."

The Beaver Bites Back?: American Popular Culture (McGill-Queen's, 356 pages, $49.95 cloth, $19.95 paper) is a collection of what appear to be academic papers collected by David H. Flaherty and the late Frank E. Manning after a 1988 conference at the University of Western Ontario in London. The cartoon on the book's badly designed cover, which depicts a twig-carrying beaver confronting a star-studded American eagle driving a southbound semi-trailer filled with Canadian logs, seems to answer the question in the book's title. Unfortunately, the papers within the book rarely answer any questions of any kind. Their authors, along with the editors, *seem* dedicated to setting us straight on the mysteries of current cultural analysis, but the analysis they provide generally isn't current, and, nearly six years after the papers were delivered, the mysteries broached aren't mysterious. Mostly, they're now either issues of fact or issues of common sense that the authors proceed, in their professional and institutional deliriums, to either muddle or miss altogether.

There are, of course, several exceptions to this in the book. Frank Manning's introductory essay makes some intelligent, if cynical, points, and Seth Feldman's essay on Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin* does a better job — in 11 pages — of contextualizing Canada's film industry than Magder's book does in 320. Feldman's elegant thumbnail excoriation of the National Film Board is probably the best piece of thinking in the entire volume, a gem in a barrel of mostly mouldy apples.

I don't want to be unkind to David Flaherty, the book's surviving editor, since it must have been difficult to pull things together after Manning's 1990 death. But to be truly useful, this book should have been in print *before* Manning died. That McGill-Queen's brought it to print late in 1993 is the purest evidence of just how serious it must think our cultural crisis is. What worries me is how common that attitude — and the behaviours it engenders — appears to be across Canada's university community, and within much of our publishing community. We need a deeper sense of urgency and a sharper focus on the changing metaphors we must engage.

I don't, for instance, think that the United States is the chief threat to Canadian political and cultural viability. Americans, blinded by their obsolete Pax Americana, may be even more helpless victims of the cultural crisis than Canadians are. The real enemy? The corporate communications and banking empires that have emerged in California and New York, the ones that would like to live in a world where corporate images, advertising campaigns, and slogans replace the awkwardness of citizenship with commodities and their consumers. ✤

And Then the Earth Moved

by DOUGLAS HILL


Wayne Johnston

HUMAN AMUSEMENTS
by Wayne Johnston
McClelland & Stewart, 224 pages, $17.99 paper
(ISBN 0 7710 4438 0)

WAYNE JOHNSTON's three previous novels (two of which won important national awards) located their peculiar brand of urban domestic mischief in Newfoundland. With *Human Amusements* he has turned to Toronto and another mismatched middle-class family: the era is familiar and the comedy as sharp as always, but the social and moral issues seem larger now, more insistently disturbing.

The Prendergasts are much like Johnston's other families. They seem to occupy an ordinary human landscape, with a few odd and even bizarre features scattered about, but it soon becomes clear that a major emotional fault line runs directly beneath them, accumulating terrible force. The parents are both part-time schoolteachers hoping to better their lot: Mary is a naïvely ambitious optimist who tries to market television scripts and program ideas; Peter is a mordant cynic who works away at a novel. Their son, Henry, senses trouble coming. It starts when Mary, to everyone's surprise, actually sells something — a moralistic kids' show called "Rumpus Room"; she ends up as writer, producer, and host, and arranges for Henry to get the starring role.

A suddenly successful mother, a disappointed, ineffectual father, a young boy confused by publicity — problems here, but nothing exactly unique or insurmountable. Then, a few years later, when Henry is 13 and just about to be phased out of the production, Mary sells a youth-oriented sitcom, "The Philo Farnsworth Show," based on the life of the young inventor of television. Henry wins the role of the eponymous hero, thanks again to a deal his mother cuts. The show becomes a cult hit, something like "Star Trek," and Henry/Philo, along with his parents, is thrust into a fierce media spotlight, pursued by goofy fans and tabloid journalists. Now life for the Prendergasts enters a dimension of true craziness.

Henry tells the story of the family's disintegration fairly straightforwardly. As a narrator he gradually develops an awareness that the implications of events are as interesting as events themselves, and, by the last third of the novel, that his feelings are more important than either. His father's wit can no longer mask anguish and jealousy; his mother's schemes for bigger successes turn into desperate gambles; his own notoriety forces him into a recluse's unnatural existence, isolated in television studio or fortress-like condominium high above Toronto, losing complete touch with the "normal" world he knows is out there. When the catastrophe comes, it's a beaut — a surreal mix of Tonya Harding and Michael Jackson, with a world convention of Philo-Trekkies (the "Philosophers") thrown in to swell the cast.

The narrative voice that Johnston fashions for Henry — earnest, compassionate, deadpan — keeps the implau-

sible from sliding over into the impossible. This is *not* magic realism; what Johnston seems to be able to do here, even more tellingly than in his earlier books, is to push the distortions of ordinariness, of typical, even stereotypical personalities and situations, right to the limits. When the earth finally splits open, as split it must, the reader can find no literary formula, no example in Borges or Pynchon to provide comfort, breathing space. This is real pain, not artistic licence.

What is undeniably odd about all the Prendergasts, as Henry records and attempts to understand them, as he works out his ambivalence about his own responsibility for them, becomes deeply sad. Johnston has indicated before that the victim in any family situation is not always the one who hurts the most, who cracks the most self-lacerating jokes, who spends the most time shut up in a dark room with a bottle or even fiercer demons. The human story of the Prendergasts' amusements is the most subtle and complex picture of violence in the name of love and crossed purposes that Johnston has yet drawn.

The larger story is also complex. By the end of the novel we have been forced to think through our attitudes toward a tangle of contemporary forces: the nature of ambition and fame, the role of the media, the place of public opinion and hype in creating value. *Human Amusements* doesn't have all the answers, by any means; Wayne Johnston doesn't even ask all the questions. But the novel is remarkably timely, on its public side, and in this respect Johnston advances into new territory. He's always been adept at recovering the dopey decades we thought we'd put behind us. Now he's as up-to-date as "Nightline" or "Hard Copy," and this gives his fable a new and alarming power. The weirdness is right here, with the weirdos, in the living room.

Her Brilliant Career

by Barbara Carey

ALL YOU GET IS ME: THE REAL STORY OF K. D. LANG
by Victoria Starr
Random House, 320 pages, $26.50 cloth
ISBN 0-394-22369-1

IMAGE and public perception are so fundamental to the success of any performer that it's hardly surprising that celebrity biographies are usually glib, cliché-ridden extensions of the entertainment industry's PR machine. Victoria Starr's biography of k.d. lang kicks off with typical hype, setting up the talented Alberta-born singer as someone who

> has completely beaten the system, bringing joy to millions of people as she thrived against all odds, retaining her strength, her focus, and her commitment to herself in a way that few artists do.

But Starr, a radio producer and music journalist who lives in New York City, settles down after the introductory gushiness and goes on to provide a very thoughtful account of k.d. lang's rise to stardom. It's a fascinating story: in the space of roughly a decade, lang has radically reinvented her stage persona, metamorphosing from a campy country-punk singer with a bad haircut, to a Nashville-style crooner with an androgynous — even butch — penchant for cross-dressing, to a crossover artist with what one glossy entertainment mag called "a new kind of sex appeal."

Along the way, lang has always insisted that she is being true to herself, not to any marketing plan; and certainly, it's hard to imagine any per-

former charting a path to the top based on the events in lang's career. She alienated much of Nashville and many radio programmers by refusing to conform to the stereotype of a female singer; she antagonized cattle ranchers — and got her music banned by some country stations — by promoting vegetarianism in a "Meat Stinks" ad in 1990; in 1992, she put an end to dumb interview questions like "Is marriage in the works for k. d. lang?" by announcing that she was a lesbian. Of course, controversy and a reputation for unconventionality can stimulate a celebrity's career; as lang herself pointed out in the aftermath of the "Meat Stinks" uproar, the resulting publicity helps sell records. And they undoubtedly add to her appeal as the subject of a biography.

In fact, much of the most interesting material in the book centres around these three "controversies" and their impact (predominantly positive) on lang's career. How they affected her on a more personal level is dealt with in less detail; notwithstanding the promisingly suggestive title *All You Get Is Me*, this biography is really about lang the *performer*. We are given glimpses of the private person, particularly in the brief closing chapter, "Olive Oil, Creativity, and Love," and elsewhere Starr does offer some of the obsessive, if not revealing, personal detail so necessary to the genre, but she is mainly concerned with contextualizing lang's ascendancy. Starr's description of the workings of the music industry is absorbing. And her discussion of the pressures on lang to be a lesbian role-model is also insightful.

Such is the charismatic performer's popularity that a skimpy little biography pieced together from magazine and newspaper articles sold more than 16,000 copies when it was published by ECW in 1992. Starr's full-length treatment, which draws on an extensive array of sources — lang herself, her friends and family, journalists and broadcasters, fellow musicians and industry insiders — is much more satisfying. It's a must for dedicated k. d. watchers; and recommended to others as proof that it's possible for a Canadian celebrity to come across as, well, nice, but definitely not boring.

WHAT BELONGS TO US

by Mary Frances Hill

HER HEAD A VILLAGE
by Makeda Silvera
Press Gang, 125 pages $12.95 paper
(ISBN 0 88974 056 9)

MISSING PERSONS
by Carole Giangrande
Cormorant, 144 pages $12.95 paper
(ISBN 0 920953 63 8)

CAROLE GIANGRANDE's *Missing Persons* and Makeda Silvera's *Her Head a Village and Other Stories* both deal with disruption, alienation, and the instincts these conflicts arouse in their characters. The authors' distinctive voices — Giangrande's rich, soulful prose and Silvera's lucid storytelling — mark the points in their characters' lives where chaos and misery end and survival begins.

In *Her Head a Village*, her second collection of short fiction, Silvera writes of strong Black women confronting invaders of the most personal of territories — mind, sexuality, race, and home — at the very point that each woman has begun to taste her independence.

"Baby" tells the story of two troubled women making love, oblivious to the would-be rapist lurking in a homophobic heat outside the door; and the title story applies racial and political intensity to a writer's search for a "room of her own." In "Canada Sweet, Girl" an honest woman's nine-year battle for

Carole Giangrande and Makeda Silvera

dignity in work and motherhood is suddenly undermined by immigration laws designed to treat her like a piece of baggage. On the verge of losing all she has built, she is struck by an overwhelming sense of alienation on a cold Toronto street: "Mi don't even want to run for shelter....Dis coldness cyaan match di numbness in me."

In Silvera's work, the immigrants' despair in the face of a racist and sexist Canada is matched by the spirit and optimism underlying the women's efforts to maintain dignity. In "Welfare Line," a proud, empathetic woman surveys other immigrants at the social services office:

> The one in front of me is a Filipina woman, just come to Canada, it seem. Maybe a refugee? Come to think of it, all of us is refugee, come here for one reason or another. Adopt all kinds of name and identity to stay on.

Her Head a Village reveals Silvera as a storyteller in the oral tradition. Her words ride the page in a consistent rhythm: these stories are disciplined, uncluttered, and beg to be read aloud.

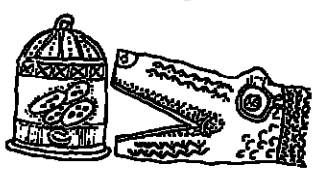
Carole Giangrande has a rare ability to construct her characters as part human, part open nerve, vulnerable and ready to burst at the slightest touch. The fine stories in *Missing Persons*, her first collection of fiction, are heavy in

anguish, catharsis, poetry. Giangrande's characters are slaves to gnawing memories they are unable to shed. Giangrande shifts deftly in and out of the psyches of a tired 28-year-old man pining for lost love, and a dispossessed farming couple reconstructing the pieces of their own lives in the urban garden of an enigmatic, lonely immigrant. In the title story, a photographer yearns to fill the vacuum left inside her when close friends mysteriously severed all contact with her. She mounts a collage of all she has lost in a gallery show; with the overwhelming public response she suddenly feels "part of a circle of people who've all lost someone; part of this circle called the human race."

Memory becomes an unexpendable limb in Giangrande's characters; personal identity is merely an accumulation of all that has passed and refuses to leave the mind and body. In "Into the Fire" a woman lives inside the senses of her twin brother, who was stolen from her by war. On the eve of a peace march where she knows the past will be spewed up once again, she hesitates:

> ...In me [memory] shouts, buried alive, pounding its fists to get out. That's what has come of burning pictures, papers; memory is outraged; it's a fault line shifting underground, an angry rumble deep in the earth. Instinct tells me this will not be a march but a small excavation; my feet will scrape the dust off memories as I walk, and I'm afraid.

Giangrande wisely does not try to lighten the emotional load in these stories; rather, her rich prose invites the reader into the sensuality that springs from a deep mourning for all that has disappeared, all that, as she writes, "is not ours and yet belongs to us."



An End to Silence

by George Kaufman

OUR LITTLE SECRET: CONFRONTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN CANADA
by Judy Steed
Random House, 276 pages, $27 cloth
(ISBN 0 394 22318 7)

NOT LIKE DAD
by John Andrew
Macmillan, 218 pages, $17.95 paper
(ISBN 0 7715 9028 8)

THE ISSUE of child sexual abuse is swamping our society. The very day I received two review books on the topic, the *Globe* carried a first-person article on abuse and false-memory syndrome, *Esquire* magazine featured the story of a family torn apart by "recovered" memories of childhood abuse, and *Saturday Night* weighed in with a strong article on the subject. *Modern Woman* magazine also got into the act, though its personal account of false memory syndrome was safely buried in the back pages, behind the fashion and make-up advice. Sexual abuse is clearly past the tabloid (and tabloid TV) shock-story stage; writing about abuse has become a growth industry. But sexual abuse is far more than an insatiable media's flavour of the month.

If that hasn't become clear to some people by now, reading Judy Steed's *Our Little Secret* will remove all doubts. The book is a passionate call to end the collective denial in our society, but Steed's passion is solidly grounded in a sound journalistic approach to her subject.

Steed's dedication, "For the Children," says it all. Like the topic itself, this book is often grim and disgusting because Steed does not spare us the details of these disturbing cases. Indeed, the purpose of the book seems to be to counter some of the retrenching already going on with this controversial issue. She quotes an expert in the field: "Very few children, no more than two or three per thousand, have ever been found to exaggerate or to invent claims of sexual molestation."

For many of us, the immediate response is to reject this view. To do otherwise is to accept that we live in a society of monsters who prey on their, and our, vulnerable young people. *Our Little Secret*, though, quickly breaks down that kind of denial. It is impossible to read these horrific stories and still downplay the extent of the problem.

While the book examines several cases from across the country, the most unnerving one involves a popular choirmaster in Kingston, Ontario. Steed's description of Kingston ("smug, white, a little self-righteous") is a little smug itself, but her exhaustive investigation of the case of John Gallienne is the stuff of parents' nightmares. Gallienne eventually admitted molesting dozens of young boys who had been entrusted to his care, but not until after a sturdy circle of community protection had been painstakingly stripped from around him. Many members of the church, and the community, were unwilling to accept the truth; even more frightening, many supporters stuck by him even after the full extent of his betrayal had become clear.

It took several suicides, broken lives, determined police work, and the courage of some of his victims to finally stop Gallienne's voracious preying on the lives of young people. Steed documents the string of shattered adult lives he left behind, a grim legacy of the cost of the silence that allowed the choirmaster to carry on his abuse for years.

The case of three sisters who finally took their father to court for incestuous abuse is also unsettling. Initially, though all three spoke out at his trial, the father was given a light sentence, and his identity was protected by the court. Through

their persistence, the sentence was eventually quadrupled, and the sisters triumphantly (though painfully) revealed their identity to the public.

Steed emphasizes that the justice system is just beginning to catch up with the public's sense of the seriousness of sexual abuse. Says one judge:

> We send bank robbers who've caused no physical harm to the pen because they've committed a criminal act...but with rapists and pedophiles we say, "They need treatment," as if they haven't committed a serious crime.

A chapter on the men who prey on young children in Third World countries presents nothing new, but it does put human faces on both the victims and the perpetrators. As Steed shows, it's the kind of despicable crime that has for too long been legally and morally ignored here in the West.

If Steed's book paints a sad picture of the terrible scope of the problem we're facing, John Andrew's *Not Like Dad* narrows the focus to the individuals involved. Andrew gives us an unflinchingly honest portrait of a life thrown into painful turmoil by childhood incest. Abused, sexually and every other way, by his brother and father, Andrew was cheated of a normal childhood and spent his young adult years trying to undo the damage of his past.

All the familiar stages of response — from denial to confrontation and acceptance — are painstakingly detailed, as Andrew tries to save his marriage, his self-esteem, and his sanity. A series of supportive therapists and friends (including his wife) helps him in the process of healing.

Andrew spares no one, especially not himself, in charting the abuse and its pernicious effects:

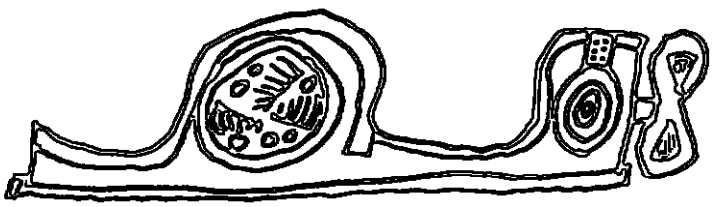
> The easiest thing...would be for me to dismiss (my parents) in anger and judgement. But even if I wanted to, I am not able to do it...I struggle today to see their own woundedness in a family legacy of incest and silence.

While his story of pain and trauma is, understandably, difficult to read, he tells it with a compassion, eloquence, and flair for storytelling that keep the narrative from lapsing into maudlin confession. Andrew makes us feel the pain and the degradation, but he also tempers it with the perspective of a survivor coming to terms with all that:

> I cried for the child who found safety behind the layers of paint on the wall of his bedroom. I cried for the teenager who bartered his body for the illusion of safety. And I cried for the terror of a young man trying to stay one step ahead of where he had finally arrived.

Not Like Dad will be tremendously helpful to anyone sharing Andrew's problem, and will provide insight and information for those of us trying to absorb and understand this phenomenon.

While these two books approach the issue from two very different angles, they share a thread of hope: that the curse of silence and shame that has kept child abuse hidden for so long is slowly, painfully, being lifted. Like the survivors themselves, society as a whole will have to deal with the frightening ramifications.



JUST ABOUT THE HOLE STORY

by Eileen Manion

THE RAIN BARREL
by George Bowering
Talonbooks, 200 pages, $15.95 paper
(ISBN 0 88922 345 9)

IF I HADN'T read the covering letter that came with the review copy of this book, I might have thought the holes in "Discoloured Metal," a first-person narrative about (if I can say these stories are "about" anything) a flight from Calgary to northern Germany and back, were some bizarre printing error. There are six round, blank spaces that begin on the second page of the story and get increasingly bigger as the story "progresses," until the reader arrives at a blank page. Then there are six pages of text the size of the holes, but the round fragments do not match (except in size) the spaces where something is missing. The last page, like the first, is holeless.

At first I was irritated. A volume of short stories should not need a covering letter, muttered some niggling New Critical conscience I thought had died at least 20 years ago. The letter invited the puzzled reviewer to call the publisher and ask what the holes are for. But it was too early in the morning to call Vancouver from Montreal, and I did not want to have to pay for a long-distance call. Anyway, that seemed like cheating: the reviewer's job is to interpret, in a tone of confident authority. So here we go: the holes call attention to the fact that stories depend on readers — they are the spaces for the reader to reconstruct the story; the holes represent the fragmentation of the narrator, pointing to the fact that he is not a reliable, unitary consciousness like a narrator in a realist story; the holes

symbolize the structural defects in the plane (note title); hole puns on "whole," which is something we never get in a postmodern story. The holes are a distraction for critics? Something for professors of Canadian fiction to talk about with their classes? A reminder that we can't know everything?

Speculating on the holes got to be fun and I felt less irritated, more intrigued. Postmodern fiction is, after all, supposed to destabilize the reader, de-naturalize the conventions of fiction, one of the most basic of which is that, unlike poetry, the words go to the end of the line.

Most of the other stories in this collection also play with the relation of writer and reader as well as with the staples of fiction itself — plot, character, setting, point of view. "Rhode Island Red," all plot and no character, shows what happens when a chicken crosses a highway at an inopportune moment. In "Fred and Pauline" the writer/narrtator just invents a couple of characters. In "Desire and the Unnamed Narrator," the speaker inserts himself into Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing*, and erotic fantasy mixes with critical commentary. The narrator of "Little Me," while eating the special in Daphne's Lunch, chats with the narrator of "Staircase Descended," exchanging problems: one has just seen his double in an 18-month-old toddler; the other is convinced that his wife can't see him.

A few stories, reminiscent of Borges, use the conventions of genre fiction — time travel in "October 1, 1961," where a baseball player from 2023 returns to 1961 to appropriate Roger Maris's home-run record; or the murder mystery in "Nadab," a story presented through multiple points of view, which lead us to believe that the former Hare Krishna devotee Nadab shot his friend, making it look as if his lover's husband did it.

"You want a story, watch television....We dont do stories here," says the hard-boiled cop in "Nadab." (Bowering doesn't do apostrophes in his contractions.) With the postmodern story, the story is the undermining of the story, the questioning of the proper relationship of writer, reader, character, and critic. (Remember the holes.) If you insist that stories must be written in a familiar realist mode, you won't like *The Rain Barrel*. But if you admire fiction that's less like soap opera and more like performance art, these new stories have enough irony, subversion, and playfulness for any postmodern fan.

Uncommon Aesthetics

by David Prosser

CALLING THE SHOTS
by Janis Cole and Holly Dale
Quarry. 264 pages. $23.95 paper
ISBN 1 55082 085 0

In 1988 the filmmakers Janis Cole and Holly Dale completed *Calling the Shots*, a feature-length documentary about women who make movies. Of the research material they'd amassed, including more than 50 filmed interviews, only a fraction had made it into the final cut. Wondering what to do with the rest of it, they had a bright idea. Why not type some of it up and put it into print?

The resulting book, *Calling the Shots: Profiles of Women Filmmakers*, presents transcripts of interviews with 20 filmmakers from the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, accompanied in each case by a filmography and a brief biographical introduction. Cole and Dale have consciously chosen their interviewees to represent as broad a cross-section of female talent

in the feature film industry as possible; so the Indian filmmaker Mira Nair (whose 1988 film *Salaam Bombay!* took two prizes at the Cannes Film Festival and received an Academy Award nomination for best foreign film) shares space not only with Patricia Rozema, director of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, but also with Penelope Spheeris, director of *Wayne's World*.

In their preface, Cole and Dale declare two intentions, among others: to reveal the complexity of the movie-making process and to attempt to define a "feminist aesthetic" of filmmaking. The first of these aims is fulfilled, sort of. In response to such questions as "How did your movie X come about?" or "Was it hard to find financing for Y?" or "What was it like your first day on the set?" the interview subjects obligingly recount their experiences applying for internships, developing ideas, labouring over scripts, pitching to producers, striking deals, and putting jerks in their place. Unfortunately, few of the anecdotes are intrinsically memorable (though I do like the one by Deepa Mehta about getting a call from George Lucas and, assuming a prank, saying "Ha, ha, very funny" and hanging up on him), and they do all rather tend to cover similar ground. Few things are as unengaging as other people's shop talk, and readers whose interest in film does not extend to giving a damn about how many drafts the script of *Fast Times at Ridgemount High* went through are liable to find their eyes glazing over.

The main problem here is the book's chosen format. The transcribed q&a session is a dodgy journalistic genre in all but the most accomplished hands. Without a narrative voice to set place and mood, to describe expression and gesture, to divine nuances of meaning and emotion, to pass quickly over inessential detail, transcripts make pretty dull reading. They work best when interviewer and interviewee engage in a true dialogue, tossing ideas back and forth, interrupting, challenging, enlarging on each other's remarks; but when you ask someone a question like "What is your film about?" or "Do you have any advice for aspiring filmmakers?" (as Cole and Dale do, with numbing regularity), then you're practically guaranteed answers that sit on the printed page like cold suet pudding.

The question of whether there exists a distinctively feminist aesthetic of filmmaking proves a more rewarding line of enquiry. Not because the evidence is conclusive — anyone who thinks it ought to be should ask themselves what sort of common aesthetic they might hope to discern in a book subtitled "Profiles of Men Filmmakers" — but precisely because it is not. The truth — and it is a profoundly encouraging truth, by the way, of which this book is most welcome evidence — is that there are as many kinds of women's movies as there are women making them. Such filmmakers as Anne Wheeler (*Bye Bye Blues*), Randa Haines (*Children of a Lesser God*), and Martha Coolidge (*Rambling Rose*) all make the modest suggestion that women's creative talents might be as diverse as men's, but it is the Québécoise actress-turned-director Micheline Lanctôt who wins the cheer. "I don't speak for crowds," she says, sensibly. "I speak for myself."

Lizzie Borden, director of the brilliant *Working Girls* (not to be confused with the Melanie Griffith movie *Working Girl*, in the singular) puts her finger on the real issue: "By putting out our own images, and choosing how we want to show those images, we are in fact changing the world." Changing the world is, of course, what all artists do. If there's a special reason to celebrate female world-changers, perhaps it is simply that every once in a while some woman will think of a new way of doing it that would never have occurred to a man.

After Sex Was Invented

by Pat Barclay

HOW TO START A CHARTER AIRLINE
by Susan Haley
Macmillan, 256 pages, $24.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 7715 9048 2)

THERE'S A moment in Susan Haley's new novel when Helen and Max, her two main characters, enjoy a post-coital discussion about the invention of sex:

> "[My wife]...got kind of a rotten deal," [said Max]. "Married her before they invented sex."
>
> "When was that?" asked Helen.
>
> "The year I was twenty-five," he replied promptly.
>
> "Was that how old you were when you got married?"
>
> "No. I was twenty-two."
>
> Helen laughed. It was historical truth. She had been alive and lucky to be young when sex was invented.

The exchange is significant because it typifies the turf that Haley's been carving out for herself in her three novels thus far: *A Nest of Singing Birds* (NeWest, 1984); *Getting Married in Buffalo Jump* (Macmillan, 1987), and now *How to Start a Charter Airline*. Haley's heroines are educated, feminist, and sexually experienced. They're also comfortable with how they look, not big on the housewifely virtues, and resourceful when faced with a challenge. When they manage to fall in love with exactly the right man — which is the development in their lives that is of particular interest to Haley — they do it with a mixture of sexual abandon and calculating thought. Here's Helen watching Max's bush plane as it disappears into the sky

Susan Haley

above the tiny northern settlement where they've recently met:

> She felt a major revolution in her consciousness.
>
> She was already looking forward to him coming home that night.
>
> It was not just her consciousness. It was her whole body. Every inch of her skin was telling her that it had been used tenderly for a true purpose....
>
> He was by no means a proper mate for her....She had been an intellectual; she had been married to an intellectual. There was an absolute separation of experience, taste, interests, class, life history. She mentally tried him out in her home, in the city apartments where she had lived when she had been at university. He fitted nowhere.
>
> It was, of course, impossible. But this was Island Crossing. They had met here.

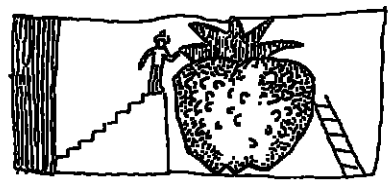
In nearly 30 years of reviewing contemporary Canadian books, I've come across remarkably few "serious" love stories. The reasons for this state of affairs are worth pondering. Have our "serious" novelists been too preoccupied with *angst* to take love — arguably the finest emotion of which human beings are capable — seriously? Has the gritty realism of our time been judged incompatible with romantic love? Maybe the battle of the sexes that fiction writers have exploited for so long simply made a novel about honest love between equals inconceivable.

But in the post–women's liberation fiction that Susan Haley writes, the "invention of sex" has made genuine love a fruitful fictional possibility again. A Haley heroine, having freely sampled the alternative, is ready to recognize true love when she meets it in her soup. Thus she values it properly; she allows it to transform her; in company with her partner she experiences a "revolution of consciousness."

She also discovers that loving someone has consequences. When Helen commits herself to Max, for example, she must somehow deal with his wife and two teenaged boys as well. Possibly even worse, she must come to grips with a telephone-book-sized document titled the *Air Carrier Act* if she and Max are going to have a future in business together. (Fortunately, as an educated feminist she is equal to this task, and gets busily on with it while Max prepares the ptarmigan stew.)

Haley sets these and various other shenanigans against a vibrant northern landscape peopled with Natives, a junkie pilot, a shotgun-toting plane owner, and two visiting anthropologists, one of whom is Helen's husband, Paul, who used to beat her up. In *How to Start a Charter Airline*, Susan Haley proves that it's possible to marry gritty realism with romantic love and beget an intelligent, moving, and funny novel. In the end, though, it's probably her skill with language that should keep the susceptible reader coming back for more:

> They walked down the road to the Legion Hall. Max immediately deposited her at a table and went off to get their drinks at the bar.
>
> Trying to appear nonchalant, Helen took in the musicians, a pimply guitarist and his octogenarian colleague, the fiddler. They were the only two people in the place who were not staring at her.
>
> "Excuse me." Someone put his arm confidentially on the back of her chair and squatted on the floor beside her. Helen turned to look into a grin arranged like a car grille below a set of headlights....



The Violent Ones

by Christopher Moore

WEB OF HATE: INSIDE CANADA'S FAR RIGHT NETWORK
by Warren Kinsella
HarperCollins, 386 pages, $26.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 00 255074 1)

Warren Kinsella

LAST YEAR George Burdi, a middle-class Catholic kid from the Toronto suburbs, beat up an anti-racist protester during a Heritage Front rally in Ottawa. In 1990 Dan Sims and Mark Swanson pounded the Edmonton journalist Keith Rutherford with a baseball bat because they heard he once reported on the presence of a suspected Nazi war criminal in Canada.

Terry Long, a veteran Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations organizer, prepared for race war by stockpiling automatic weapons in a concealed cellar in Caroline, Alberta. His friend Matt McKay, Canadian Airborne Regiment corporal and Somali peacekeeper, boasted of using his steel-toed commando boots to "stomp" Natives in the Canadian cities where the forces sent him. And on almost any night, White Power skinheads stalk and sometimes murder gays and immigrants in most Canadian cities.

There is awful stuff out there, and Warren Kinsella knows a great deal about it. Kinsella has been documenting race-hatred organizations in Canada since his days as an anti-racist punk rocker in Calgary. Since then, it seems, he has covered every Aryan Fest rally, interviewed every neo-Nazi and racist skinhead, and assembled every scrap of documentation about far-right activities across the country. In *Web of Hate*, he meticulously charts the bondings and schisms of the Ku Klux Klan, the Church of the Creator, the Aryan Nations, the Identity Christians, the Holocaust deniers, and other fringe groups with loony, often contradictory rationalizations for hatred and violence. He examines the international networks that circulate race hatred, and the reckless violence of the racist skinheads such groups cultivate. *Web of Hate* is detailed and up-to-the-moment, and everyone concerned about hate networks and neo-Nazism will be indebted to it.

A back cover blurb says Kinsella's book will "shock this complacent nation." Well, I was shocked. But from Kinsella's point of view, I may still be complacent. His exposure of hate-group activity in Canada has been both effective and brave, but having laid out the facts, he seems content with superficial thoughts about how we should respond.

Kinsella is hard to dispute when he argues that racist violence is increasing. But he is less convincing when he asserts that "the values of our society" are threatened. Kinsella confronts us with young male misfits who love to abuse and to fight, who love to use guns and strut about in paramilitary gear. They are certainly alarming, and they are dangerous to all whom they encounter. I don't want these people on my street or my subway platform. But their fundamental enthusiasm is violence for its own sake. To truly threaten our social values, they would have to tap into something that earned them broader community support.

Violence-loving young thugs who join the IRA Provos in Ireland, the Kahane/Kach groups in Israel, or ethnocidal militias in Bosnia do threaten their societies, precisely because the disgusting causes they espouse do command significant community support. Kinsella can suggest no equivalent to that in Canada. The ideas of Canada's hate networks are concoctions of loony drivel, mostly borrowed, and their passion for violence mostly alienates and horrifies Canadians. Though Kinsella leaps on every case of a neo-Nazi joining the Reform Party, Social Credit, or even Real Women, he provides no evidence of convergence between the neo-Nazis and political groups that command any significant popular support in Canada.

In a brief conclusion, Kinsella proposes simple solutions that will "stamp out" racism and hate. He regrets the civil-libertarian rulings our courts sometimes provide, and he proposes strengthening both administrative and civil-law restraints upon racist speech. Given the way Canada Customs

already abuses its authority to inspect for pornography, it is alarming to see Kinsella recommend that it should also supervise dissident ideas. And when our libel processes are already so unjust that virtually their only function is to permit the relatively wealthy to harass the relatively less wealthy, it is scary to see a journalist propose broadening their reach, merely on the calculation that victims of racist speech will be able to spend more on litigation than its purveyors.

Foreseeing such criticism, Kinsella declares that

> people's perspective on the problem of organized racism dramatically changes the first time they spot a swastika painted on their place of worship.

A civil libertarian, he means, can be dismissed as someone who has not yet been mugged. But, even allowing for the real concerns Kinsella raises, the laws need to be rooted in principles as well as fears.

Like a Rolling Stone

by Keith Nickson

TRAVELS BY NIGHT: A MEMOIR OF THE SIXTIES
by Douglas Fetherling
Lester, 255 pages, $22.95 cloth
(ISBN 1 895555 66 3)

JUST AS the first golden period of our literature shows unmistakable signs of exhaustion, along comes a memoir that beckons us back to where some of it started — bohemian Toronto, *circa* 1967.

It was here that Douglas Fetherling, full of a shy poet's ambition, settled into the house where the pioneering House of Anansi Press was born. But I run ahead of myself, made light-

headed perhaps by an intense four-day read of *Travels by Night*, a compelling and colourful memoir not lacking in curiosities and unanswered questions.

The first part of the book covers the 1950s and early '60s, when Fetherling was a child in the gangster-and-steel town of Wheeling, West Virginia. The second and longer section begins when the 18-year-old Fetherling flees Greenwich Village in 1967, determined to live the literary life in Toronto.

Fetherling's mother was a disturbed, violent, drunken woman; his father was hard-working and long-suffering. Fetherling attributes the domestic warfare to class differences between his parents:

> My father was a product of the upper middle class who through an unfortunate conjunction of circumstance and personality, married a lower class woman...the friction it produced was real enough to destroy lives.

In her addiction to drink and gambling, Fetherling's mother drags the family to bars and racetracks, and to restaurants like Billy's Spaghetti House, run by Big Bill Lias, "the local crime lord." She raises hell, while gambling away her husband's pay cheque and impoverishing the family. Young Douglas stays home whenever he can.

Supplied with plenty of good material for natural story-spinning, Fetherling's economical and brisk prose works well. As the story proceeds, he gradually widens the focus to include political events of the time such as McCarthyism, which began in Wheeling, and the Vietnam War. Fetherling also draws deft portraits of his parents and the gangsters who control Wheeling. Curiously, the existence of an older brother is acknowledged, but little more is said.

Fetherling, complete with a stutter, finds his vocation early when he lands a job at the *Intelligencer* newspaper. He was 16 or 17 and duly impressed with the salary of $80 a week. And not for the first time, Fetherling was surprised at his good fortune, "given that I usually couldn't talk on the telephone, was terrified of strangers and had no special interest in the facts."

After his father's death, Fetherling moves to Greenwich Village; here the story truly gets weird. He meets Allen Ginsberg, hangs out with the Fugs — remember them? — and has an upper-class girlfriend called Jasmine. Fetherling does crazy things like this:

> We practised a primitive form of performance art, such as when we stood at busy intersections dressed in old tuxedos and gave public readings of *TV Guide* in English and Spanish while smashing television sets with a stolen fire axe.

Fetherling seems rather serious about all this, and there's little sense of fun in these Village adventures. The weirdness really sets in when Fetherling starts filling in days at the public library reading up on a place called Canada. And lo, deep in the Village, the eye of the '60s hurricane, Fetherling doth pine for sleepy Toronto. Strangeness indeed.

Though not a draft resister, Fetherling was attracted by Canada's "abiding tradition of anti-Americanism." His loathing of Yankee things runs deep; he writes that his relationship with Jasmine didn't work because she was "infected with the great American virus." He announces rather archly: "I felt I could never again have a serious relationship with an American, and I have not." Fetherling doesn't consider that maybe he and Jasmine were waging another class war, the same kind that destroyed his parents' marriage. After turning 18, he moves to Toronto in search of "privacy."

Although Fetherling is shy and awkward, he does well merely by hanging around — sometimes rather doggedly. That's how he got a job at the *Intelligencer*, and in Toronto it helps him get work at Anansi, make friends at the CBC and *Maclean's*, find girlfriends, hang out at a literary salon on Church Street, and go to endless parties. Personally, I find something heroic in Fetherling's knack for getting where he wants to go so soon after a nightmarish childhood that left him emotionally damaged.

The account of Anansi's early years is fascinating, especially the sharp portraits of Dennis Lee and Dave Godfrey. In a telling anecdote, Fetherling describes how he chaperoned Allen Ginsberg around Toronto and obtained a manuscript for Anansi. As the lowly office clerk, however, Fetherling looked on while Dennis Lee edited and published the book. Gwendolyn MacEwen is lovingly remembered and there are vignettes of Margaret Atwood, Howard Engel, and John Glassco. There are well-drawn sketches of many friends and acquaintances who have since slid into obscurity or even committed suicide.

Fetherling himself remains a shadowy figure, happy to stay drug-free at parties, play acolyte to stronger personalities, and observe the merrymaking. The reader is left to look through these pages for clues about the real Douglas Fetherling. The scanty evidence suggests that Fetherling was a Canadian born in American skin. His love of secrecy and privacy is surely a common Canadian trait. Early on, Fetherling writes about his father in a way that might well describe himself:

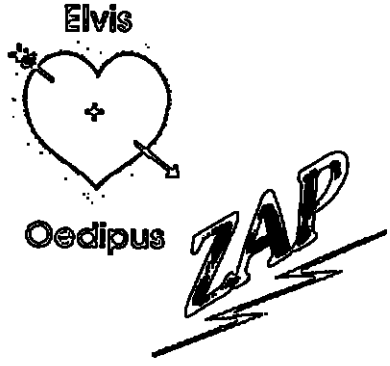
> ...he had, I feel, an essentially English character, so rare in an American. He must have sensed that, without quite realizing what it was that made him so out of place....

Laughing at Convention

by John Doyle

ARCADIA WE$T
by David Gurr
Quarry, 416 pages, $21.95 paper
(ISBN 1 550082 097 4)

IT SEEMED for a while that the great days of the experimental novel were behind us. In the heady, hallucinatory '60s every publishing house had a pet writer whose work treated the pat formulae of plots and narrative lines with high disdain. Sometimes it was possible to believe that it was all a lark, a laugh at convention that echoed all the way back to Lawrence Sterne. Often, however, serious claims were made for the snipping-and-reassembly school of fiction. The suspicious, bewildered reader was asked to believe in the book as a cultural touchstone rather than a mere curiosity.



From Arcadia West

For a multitude of reasons — critical neglect and the sheer cost of publishing complex texts — the experimental novel in Canada, the United States, and Britain faded back to the dark corners. Now the computer has changed all that and the wild and wacky novel is back — easier to produce and, in the case of David Gurr's *Arcadia West*, it even looks awfully familiar. *Arcadia West* is both a novel, in the sense that it's a story, and a storyboard in the sense that it's a movie moving along at a fast clip over pages interupted by computer-generated signs, symbols, instructions, asides, warnings, and countless bits of sheer, wanton trivia. The panels of old-fashioned storyboards appear always at the start of chapters and ZAP! appears when the scene is switched from one narrative level to another. Period, Location, Character, and Action are synopsized at the start and after that you're on your own.

The first thing the reader sees is the HOLLYWOOD sign and there, beside it, is poor old D. W. Griffith in 1946. He's a has-been in Hollywood, living in a hotel as decrepit as he is and morosely going about the business of pitching his last great movie idea to various moronic moguls. Into his dwindling life comes Myles Manyon, a phoney British actor, writer, and schemer. When Griffith dies, as he does soon enough, Myles takes the screenplay for *The Story of America* (*An Epic for the Atomic Age*) and spends most of his life trying to have some version of it produced. ZAP! We're in real time and the narrator — Yours Truly, or the more friendly Y-T — is in Los Angeles, doing business with Myles Manyon in the present day, unloading oodles of Elvis trivia and, in general, careering through contemporary pop culture with Ezra Pound's *Guide to Kulchur* as a handy reference guide.

The Story of America is a motherlode of malarkey in this crypto-novel. It's the gist of American history told from the skewed vantage point of Sophocles, Seneca, and others. There's a lot of steamy sex, jokes, and madcap meanderings through Greek drama. Then there's some business with a rabbit and a great load of expletives. Thomas Jefferson has a role to play, but that is overshadowed by what goes on in Roman togas. Somehow all of this becomes interconnected with the

beginning of the Gulf War, Bill Clinton blowing his saxophone on "Arsenio Hall," and a lot of lurid, tabloid-style speculation about the private lives of real Hollywood stars.

What is happening here is a basic reliance on one giant metaphor. For all the novel's splashy sidebars and constant use of computer trickery, the intent is to paint all of Western culture as a vast repository of pop-culture kitsch, gossip, and glamour. The Elvis myth that pops up all the time is placed on the same level as Greek mythology. American history is given through the techniques of TV-channel surfing. All experimental novels attack the false cohesion of time, place, and action as they are presented in conventional writing. Here a cohesion is imposed on a chaotic, vast, and interconnected story by using TV, comic-book techniques, movie structure, and the relationship between user and computer. The book looks scattershot and random, but an order is being sedulously imposed.

It is a measure of Gurr's skill that he manages to maintain a sense of fun. This is at times a hilarious book, brimming with good and bad puns, outrageous jokes, and sarcastic innuendo. There is a current, dubious craze for attaching abstract dignity to the trash of pop culture — bad movies, low-grade rock and roll, and ancient TV shows — and Gurr manages to turn that affectation on its head by wildly soaring through Hollywood history and exposing the stupidity of taking it seriously. At the same time the book is a challenge to the reader to concentrate. It only looks glib and crazy. *Arcadia West* is several things: an all-out joke, a street-wise examination of the fascination with trivia, a multi-layered text that contains, somewhere in the layers, a commentary on the frailty of the ways of communication that link contemporary people together. It is also indescribable.

The Second Time Around

by Glenn Sumi

Eliza Clark

WHAT YOU NEED
by Eliza Clark
Somerville House, 152 pages, $19.95 paper
(ISBN 1 895897 11 4)

MANY ASPIRING writers, just starting out, search for a genuine voice — an authorial thumbprint that distinguishes them from others.

With her first novel, the acclaimed *Miss You Like Crazy*, Eliza Clark found her voice. Deeply rooted in the American South, it was a hokey mixture of platitudes, jukebox lyrics, and psychobabble, spoken by loud-mouthed women and shy men. Clark's dialogue was a kooky concoction, for sure, but her voice was hilarious and seductive, a bona fide pleasure.

That voice is back again in Clark's second novel, *What You Need*, a book so confidently written it's hard to detect any second-novel jitters. If anything, the new book seems more accomplished than the first, exploring more ambitious territory and dispensing with some mild self-indulgences.

When the book opens, Terrence "Buddy" Whelper has just split from his wife, moved to Savannah, Georgia, and set up as a "superintendent slash Mr. Fix-It" in an apartment building. Buddy's life is comfortable, if dull, with his Craftmatic adjustable bed and La-Z-Boy recliner. He's a bit eccentric, never taking off his miner's hardhat and safety goggles, but his landlord realizes that "a man left to his own devices, unprissied by a woman's domesticating touch, was bound to be somewhat rough around the edges."

Before long, however, Buddy's staid life is upturned by Dorene LaTisha Perney, an exotic dancer, wannabe backup singer, and woman-on-the-

run. Having just electrocuted her abusive boyfriend, Chad Delmonte, Dorene needs a place to hide out until the heat dies down. Out of the blue, she knocks on Buddy's door, strips to the music of Tony Orlando and Dawn, and decides to settle in.

It's to Clark's credit that all of this takes only a few chapters to set up. One of the problems with *Miss You Like Crazy* was the over-abundance of dialogue, funny though much of it was. In the earlier book, Clark was discovering the joys of language — seeing just what she could get away with — and the result was pleasurable, if a little unfocused.

What You Need is tighter, and shows off Clark's new control of narrative. The point of view shifts easily between Buddy and Dorene, so we get a rich sense of their lives — through Buddy's phone calls to his ex-wife, and Dorene's troubled relationships with her boyfriend and her psychic mother. What emerges is an interior dimension that was almost wholly absent in the earlier book.

A few chapters in, Buddy and Dorene are together in the shower. Dorene has just told Buddy about her sad life in stripping, and Clark gives us this quiet passage:

> Buddy took the soap from the shelf and smoothed it over Dorene's shoulders, her breasts, stomach, hips, thighs, turning her this way and that as he needed to, like a doll or himself he was washing. He didn't take advantage. They were walking on glass, everyone was. You went through the world stepping as lightly as you could, trying not to get cut, hoping for something somewhere worth the effort, worth believing.

It's a tender moment, revealing a side of Buddy's personality we didn't know existed. He too has been cut by life's shards, which in a way explains his present condition.

The book's main theme is echoed in the title. People get what they need from others and then leave. It's a sad theme, taken up by most of Clark's characters. Mothers abandon children; men commit adultery; people murder. At one point Dorene muses,

> From now on Dorene was making Dorene her top priority. To hell with being nice. Nice was for people who saw rainbows and forgot about the rain that pelted you first.

It's an appropriate message for the stock-taking '90s. If you aren't acting for yourself, then you're being acted upon. And the number of victims in the book is considerable, ranging from a parrot abandoned by its suicidal owner, to a flea-bitten bear trapped in a rusty old cage. (Clark's symbolic use of this bear is, to be sure, a bit rusty itself.)

This is not to suggest that the book, as Dorene might say, is "all gloom and doom." *What You Need* is genuinely funnier than Clark's first book, filled with car chases, a shopping spree, a beach-front childbirth scene, a bowling team made of hairdressers, and a feisty 80-year-old woman who still twirls a mean baton.

Perhaps the only question that nags at the reader is this: "What's Eliza Clark, born and bred in Toronto, doing writing about the American South again?"

It must have something to do with irony and voice. Clark's characters would be bereft in chilly Canada, with our understated, ironic jokes. Her good country people are almost devoid of irony; they call a spade a spade.

And with writing this good, you don't ask questions.

Ordinary Damage

by Linda Leith

CASINO AND OTHER STORIES
by Bonnie Burnard
HarperCollins, 176 pages, $22.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 00 224255 9)

Bonnie Burnard

THERE'S NOTHING showy about Bonnie Burnard. A quiet, meditative writer, she is more given to thinking things through than to dramatizing them. Her characters are anxious, wounded people stumbling around more or less engagingly in some unprepossessing Prairie town, or somewhere in Ontario. The stuff of her stories, in short, is the stuff of every day. Perfect — in the hands of a writer who can turn it into material worth all our attention. In her new collection, Burnard makes this look easy as pie. *Casino and Other Stories* is beautifully written and shaped: a subtle, substantial achievement.

Burnard's subject is the damage that people suffer and inflict, and she finds hope even in lives reeling from cruelties. She has a special sympathy for divorced women and adolescents, but her collection — which is dedicated "To my brothers" — knows that men are human too. In "Breaking the Law," newspaper reports of remote horrors — a rape, a severed human head in a refrigerator — remind a single mother named Chrystal of the dogfights that used to be organized close to her childhood home in Ontario. Chrystal's worries about the world in which her adolescent son is growing up — a world that includes Mike Tyson and serial killers — are stilled in an image of her son's Ontario uncles, Chrystal's own brothers:

> grown-up, dependable, funny, complicated, sorrowful, good men who don't lay money on bleeding dogs in dark barns, or pound other men's skulls, or dream in madness.

The brilliance of this collection is often as brief as a sentence and as comfortless as the truths that flicker through a lonely woman's mind. Burnard knows how to suggest, she knows how to use a chilling detail, and she especially knows how to unsettle. In "Jiggle Flicks" Heather remembers a day soon after her divorce was finalized when she was sitting alone in her backyard and a monarch butterfly came to rest on her bare shoulder:

> She was breathless, amazed, thankful. But it stayed too long, longer than seemed possible, and when she turned her head to look she saw that it had been partially dismembered.

This dismembered creature reminds us of other incomplete or broken bodies in the collection. The severed head in the fridge. The woman in "Nipple Man" who has undergone a radical mastectomy. A wounded deer in "Deer Heart." The adolescent girl in the very first story, "Crush," who is leaning so far into the kitchen cupboard she's painting that

> ...a stranger, coming into the kitchen, seeing only the rounded buttocks in the terrycloth shorts and the long well-formed legs, might think he was looking at part of a woman.

Already the point of view has shifted from the girl to the "stranger." It quickly goes back to the girl, who has a crush on the bread-delivery man. Knowing he'll be at the door any minute, she strips off her blouse and bra. "Jesus," he says, when he comes to the door, and he backs out of the house quickly just as the girl's mother gets home. Without warning we get the man's point of view — his fear, his repressed desire — for a couple of pages, and then we move into the mind of the mother and her jumble of emotions in face of her daughter's sexuality:

> She feels barren. She is not a mother any more, not in the same way. It is as if the girl's undressing has wiped them both off the face of the earth.

Our sympathies not only shift but also expand in this splintering of consciousness. In the end — and the story is only nine pages in length — we come back to the girl, her understanding that she has frightened the man, her embarrassment over her mother's reaction, and her refusal to deny her own adolescent desire. "It's the best feeling she's ever had. She won't give it up."

Fearing for this girl, we find ourselves remembering another meaning of "crush." We are reminded, too, of another woman in danger of being crushed — in the concluding story of the collection, "Ten Men Respond to an Air-Brushed Photograph of a Nude Woman Chained to a Bull." The collection seems to be exploding here, in this radically fragmented story. In the very process of disintegration, though, "Ten Men" paradoxically succeeds in bringing *Casino and Other Stories* to completion, as the flying debris around 10 ordinary, all-too-human men reminds us of all the earlier stories in the collection — and of all the damage, sexual and otherwise, that is suffered, inflicted, and sometimes survived in this very impressive book. ✤


Multi-Medid-Misfit-
That's my new story. Is it not brilliant?
Maybe if it was halfway literate!
Well that doesn't matter, because now it's a live SOUND POEM!!
Check it out! Check it out! Ch-ch-check it...
hmm!
That's okay, I'll turn it into a PERFORMANCE PIECE with original music and slides!
Booo!
Booog!
Boog!
Yes, but it's still lousy!
On the other hand, I think its full meaning is explored as an EXPERIMENTAL VIDEO!!
But...
Then it will really work as an INTERACTIVE COMPUTER PIECE!
That won't help! You've always been a lousy artist!
I just haven't found my medium yet!!
Ruttan 94

FICTION

NANCY BAUER's fifth novel, **The Irrational Doorways of Mr. Gerard** (Goose Lane, 323 pages, $16.95 paper), is a mystery set in and around Fredericton, New Brunswick. It begins intriguingly: Arlene, a thirtysomething single mother and freelance reporter, kidnaps a five-year-old girl from the home of Mr. Gerard, a psychic.

The rest of the book focuses on Arlene's quest for explanations for her "irrational" act. Who is this strange, subdued, dark-eyed girl she names Andrea? And why does an exotic religious cult, which worships the ancient nature goddess Cybele, want the child? Is James, the friendly weaver who rents Arlene a cottage for a song, a member of this matriarchal cult?

Bauer writes in a lucid style that conveys her story effectively. But as a mystery writer, she is unfortunately unable to sustain the tension necessary to keep the reader on edge; the suspense is lost amid too many scenes of mundane domesticity. In fact, this book might have been stronger if Bauer had simply written a love story between Arlene and James; the latter, we find out, had once secretly been in love with Arlene's mother, and made a special promise to her on her deathbed.

Nevertheless, there may be enough mystery and romance in this novel for diehard fans of both genres.

ANNE CIMON

THE NOVELS of Sam Selvon, who grew up in Trinidad and is now based in Calgary, are being reissued and, happily, rediscovered. His second novel, first published in 1955, **An Island Is a World** (TSAR, 237 pages, $12.95 paper) is a startling, teeming novel of ideas. Set in Trinidad in the 1930s to '50s, it is mostly about Foster, a man tormented by the search for some significance in his life and some sense of what it means to be living on a Caribbean island where the sweep of world events is felt only slightly. As the title implies, the main intellectual problem is whether an island offers sufficient sustenance for someone filled with vague dread about his role in the world.

In his introduction, Kenneth Ramchand points out that Foster is really a writer trying to write. He's uneasy about the paths in life that are offered to him, and a great part of the novel's attraction is the way Selvon presents characters who represent alternatives to Foster's rambling unease. His brother, Rufus, sets out to America to find an education, a career, and a wife. His father-in-law, Johnny, an artisan with a family, purges his doubts with drink. Then there is Foster's friend, Andrews, an artist who seems — but only seems — to have found personal salvation; there is also a priest with a very different source of fulfilment.

Selvon, a gifted comic writer, gives ample space to Rufus and Johnny, as well as Foster. Their loquacious energy, foolishness and all, is celebrated with humour and affection. The two strands of the novel — real life set down as it happens and an artist's struggle to come to terms with reality — blend perfectly to create a unity that is sweet and strong.

JOHN DOYLE

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL novel translated from the Yiddish by Zigmund Jampel, **In the Heart of Warsaw** (Véhicule, 326 pages, $16.95 paper) confirms Szloma Renglich's gift for traditional storytelling. His self-contained sequel to *When Paupers Dance* (1989) smoothly narrates 14 years of struggle: a broken family, a shattered economy in Poland between the wars, the terrors of the Nazi invasion, and escape into the USSR. "The world is full of stories," Renglich writes. "Everyone carries around his own bundle of miseries." Few relate them so well.

In succinct prose, Renglich recreates a historical nightmare without direct comment on politics, economics, war, anti-Semitism, or human character. He conveys emotional impact through action, and universal themes through an intensely personal focus. Reading him is like listening to an "elder," sometimes with dutiful patience, but more often with rapt attention. By the book's close, one wants to call him to see how he's doing.

Informative as social history, moving as a personal account, *In the Heart of Warsaw* also engages as a novel. It is plot-driven, full of intriguing characters and stirring situations. Though at times heartbreaking and truly terrifying, it is ultimately uplifting in its affirmation of compassion and its faith that power to help or harm remains in one's hands even amid totalitarian brutality. Its literary merit and thematic depth, combined with compelling subject matter and traditional style, make it not only deserving of a wide audience but capable of satisfying one.

CATHERINE AUSTEN

MISS PEGGY had been whoring ever since she could remember and she felt no shame about it." With the opening line of the title story of **Ladies of the Night** (Sister Vision, 174 pages, $12.95 paper), Althea Prince draws the reader into a sometimes alien world. Her evocative prose and her uncanny ear for the dialect of her native Antigua bring that world vividly alive.

The title story deals with fidelity and infidelity, both familial and sexual. A secret revealed at the end explains much of what went before.

Most of the stories that follow are subtle variations on this basic theme and structure: infidelity clarified by means of a secret unveiled. A daughter discovers why her father has indulged her mother's indiscretions; a wife finds out that her husband is having affairs with several other women. While some-

times the "secret" is predictable, the resolution of the conflict is almost always satisfying.

Not all of the stories are set in the Caribbean or revolve around sex. Several take place in Toronto, while others deal with the concerns of abandoned, elderly women.

Writing in *The Guardian*, the theatre reviewer Michael Billington once commented that "a play that is local, detailed and specific often has the capacity to reach out beyond its immediate environment." So it is with Althea Prince's stories. You may never have drunk brebrige or eaten fungie, never gone to Carnival or dared to dabble in witchcraft. But when Prince creates a world filled with such images, you feel right at home.

LAURA BYRNE PAQUET

A "TRULY distinct society" is how Sergeant Moreau describes Entry Island, home to fewer than 200 people and the scene of two sinister deaths in Jean Lemieux's **Red Moon** (Cormorant, 240 pages, $14.95 paper), translated by Sheila Fischman.

Moreau is the chief investigator of the murder(s). He's a sharp cop with a "distinct" sense of humour, who has chosen to be posted to a small community rather than promoted to the city. It's his job to unravel the clues. Why would the eligible daughter of an aging artist in residence and the hard-to-get-along-with middle-aged nurse both die by plummeting off the same cliff, about 24 hours apart?

Central to the investigation is the young visiting doctor, François Robidoux, who has the dubious distinction of having slept with both women on a single night, as well as having been the last person to see each of them alive.

Originally published in French in 1991, *Red Moon* is a fast-paced and insightful psychological thriller with a terrific sense of humour. The author chooses to call the dogs in the book "Freud" and "Churchill," while he nicknames people after animals. And what distinguishes the book from many contemporary mysteries is its lack of violence and gore. Instead Lemieux, himself a practising physician, prefers to examine the characters by peeling away layers of thin skins. And in so doing, he exposes a tangle of underlying motivations, twisted relationships, long-standing rivalries, bitterness, scandals, and anguish that permeate the community's seemingly peaceful façade.

MARTIN WAYMAN

NON-FICTION

THE EVENTS that inspired Wade Hemsworth's **Killing Time: The Senseless Murder of Joseph Fritch** (Penguin, 284 pages, $25.99 cloth) are any small town's worst nightmare. In Burlington, Ontario, two teenagers bludgeoned a stranger to death for reasons so mundane as to barely register: they wanted his credit cards to buy clothes and trinkets, and his car to go to British Columbia and party. Steve Olah was caught within hours, Jamie Ruston and his girlfriend, Cari-Lee Chisamore, within days. Olah and Ruston are now serving life sentences.

One's heart goes out to the Fritch family for their horrific bad luck: Olah and Ruston were teenagers from hell. Ruston was more emotionally disturbed than clinically ill. Chisamore was with him out of loyalty on the night of the murder and then fled with him for lack of immediate options. Of the three, Olah was the most terrifying — a psychopath by general agreement, and possibly schizophrenic as well. In the weeks leading up to the crime spree, he begged to be treated for his mental illness, but neither the judicial nor the medical system had ears to listen.

This is almost the archetypal story of small-town teenagers on a crime spree. The best parts of this book are those that discuss whether Olah was insane, and if his crime could have been predicted and stopped. The opportunities for hindsight are endless. Hemsworth knows and respects his material, but there is a lack of depth here, and little new said about the criminal justice system or the people in it. *Killing Time* is an interesting read but only sometimes a provocative one.

MATTHEW KUDELKA

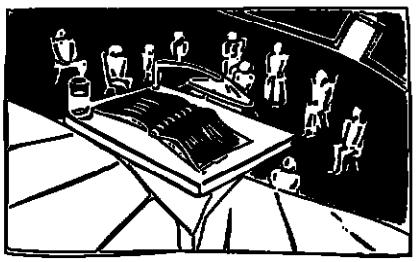
EVERYTHING from Madonna and TV sitcoms to malls and comic books has lately become fodder for academic theorizing, so why not sports? Thus reasoned Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, professors of cultural studies at, respectively, Simon Fraser University and the University of Alberta, who have combined to produce **Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics** (Garamond, 312 pages, $29.95 cloth, $21.95 paper).

"Modern sport," the authors argue, "is significant as a central dimension of popular experience and collective memory." They examine hockey from its origins in the 19th century (when it was thought of as "a civilizing cultural practice") to contemporary times (rife with controversy about the amount of violence in the game), and from its most organized level (the National Hockey League) to its most informal setting (the arenas and ponds of small-town, rural Canada).

Drawing on theories of sociology, economics, politics, gender relations, and even urban planning, Gruneau and Whitson analyse the role that our national game plays "in the broader constitution of social and cultural life." A chapter linking hockey's rough-and-tumble style to traditional ideals of masculinity is particularly interesting.

This book is not a light read — but it's an engrossing one for readers with a serious interest in popular culture.

BECKY LIDDELL



Surfaces and Shadows

by SANDRA NICHOLLS

TWO FIRST collections, a second from Wayne Keon, and the latest from two established poets: what links these books is their consistent quality.

The publisher's blurb describes Maureen Harris's first book, **A Possible Landscape** (Brick, 59 pages, $11.95 paper), as playful, and while Cinderella and Frog Prince stories are playfully reinvented for sceptical ears, there is also a darker, more evocative seam. Whether she assumes the character of Persephone or Eve or Alice, the narrator's thematic preoccupation remains the same. Through forests, into tunnels, or down wells, her women ache for the descent, in which they "encounter what is lost, what is gathering itself / beneath winter's snow, to be born," so that "past this unease and stepping through a curtain / I find meadow grass, a heap of words, shimmering." For in the surface world, each narrator struggles blind: "At any moment I can't see it anymore. / A hand gropes (for the wall)." The desire is not to re-emerge from this lost landscape but to remain, "undisturbed."

This intriguing relationship with the Jungian underwor(l)d is the most strikingly original aspect of the book. "Never fall in love with a snake; / he'll soon tire of your wearing / the same skin day-out, day-in," Harris warns. Like the snake, Harris tries on the skins of women of fairy tales and mythology, yet one believes she would shed them all if she could find that place where words are not tight-fitting, but the liberation she seeks. "I'm still waiting for / the word that will unleash me." So, unleashed, I look forward to the next book by this lyrical and provocative poet.

James Deahl seems to have found the words in his new book, **Even This Land Was Born of Light** (Moonstone, 112 pages, $14.95 paper). In his precise articulations of landscape, we get such a highly charged evocation of place — be it a steel town, Toronto, or the Appalachians — that it is as if the reader were the first person to stand there. With an imagist's care, he compresses considerable emotional resonance into a single detail: "I count eleven sparrows on my garden fence. / They are mountains rising to the clouds."

In graceful echoes of the Japanese style, he allows the natural world to form the most eloquent syllables of human experience:

You roll against me
press of smooth cool belly
scent of ground turned
moist and dark
in new spring.
("In the East Wind")

Deahl is organic, earthy, erotic. For him, few borderlines exist between the natural and the man-made world, so that a river is "a brown muscle," the bay has a "rocky throat," motorized horns become "steel bats," and we hear "the thunder of log trucks." He works in the immediacy of the present tense, and with a few deft strokes can call up an entire history, for example, that of Pittsburgh's steel industry: "The tapper has worked here twenty years, / bright comet swinging through a sky of flowing iron."

This is a hefty book, and my only quibble is that it's too long. By about page 85, although the poems are consistently good, I found myself tiring of the relentless syntax of subject, object, verb, and the weight of the accumulated details began to plough me under.

Joanne Page's first book, **The River and the Lake** (Quarry, 82 pages, $12.95 paper), opens with the entrancing "Black Ice":

Wait for the beat of your heart to slow
enough to hear the light tatter-music
weeds make without wind
and finally
a great boom
as the river draws breath.

A remarkably assured beginning, and the collection courses forward at the same crackling pace throughout the first section.

"The River" chronicles the lives of a small town. Page isn't shy; she names names. It was "Young Bill Corbett" who "ran rough-cut / hemlock through Ben's planer," "Aggie" who couldn't read the sympathy card. While it's easy to imagine the characters, there is something clannish about this naming, something that excludes the reader. It's a strange phenomenon: how much more effective I found a poem like "Confidence," where the "she" remains unnamed.

Page's understanding of a small town is thorough and convincing, and she invests its seemingly mundane features with grace and potency: "green tomatoes / in the dark, ripening" and the music from the Legion dance, "rising / like yeast, /

warm, rich, undeniable." Page is particularly eloquent when she tackles death. At the funeral of a young drowned girl, she juxtaposes the "unsupportable flaw" of her hair "done all wrong, back from her forehead / instead of bangs," with water lilies spread out in the river.

In the powerful second half of the book, Page grapples with the death of women friends by cancer, and the narrator's own struggle, as after surgery she finds "my dark and gleaming centre / laid open." Meditative, rich with insight, and slowed right down, the poems search for an explanation and find, in the ambiguity of the land, a quiet peace in the absence of answers. The poet links herself to "an afternoon so burdened with knowledge/ of its end," and contemplates how

the lake road knows no purpose
but to divine,
no precision
beyond the accuracy of getting there.
("before spring")

As the edges of other lives and deaths begin to blur, Page observes:

in deep water
minnows and their shadows
visible but absent
...at the same moment.
("high summer sun tracks small fish")

This is an extraordinary book, lyrical and intelligent, and graced by Page's own drawings and paintings.

Moving from Page's world into the stark, clean lines of Wayne Keon's Storm Dancer (Mercury, 103 pages, $11.95 paper) is a bit of a jolt. Here traditional Ojibway and Toltec spirits roam about on downtown streets as freely as on mountains or in forests, and Keon calls out an aggressive chant to them, calling them down, calling them into the music of his life. His language is plain, his syntax is bracing, and his resonant repetitions often create the insistence of a drum beat, or a heart, or a sound itself, as in "high travellin":

just the eagle
nd raven
soarin
nd cryin
soarin
nd cryin
soarin
nd cryin
on all that
blue nd
wind

or "the bell of saint john":

hearm
the bell
the bell
of saint john
and
catchm up
catchm up
to those places
you've
already
been.

Many of the poems wind down to an anonymous "you," perhaps a lover, or a soul, a spirit, or the reader. There's a self-consciousness about it, yet it works. For in the end, it all boils down to "you": mountains, sacrifice, sunsets, misery, friendship, power, love, dream, and reality. Keon knows we cannot separate ourselves from either history or the land that keeps history's memory, the spirits that move dreamlike in and out of time. Keon turns within, to the spirit, the storm dancer, and finds the power; he shares the healing with us in a book of unlikely but convincing connections between inner and outer worlds.

In Bedrock (Véhicule, 105 pages, $9.95 paper), the award-winning poet David Solway navigates above and below the surface of Greek islands, and in the shadows of language itself, looking for the "bedrock of experience," "the fugitive coordinates," a jump-start on elusive cosmic answers. Through his vivid questioning, acute observations, and life on the island, the navigator is

gradually restored
to a kind of health
here among burdock and couchgrass
where a little is more than enough.
("The Lotus Eater's Confession")

Storm-stayed by a Maritime blizzard, I was captivated by Solway's powerful descriptions of islands filled with light, of the coldest sea:

marrow-cold and near unswimmable,
the sea from close a different shade of blue,
of blotting paper or of goggle fog,
or the blue of gradual intimacy
("Blues")

The poet wades into existential musings, like the snorkler who "frog-flops... / all snort and thrash / ...beyond his harboring depth." Yet Solway is never out of his depth, or clumsy, except perhaps when he tries to explain the book, asking questions such as, "Is the solidity of grammar founded on the semantic vagrancies of tendency and intention?" I'd really rather read the poems, which are lovely, tender, and spun with the hands of a master. ✦

Self-Making Methods

by MAUREEN McCALLUM GARVIE

NOVELISTS aren't born but made —self-made, through a variety of labour-intensive methods. By the time a first novel gets into print, most writers have served lengthy apprenticeships, in academe, newspaper offices, literary mags, or some other wilderness. So these four first novels, far from bursting fully formed from the thigh of Canadian consciousness, are merely the latest flowering of talents that have found expression already in other forms.

Lola Lemire Tostevin has distinguished herself with four fine collections of poetry, reaching a level of fluency she translates splendidly into prose. Her first novel, **Frog Moon** (Cormorant, 217 pages, $14.95 paper), is ambitious, accomplished, and mature. In the opening chapter a young girl in a convent choir is told to listen, mouth the words, but not to sing. Funny, haunting, not a word out of place, this image of the girl's long wait for the time when she too may sing strikes a near-perfect first note.

Tostevin evades potential problems in moving from poetry to the novel's sustained development by dividing her narrative into 18 distinct stories. These are connected by two main threads: a girl's convent education, and a family Christmas some years later. By this time "the child who spoke French is no longer the adult who speaks English. [Laura] is the smallest doll in a set of dolls...each doll living within another version of herself, as in a vault." Tostevin opens version after version to release the captives within, moving back through the mining towns of Northern Ontario and Quebec, forward to Toronto and Paris. The story is told in a rich gathering of voices: the priest in St-Bruno, the nuns at the pensionnat in Sturgeon Falls, Laura's Anglo husband, her worldly school friend, her almost-grown children and almost-old parents. All together they make up a heritage. But what weight is Laura to give to each? How is she to keep from being overwhelmed in a babel of tongues? The tension between integration and assimilation is subtle and complex; in its working out lies Laura's sense of self.

The link between individual identity and the past is central as well to Richard Wagamese's **Keeper 'n Me** (Doubleday, 214 pages, $13.95 paper). Wagamese is a former columnist for the *Calgary Herald*; in turning now to fiction, he draws on his own past. The story is framed by the voices of Garnet Raven and Keeper, the elderly Native who becomes his spiritual guide. Abducted as a toddler from an Ojibway reserve by the Children's Aid, Garnet has passed through an endless series of foster homes, lost to his family until he is nearly 25 and in prison for drug trafficking. Neither white nor Native, he has passed himself off as Hawaiian, Mexican, and Black.

Sporting a huge Afro, lime bell-bottoms, and a canary-yellow shirt, Raven goes home to the kin he can't remember in a ramshackle village in Northern Ontario. His recovery of his Indianness is the main thrust of *Keeper 'n Me*. The narrative is carried through dialogue and storytelling, full of teasing, self-deprecating humour ("Anishanabe got a good word no one ever argues with, Indyun or not...TRA-DISH-UNN. Heh heh heh"). But when Wagamese turns serious, his voices can grow garrulous. The story often drags and the climax is a sentimental rather than an emotional one. Hugging and happy tears are rife: this story of return and healing slips too often into cliché. Though the writer succeeds in getting voice vividly onto the page, the dialect can be a hindrance when he requires more descriptive power, or when he struggles to convey powerful silences in words.

Technique and form are not a problem with Christine Slater's **The Small Matter of Getting There** (Gutter Press, 99 pages, $9 paper). Slater is an experienced writer of fiction and her previous book, a story collection called *Stalking The Gilded Boneyard*, was widely praised. Her assured first novel, like Tostevin's, is built up by layers, in this case using diary entries, excerpts of novels by one of the central characters, and smoothly crafted narrative bridges. The story is set in London, England, where the hungry young writer Mal Sully meets the publisher Kay Blessing, two decades older than her protégé and with a hearty appetite for what he has to offer. The seduction is quick: she goes for the marrow, then spits out the bones.

The book's language is smooth and unremarkable; a slight plot is carried by sharply realized images and concise dialogue. Slater juxtaposes the passionate, self-absorbed aches of youth and the cynical and savvy urges and itches of middle age. Will success spoil Mal Sully? Maybe not in the long run, but by launch time his marriage is in tatters, his next manuscript already rejected as repetitive and trite.

Mal Sully's fictional novel bears slight resemblances to James R. Wallen's **Boy's Night Out** (Gutter Press, 187 pages, $15 paper), but unlike Sully, Wallen is no neophyte wordmonger. Coming from a background in film and theatre, he has a number of screenplays and radio plays to his credit.

His *Boy's Night Out* begins and ends with an erection. Abel, the agitated protagonist, sees a whole room as the extension of a ticking clock; so all this novel, with its passion, hope, anger, stupidity, and despair, is an extension of Abel's rising and falling penis. Abel's Friday nights, a terrifying blend of *Under the Volcano* and TV beer ads, are regular near-death experiences ("his body can usually manage three drunk sessions in the course of a Friday night without hospitalization"). During the course of this particular grim bacchanalia, figures appear from his past, speak, and withdraw in sorrow and disgust. With every debacle comes some further shred of insight, but Abel is already 27 and life may be too short.

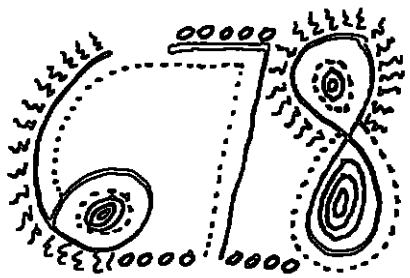
A book that answers the question "are we really as bad as women say we are?" in the affirmative may be unlikely to appeal to female readers. (What's more, the maroon and chartreuse cover has to be one of the most repellent in the history of first novels.) Yet my admiration for Wallen grew in the face of a torrent of one-liners and surreal fragments of Spiderman comics, "Jeopardy" shows, Camille Paglia, Elvis, and John 3:16, delivered with breathtaking timing. Here, for example, is Abel boarding a bus:

> The squeeze is on. Through the doors, up the stairs, past the driver with his dead eyes and outstretched claw holding transfers by the pound...RIGHT TO THE BACK PLEASE. As if he had any choice, seeing how his feet have yet to touch ground. Off we go, down the aisle, right to the back please, to be hung on hooks and gutted. Hey, what gives? There are not enough hooks to go around. Some people must stand, feet sloshing about in viscera. Abel is one of the few left standing...A pain in his head. In his heart.

It also helps that Wallen's female characters come off no worse than male ones — in fact, are generally more intelligent and focused on their career paths and RSPs. Abel may wish to believe that their withering scorn is because of his failure to produce the eight and a half inches of his dreams; but he knows at heart — and so do we as readers — it is because of his tragic inability to find a handhold on life. ✤

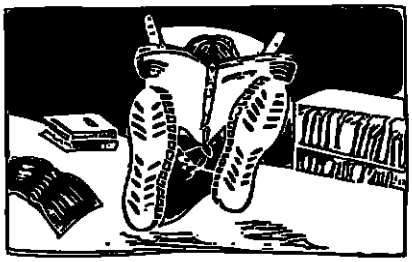
CAN WIT # 181

OUR REQUEST for outrageous author/title combinations produced a grand total of seven entries, which confirms our earlier decision to discontinue Can Wit. The winner of the final contest is Dorothy Scully of Vermilion, Alberta, who suggested several amusing possibilities, including "Lynch on Cattle Rustling" and "Lightfoot on Dancing."



Solution to Acrostic #62

"Blue, nearly translucent flames leaped from the liquid fuel tank, yellow from the solid fuel tanks that once ignited could not be turned off, seven million pounds of thrust and all I could hear was the single cry of a marsh bird, the echo of a tiny human voice."
Minus Time, by Catherine Bush (HarperCollins)



Bombs Away!

by PHIL HALL

From Ninja's Carnival

SLIM PICKENS. Isn't that the stage name of the actor who rides the dropped bomb like a wild bronco at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*? Well, spring in the children's book trade means I have to ride a few bombs also.

Have to. Because my daughter, Brett, says that I must not leave any of her favourites out of my review. And we disagree. She has insisted on clinging to and extolling the virtues of a few of these books for review — ones that I had quickly pronounced "turkeys."

Just like stuffed animals and blankets, children's books are sometimes diabolically defended and worn apart by rotten kids who, out of spite, will not listen to the better critical judgement of their parents. And so Brett has championed **Nobody Knows!** (Gemma, 24 pages, $8 paper) by Sarah Yates, and illustrated by Darlene "Toots" Toews, as well as **Teeny Weeny Penny** (TSAR, 24 pages, $4.95 paper) by Shenaaz Nanji, with illustrations by Rossitza Skortcheva Penney.

Now, these are the two worst books in the bunch — in my opinion, that is. But Brett loves them. Does this mean that my standards are irrelevant? Perhaps. Or does it mean that at five and a half my daughter has learned that by sticking up for the under-turkey she can get my goat?

Nobody Knows! looks amateurish. It is about Ann, a six-year-old girl who has cerebral palsy. With a friend's help, she uses her walker to adventure to the park. She meets a turtle, who moves slowly, like her. She encounters an alligator.

Her mom doesn't know where she is. Nobody knows! Her mom comes running, worried.

Assisted in its publication by the Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba, and partially coloured by computer, this book has illustrations that are crudely pencilled in, then garishly enhanced by shocking pink and shaded greens. The story is told from the point of view of Ann, who can't speak but writes down what happens.

But just as I am about to criticize the clunkiness of the prose, I wonder if the text isn't *based on* the halting speech of children with cerebral palsy. It has certainly been written *for* them. Not me. And on second thought, maybe the pink and green are usefully distinct.... Disliking a special needs book for children! I should be ashamed of myself. As penance I owe Brett a fourth read through the darned thing.

Teeny Weeny Penny is a story that a child can play out as it's being read. At least that's why Brett likes it. (You'll need a penny, obviously.) Shaira finds a dirty penny in the garden. It's smaller than usual pennies. She shines it up and calls it lucky. Should she throw it in a fountain, bank it in a pig, buy a friend's toy? No. Her daddy spins it like a top and tells her to keep it for good luck. He gives her three other pennies: one for the fountain, one for the pig, and one for the toy. (You'll need *four* pennies, obviously.)

Grandma's Heart (TSAR, 24 pages, $4.95 paper), also by Shenaaz Nanji and Rossitza Skortcheva Penney, again features Shaira and her family. This time, Shaira is worried about the size of her Grandma's heart — whether it is big enough to love all the members of her extended family and still love her, too. Where the fluid and wispy drawings of *Teeny Weeny Penny* are enhanced with orange, *Grandma's Heart* uses green. These are not expensive, showy productions, though their covers are tropically festive.

As is all of **Ninja's Carnival** (Sister Vision, 24 pages, $6.95 paper), with its story by Ramabai Espinet, and its art by Farida Zaman. This will be a good book for all children who like fairs, but especially for those who get caught up preparing for and celebrating Caribana each year. As snow falls outside the window of his new home in a northern city apartment building, Ninja dreams that he is back in the West Indies with his Gran on Jubilee Street on Carnival Day. He has a scary and indoctrinating encounter with the devil dancers, the Jab Malassies, who turn out to be men from his neighbourhood, dressed up, swinging their tails and tridents for the festival. "Play de devil! Jab! Jab! Play! Jab! Jab!"

Purple Hair? I Don't Care! (Oxford, 32 pages, $5.95 paper) and **Cookie Magic** (Oxford, 32 pages, $5.95 paper) are both new from the "Ox Tales" imprint.

Dianne Young's *Purple Hair? I Don't Care!* is delightful. Brett and I agree. Without giving too much away, I can tell you that Mrs. Della Ragon is having a baby. A very peculiar baby. However it looks, the mother will be delighted:

Breath that's smoky –
Okey-dokey.

Wings of blue —
Well, whoop-de-doo!

Besides the maternal rhyme-making, what makes all this so much fun is that in Barbara Hartmann's watercolours everyone in the old village is trying to imagine what this baby will look like. The skeleton in the doctor's office imagines a skeleton with purple hair, of course. The sleeping cat dreams of a purple cat. And so on.

Cookie Magic, by Geraldine Mabin and Lynn Seligman, is almost as good, but not quite. This is a story about two kids who earn money for a pet by pet-sitting, watering plants, even visiting someone's granny. They feed cookies to each plant, each fish, each dog and cat — and to Great-Grandma Berry too. It seems as if the cookies work magic, because every creature has babies! Even, it seems, Great-Grandma Berry! (Not really.) Well, somehow all of this comes off as less plausible than the purple-haired, blue-winged baby in the previous story. The prose is less funny than the poetry, and Mark Thurman's illustrations for *Cookie Magic* are less fanciful, less detailed than Hartmann's are for *Purple Hair? I Don't Care!*

The Flying Tortoise, An Igbo Tale (Oxford, 32 pages, $17.95 cloth) will probably be bought by folklorists and art lovers more than by children, or for children. Barbara Spurll's illustrations are jungle-lush and in their detail flirt with an ornithological satire I admire. The story itself has been told in many ways in many cultures; here it is retold by Tololwa M. Mollel, and an end note explains that the Igbo are a people from southeastern Nigeria in West Africa. The Igbo apparently use Mbeku, the troublesome trickster turtle, in many of their stories. In this one, Mbeku persuades the birds to each give him a feather so that he can make wings to fly up to a feast with the Skylanders. Then he tricks the birds into letting him eat every bit of the feast. How the birds get their revenge, and how Mbeku recuperates, is a tale that explains how the turtle got its patchworked shell.

Final confession: after all of our disagreements over the merits of these books, there is one that I would not let Brett touch. I *did* show it to her, but then put it way up high. This one is Daddy's own! **Seven Mysterious Wonders of the World** (Raincoast, $11.95 cloth) is a pop-up book by Celia King. Imagine: Atlantis and Stonehenge and the Bermuda Triangle and Shangri-La and...all popping up! That old thingumabob collector in me cartwheels when I open this book. Of course, my motive for keeping it from Brett isn't completely selfish: I'm going to put this toy in a time capsule for us to open in 20 years or so. (That is, if *Dr. Strangelove* remains a fantasy.) As they age, mysterious wonders (such as this book) just get weirder and weirder. ◆

Eat My Launch

by MICHAEL COREN

I HAVE LOST track of how many book launches I have attended. I am 34 years old now and have been a part of the literary community, first in Britain and now in Canada, for around a decade. So we are into the hundreds. Hundreds of glasses of wine, hundreds of cardboard plates of cheese and fruit, hundreds of exchanges of courteous and perfunctory humbug. Nor am I a regular at these events, unlike some writers and literary journalists in Canada whose maxim appears to be "Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of the launch party."

As a spectacle, book launches are unique in their peculiarities, their façades of interest, their rigid and regulated mores and moves.

Over in the corner, talking earnestly with the owner of the bookstore, who only opened the place on a cold Thursday evening because he was guaranteed extra sales and a mention in the "Noises Off" column of the *Globe and Mail*, is a dramatically embarrassed publicist. She is speculating why nobody has turned up from any of the major newspapers and why there are only 17 people in the place. She wears a now well-rehearsed look on her face, as though she has just heard tragic news, perhaps of a death, over the telephone. She has employed it five times this month alone.

"I know there would have been a line 50 yards long if it hadn't been for the snow (Montreal)/ earthquake (Los Angeles)/ indifference (Toronto). And I just can't understand why Harbourfront, The Idler pub, the U.B.C. Bookshop all decided to host readings on the same evening as our launch. It's entirely their fault. I'm definitely going to talk to my publisher and I know he'll be very, very pissed off."

In the opposite corner is a knot — tight, coiled, and unoriginal — of lugubrious young poets who write about the mystical sanctity of the clitoris and are published by White Nostril Press. They are competing in the playoffs for the "nonchalance and contempt for establishment success" competition. They discuss a figure holding court in the middle of the room.

"That talentless bastard over there has just got another bloody grant from the Canada Council. Sickening."

Talentless bastard approaches and holds out a hand in friendship.

"Hi, man, how are you? Loved the last column. And congrats on the grant, well deserved. Yeah, *mazel tov*."

And then there is the poor author. Was this such a good idea? Was the head of publicity correct when she said that launch parties don't sell books and that the money would probably be better spent on an advert or an airplane trip to other cities?

Perhaps. But she did admit, speaking in academic terms and thinking of other authors who were nothing like him at all, that launch parties do bolster the egos of notoriously insecure people.

The cynosure of the hour knows that some of his peers, other young novelists, spend hours, days, on the telephone inviting and then reinviting people to their launches. These tend to be the same people who are obsessive about blurbs, hunting down celebrity authors with the assiduity of a safari leader ordered to satisfy a royal visitor. "I've done it. I mean, I've really done it. Jonathan Tedious has not only agreed to give me a 'brilliant young writer, with promise aplenty' but has also agreed to come to my launch." His friend is cynical. "Darling, he comes to every launch. And he hasn't read a book in years."

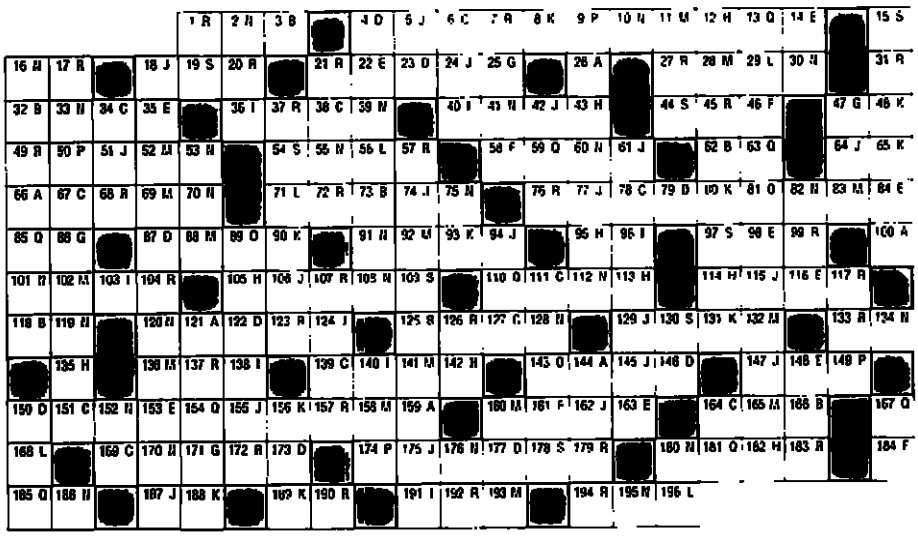
But just as our Galahad in the authorial wilderness is wishing that he was indeed appearing somewhere in Halifax discussing the relevance of his book to the rape of the fishing industry, God rises from his slumber, smiles down on him, and directs his heavenly flashlight towards the tower of unsold copies.

Lights. Lights. They are illuminating his efforts and his creative panache. He is transformed by the piercing exposure of television. Yesssssss. It has all been worthwhile. Quickly he evinces apathy. TV is a sell-out, he'd rather have an extract in *Why* magazine or the *Onanism Review*. Honestly. Still, the cameras are here so he might as well do the interview. "Relax, honey," from one of those annoying poets, who have scattered like a bunch of mall rats being approached by a security guard, and now buzz around the floor babbling at anything that moves. "It's Cable 10 doing a piece about the owner of the bookstore. Apparently he has an interesting collection of hockey memorabilia."

So it ends. Really enjoyed it…See you at mine…I don't think reviews matter anyway…Are you going to Banff? And the author moves gradually towards his publicist and asks ever so quietly, "I didn't sign too many copies, did I?" No, dear, not at all. Not at all. ◆

No. 63

By Fred Sharpe



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. "Camptown Races" refrain
100 121 66 159 26 144

B. Toronto subway stop (2 wds.)
118 166 3 73 62 32 125

C. Very close (3 wds.)
6 67 169 127 164 78 38 151
111 34 139

D. Refuse remover (2 wds.)
173 23 146 4 177 122 150 79
87

E. "____ ____ ____ chances"; willing to accept risk (3 wds.)
84 22 148 116 98 35 153 163
14

F. Drink rapidly
58 161 46 184

G. Family of Dutch painters
25 171 86 47

H. Not in the floor or ceiling (3 wds.)
12 43 105 95 113 142 135 182
114

I. Addition to church service (2 wds.)
140 96 40 191 138 36 103

J. "Heard melodies are ____ , ____ ____ ____ are sweeter." Keats, "Ode to a Grecian Urn" (4 wds.)
155 64 74 145 94 187 5 129
18 51 115 124 162 77 24 105
42 147 175 61

K. Directions to the privy, perhaps (3 wds.)
189 48 8 80 65 93 156 90
131 188

L. Local deity
71 56 29 168 196

M. Irish pronunciation of Timothy Findley title? (4 wds.)
132 92 141 160 69 11 165 102
88 136 158 83 28 52 193

N. Canadian self-image drawn from the Book of Joshua (7 wds.)
41 176 91 128 103 170 134 120
33 101 53 82 2 152 75 112
16 195 30 70 55 119 180 10
186 39 60

O. East Toronto University, say
89 143 81

P. Actor Robert
50 9 149 174

Q. ____ ____ subscription to *Books in Canada*, please! (2 wds.)
154 181 63 185 110 13 167 59
85

R. 1979 William Leiss title (5 wds.)
107 7 157 183 45 104 179 68
20 57 99 137 117 76 194 172
126 27 192 21 17 133 49 31
72 190 1 123 37

S. Query concerning *Christina's World* painter? (2 wds.)
15 130 54 97 44 109 178 19

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC #62 on page 56

A Bitter Exile

by DOUGLAS FETHERLING

STUDENTS of Australian culture call them the Canadian Exiles. They were the Canadians (and some Americans, too) who were sentenced to "transportation to the antipodes" for the crime of sympathizing with William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis-Joseph Papineau in the rebellions of 1837–38. For those from Lower Canada, this meant being sent in chains to Sydney, while a worse fate awaited the anglophones — the penal settlements on Tasman's Peninsula in Van Diemen's Land to the south.

They numbered about 200 in all, and were on the whole a highly educated, even literary bunch. Within five years or so, most of those who hadn't escaped were given parole, and in the 1840s many of them wrote books about their misadventures in the northern and southern hemispheres. It's safe to say that these narratives are more central to Australian writing (where they're part of the large stream called convict literature) than they are to CanLit. (In somewhat the same way, escaped-slave narratives of the same period, though they frequently deal with Canada, are a fertile field for scholarship in the United States but seldom studied here.)

Not all the people arrested were guilty, and not all those punished were sent such great distances. Some, like Mackenzie himself, escaped to the United States and lived there until the eventual amnesty. Others were banished to the United States for a set term; such was the case with Charles Durand, a Hamilton lawyer who unwittingly got caught in the net when the authorities (as though forecasting October 1970) started arresting people on the slightest pretence.

If few Canadians readers today consult the books by those who were sent to Tasmania, then hardly anyone knows the cautionary tale entitled *Reminiscences of Charles Durand of Toronto, Barrister* (1897).

On December 5, 1837, the 26-year-old Durand was in Toronto on court business, his carpet bag stuffed with legal papers. This was the day of the Battle of Yonge Street, when Mackenzie's men and the local troops finally clashed at arms — an event about which Durand, though always a Reformer in his politics, claimed to know nothing. At the end of the day, he was stopped by the sheriff, who let him pass with a warning, "I hope you are taking no part in this rising, or trouble, and will not do so."

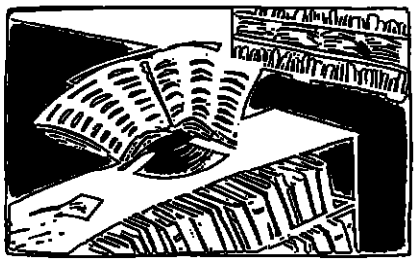
Durand tried to return to Hamilton by coach, but the vehicle was captured by rebels, and he was forced to walk back to Toronto through the woods at night. At Streetsville, a Tory mob arrested him as a suspected spy. He proposed posting a huge bail ($10,000) but the judge refused and Durand was held in the Toronto jail, waiting months for his sedition trial to begin. The book gives a vivid and detailed picture of prison life at that time. While he was in custody, the authorities wrecked his house, stole what they wanted of his property, and harassed his young wife (who gave birth to a daughter during her husband's incarceration).

As Durand recounts so bitterly, he was a political prisoner, guilty of nothing more than having written articles for one of Mackenzie's papers, the *Constitution*. In such an atmosphere of retribution and hysteria, in a situation he likened to "a Star Chamber, or *political inquisition!!*," he was found guilty. The court seized all his possessions and exiled the prisoner from Canada for six years.

Many who received similar sentences never returned to the place that had spurned them for their politics. But Durand, after living first in Buffalo, then in Albany (where one day he saw Papineau in the flesh), and finally in a wild Prairie town called Chicago, returned to Toronto and established a new practice — and for well over half a century nursed his quite understandable grudge. He continued to do so even after virtually all his old enemies (to say nothing of his old friends) died off.

In frail old age, he could only shake his head at "the bloodshed and sufferings [that] could have been saved by honorable men and true concessions on the part of a wicked set of men, who would not do justice to the people at large." What's more, he couldn't understand how those opposed to Reform could "write so bitterly against men struggling for justice, as the noble farmers were who took up arms against an ungodly set of office-holders like those of Toronto in 1837" — even though he was at least as bitter on his side as his opponents had been on theirs. More so, in fact.

He must have been the kind of person who thought he could win by hating longer. Which is to say that he wasn't quite as New Testament as he thought he was. He let rancour overcome principle, and at some point crossed a line. He ceased being someone to be admired for his tenacity. He became someone to be pitied for his inability to forgive. ✠



Quango Tangle

by ALEC McEWEN

QUANGO QUANDARY. During a speech to a Toronto audience, the articulate Conrad Black strained his already extensive vocabulary by reportedly attacking the "vast quango of transfer payments and wealth distribution" that Canada is groaning under. But a *quango* is a group of people, not a government program. It originated about 20 years ago as the acronym for quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization and has since spawned *quangocrat* and similar neologisms. Perhaps the controversial tycoon meant to say quantum, or even quagmire.

AUGER, AUGUR. A *Calgary Herald* columnist claimed that Lucien Bouchard's calm response to the federal election results "augers well for the atmosphere" of Parliament. That may be good news for those who find politics boring, but what the writer meant to say was that the Bloc Quebecois's attitude *augured* well, or showed promise, for responsible government. Originally, an *augur* was a Roman religious official who was consulted as to whether or not the gods favoured a proposed course of action.

SURROUNDED. In *The Great Dragon's Fleas*, the author Tim Ward described a Ladakh courtyard as "surrounded on three sides by a double row of balconies." To surround something is to enclose it; the word is an absolute and has no need of qualifiers, such as completely surrounded or surrounded on all sides. The courtyard, not being surrounded, is *bordered* on three sides by the balconies.

BOARD OF EDUCATION. *Maclean's* reported that a Progressive Conservative proposal to divert welfare and unemployment funds into education and job training "went by the boards" because of feared accusations that it would dismantle the social safety net. The word *boards* means the stage of a theatre, and those who walk them are actors. To go by the board, in its literal sense, is when an object drops or is thrown over a ship's side or board; its figurative application means the abandonment or neglect of something.

TANDEM TWOSOME. According to a *Quill & Quire* review of J. Robert Janes's *Kaleidoscope*, the crime is unravelled by a "tandem of detectives" consisting of a Sûreté and a Gestapo officer. Why not call them a pair or a team, for *tandem* really means two persons or animals working together one behind the other, as in riding a tandem bicycle or pulling some other vehicle. The same investigators are later described as a "duo of sleuths," and perhaps a longer review would have produced a couple of cops or a brace of bobbies.

QUADRANT, MINIMAL. A *Calgary Herald* editorial predicted that the passage of NAFTA will not soon extinguish "the protectionist fires burning so strongly in many quadrants of the United States." *Quadrant*, like *quarter*, derives from a Latin source meaning a fourth part, but whereas quarter can now signify any district of whatever size or shape, quadrant is not synonymous in that sense, for it means one-fourth of a circle's area, enclosed by two radii and an arc of circumference. The same writer incorrectly described Canada's population as *minimal*, which means the smallest possible, not just small.

FOOTBALL, SOCCER. Allan Fotheringham, writing about the 1994 World Cup competition in the United States, claimed that most citizens of that country don't realize the international dominance of a game that is not baseball or football but soccer. Yet soccer is true football, for it is played mainly with the feet, sometimes with the head, and no team member other than a goalkeeper is allowed to put a hand on a ball that remains in play. The ball in North American football is touched by a foot only on punts, kick-offs, and extra-point attempts. *Soccer* originated in England as socker, a diminutive of Association football, as distinct from Rugby football or rugger, but the expanded form survives, for example, in the International Football Federation, better known by its French acronym FIFA.

WANKER. The publisher of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is reported to have denounced the five Booker Prize judges as "wankers" for their failure to confer the award on his author. *Wanker*, a word unfamiliar to many North Americans, has long been British slang for a person who masturbates. No doubt the individual biases of the Booker panelists affected their decision and may even have induced them to pull strings, but not necessarily wires, to influence their colleagues.

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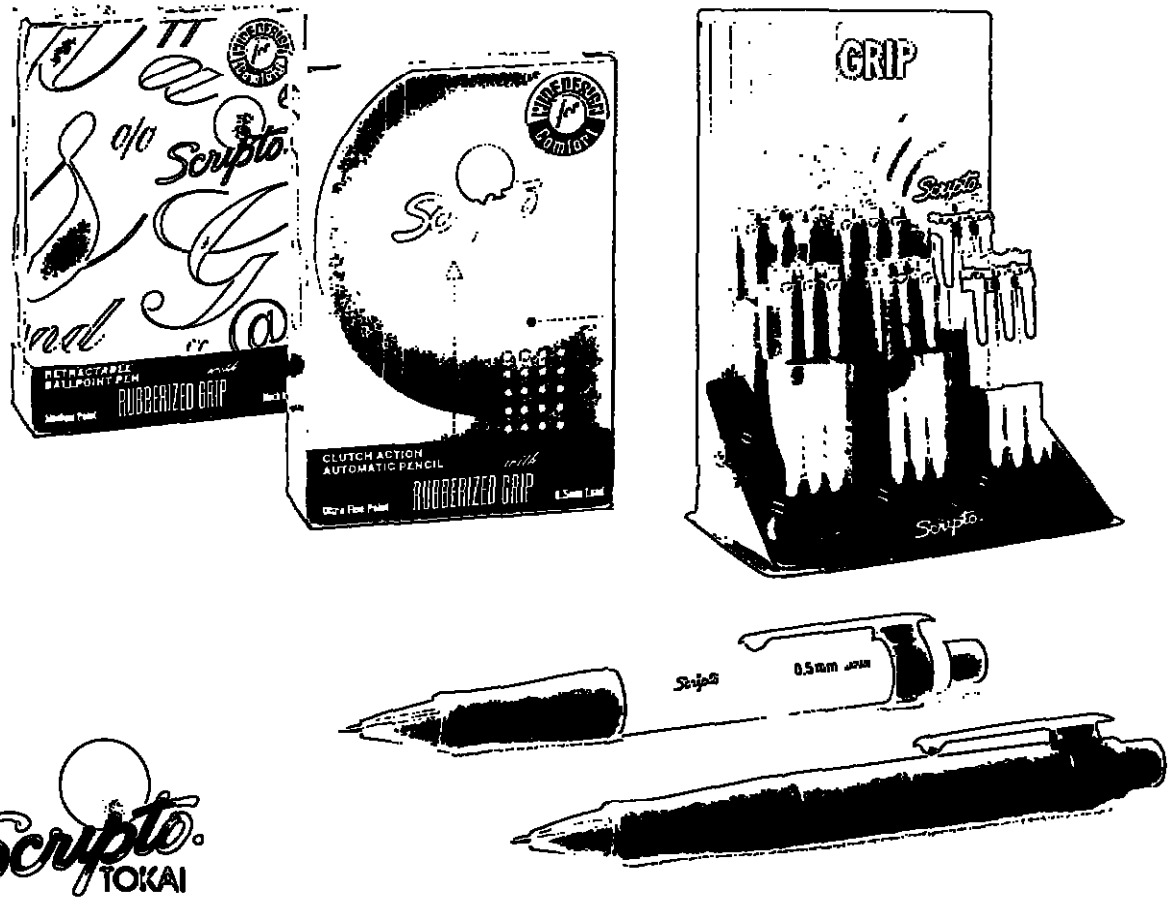

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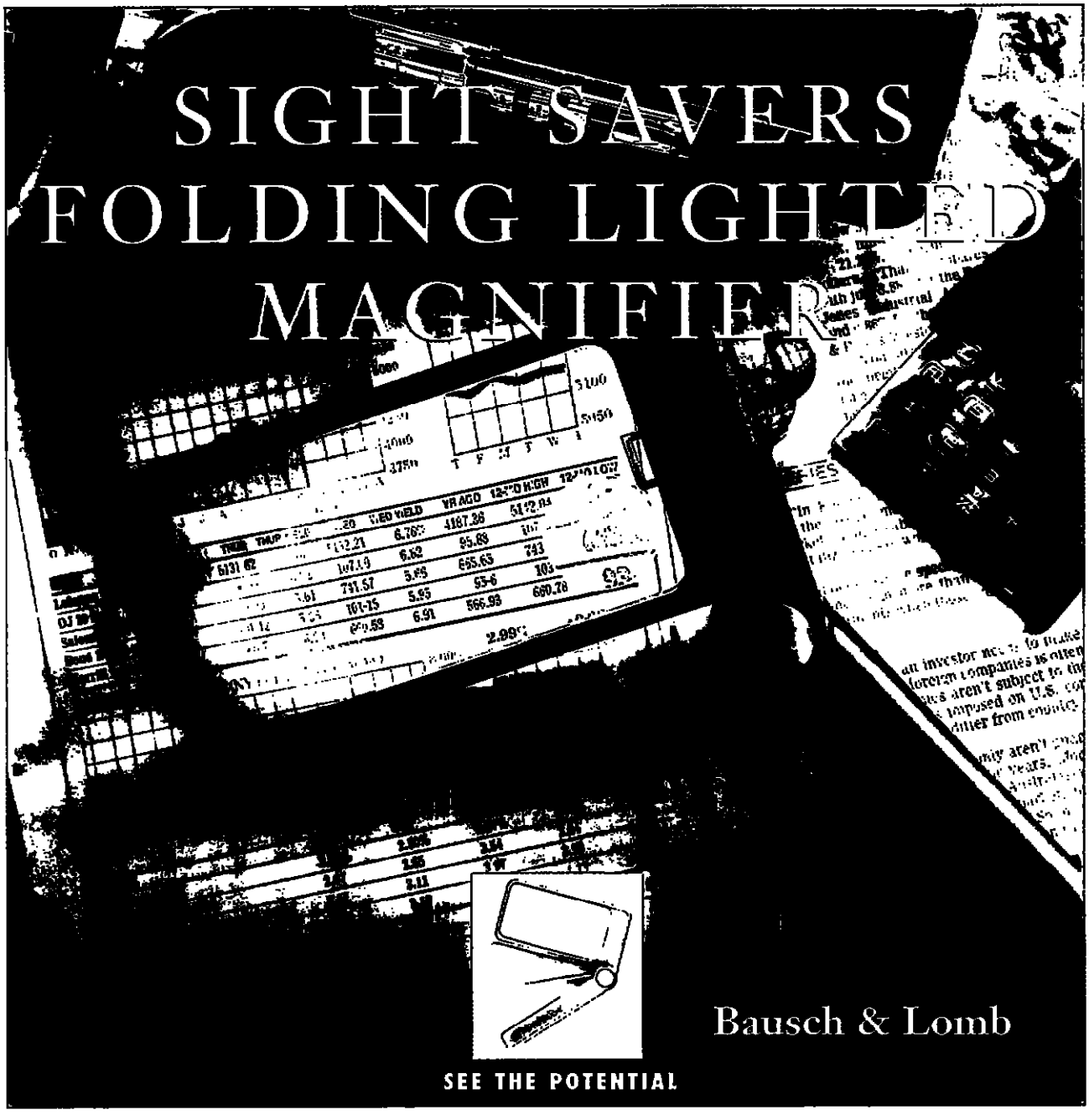

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