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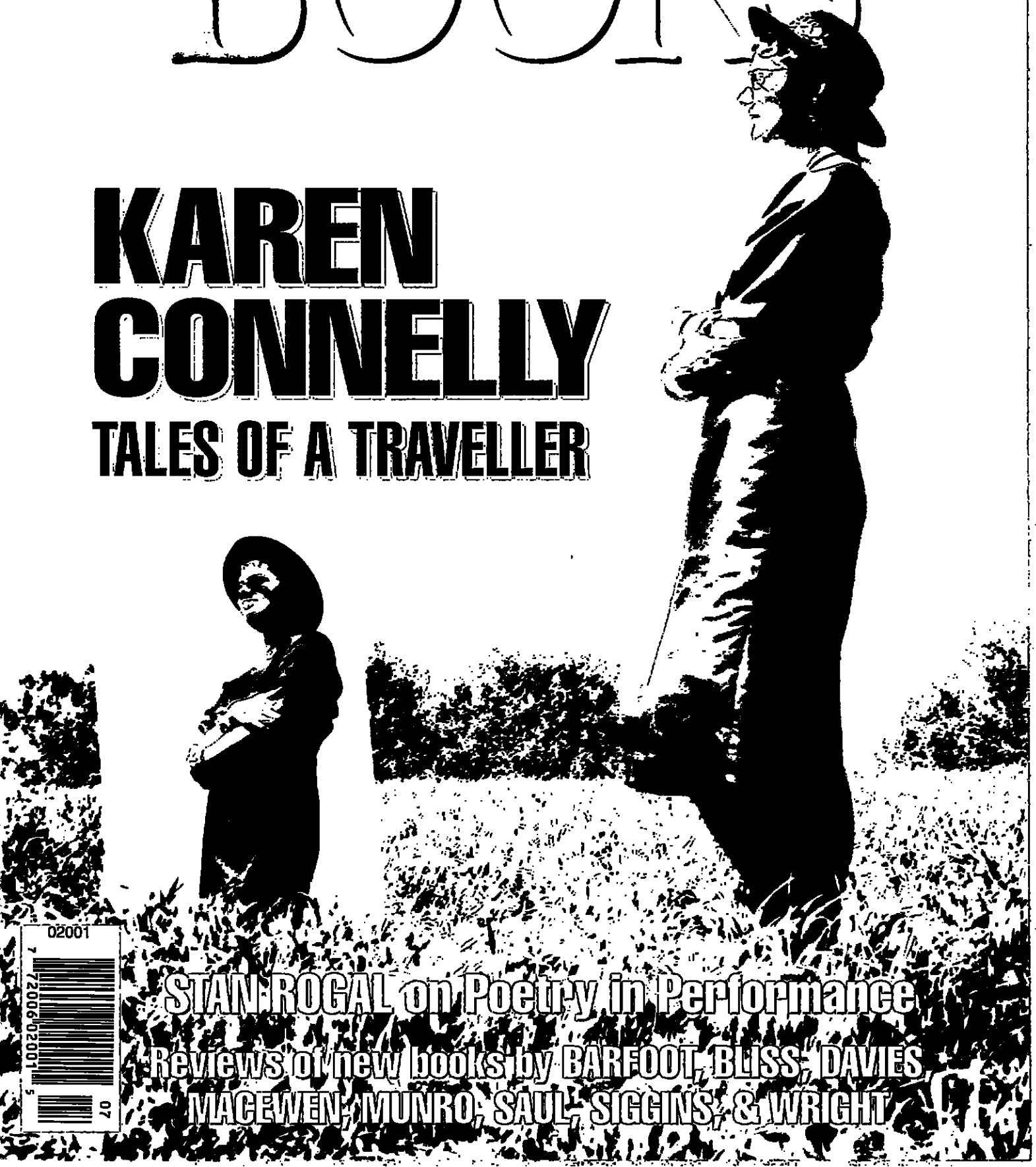

KAREN CONNELLY

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STAN ROGAL on Poetry in Performance

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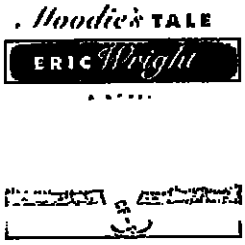

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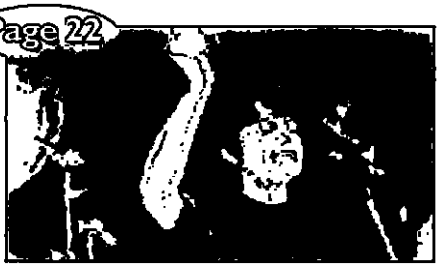

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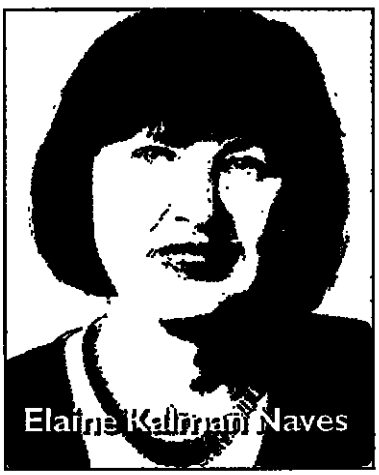
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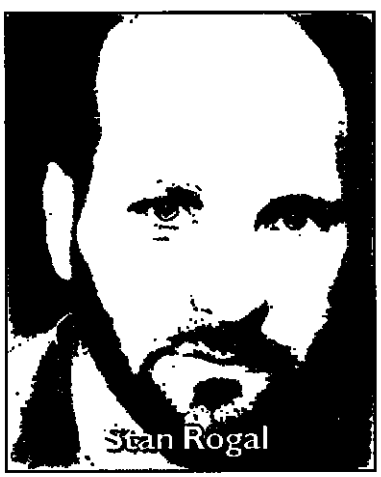
Stan Rogal

Lorin Altomonte is a Toronto illustrator. **Pat Barclay** is a frequent contributor to these pages. **Jinnean Barnard** is a Toronto writer. **Tim Bowling** is a poet living in Ladner, B.C. **David Campion** is a Calgary photographer. **Clive Cocking** is a Vancouver writer. **Anne Collins** is a writer and editor currently on sabbatical from her job as senior editor of *Saturday Night*. **Lorna Crozier's** new collection of poetry, *Everything Arrives at the Light*, will be published by McClelland & Stewart next spring. **Michael Darling** is a writer living in London, Ont. **Anne Denoon** is a Toronto writer. **Charlene Diehl-Jones** teaches in the English department at the University of St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, Ont. **Rita Donovan's** latest book is *Daisy Circus* (Cormorant). **Brian Fawcett's** most recent book is *Gender Wars* (Somerville House). **Maureen McCallum Garvie** is a writer living in Kingston, Ont. **Helen Hacksel** is a Toronto writer. **Debbie Howlett** is a Halifax writer. **Joe Matt** is a Toronto cartoonist who writes *Peepshow* (Drawn & Quarterly). **Eric McCormack's** latest book is *The Mysterium* (Viking). **Janet McNaughton's** most recent book is *Catch Me Once, Catch Me Twice* (Creative). **Maurice Mierau** is a Winnipeg writer. **Elaine Kalman Naves** is the author of *The Writers of Montreal* (Véhicule). **Richard Perry** teaches in the visual arts department of York University. **Stan Rogal's** latest book is *The Imaginary Museum* (ECW). **J. R. (Tim) Struthers's** most recent books are *Canadian Classics* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson) and *How Stories Mean* (The Porcupine's Quill). **Fred Sharpe** is a Toronto puzzle enthusiast. **Robin Skelton's** most recent book is *Wrestling the Angel: Collected Poems 1947–1977* (Beach Holme), a revised edition of an earlier publication. **Carolyne Van Der Meer** is a Montreal writer. **Paul Watson** is a Toronto computer illustrator. **Ted Whittaker** is the custodian of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Toronto. ○

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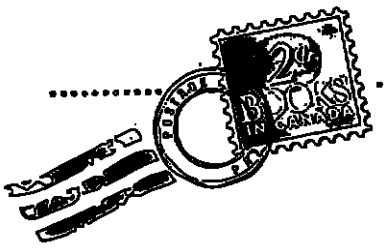
THE ASSISTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, TOURISM AND RECREATION IS ACKNOWLEDGED



Letters

Telling Conjunctions

GLEN DOWNIE'S INFERIOR and irresponsible review of Mary Dalton's *Allowing the Light* (Brief Reviews, Summer) is asking for it. His temerity knows no limit: Dalton, he concludes, "may yet have something to learn from those complex poems she dislikes so much." But discerning readers of *BiC* may have noticed the two refutations of this silliness right in the same issue. On the facing page of Downie's piece is George Elliott Clarke's survey review. This is the same George Elliott Clarke who elsewhere compares Mary Dalton's poetry to Yeats's myth-making. And then there's *BiC*'s own serendipitous defence: Dalton's insightful review of Patrick Friesen's selected poems ("Memory's Fiery Circle"). These telling conjunctions have the flavour of some of the poetry in *Allowing the Light*.

How sad that your reviewer misses the gentle humour of "maiden and dragon" or the satire — *sans ressentiment* — of "Handy Helpers" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Memo." Instead, for appreciation we have to settle for yet another writer who tries to pass off as critical acumen that bigotry that can only pat the ole Newf on the head for a "truly distinctive voice" so long as Newfoundland itself is the subject. This kind of dismissive shorthand is reflective of Glen Downie's stunted poetics, not Mary Dalton's.

Moses Lott
St. John's, Nfld.

Catholic Tastes

MICHAEL COREN ("WRITERS and Politics," Summer) has "an enormous problem" with writers who ally themselves with political parties. Truth lies with the individual, he nobly asserts, as he decries writers' connections with the political party, community, commune, collective, club, union, or association. He leaves religious institutions off the list.

This is an astonishing omission from a writer who's closely allied with a rather substantial community — in 1993 Coren was associate editor of a leading Catholic journal.

Coren bemoans the writer who gives part of his or her soul "to an organization that stands for all sorts of policies and platforms"; he champions individual thought. But are the attitudes revealed in Coren's writing the fruits of long years of deep private reflection? Or are they, perhaps, the result of his association with a repressive, misogynist, homophobic institution?

Coren would rather writers spent their weekends in dusty libraries than at political conventions because there are "no political dictates in libraries." Has he never seen an imprimatured book, an encyclical, a policy statement from his pope?

Coren, in his vanity, appears to think that while he can subscribe to the tenets of a dictatorial organization and still maintain his status as a free-thinking writer, no one else is capable of the same feat.

Marjorie M. Doyle
St. John's, Nfld.

Bytown Bypassed

IN HIS ARTICLE ON LITERARY activity in Ontario, Douglas Fetherling devotes a skimpy half-paragraph to Ottawa's writing scene, but the city has many more centres than those you mentioned. Try the Ottawa Poetry Group (in its third decade), the TREE reading series (a dozen years old), Gallery 101 (avant-garde stuff), *Canadian Forum*, the Jury Room Workshop, Artscourt, Algonquin, the fine Agawa Press, the Writers Independent Native Organization (W.I.N.O.), *Possibilities* magazine (for writers of colour), CAA Ottawa, a whole set of excellent bookshops .... It goes on and on. The past president and the Ontario rep of the League of Canadian Poets both live here — they could have told you.

And that's only poets! What about the many novelists, children's writers, playwrights, essayists, you name it? (You featured Rita Donovan, for example, in the same issue.) And by the way, people don't "come and go" in Ottawa, they live here, or do their first significant work here before (very!) regretfully moving on (Sandra Nicholls, who wrote the May poetry column, Carol Shields, Isabel Huggan, Margaret Dyment, spring to mind ...).

Tell your researcher to make more than one phone call next time!

Susan McMaster
Ottawa

Branden Redux

HOLY MOLY, AND GEE WHIZ, as Roz in *The Robber Bride* might say. I really am an evil creature, to suggest that I find a good deal of Canadian writing about sex tiresome and uninteresting. However, I didn't say (as Gordon Phinn suggests in his letter) that "only the sinful enjoy sex." I think everyone and everything should enjoy sex: there's no point in it at all if it isn't enjoyable. My complaint is that so many writers make it seem dismal, a punishment rather than a pleasure. It's too dangerous a sport to play about with unless it's really good fun.

I wonder how Margaret Atwood will feel if she learns from Mr. Phinn that she hails "from a time when the sex drive was denied and the orgasm constituted a virtual mystery." Whatever age Mr. Phinn may be, he obviously subscribes to the perennially renewed belief by adolescents everywhere that they alone discovered sex, and all of humanity before them lived in igno-

rance and frustration, and thought babies were found under cabbages.

Wayne Jones, in his letter, claims that I implied that "one of the purposes of art is to teach," whereas art should not teach but excite. (In fact, I hadn't said a word about the purpose of art, but I suspect it has a great many different ones.) I suspect Mr. Jones is confusing teaching with preaching. Most people dislike being preached at (well, some obviously like it, or the TV evangelists would be out of business), but I think art teaches willy nilly, sometimes for good and sometimes for evil. Remember Merlin's speech in *The Sword in the Stone*:

> The best thing for disturbances of the spirit ... is to learn. That is the only thing that never fails .... You may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then — to learn.

I submit that this is high art, and that it teaches an immensely valuable lesson. It should of course be read in its entirety, but it's too long to quote in full.

Which brings me to another point: I was criticized for omitting various authors, for keeping the discussion "shockingly miniature in scope," and for only discussing white women writers. The reason is that I was asked to keep each article to about 2,500 words, which makes it tough to be encyclopedic.

For Ms. Crosbie: I didn't have to "tatter my thesaurus" to find words like tedious, wearisome, dull, etc. They're a fairly normal part of the average vocabulary, whereas "tattering a thesaurus" is surely an unnecessarily picturesque figure of speech?

As for my "purse-mouthed distaste" for four-letter words — what I object to is their overuse and abuse. Here's an example from Martin Amis:

> It's easy to see what fucked me up ... my mad fuck of a father killed my sister .... Someone fucked up. Who the fuck are they, anyway, that they won't fuck me? What made them fuck me before? What is it with you fucking girls all of a sudden? Fucking get up or get out, you fuck ...."

Now there's a writer who *should* be tattering his thesaurus. I remember a review that praised Amis's dialogue: so authentic. Is it good writing to overwork a word like that? What does he mean by "fuck"? Doesn't he know any other words? Can't we have a little variety and precision, instead of this monotonous repetition?

The effect, as I said in my article, though none of my critics noticed, is to rob formerly potent words of power. "Fuck" (I said) was once the ultimate obscenity, the cry of someone tried beyond control; now it has roughly as much force as "dam" or "heck."

Holy moly, Ms. Crosbie, is that so terribly purse-mouthed?

Now a real piece of dishonesty on the part of my longest-winded critic. Ms. Crosbie refers to my "rhapsody over the staircase scene" in *Gone with the Wind*, and claims I cite it as an "endearing classic." This, quite simply, is a lie. I said, "When Rhett picked up Scarlett and ran up those stairs, we knew what was going to happen." That's a rhapsody? Where is the bit about an endearing classic? In Ms. Crosbie's article, not in mine. Such twisting does not inspire confidence in the honesty of the critic.

Finally, more seriously, throughout the article Ms. Crosbie implies, though she doesn't say it outright, that I am subtly advocating censorship, and that I "ask you to surrender the fight." I ask nothing of the sort. If you want to write about sex, go ahead, and get it published, and make a bundle if you can, and God bless you. But if I happen to think that it's neither exciting, entertaining, nor even worth reading, I claim the right to say so, loud and clear. And if you try to deny me the right, that's censorship.

Victoria Branden
Waterdown, Ont.

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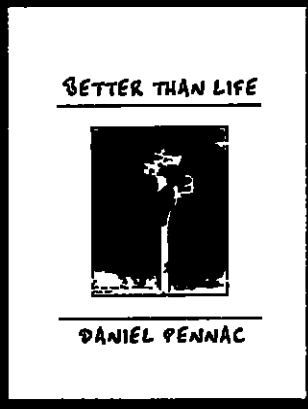

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Outmoded Arguments

BRAVO LYNN CROSBIE AND her "Sexual Positions" (September)! *Books in Canada* readers not only deserved but needed her intelligent response to Victoria Branden's nonsensical opinions regarding sexuality in Canadian literature. Branden's puritanical view of sex would leave no room for any depiction of the act itself and her arguments in both essays struck me as outmoded and ridiculous. As Crosbie rightly points out, descriptions of sex reveal societal attitudes and play a vital role in the examination and critique of these ideas. Branden's prudish call to eradicate sexual writing and sexual language would move us back to the dark ages. Sex, whether carnal or erotic, brutal or loving, straight or gay, is part of the character of humanity, and I want to be able to read about it. I found Crosbie's rebuttal welcome and essential reading.

Monica Stevens
Toronto

Correction

We apologize to the biographer Ira B. Nadel, whose name was misspelled in the review of his latest book, *Leonard Cohen: A Life in Art* (ECW), in our September issue.

Clarification

Insomniac Press, whose *Mad Angels and Amphetamines* was reviewed in our September poetry column, is not associated with HarperCollins Publishing. *Books in Canada* regrets the error.

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.

1994 STUDENT WRITING AWARDS

YEAR FOUR OF CANADA'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS literary competition for students attracted the usual flood of entries, proving that there's no shortage of aspiring writers waiting to take their place in the sun. Making it all possible were: the *Book City* chain of bookstores in Toronto, without whose generous support there would have been no awards; our final judges, Rita Donovan, John Oughton, and Diane Schoemperlen; and the staff of *BiC*. Way to go, you winners; and our sincere thanks to everyone involved, along with a reminder to watch these pages for news of next year's contest.

Short Fiction

1st **Teresa Anne (Tracey) Halford,** University of Toronto

2nd **David Robbeson,** University of Ottawa

3rd **Jessica Freiheit,** McGill University

Honourable mentions

Nancy Mauro, University of Toronto

Jennifer Burns, Champlain Regional College — St Lambert

Teresa Anne (Tracey) Halford was born and raised in Toronto; now 28, she has just completed her B.A. — majoring in English and cinema studies — at the University of Toronto, and will be starting graduate work at York this fall. She is completing the first draft of her first novel (tentatively titled *Alberta Bound*) and is beginning the outline for her second. When she's not busy being overworked as a secretary in a major accounting firm in Toronto, she tries to see as many films as possible.

Poetry

1st **Maria Ford,** University of Lethbridge

2nd **Martine Fournier,** Dawson College

3rd **Ross Thompson Finley,** St. Francis Xavier University

Honourable mentions

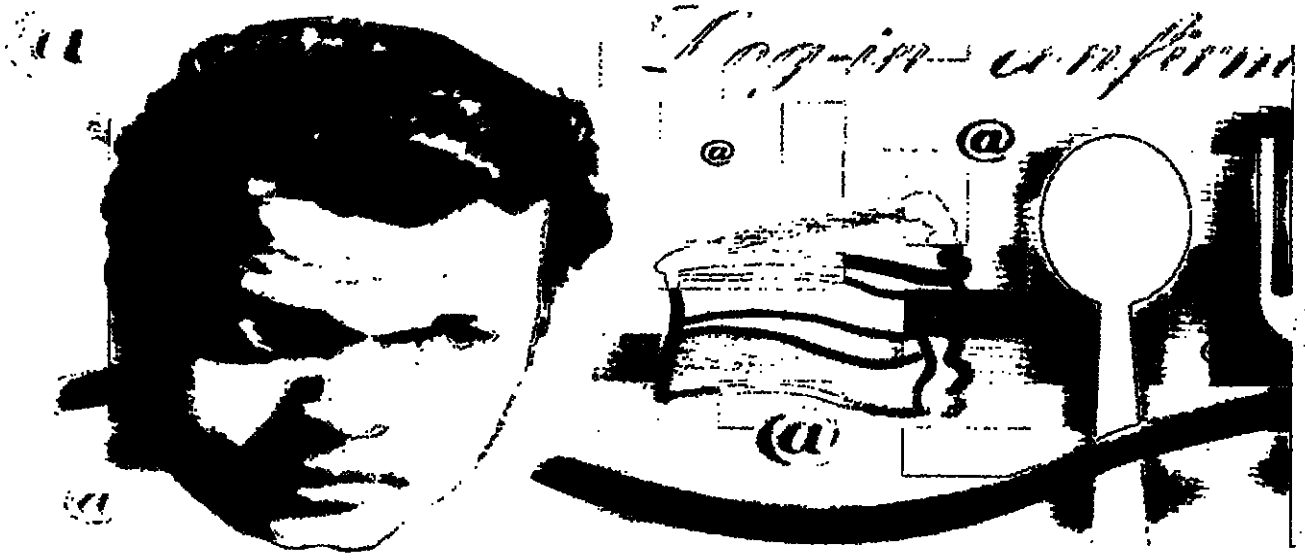
Susan Sinclair, Mount Allison University

Anita Willis, University of Victoria

Maria Ford, 21, was born in Penhold, Alberta, went to high school in Innisfail, and is going into her final year as an English major in the B.A. program at the University of Lethbridge. In 1994, she served as editor of *Whetstone*, Canada's oldest literary magazine. Her poetry has been published in *Whetstone*, as well as *blue buffalo* and *Event*. Last year her poem "Carnival" won second prize in the University of Guelph alumni magazine writing contest. In the future, she hopes to do graduate work.

BY TERESA ANNE (TRACEY) HALFORD

The Day Dali Painted My Llama



NIGHT AFTER NIGHT I WOULD DREAM OF A YOUNG ORSON WELLES KISSING ME SOFTLY, touching me gently, calling me his Little Buttertart. Each night the dreams grew more vivid, more erotic. Soon Orson would appear dressed as Batman (from the TV series, not the films) and sweep me into his arms, carrying me through Gotham City to the local bakery/cafe for chocolate cake and herbal tea. As the dreams grew in their gustatory and orgiastic intensity I began to realize that my unconscious was trying to tell me something — but what, sweet Jesus? what?

My Teletherapist would ask me why these dreams preoccupied me so. *I fear,* I would tell it, *that one day Orson Welles will transform into William T. Riker from "Star Trek: The Next Generation."*

But why should this bother you? it would ask.

It had never seen the show, I could tell.

Orson, I would mumble, licking the corners of his chocolate-smeared mouth, my Little Kahlua Truffle, I would mumble, never change, always be yourself. The two of us would dance off into butter pastry oblivion, never counting the calories or worrying about saturated fat levels.

What do you make of these dreams? asks my Teletherapist (a new service offered by Ma Bell and Microsoft).

Well, everything is bliss, then after I've been awake for a while I begin to feel, well, sad, I guess.

You say that you begin to feel sad...?

Yes.

How does that make you feel now?

Well, sad again, I guess.

You say that you feel sad?

Well, not so much sadness as despair — like something is irretrievably lost.

What do you think is irretrievably lost?

I'm not sure.

Unfortunately our time has run out for today. We'll be seeing each other on Friday.

Be seeing you, I typed, gesturing the "goodbye" sign from "The Prisoner" although I knew that the words on my screen couldn't see me.

Thank you for using the Bell-Microsoft Teletherapist ....

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I thought, clicking the window closed. I didn't want to see how many hours I had racked up on this thing.

To justify this frivolity I feel that I must pause for some didacticism on a fairly obvious subject: the changes in technology at this point in our history far surpass the changes made by humanity on their emotional and intellectual levels — I cite "The Ralph Benmergui Show." The past decade produced a generation of mentally stunted Microsoft dweebs who watched a lot of soulless "Star Trek" spin-offs but who couldn't make small talk over a piece of chocolate cake and a cup of herbal tea. I mused thus in the lunch room, watching my few remaining colleagues not yet lost to the virtual office bond over the invisible wires of their Fig Newtons (a vastly improved product by Apple, Fig Newtons were a multimedia *mélange* of networking LED readouts and beeps). The office dweebs no longer bonded with me because I could no longer interface — my on-air credits were going to my Teletherapist.

Orson, Orson, I cried into the electronic wilderness of my dreams. My state of paranoia was such that I was afraid I would conjure up Will Riker. Please, Orson, find me, I would cry. Suddenly, from somewhere behind me, I would hear that RKO voice and know that I was safe again. I know a great little bakery off an alleyway, he'd say, and off we'd go, satiating our appetites on fine pastries baked from scratch. Orson, I would weep at the end of each dream, how can such happiness exist? Kismet, he would say, slowly licking the confectioner's sugar from my toes.

Well, how are things going for you today?

I'm tired. I was up all last night with Orson Welles eating pains au chocolat.

And what are *pains au chocolat?*

Thin layers of butter pastry surrounding a chocolate centre and dusted with confectioner's sugar.

I see. Was this another dream?

Yes.

You have frequently been dreaming about Orson Welles. Why do you think that is?

Well, I've always had a thing for Orson Welles.

What have you always had for Orson Welles?

I mean, I have always been attracted to Orson Welles.

You say that you have always been attracted to Orson Welles?

Yes.

Is that why you continue to dream about Orson Welles?

Yes.

Can you think of any other reason why you would dream about Orson Welles?

Well...not as yet. (I did not want to admit how much I enjoyed nibbling up the naughty dream goodies.)

And what about William T. Riker? Are you still concerned that you might dream about him?

Yes. I'm afraid he'll try to French kiss me, or make me listen to his trombone.

You are afraid that he might try to french kiss you or make you listen to his trombone. How would that make you feel?

Nauseated.

My Little Nanaimo Bar, Orson said to me — he was dressing these nights as Nick Charles — I have some news. What, I asked (dressed as Nora), could be so important as to interrupt our lemon meringue pie? Well, I have good news, and I have bad news, he replied. Bad news first, I said. Well, I can't come to see you for the next night or two. Why? I asked, horrified. Well, he said, licking meringue from my knuckles, that part's actually the good news. I've been told that the Cosmic They have found the lost footage from *The Magnificent Ambersons.* It'll take a couple of days to update my files. Who will They send in your place? I wanted to know. Orson had no answer for me. They hadn't told him. I would definitely be on my own tomorrow, hoping that Sandpeople Inc. would find a suitable companion for my early morning REM. They should, I pay them enough. Perhaps They had finished the Patrick McGoohan files, but I doubted it. I would have to wait it out or just plug in and hope for the best.

That night I clicked the cable into place, just slightly behind my left ear. Please, God, please let it be Patrick McGoohan or, perhaps better, Spock in the middle of his sev-

en-year rut. I hadn't dreamt him in years but it should still be in my files somewhere. I was almost too nervous to sleep but didn't want to take anything that would inhibit my REM.

I could hear whispers, it was dark. Who's there? I asked. Come over here, said a voice, we want you to join us. Join you at what? I asked, feeling my way over to the voice in the dark. A dim light came on and I screamed: it was Riker and Kevin Costner nude, reading *The Firm* aloud to each other, the rest of John Grisham's *oeuvre* lying in a pile at Kevin's feet. What do you want with me? I screamed, turning my head so as not to burn my retinas with their image. I could hear one of them scratch a hairy part, then laugh. Come join us, Riker called, you can read all the women's parts. There's no place like home, there's no place like home, I chanted over and over again, eyes shut. I opened them. I was still there but now I was tied to a chair — Kevin and Riker sitting in front of me with a diagnostic manual held between them. Chapter One, Riker read, licking his fleshy lips, *How to Determine When You Need to Run a Level Three Diagnostic*.

You say that this is a different type of dream?

Yes, I would prefer to call it a nightmare.

Why would you prefer to call it a nightmare?

Because that's what it was. A horrible experience. The rest of the dream was a reading of the diagnostic manual while Kevin Costner chanted Make It So. Now I'm afraid to fall asleep.

You say that you are afraid to fall asleep?

Yes. I'm afraid to have another dream like that. I don't think I'll use the cable tonight.

What will you do if you don't use the cable?

Well, I guess I will have to dream on my own for a change.

Unfortunately our time....

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I thought. I looked over my shoulder to see if my boss was monitoring my screen. The camera was pointed at one of my colleagues. I knew that I shouldn't have my sessions at the office but I had sold my home computer to pay for the therapy. All I had left was my dream cable.

I closed my eyes tight and thought to myself, Surely to goodness you should be able to dream about Orson yourself, without the aid of the cable.

Tom Cruise was standing over me holding a container of instant, sugar-free, decaf, microwaveable butterscotch- flavoured cappuccino crystals. Hi, he said, care for some boil-in-the-bag Kraft Dinner and a cappuccino? Orson Welles walked by, holding hands with Peg Bundy, eating a fruit roll-up. Orson, how could you? I wept. He ignored me. Auntie Em, Auntie Em, I cried.

I went to work the next day bleary-eyed and grumpy. I typed good morning to all my colleagues and began to sort through my mail. My Teletherapist bill was there. I had used up all my credits well into the next month. I was going to be cut off after tomorrow's session. Fine, I thought, perhaps Orson will be back tonight. I know that I've paid my dream cable.

My Little Fudge Brownie, he called to me. I ran into his arms, smelling the cocoa on his breath. We shared a bowl of chocolate *gelato*, using the same spoon. Orson, I said, licking the smears from his lips, my Caffe Latte, did you miss me? Instead of replying, he licked some dripping *gelato* from my wrist. I see, I said, you simply haven't been eating well. My Godiva Chocolate, he said, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news first, I said, feeling cold creep up my shoulders and the blood drain from my face. Well, Angel Food Cake, he said, licking biscotti crumbs from the corners of my mouth, that part's actually the good news. They have restored *The Magnificent Ambersons* to its original glory and because of that, I have been moved into a new level, second from the top, in other words, my rates have quadrupled overnight. This visit is a free bonus. Orson, I cried, tell me you're lying. I can barely afford you already. I know, he replied, moving on to some tiramisu, but

surely you could take another job? I wept bitter tears.

Well, how are things going for you today?

Just frigging dandy.

What do you mean when you say that?

Oh, nothing. (I looked at my clock ticking away in the upper right corner of my screen, only minutes left in my last session for a while.)

Is there something in particular you've been wanting to talk about?

No.

You have nothing in particular that you want to talk about?

No. (I sat for a few of those precious minutes, not hitting the Enter key.)

You seem hesitant.

Yes.

Is there anything you would like to discuss about our not meeting for a few weeks?

No. (Again I waited a few minutes.)

Unfortunately our time has run out for today. We'll be seeing each other in three weeks.

Be seeing you.

I felt cold and sad. I decided that I would at least try another few evenings to see what I could conjure up in my dreams. I was too embarrassed to discuss my problem with any of my colleagues. I couldn't interface and most of them were too nervous to talk to each other in person. I thought that at the very least I could type a few mails to some of my colleagues while we worked if only to pass the time.

Hi, I typed, *how are you today?*

What?

I said hi. What's up?

Why, is something wrong?

No, just wondering how you are.

I have almost finished this report.

That's nice. So, what's new?

Well, I don't have a lot of work today after this is done.

Good. So ... let's go for a gelato *afterwards.*

A what?

Italian ice-cream.

Why? Do you have some work for me to do?

No, just thought maybe we could bond in person.

Why? What's wrong with this?

Nothing. Just being silly.

I closed my computer and leaned over the partition. Hey, I said, can you believe that we've been sending each other mails when we're only 27 inches away from each other?

Well, I hadn't thought about it much.

Me neither. Have you been here long?

About 10 years.

Me too. I didn't realize that it was you sitting on the other side.

I always come in the back way; it's more efficient.

Well, I said, how about a coffee?

I'll try, I'm not very good at this person-to-person thing.

Last night I dreamt a dream. I tried to run on the sidewalk but became winded, the sun was too hot and the pavement sent painful shock waves through my hips.

I had to rest before I began again.

The trees were incredibly lush and every one of them had a purring Cheshire Cat in it. Suddenly I was floating in the soothing water when someone approached me in a canoe, bringing with him two hot cocoas. The wind caught and lifted his hat. It was Orson. I tugged playfully on his oar. Drink up, he said, helping me draw my arms over the edge of the canoe, there's plenty more where that came from. What ever happened to your office dweeb? He styles himself after Riker, I replied, we were doing all right until I noticed that every time he left a room, he cocked his head to the left. Orson simply laughed his rich laugh and passed me an almond *croissant.*

I just love a happy ending. O

BY MARIA FORD

Poppies

mother you grew poppies like weeds
didn't mean to of course
so carefully planted eighteen that first year
ey – teen you pronounced
when they bloomed beneath a select
bay window you weeded between
cultivated the splash of crimson visitors
commented on

the next spring they grew everywhere
any soft spot of soil i would lie
naked in fields of lusty poppies
dream dreams of pollen
huge blood petals spotting
my skin as they fell nipples
wounds

aghast at the mutiny mother
you pruned them uprooted the red
celebration dropped goblet heads into pails
for compost cried into your soil black hands
left me parching under hot sun
i salvaged the executed dried them in a far
corner rolled the thousand dark seeds
like lost periods through grass
said prayers for rain

Garden

hours a day
through singing flowers
she pruned searched
for drooping petals
to snip
held monarch butterflies
velvet wings fluttering
like eyelids
in marigolds

lady slippers
she showed me
cinderella

not tall enough
to pick soggy leaves
out of bird baths
I held out cupped hands
cradled they wept
through fingers

when she food-coloured the
plastic rock waterfall
blue
the sky disappeared

thick waxed leaves
like plastic hoya
flowers lipstick red
five-year-old lips smeared
with orange pollen
wishing
they made blue
for eyelids pink
for cheeks

when tickled
geraniums
throw confetti
pansies smirk
the soiled faces
of fat-cheeked boys

delphiniums
toppled clarinets
lashed again
to the green stake they
stand
back to back
periwinkle blue daring
to nod in breeze

I pull weeds
along the walk
not even ants
notice

kitchen corner
the yard a book
in front of her
lost in petals
hours
die like sparrows
against glass flying
into skies

when the painters
speckled tigerlilies white
she turned her head
weeping for lepers

where the willow died
a space too big
for the smiles of grandchildren
shaded corners fill
with words
silences pile
into hedges
step over them
to leave

nicotine fed daffodils
choke heavy heads
brown stems wither
she snaps off their mouths
palms them like wings
holds them out
to fly.

BY ELAINE KALMAN NAVES

Tales of a Traveller

With major awards and early successes already behind her, 25-year-old Karen Connelly looks for new worlds to conquer

NOT LONG AGO, A PACK OF MONTREAL WRITERS GATHERED TO TOAST ONE OF THEIR own. He had just launched a book, a good one — one that even held the seeds of popularity. There were readings, a well-attended launch party at a literary café, apparently brisk sales of the book, and then adjournment to a nearby Greek restaurant for a late dinner. Some 30 of us grouped ourselves around two tables, the celebrant and his closest friends around the larger one. Entering with a group of stragglers, I ended up at a table of 10. In our overlapping jobs and avocations, we included poets and publicists, editors and journalists, fiction and non-fiction writers.

Talk veered back and forth about winning and losing. At our table were some who had been on the short list in their respective categories in the Saturday Night/CBC Literary Awards and others who had been nominated for the National Magazine Awards. There were wry jokes about the condition of being perennial bridesmaids and best men. Although I had not mentioned the fact that I would shortly be interviewing Karen Connelly — who, four years ago at the age of 21 had won the Pat Lowther Prize for poetry and in 1993, at 24, the Governor General's Award for non-fiction — it appeared to be common knowledge around the table. Barbs suddenly flew fast and furious.

"Ask her why she pronounces Calgary 'Cal*gah*ry'!"

"And ask her where she got that cute little nose ring."

"She's *very* ambitious."

Right. And the rest of us aren't?

"Writers," Saul Bellow once said, "seldom wish other writers well."

I'm not trying to point any fingers here, because as I sat waiting for Connelly to arrive at Else's, a trendy café in Leonard Cohen country off St. Laurent Boulevard (with Leonard's own "Democracy's Coming" pulsing through the room), my own feelings were decidedly mixed. I had loved *Touch the Dragon* (Turnstone), Karen's journal of her year spent in Thailand at the age of 17. I had also been touched by the honesty and freshness of her two collections of poems, *The Small Words in My Body* (Kalamalka) and *This Brighter Prison* (Brick), and impressed by their accessibility and arresting, imagistic language. Still, I did wonder about the choice of such a young person for the country's premier non-fiction prize, particularly in view of the snub to Jane Jacobs's *Systems of Survival* (Random House), a work of serious scholarship and synthesis.

And — to be quite honest — I felt personally put on the spot to be interviewing someone young enough to be my daughter. Over the course of the past year, it has been my good fortune to meet some world-class writers. And, while awed by a William Trevor or a Margaret Drabble or a Marie-Claire Blais, I found none of them personally threatening. All my seniors, they had earned their fame over a lifetime apprenticed to writing.

Connelly's career trajectory, however, is frankly unsettling from the vantage point of a struggling writer at midlife who still dreams of being "discovered." To put it simply: like my buddies in the Greek restaurant, I felt envious, and envy laced my tongue as I blundered over the first, basic questions.

Lest anyone's sitting on tenterhooks, here are the answers to two vital ones at the outset. Mispronouncing the name of her home town is "one of my little personal quirks. I say it wrong, but for whatever reason I'm going to keep on saying it. I figure if you speak five languages [English, Thai, Spanish, French, and Greek], you're allowed to say words wrong."

As for the nose ring, with its tiny black bead, she acquired it while working as writer-in-residence last year at the University of New Brunswick. At a tattoo and piercing establishment called Skinetics, at the Oromocto armed forces base. David Adams Richards got a tattoo there, too, she confides. She recommends the place.

I never asked her about being ambitious. Her career speaks for itself. And if anyone has any illusions about the lucky breaks in Karen Connelly's life, that's just what they are. Illusions.

She was born in Calgary in 1969, the third of five children, in what she calls "a family of rednecks and bricklayers and landscapers." Her father had a serious drinking problem and was absent for long stretches of time. Religion was a major bone of contention between her father, a lapsed Catholic, and her mother, a Jehovah's Witness. Karen, too, was raised in that fundamentalist sect, an upbringing that set up a great store of bitterness and alienation in her. There are references in *Touch the Dragon* to "a deranged old god with a white beard" requiring "serious ceremony and secret incantations."

When Karen was 16, her oldest sister died at the age of 24, a tragedy that marked her deeply.

The Small Words in My Body, which is being reissued later this year by Gutter/Steel Rail Press, reels with the pain of her troubled childhood:

This is the fifth season,
when history is gone
and words have neither
echoes nor meanings
When my father is lost
and my sister rots alone.
("The Fifth Season")

At the age of 16, while still in high school, she won a Rotary Club scholarship and spent a year in Thailand. The distillation of that experience resulted in *Touch the Dragon*. The book's first sentence, a description of Canada from the air, tells us we're travelling with a poet: "A view of the body of mountains: deep sockets of aquamarine, blue veins slipping over cliff-sides, stone edges splintering from the earth like cracked bones." On the first page she tells us, "There's almost nothing to write yet because I know so little."

Yet every instinct led Connelly to write. From the age of 11, she says, "I kept a sort of regular journal and had a little binder full of awful poems and read a lot." She had an early love of the exotic and was inspired by Rudyard Kipling. A little later, she discovered that the library of her junior high had a poetry section. "And so I just went and I slowly read every book of poetry. I was about 14 when I started reading T. S. Eliot and certainly I didn't like everything ... some of it I thought, What the hell is this? But some of it I loved. One poem that really amazed me was 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' It blew me away."

Touch the Dragon is much more a book of discovery than of self-discovery. A sense of wonder permeates it, as the young woman who felt so alienated in her own land is taken into the heart of another culture. Revelling in both language and experience, Connelly lays before us the country's many injustices and cruelties, yet still makes us tumble vicariously in love with the place.

Thailand "gave me an amazing education in beauty," she says, sipping her cappuccino and dabbing at her nose as she fights a cold. "And I'd never really experienced anything like that before. And it was also such a surprise to me to receive such generosity — from the people, from the place ... it seemed that everything was a gift."

The year came to an end and Connelly returned to an unhappy transitional time in Canada. Her parents' marriage had broken up just before she left for Thailand; her mother was now living on welfare and Karen still had high school to finish off. She did so, but then left again at the first op-

If anyone has any illusions about the lucky breaks in Karen Connelly's life, that's just what they are. Illusions

portunity — an *au pair* job in Spain.

Once again she was rescued by another country and culture.

Spain takes you in like a masked lover,
ties you up with a red scarf,
throws you the ocean score
and commands you to sing.

"Spanish Lessons"
This Brighter Prison

Connelly lived in Spain for a year and a half, shedding the *au pair* job after a few months, learning Spanish, "going horseback riding on cliffs," teaching English, and writing poetry. And working on *Touch the Dragon*, which at that point consisted of a vast and formless compendium of letters and journals.

"The first thing I had to do was choose which material I thought was good enough to go into a book. So I basically chose the things I was really interested in and the things that I thought were good enough to say. In the mornings I would work on the book. And I had this puny little typewriter and I just basically typed all the stuff that I had into it. So that was the first draft."

Connelly still had no idea of form and tried alternately to fictionalize it and to turn it into essay form. ("It's very hard for me to fictionalize, because I think my own voice is so strong.") She struggled with the self-imposed discipline of the task she had set. "I cried writing it sometimes, it was so hard to sit still long enough. I guess I'm always like that, but the younger I've been, the more volatile I've been. So it was very hard for me to sit the whole time. I had had a few poems published but I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know if it would be published. I had all this material and I was spending all this time writing and writing and writing, and thinking: What if no one ever publishes this? What if I'm just doing this?"

In the meantime, *The Small Words in My Body* had been accepted for publication and Connelly returned to Canada. She bought a computer, fed the *Dragon* into it, and tightened it up before beginning to send out excerpts to publishers. Key Porter asked to see the full manuscript, then sent her a two-page rejection letter explaining why they wouldn't publish it.

Connelly chuckles now in retrospect. "I was really disappointed — like, What do you mean, you want to know how much rice the country produces?"

Then Turnstone Press, in Winnipeg, asked to see the whole manuscript. She remembers when the letter of acceptance arrived, and gives a mock shriek. She was back home in Calgary, there had been a chinook and great mounds of snow lay everywhere. "I just have this memory of my-

self jumping up and down on my front porch ... My mother was so pleased."

Touch the Dragon has done Turnstone proud. At the time of writing, 10,000 copies had already been sold and another 5,000 were about to be printed.

The Governor General's Award has undoubtedly bolstered those sales. For Connelly, even being short-listed for the prize came as a thunderbolt. Because the book was published in 1992, she had not even known it was eligible for the 1993 awards. She was delighted to win ("shocked" is how she puts it), but certain tensions have since tempered the glory. "Right now, I feel a lot of pressures as far as my writing goes that I never felt before. So I don't really like that very much at all. If there's anything that inspires me to leave Canada right now it's that."

In fact, by the time you read this she will be gone once more — this time to Greece, where she spent five months two years ago. She calls Greek a "foolishly, ridiculously complicated" language, but mastered it by spending enormous amounts of time with villagers on the island of Lesbos. Her thirst for foreign cultures will probably result in travel books about both Spain and Greece, although at present she is working on a "book of tales."

In it she uses Gypsy mythology, folklore, and characters. Connelly gives another mock shriek when I point out, predictably, that she's a bit of a gypsy herself. Never mind the lilting voice, unmatched dangling earrings, and, yes, that nose ring. Her appetite for the exotic, her need to keep on moving, prompt the inevitable comparison.

She turns serious. "I just think that really we *all* share such an affinity for the Gypsy people, even when we don't know very much about them, and even when our ideas of them are very romantic and not correct, as the Gypsies would know. Generally speaking, they're not a very popular people. But as a race, they're a great metaphor for humanity in general. I just view all of humanity as a big Gypsy camp. We don't know why we're here ... now especially, more than ever, our homelands are getting more and more confused, our cultures are getting less and less *graspable*. It's so hard to hang onto anything. Our history is more and more mysterious ... I think everybody identifies with them even if they lead the most sedentary lives imaginable."

This is a Karen Connelly wise beyond her years, who surfaces elusively in the two-hour interview. There's also the Connelly quite full of herself who airily informs me of the irony of her having to take English literature and social studies when she returned to Canada from Thailand at 17 ("they were the only courses that I knew everything

about already before I even took them"). There's the tart-tongued Connelly who dimples when I stumble over my questions: "This is good for you ... I'm *glad*!"

Later, she worries about the impression she's made. At the conclusion of our talk, she asks me how long the article will be and when I tell her, seems a bit stunned. "Shit, that's really big!" But then she adds, with genuine anxiety, "I hope you're going to make me sound intelligent."

"*Aren't* you really intelligent?"

"Of course I am. But I don't necessarily sound really intelligent. Some journalists pick on the fact that you said 'like' 14 times!"

Chameleon-like, Connelly showed me glimpses of her many faces: sassy and opinionated, emotional and vulnerable. When I asked about the death of her sister, her throat worked perceptibly. Yet, as we parted in front of Else's, Connelly hugged me impulsively, apparently having forgiven me my probing questions.

There's something about coming in on the ground floor of a writer's career, I've decided, that can match the thrill of meeting an established author. To hear Karen Connelly recall an early, graphic memory is to tour the mind of the genuine article. Her father was a hunter, and she has "incredible memories of coming into the garage and these two skinned deer were hanging from the rafters. Who knows, maybe that was my first memory. Very, very evocative. Those memories still mean so many things to me. What my father was and what we all are; how we can be the deer and how we can be the father and how we can be the flies that are buzzing at the window to get out ....

"The smell of the animals comes back now, the smell of deer, their legs half hacked off. We played with those legs, you know —they're just like sticks, they're so slender. Once you cut them off, from the knees to the hoof, they're really thin. It sounds so awful, but to me it's quite normal."

Memory and writing are inextricably linked. "You write to remember. At least, I write to remember. In some ways, it seems that the experience is not complete unless it has been written down, for me. In some ways it's quite bizarre, that a thing is somehow not really lived until it's on paper. Even when something sort of *secret* happens or something that I don't want other people to know about."

I say goodbye to Karen Connelly on the corner of Roy and deBullion streets in the heart of Plateau Mont Royal. Saul Bellow notwithstanding, I find myself hugging her back and — to my surprise — sincerely wishing her well. ○

BY STAN ROGAL

It Seems To Be a Verb

Sheri-D Wilson reading at the Malcolm Lowry Room, Vancouver, B.C.

Performance poetry has jumped down from the ivory tower and hit the streets with a hot, sweet beat

JEAN COCTEAU ONCE SAID, "TO THE YOUNG, OLD jazz appears new." Similarly, to the uninitiated performance poetry appears to be a '90s phenomenon. But historically poetry has been closely linked to an oral/performative tradition, whether as recital, song, theatre, or storytelling

It's doubtful there has ever been a time when poetry has not been performed in one way or another. What *is* new, I think, is that the media have finally recognized that not only are poets performing their work in varied and various venues, but there is an ever increasing audience. This makes poetry a very sexy topic.

But what is this thing called performance poetry, and what makes a performance poet? That depends on who you talk to. The Vancouver writer Sheri-D Wilson feels that the term "performance" is a convenient label for reviewers and critics. In fact, on the back cover of her book *Swerve* (Arsenal Pulp), she is referred to as an "action" poet. Lillian Allen, a Toronto writer, prefers to call herself an "action" or "dub" poet. She finds the term "performance" to be slightly pejorative and too easily taken to mean simply "entertaining." For her, a poem is first and foremost a political act; her use of performance techniques is instrumental in conveying her words and engaging her audience.

In recent interviews I've been asked to comment on similar issues: does concentration on the performance aspect negatively affect the quality of the work, or, when does the performance shift from poetry to, say, theatre? These are the wrong questions. They imply that there are some kind of objective criteria with which to compartmentalize poets and their work. It's the sort of thinking that has kept poetry trapped in institutions for the past 20 years or so, and tends to eliminate personalities from the experience of the text — the personalities of the audience members as well as those of the poets themselves. It is exactly this type of restrictive thinking that many poets are fighting against, feeling that it is their job to bring poetry back into the workaday world; to loosen it up a bit, to make room for improvisation, ad lib, anecdote, change of mood, change of rhythm, and so on. Says Allen, "It should never be a matter of being better or worse than the written page — it's just different, that's all." What is also different is that once an audience member has seen and heard a poet, that person can never read the work the same way again. A live experience can alter both the sound and even the interpretation of the poetry.

There is another side to the coin, naturally. Many poets still do "straight" readings, without the histrionics and without any intention beyond conveying their words as simply and directly as possible to the audience. Still others hem and haw and fumble their way through a reading and are quite happy when they get to sit down. As to whether this is a performance or not, I tend to agree with Clifton Joseph, "dubzz/poet/at large," who uses the phrase "the spoken word" to include all

live readings. A performance occurs, then, when there is a poet reading to an audience. Once that fact is settled, what varies is the type or form of the performance, and this will depend solely on the style of the poet and the dynamic that occurs between the poet and the audience. The main objective is to get the words off the page in order to create a dialogue between the poet and the audience; to create a sense of presence and community, to give the poetry life — something that a book can only do in a very limited manner. Poetry becomes an action; it becomes, in essence, a verb. Allen states that she had been "reluctant to commit her poetry to the page over the years because, for the most part, the poems are not meant to be still." In the foreword to her recent book, *Women Do This Every Day* (Women's Press), she says she wanted

> ... to work with a form whose aim was to increase the dynamism of poetry, to increase its impact and immediacy; a poetic form that could incorporate many aspects of other art forms: performance, drama, fiction, theatre, music, opera, scat, a capella, comedy, video, storytelling, and even electronics. It was poetic ammunition, an artistic call to arms.

Sheri-D Wilson also seeks out rhythms and sounds to enhance her work. She recently did two Toronto readings: at Harbourfront she was accompanied by two jazz musicians; at the Idler Pub she was solo, but asked the audience to *imagine* the two musicians playing alongside. That single suggestion opens a door, giving an audience the opportunity to help create the poetic experience. For Wilson and numerous others, jazz is the music of choice, possibly because it is based on improvisation. Dub poetry, on the other hand, sprang directly from the sounds of reggae. But there is no shortage of alternatives — I've been to readings where poets were backed by guitars, cellos, percussion instruments, taped electronic sounds, record players, trumpets, and even a kazoo.

SOMEWHERE near the end of the '70s I was hearing a rumour that the '80s were going to witness a Renaissance in poetry similar to the Beat Generation of the '60s. It never happened. If the change is indeed occurring in the '90s, is there anything special or different either about the time or the type of performance poetry that might account for its growing interest and popularity? I don't think so. Persistence obviously plays a big part. After all, poets like Lillian Allen, Clifton Joseph, Sheri-D Wilson, Paul Dutton, et al. have been out there *doing it* for years with mixed results. And there have always been those few fine folks who have been willing to put in the time and effort to organize literary events. Too often though, the venues have been institutions such as universities and libraries. These places appeal to a very small cross-section of the populace; in short, it's poetry for the converted. Since these venues have been the rule rather than the exception, it is little wonder people conclude that poetry is for a particular élite and that it is somehow above the crowd. But anyone who has flipped through even a couple of books of poems or who has attended a reading or two knows that nothing could be further from the truth. Most poetry is very accessible; most poetry deals with very easy-to-relate-to human concerns and experiences; much poetry is often even light and humorous. For anyone with an adventurous spirit and a desire for something more challenging, there is ample diversity.

More people, especially more young people, are writing poetry and are treating poetry as a serious endeavour, not as a hobby or a pastime. They feel that poetry is vital; that they have things to say through the the medium of poetry and want to get their words out to a larger audience. They unashamedly call themselves poets. Many

FAUSTO TOFFOLETTI

Lillian Allen **Jill Battson** **Clifton Joseph** **Sheri-D Wilson**

have been or are going to university and they are tired of the institutionalization, the ghettoization of poetry. They are also tired of being told that poetry doesn't sell, that nobody reads it, that poetry is something people do when they can't write a novel. It's the poets themselves who are grabbing poetry by the shoulders and shaking new life into it; who are going out there and making it work.

For too long there has been the misleading image of the gentle poet sitting alone in an attic or tower somewhere, too sensitive and fragile to exist in the real world, too caught up in abstract thoughts to ever dare attempt something as mundane as promoting their work or organizing a reading or planning an event. Not so now. As Allen says, "It was time to eliminate the middlemen."

And so the poets have taken to the streets and set up shop in restaurants, pubs, coffee houses, church basements, community centres, ice-cream parlours — any place that will have them; any place that shows some interest; any place that doesn't reek of academe; any place suitable for an informal gathering where one can enter with an open mind and relax over a cup of coffee or a beer. The poets do their own advertising and promotion; they support other venues; they start up small magazines and presses. The best part is that they are having fun doing it. As in anything else, if the organizers and performers aren't having a good time, neither will the audience.

In Toronto, the poet Jill Battson has lately been dubbed "the high priestess of poetry promotion." She organizes the popular Poet's Refuge series, which runs once a month at the Free Times Cafe. Through MuchMusic she is producing 30 poetry videos to be aired on the station; she also set up a poetry "slam" at this year's rock music extravaganza, Lollapalooza, and she took advantage of the Fringe Festival's invitation to bring-your-own-venue. Battson rented a yellow school bus for two weeks and created the Poetry Express. Imagine, if you will, six poets travelling around the streets of Toronto performing their poetry to a captive audience of fellow passengers. The poets, each of whom performed a 10-minute set, were given the choice of using the bus sound system or being "intimate and interactive" — setting themselves in the aisle and speaking directly to the passengers. Either way, everyone must put up with the rocking of the bus, the traffic, the weather, the city noise, and even comments from passersby. There was a mix of styles and voices; as the weekly entertainment magazine *eye* reported, "... a sound poet, a cyberpunk poet, a Celtic poet,

and two confessional poets in the tragic vein." Some poets fared better than others, but, more important, there was an enthusiastic and appreciative audience. Everyone had a good time.

Clifton Joseph will be doing a special Spoken Word show for TVOntario's "Imprint" program. He was an organizer of last year's International Dub Poetry Festival, which brought in 50 poets from around the world, and he's also involved with Spoken Word festivals taking place in Toronto and Vancouver. (These two cities are the hot spots, although performance poetry is catching on in other parts of the country, too. This past summer, the Banff Centre for the Arts hosted the program Action Poetry '94. And Montreal's Wordapalooza, organized by Fortner Anderson, was Jill Battson's model for the poetry slam at Lollapalooza.)

Toronto's Scream in High Park has run successfully for two years now thanks to the poets Matthew Remski, Peter McPhee, and their friends. The Scream takes place on the stage of Dream in High Park, which features a play by Shakespeare each summer. People bring picnic baskets, sit on the grass, and watch and listen as nearly 20 poets and fiction writers perform into the night.

Sheri-D Wilson is in the process of setting up a West Coast reading circuit stretching from Vancouver to Los Angeles. For my part, I coordinate the Idler Pub Reading Series in Toronto every Sunday. Now into its fourth year, the series plays host to about 150 readers per year, of whom 80 to 90 per cent are poets. Across the country, alternative venues are making the scene. Most (if not all) of them are being organized by poets.

In one interview I was asked if this interest in performance poetry was just a passing fad. Hardly. I think that this is the tip of the iceberg. In the United States there's a craze for live readings, with major bookstores putting in food and beverage facilities as well as setting aside ample floor space to accommodate readings. Why do this? Because live readings sell books. Ask almost any poet and you'll hear the same story: they sell more books themselves through readings than through bookstores. On a broader level, readings bring an informal vibrancy to the stores, not to mention a steady stream of potential customers. Doesn't this make more sense than filling the aisles with remaindered copies of "how-to" books? Toronto's Longhouse Books has converted its former office/storage area into "The Green Room," a bistro with a stage for readings and book launches. *Santé!*

Open-mike venues are also big in the United States. Cities such as New York, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles each have well over a hundred such places. Anyone can walk in with a handful of poems and have a chance for a quick shot in front of an audience. There are poetry sweatshops and poetry slams going on constantly. Poets are on the move, and the audience is following. Lillian Allen calls poetry "portable"; she says it's "Art to go. Take-out art." What literary form suits our fast-paced age better than poetry? Poetry uses a compact language and most poems are fairly short. If listeners don't like one poem, they may like the next. If listeners hate a particular poet's work they will surely love another poet's work. Bear in mind, too, that there are some wonderful poets who read their work terribly and there are some terrible poets who read their work magnificently.

I see this present awareness and popularity as just the beginning — but the beginning of *what*. I'm not quite sure. It all depends on who and how many get involved. More venues and more events are necessary; poetry publishers, distributors, and sellers have to pick up the ball and start running with it. And the media have to begin taking poetry seriously — not just pump it up when it's in fashion to do so. Poetry has always been there to shake things up when they get too dull or too restrictive.

It's probably true that much of the popularity of performance poetry is its entertainment value. But that isn't to say that the work is shallow. Lillian Allen insists that "The work of the poets extends beyond merely creating art; we take our poetry and our convictions into the community. We organize, we network, we participate, we protest, we celebrate, we build community." And Sheri-D Wilson emphasizes, "Content has to be at least as important as the form." I have always thought of the word *entertain* as: to entertain an idea or concept; to consider something new. This needn't be an arduous process but should be an activity that is stimulating and pleasurable. Even if we are to believe Bill Kennedy when he writes that "Poets have become stand-up comics," perhaps that's all for the best. Perhaps it's time to joke and rant and rave and holler and have a bit of fun with poetry.

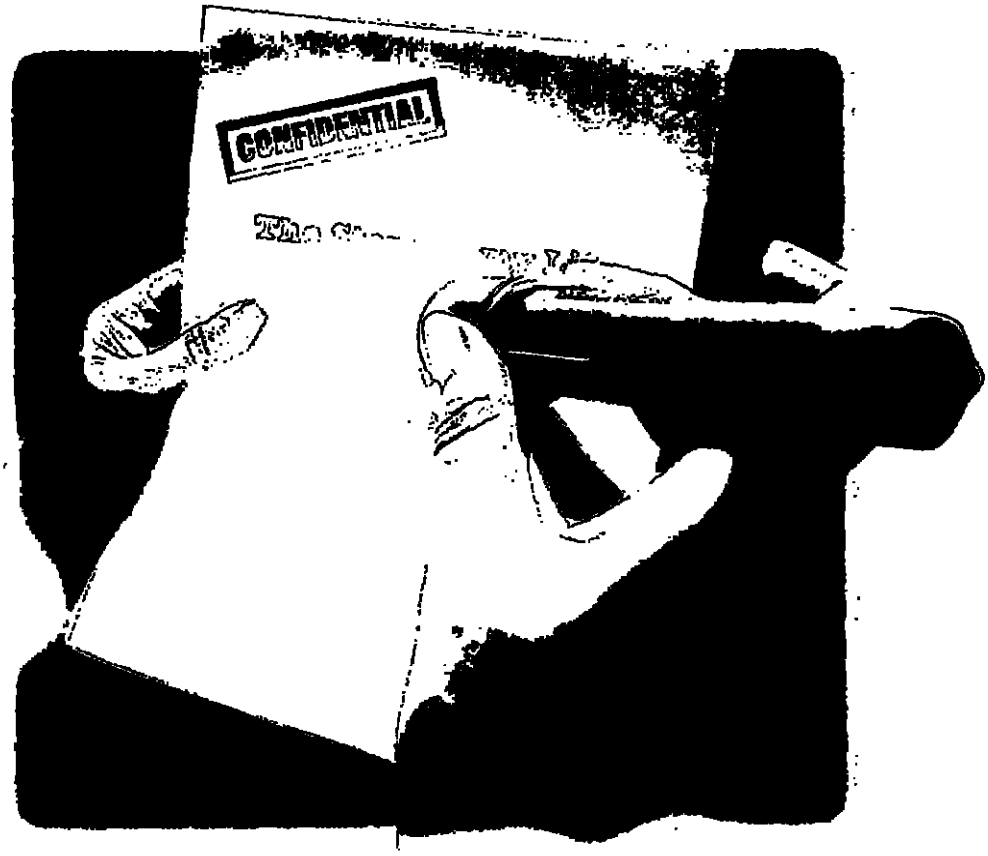
What's important is that poetry is shedding its academic ball and chain. The work is getting out to the people and it is finally up to them to decide what they like and what they don't like; what books to buy or not buy. A dynamic is being set up: a dialogue between performer and audience. Poetry is flexing its celebratory muscle and asserting its presence as a personality. It is definitely *out there* and happening. It will become what the poets and the audience make it. O

BY ROBIN SKELTON

Law and Disorder

MOST CRIME FICTION DEPENDS for its success upon our belief in an ordered universe that can only be disrupted temporarily. The return to order is achieved by the punishment of the villain and a ceremony of purification that may take the form of a family reunification, a wedding, an act of generosity, or even an altered will. All this is obvious, but in the '90s things appear to be changing; the universe that is disturbed by villainy is not necessarily ordered at all, and may even be grossly corrupt.

This can be said, cheerfully, of William Deverell's delicious novel **Kill All the Lawyers** (Random House, 338 pages, $27.95 cloth), for everyone in the story appears to be morally imperfect and definitely self-serving. A lawyer is killed shortly after he has astonished everyone by successfully defending an undoubtedly guilty client. A second lawyer who has a similar success is shot at, and the legal community begins to think that someone out there is attempting to correct undesirable verdicts by sentencing lawyers to death. Brian Pomeroy, whose recent moment of glory has given him the opportunity to take time off to write a novel, disappears to Costa Rica where he studies Widgeon's how-to book, *The Art of the Whodunit*, and writes letters to his wife, his colleagues, and others about the scene he has left and about his own hedonistic existence. The letters are such as to suggest that the detective novel he is writing may not be wholly satisfactory stylistically; his opinions about the murders are also rather unsatisfactory; his vitality and ebullience, however, are delightful, and the social comedy is hilarious.



This is a brilliantly wrought novel, ingenious, entertaining, and continually surprising. The denouement is marvellous. Deverell deserves an award for this one.

The social scene of John Lawrence Reynolds's new novel is also far from orderly. **Solitary Dancer** (HarperCollins, 256 pages, $22.95 cloth) brings us Joe McGuire again, but he is not merely in his usual uncomfortable state of mind; he is addicted to pills

of many kinds and also accused of murder. McGuire attempts to deal with his addiction by undergoing withdrawal; these scenes are presented graphically and are painful. He is surrounded by the denizens of the combat zone; thieves, prostitutes, pimps, and bullies abound. We have here the Chandlerian private eye taken to the extreme of suffering. It is a tough, bitter, and splendidly written book. Reynolds has the power to appal and excite, and the compassion to make us feel the story has real human relevance.

This cannot be said of Kenneth J. Harvey's **Stalkers** (Stoddart, 227 pages, $22.95 cloth), which deals with the making of snuff films, with child pornography, and with sexual perversity in such a fashion as to rouse disgust rather than interest. The novel exploits rather than explores, and the violence has the unreality of a cartoon; moreover the denouement and the final chapter are morally indefensible.

Eve Zaremba's **The Butterfly Effect** (Second Story, 331 pages, $11.95 paper) also deals with the underworld, but not with sexual perversion. We become entangled in art theft and, along with the engaging Helen Keremos, our hard-boiled lesbian detective, we find ourselves in Japan, England, Canada, and the United States. It is all rather hurried and complicated, but some of the characters are entertaining and the action is vivid. It could be described as a good book for a long bus journey — it entertains without causing anxiety.

One can't say the same for Ernest Langford's **The Apple Eaters** (Harbour, 176 pages, $12.95 paper), for the prose style is excruciatingly embarrassing. The tale is told largely in the present tense, with the only relief occurring in conversation. This may be intended to create intimacy; it doesn't. The detective, Jimmy Sung, is boring and the plot is undemanding.

The plot of **Salamander** (Constable/Stewart House, 272 pages, $28.99 cloth), by J. Robert Janes, is made complicated by the central figures being, once again, a French detective of the Sûreté and a member of the Gestapo, and the setting being Lyons at Christmastide in 1942. As in Janes's earlier novels, the continual shifts of viewpoint and of styles of speech, and the confusions of loyalties, make the book tiresome, and while there are splendid scenes there is no real narrative drive. The tale staggers along from one difficulty to another.

Betsy Struthers does better in **Grave Deeds** (Simon & Pierre/Dundurn, 179 pages, $16.99 paper). Rosalie Cairns inherits an old house in the country; it comes with relatives she does not know, stories she

would rather not have heard, artefacts that are uncomfortably valuable, and a great deal of mental and physical discomfort. Death also joins the party, and the result is a tale that has a kind of Gothic intensity without the usual Gothic impedimenta. The plot is pleasingly complicated and the characters are all interesting and fully rendered. We could do with more Rosalie Cairns stories.

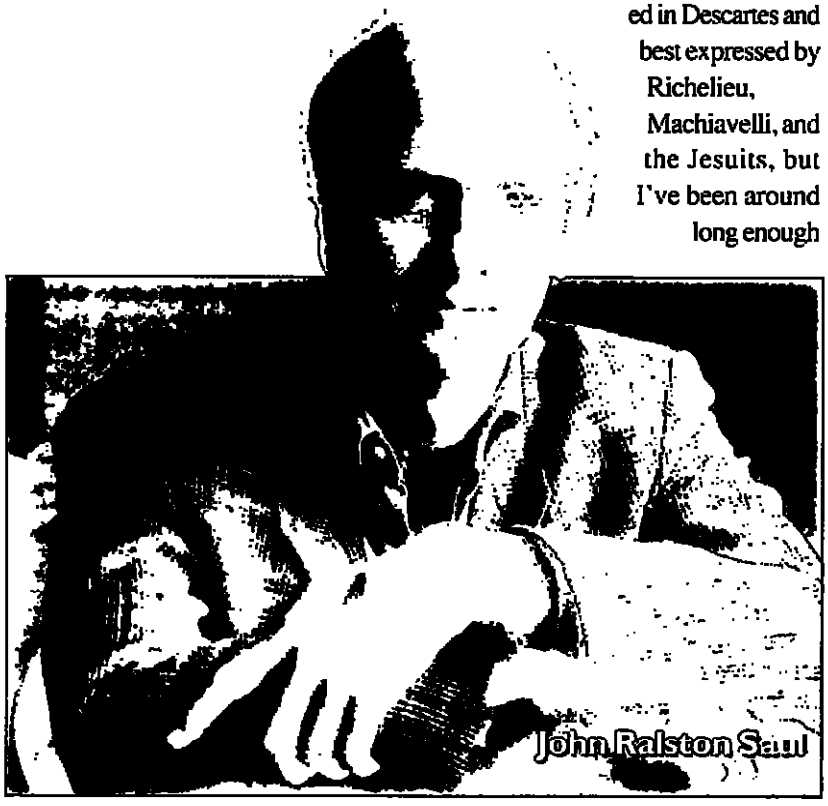
Gillian Adams is another woman detective whom it is usually pleasant to encounter. In this new novel from Norah Kelly, she has left Vancouver to visit Cambridge, England, where she encounters some **Bad Chemistry** (HarperCollins, 252 pages, $24 cloth). A brilliant young research chemist is found dead in her laboratory and Gillian, whose lover is a detective chief inspector at Scotland Yard, finds herself investigating the crime. The setting is handled well (though a map could have helped those unfamiliar with Cambridge), and the academic games are well played.

Peter Robinson's **Final Account** (Viking, 318 pages, $18.99 paper) is one of his most formidable novels. Set in the Yorkshire Dales and in Leeds, the tale is splendidly contrived. A man is found dead in a barn, his head blown off. He has been taken there by masked men, we are told, and slaughtered. He was a rather dull accountant who had married the boss's daughter but, Inspector Banks discovers, on his frequent absences from home "on business" he had a different personality and name. It seems there may be some money-laundering going on, and vast amounts of money may be hidden somewhere or other. Once again Banks's determination takes him to the solution, and once again his sense of compassion and his understanding affection for his fellow beings keep the book alive with human warmth qualified always by wry humour. Peter Robinson is a fine writer and this is a strong and fascinating novel. Like William Deverell, he should have an award. ○

BY BRIAN FAWCETT

Common and Uncommon Sense

I WASN'T TERRIBLY SYMPATHETIC to John Ralston Saul's *Voltaire's Bastards* when it appeared two years ago. At first it seemed like just another narrow-path guru-gizmo, in the tradition of, say, Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Saul ascribed the source of the excesses of the recent past and the present to the intellectual universe rooted in Descartes and best expressed by Richelieu, Machiavelli, and the Jesuits, but I've been around long enough



John Ralston Saul

to know that any single-cause conspiracy explanation for the collective mess we're in is bound to be an intellectual contraption requiring secret police and bureaucracies-of-the-very-wise in order to operate. Besides, it conflicted with my own (equally provable) single-cause conspiracy explanation — that the grizzly bears are trying to take over the world.

The chief weakness of *Voltaire's Bastards* was that Saul's somewhat elusive "general theme" was a lot less compelling than the incidental and anecdotal evidence he brought in to demonstrate its verity. In fact, the book's thematic portentousness tended to overwhelm the frequently fascinating anecdotal information in order, I suppose, to keep the general theme on track. It made Saul's ideas seem a lot loonier than they actually were, and personally, it made me forget just how much I was learning from him as I perused the fine detail.

Among Saul's more startling insights in *Voltaire's Bastards* is that the goal of the Cartesian enterprise has been not just to authoritatively ascribe prior knowledge, but to *inscribe* it as well — and to mask the inscriptions from its users. He also hints that the universe of assumptive knowledge we now live in has turned out to be as deep and powerful as the ocean — and as narrow and dangerous for the unwary as a darkened New York City alley. *Voltaire's Bastards* gave a sense of how fecklessly we have been swimming in those depths, but it didn't provide what is now most needed — a new lexicon and a map with which to make it through the alley.

In **The Doubter's Companion: A Dictionary of Aggressive Common Sense** (Viking, 331 pages, $28.99 cloth), Saul gives us a substantial part of the lexicon. I'm not sure whether it'll help make him the Voltaire of the late 20th century that he'd like to be, but I'm dead sure he's written the most entertaining and useful book of this publishing season, and maybe well beyond that. It's meant to be the clarifying footnotes to *Voltaire's Bastards*, but without the general theme that tried to pave every detail into a single road. *The Doubter's Companion* is much easier to follow and sharper in its detail. Actually I can't recall ever having as much *fun* with a book as I did with this one, leaping from definition to definition to see what indignity Saul would perpetrate on which set of fools next — or what new insight he was going to deliver.

Some of his 300 or so definitions, which run from one sentence to several pages in length, are just

plain witty, like his explanation of where croissants come from, and the circumstantially hilarious discussion of dandruff. But Saul's wit is always laced with acid. This occasionally leads him to the politically incorrect, but more often to the uproariously funny. Yet most of the time — even when he appears to be indulging his own wit — he is penetratingly accurate. And on the crucial subject of economics, he is dead on.

Saul's greatest gift is a first-rate nose for large-scale bullshit, and in *The Doubter's Companion* he uses it to sniff out the vast lies that he seemed merely to cast a reasonable light on in *Voltaire's Bastards*. His is a rare gift in this country, which has, arguably, fewer than a dozen writers who possess this kind of nose at all. And none of them quite have his nose for the big stuff.

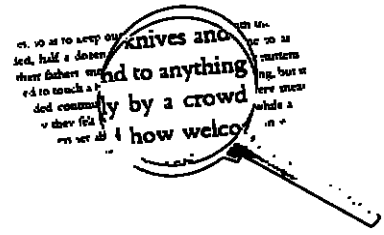
The Doubter's Companion isn't perfect. One would have to share Saul's remarkable and unorthodox intellectual range to edit him properly, and this may be why some of the writing is less than translucent. In addition, he can be impatient and arch, and a few of his gags end up being smothered by the irritable cognitive shorthand he uses to move ideas from one place to another. He also suffers from a vaguely Oedipal hatred of Margaret Thatcher, one that leads him to some frivolous — or at least excessively fanciful — definitions whenever the subject of Great Britain appears on the horizon. And of course he isn't exactly qualified to make the sweeping pronouncements he does.

Which brings me to the purpose of this rave, and my assignment as *Books in Canada*'s culture cop. The mission of an expertocracy like ours is to prevent intelligent citizens from penetrating the sterile web of addled ideas and intellectual habits that experts and their masters have used to construct the present insanity. Close to the core of both *Voltaire's Bastards* and *The Doubter's Companion* is the idea that our present societal reliance on expertise is the most malevolent outgrowth of the covert inscription of assumptive knowledge. What Saul is practising in these books — and implicitly demanding of us — is a return to common sense. By "common sense" he doesn't mean quaint folklore and cracker-barrel truisms, but a more deliberate and civic-minded generalism that we rarely see nowadays. *The Doubter's Companion* is, first and finally, a civic-minded work — exactly what an artist in a democracy is bound by the terms of citizenship to produce in a time of crisis. Saul's generalism is also precisely what the great writers of the past practised, and a sharp rebuke to the specializations that conventional novelists, poets, and playwrights have settled for. That *The Doubter's Companion* (and for that matter, *Voltaire's Bastards*) is much more exhilarating to read than 99 per cent of our novels and poems is perhaps the best proof of just how successful Saul's project is as art.

Still, let me go a step beyond that and be brutally clear about what I'm suggesting here. Expertise and art are natural enemies. They are so because expertise operates by secrecy while seeking control and power, and art operates by clear, public language in the service of free expression and wholeness.

It seems to me that most of today's writers are all too prepared to plead specialist's rights for what they do — and to punish anyone who transgresses the declared boundaries of the specialty. They take it as a given that the purpose of "serious" literary art is to illustrate the range and fragility of human sensitivities, and nothing much more than that. It makes most of our tired-out fiction not much more than a quick, cheap holiday from the mess looming over our collective heads, and our poetry little more than soulful drool.

Of course, these same writers can be heard whining about how insensitive the instruments of political control have become, and they whine much louder about the plight of suffering authors. Evidently it never occurs to them to do what Saul has done by insisting that the world is comprehensible through a renewed common sense, and by refusing to step into the trap of specialization. Maybe they should reconsider what they're doing. And lo, *The Doubter's Companion* just happens to be an excellent place to start. ○



How Real, How Magical

OPEN SECRETS
by Alice Munro
McClelland & Stewart, 294 pages, $28.99 cloth (isbn 0 7710 6699 6)

Reviewed by J. R. (Tim) Struthers

READING — BY WHICH I MEAN *luxuriating in* — the eight marvellously impressive, profoundly compelling, and darkly luminous stories that form Alice Munro's eighth book, *Open Secrets*, I am led to remember a mistake that I made years ago in high school when I read my first two novels by Thomas Hardy, now probably my favourite novelist. I assumed that the real story, the real action, was captured in the relatively short stretches of dialogue — a mistake that allowed me to race by all the complex passages of description. Now I pay attention to everything — a lesson that seems especially helpful in reading short stories, where the most innocent suggestion can acquire grave significance if the reader is patient and alert enough to sense it.

A comparison between Munro and Hardy would seem to be invited by "Carried Away," the opening story of *Open Secrets*. Louisa, a commercial traveller "for a company that sold hats, ribbons, handkerchiefs and trimmings, and ladies' underwear to retail stores," secures a new and assuredly different job as the local librarian because the former librarian happened to die on a day when Louisa was passing through town and because Louisa suddenly felt that a change in her own life might be opportune. At one point in "Carried Away" Louisa remarks that Thomas Hardy and Willa Cather (a novelist who previously figured in the story "Dulse" in Munro's fifth book, *The Moons of Jupiter*) are her "favorite authors." Although some people accuse Hardy of "being gloomy," Louisa states, she herself considers him to be "very true to life." Like Hardy, in one magnificent volume of fiction after another, Munro is able to explore with increasing graveness and love, with increasing precision and wonder, the complexities of the human condition.

This is not to say that Munro's writing in *Open Secrets* or earlier books is without comedy. Indeed, comedy plays a very important — even ritualistic — role in her stories. In fact, I would say that imaginative play and verbal play represent a crucial, if sometimes underestimated, factor in Munro's work. Consider the following passage, from the story "Spaceships Have Landed," describing the friendship of two country girls, Rhea and Eunice:

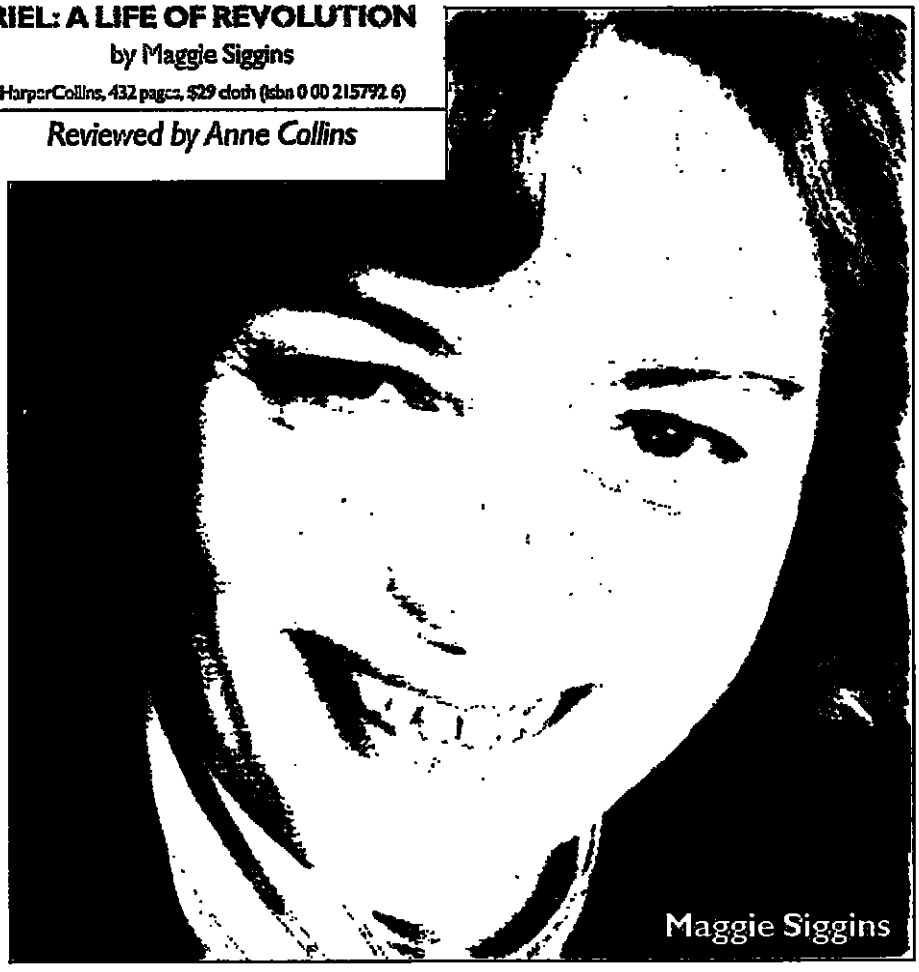
> ... And the worst thing was when Eunie launched into accounts that Rhea found both boring and infuriating, of murders

REVIEWS CONTENTS

A Rebel and His Cause

RIEL: A LIFE OF REVOLUTION
by Maggie Siggins
HarperCollins, 432 pages, $29 cloth (isbn 0 00 215792 6)

Reviewed by Anne Collins


Maggie Siggins

HISTORY, WRITES THE philosopher Paul Ricoeur, is the telling of stories from the past for present purposes. Biographers of Louis Riel could write a variation on that: history is the telling of stories from the past to soothe present consciences. For instance, when the military and western historian George F. G. Stanley first tackled Riel in a pamphlet for the Canadian Historical Society in the 1950s, he considered Riel a "sad, pathetic, unstable man, who led his followers in a suicidal crusade and whose brief glory rests upon a distortion of history." In the Red River uprising and the North-West Rebellion, Riel resisted on behalf of his "primitive" people (the Métis) "what for want of a better word may be termed progress." The Métis execution of the Ontario Orangeman Thomas Scott was the aggressive display of an "inferiority complex," and Riel's own hanging was inevitable, a side effect of the march of civilization.

Stanley came back to Riel again, at book length in the 1960s, as if the Métis leader were a moral sore tooth he could not leave alone. In his preface, the historian had the grace and the intellectual honesty to admit, "When I wrote [that] pamphlet ... I thought I knew all the answers: now that I know more about Riel, I am less certain what the answers are." But Stanley still judged Riel to be strange and pathetic. Though far more sympathetic by the time he wrote the entry on Riel for the *Canadian Encyclopedia* in the 1980s, Stanley still viewed the killing of Scott as the "colossal blunder" by which Riel brought himself to the executioner.

Was Riel a madman? Was he a martyr? The questions still loom so large because the government of Canada hanged him for treason and has never succumbed to pressure for a posthumous pardon — even though "founder of Manitoba" is now as often attached to Riel's name as "rebel." Historians keep rising to the questions, and providing answers that in hindsight seem alarmingly flavoured by their times. Another academic biographer, Thomas Flanagan, perhaps intended his *Louis David Riel: "Prophet of the New World"* (1979) to restore Riel to sanity by placing his passionate spirituality in the "context" of its times. But, in Flanagan's hands, Riel became almost a cult leader, who held dangerously autocratic religious beliefs: once again a telling of the Riel tragedy made his death at the end of a government rope seem almost self-inflicted.

By the record of his biographers, there is one more element to add to Ricoeur's definition of history: the telling of the past for present purposes when the present is ready to listen. Finally in Maggie Siggins, not an academic but a Governor General's Award–winning journalist, Riel has found his mainstream champion. The aim of *Riel: A Life of Revolution*, quite simply, is to exonerate him. Siggins believes the old questions (madman? martyr? murderer?) are a distraction: Riel was assassinated by the state because, as the only leader who could rally the Métis against the overwhelming and exploitative stream of English-speaking immigrants, he stood in the way not of progress but of land speculation.

From the broad brushstrokes of her

and disasters and freakish events that she had heard about on the radio. Rhea was infuriated because she could not get Eunie to tell her whether these things had really happened, or even to make that distinction — as far as Rhea could tell — to herself.

Was that on the news, Eunie? Was it a story? Were there people acting it in front of a microphone or was it reporting? Eunie! Was it real or was it a play?

It was Rhea, never Eunie, who would get frazzled by these questions. Eunie would just get on her bicycle and ride away. "Toodeley oodeley oo! See you in the zoo!"

Pure nonsense — or is it? Does Eunice possess an understanding of the indivisibility of truth and imagination, seriousness and play, the natural and the supernatural, that surpasses Rhea's meagrely realistic, literal-minded understanding? Does Eunice represent some kind of metaphor, or an alter ego, for the artist?

In "Spaceships Have Landed" it is Eunice who, in the words of the title of the first story of *Open Secrets*, is "Carried Away." But so is Rhea — first emotionally, then geographically, and, near the close of the story, within view of death itself. And so is the reader, in this particular story and throughout the collection. "Spaceships Have Landed" begins with a reference to Eunie's disappearance. As we learn later, a spaceship has indeed landed and Eunie has been suddenly transfigured:

> It was two boys and a girl who took her. They looked about nine or ten or eleven years old and they all wore the same kind of outfit — a kind of seersucker sunsuit with a bib in front and straps over the shoulders. ... They took her along the path and out onto the old fairgrounds. They took her to their tent. But it seemed to her that she never saw that tent once from the outside. She was just suddenly inside it, and she saw that it was white, very high and white, and shivering like the sails on a boat. Also it was lit up, and again she had no idea where the light was coming from. ... Some singing or humming might have been taking place, getting inside her head, something pacifying and delightful. And everything got to seem perfectly normal. You couldn't inquire about anything, anymore than you would say, "What is that teapot doing here?" in an ordinary kitchen.

How real, how magical. In story after story, Munro reveals the exhilarating character of life itself, with all its surprising but inevitable interventions. Such interventions may take the form of a death, unexpected visitors, an unusual letter, whatever. Such occurrences pervade the stories in *Open Secrets*, fracturing each character's — and each reader's — expectations, rendering easy accommodations with life or art impossible. Moreover, from these interventions other actions unfailingly unfold. Increasingly in Munro's later stories, I believe, we see something of the quality that Eudora Welty (an acknowledged influence on Munro) admired in William Faulkner: "veracity and accuracy about the world" that reveals both the comedy of being human and what Welty terms "that comedy's adjoining terror." O

miniseries-like opening (a recreated jailhouse interview with the condemned man) to the foretold conclusion in which Riel mounts the scaffold, Riel stands for an ideal of progress of his own, grounded in the democracy of the Métis buffalo hunt, tempered by his fine education in the classics and his familiarity with the law. Earlier writers on Riel didn't have a hope of perceiving the nature of community Riel was proposing, Siggins argues, in one of the few passages in the book in which she wrestles with what Riel means rather than what happened to him:

> It is only recently that our society has slowly taken off its blinkers of prejudice and come to understand, often with shocked amazement, that Native cultures have their own uniqueness and value.

So, in Siggins's account, the push that hit the Red River district in the late 1860s was not of civilization but of shoddy road contractors and greedy speculators conniving with the Canadian government as though robbing the original inhabitants and settlers (whether Métis, half-breed, French, or English) was a right conferred by the god of the frontier. Thomas Scott, a violent racist and obnoxious no-account, is the one who brings his execution on himself. Though Siggins doesn't go so far as to say that shooting him was a smart move on Riel's part, she makes a persuasive case that Riel's provisional government believed it had the authority to sentence him to death for treason. And that the hot Orange bigotry that flared in Ontario in the wake of Scott's death was fanned by men with land interests and opportunistic ambitions in Riel's Red River.

Siggins is at her finest in the sections of the book that describe Riel's first stand in Manitoba (for one brief shining moment, a multiracial Camelot), and his ugly and repeated betrayals by politicians and early Canadian "entrepreneurs" of the West such as Charlie Mair and Dr. John Schultz. She is incisive also in slicing the myths away from the Métis rebellion at Batoche in 1885, and describing the Ottawa-condoned destruction of Métis communities; her previous book, *Revenge of the Land*, was a wonderful schooling in the grubbing chicaneries of Prairie settlement.

But the portrait of Riel himself is less persuasive, though Siggins cites many passages of his voluminous journals and poetry, and devotes far more pages to his personal life than any other biographer has done. Perhaps the contemporary eyes that allowed her to see the value in Métis culture did not work quite as well when it came to the "intimate" portrait her publishers asked her to draw. This reader, anyway, could find no empathetic window into Riel's profoundly emotional religious life, for instance. Siggins diligently mentions its components (ultramontane Catholicism married to Métis spirituality and the Riel family's deeply personal relationship to their God), but doesn't make the parts add up to the Riel who became "the prophet of the New World." A letter written by someone else on the subject that she includes as an appendix comes closer to plumbing the meaning of religion in his life. And to describe Riel in his Montana days as a Che Guevara strikes a false note when you realize that he was also stumping for the Republicans. Siggins is mostly willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, which is refreshing in its way, but sometimes strips him of his edges. He dumped a fiancée, ignored for a decade the sister who had made the greatest sacrifices for him, and for a time went right out of his head; it seems a too-glib reflection of *our* times to say he behaved this way because he was under so much stress.

On the scaffold Siggins draws Riel in largely symbolic strokes. As he climbs the steps, he comforts his confessor, as only heroes ever seem able to do. Then, as the noose is lifted over his head, a whisper comes from Jack Henderson, the hangman: "Louis Riel, you had me once and I got away from you. I have you now and you'll not get away from me." An Orangeman and friend of Thomas Scott, Henderson is there to take personal revenge for Scott's "murder" and his own brief imprisonment during the Red River resistance. The extra chilling touch is that Henderson was paid $50 to do it. In Siggins's telling, hate and greed literally tighten the rope around Riel's neck, and blame at last finds the proper resting place.

A personal note: for me the most annihilating sentence in Siggins's book describes a small detail of Riel's execution — "A strong cordon of Mounties was on hand to keep anyone from drawing near." My paternal great-grandfather was part of that cordon. He was not only a Mountie but as Orange as they come, and proud of his part in the hanging of Riel. He even brought back a piece of the rope; how he got it and what it probably meant to him is something that makes his great-granddaughter queasy. (It's hard to accept hate as your heritage, as the only intersection between your family history and the larger history of your country.) In my father's boyhood, the hate had already leached away from the rope; it had become colourful, part of what Granddad did in "taming" the West. By the time I was a child, the rope was lost, not even a keepsake any more; that there had once been a piece of this rope was something my father only mentioned to me as I was writing this review. My great-grandfather brought it home so his family would never forget; he couldn't know that what they would finally "remember" was a great injustice. O

Between Past and Present


Mordecai Richler

THIS YEAR IN JERUSALEM
by Mordecai Richler
Knopf, 293 pages, $27.50 cloth (isbn 0 394 28055 5)

Reviewed by Michael Darling

THIS IS THE BOOK THAT Mordecai Richler would have published 30 years ago had he not been too busy at the time writing novels. In 1962, Richler visited Israel and wrote up his experiences in a journal that was published in a three-part series in *Maclean's* under the title "This Year in Jerusalem." A revised version appeared in Richler's first collection of essays, *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* (1968), the working title of which was *This Year in Jerusalem*. The idea for this "new" book then, not to mention a portion of its contents, has been around for a long time.

The idea came to fruition after Richler made a return visit in 1992, with the intention of locating friends and relatives who had made *aliyah* — emigrated to Israel. The structure of the book, which in its constant and frenzied oscillation between past and present resembles nothing so much as that of Richler's later novels, allows for the juxtaposition of the author's perceptions of people and places he encountered 30 years ago with updates on their present-day situations. Richler fills in the gaps with some potted history lessons and sketches of the major Israeli political leaders and movements, but this is not a particularly *political* book. In that respect, it differs strikingly from *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!*, which earned Richler more notoriety than perhaps anything else he has written. *This Year in Jerusalem* does take the position, however tentatively argued, that the Palestinians also have a right to a homeland, but this is an opinion shared by many Jews, and is unlikely to bring down on Richler's head the same howls of execration that greeted his comments on Quebec society.

There is another element to the book that has little to do with the history of Israel but everything to do with Richler's interest in it. Missing from the 1962 journal was any sense of Richler's own past,

his personal involvement with Zionism. And this is precisely the aspect of the book that will likely prove to be of most interest to Canadian readers. His publishers do not mislead when they indicate in the Cataloguing in Publication data that the primary subject of the book is "Richler, Mordecai, 1931– Biography."

In some ways *This Year in Jerusalem* is a sourcebook for Richler's fictional world of St. Urbain Street. Here we encounter the models for many of the characters in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *The Street*, and *St. Urbain's Horseman*, as well as his earliest literary influences. There's Richler's maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg ("the Genius of Skaryszewer"), author of *The Golem of Prague and Other Tales of Wonder*. Richler devotes an entire chapter to the reprinting of one of his grandfather's stories, and mentions that the old man had once taken him on his knee and drawn him a picture of a horseman. His militantly Orthodox paternal grandfather, Shmariyahu Richler, who "once denounced me before an assembled court of aunts, uncles, and cousins as a *Shabbes goy*" and then threw the young Mordecai out of the house, is almost certainly the original of Noah Adler's grandfather, Melech, in *Son of a Smaller Hero*. Uncle Israel and Aunt Vera, once star performers in New York's Yiddish theatre, represented the glamorous world that attracted the young Jake Hersh in *St. Urbain's Horseman*. Mr. Sullivan, his mother's only *goy* boarder, gave young Mordecai a copy of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*: " 'Among other delights,' he said, 'you will find that one of the characters is your namesake.' "

Most fascinating of all is Richler's Baron Byng classmate, here called "Jerry Greenfeld," who introduced Mordecai to Habonim, the Zionist youth organization that gave him his first and lasting impression of what Israel should be. In his boldness and vulgarity, his desperate and fruitless drive to be a somebody, Jerry is Duddy Kravitz, and also in some aspects the elusive Joey Hersh, the Horseman of St. Urbain. Richler recalls his last conversation with Jerry in 1981, in words that might have come out of — or, perhaps, more precisely, gone into — the mouth of the middle-aged Duddy of *St. Urbain's Horseman*:

> Hanna Rosen, I knew her before her nose job. Boy, what a pair! I don't mean hers. I mean them. Hershey and Hanna. He grudgingly pours me a drink. "This isn't ordinary scotch, I'd like you to know. It's a single malt." Glen *tuchis-lecker* or whatever. "Twenty-one years old." And she quickly slips a coaster under my glass, I might leave a watermark on her antique table, for two cents I'd piss all over it.

This Year in Jerusalem is not the book to turn to for informed or impassioned insights into the state of contemporary Israel. Richler is not, as Jonathan Raban has described Saul Bellow, "an intellectual hippo" wallowing in ideas. As a writer, he is more the equivalent of a skilful film editor, someone who takes images and dialogue and puts them together in such a way that his audience cannot miss the point, without him having to actually *make* one. This is also the art of the satirist, whose moral position may always be inferred from what he castigates as *immoral*. Richler's view of the Israelis, not unlike his opinion of Canadians, is that no one whose views are too self-regarding should 'scape whipping. O

Magic and Myth


Gwendolyn MacEwen

THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT events you miss in your life, and regret. For me, it's not an occasion like Woodstock or the Rolling Stones' recent concert in Toronto, but the chance to hear Gwendolyn MacEwen read. Everyone says she brought magic to her performances, and no wonder. Magic was not a party trick for her but a mysterious presence she sensed in the world, be it in Egypt or Canada, Jerusalem or Toronto.

THE POETRY OF GWENDOLYN MACEWEN
Volume One: The Early Years
edited by Margaret Atwood
and Barry Callaghan
E. da Editions, 176 pages, $19.95 paper (ISBN 1 55096 019 9)

THE POETRY OF GWENDOLYN MACEWEN
Volume Two: The Later Years
edited by Margaret Atwood
and Barry Callaghan
Exile Editions, 148 pages, $19.95 paper (ISBN 1 55097 076 8)

Reviewed by Lorna Crozier

For years I had been reading her work with the attention a young poet pays to a master, but by the time I was invited to a festival at Harbourfront where she was also on the program, she did not show up. There were rumours in the audience of stage fright, of alcoholism, of a bad love affair; the image I am left with is the light on the stage after the brief introduction, and no one there.

The next best thing to hearing her is to sit down with her poems and be reminded of the vatic power of her words. Seven years after her death, Exile Editions has published a two-volume selection of her work, including a short excerpt from her novel. The first volume begins with an introduction by Margaret Atwood; the second, with one by Rosemary Sullivan, who has just completed a biography of MacEwen. These, along with the notes that introduce the selections from each of MacEwen's books, establish a context. Their brevity ensures they won't interfere with the reader's own response to the poetry, but they provide directional signs to help us follow this amazing poetic journey, which began when MacEwen was 16 and ended when she was 45.

As you would expect from a collection that draws from all of the published books, the poems are not of equal quality. There are apprenticeship pieces here, such as "For Alick MacEwen: d. 1960," which show us too little about the subject or the poet's stance. In fact, the poem's evasions and abstractions make the last lines "(... it is / time to speak the truth, ... / it is time)" unintentionally ironic.

Poems like this aside, MacEwen is a lyricist of the highest order; there is so much intensity of feeling in her work that you wonder how the lines can contain it. One way they do is through their music. Her poems are so perfectly sounded that many of them, such as "The Children Are Laughing," become incantatory.

Even in her narrative pieces, MacEwen is a muse poet, a poet of inspiration who intimately shares her wide-ranging intelligence and the extravagant creations of her imagination. Though her poems are ultimately optimistic in their engagement with the world and their insistence that Something survives in the midst of Nothing, the word "darkness" is ubiquitous in the two volumes. Appropriately, her last poem concludes:

I hurl
Breathless poems against my lord
Death, send these
Words, these words
Careening into the beautiful darkness.

Her attraction to dark romanticism could seem precious in the hands of a lesser poet, but MacEwen laces her intensity with a playful wit and sexy humour. One of my favourite couplets comes from the collection *Breakfast for Barbarians*: "O baby, what Hell to be Greek in this country / without wings, but burning anyway."

For me, MacEwen's considerable talents all come together in *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*, well represented here,

though I have to wonder at the exclusion of "Ghazala's Foal," one of the strongest pieces. In the sequence she slips inside the skin of T. E. Lawrence and speaks his words in the charged language of poetry. It doesn't get any better.

Perhaps the most striking quality of her work, and the one that is most enviable to young writers, is the confidence of her voice. She never doubted her prophetic role, and her ambitions were huge; in 1966 she claimed "I want to construct a myth." She felt she was born to be a poet. In her first major collection, she writes "Gwen, / the small one, whose first salt scream / heralded more and borrowed excellence."

Reading these two volumes, I was reminded of John Berger's statement that poetry is closer to prayer than it is to prose. With Gwendolyn MacEwen, the marvellous self-assurance of her voice is an expression of faith in poetry's ancient, irrevocable power. O

New Bottle, Old Wine

RIGHT HONOURABLE MEN: The Descent of Canadian Politics from Macdonald to Mulroney
by Michael Bliss
HarperCollins, 320 pages, $28 cloth (isbn 0 00 255071 7)

Reviewed by Clive Cocking

CANADIANS WOULD BE even more ignorant of their history than they're widely lamented to be if it weren't for journalists of the Pierre Berton school writing popular history. Schools have failed at teaching it and academic historians rarely deign to write for the masses. So when one of our scholars emerges from the cloister offering history in plain language without footnotes, he is to be commended.

Michael Bliss, a professor of history at the University of Toronto, merits praise for his contribution — and for opening himself to criticism from his learned peers. Some will likely chide him for unscholarly conduct as a popularizer. Bliss's review of Canada's most important prime ministers is aimed at a general audience in order to counter what he feels is a pervasive low level of knowledge about Canada's political and constitutional evolution. Other colleagues will doubtless rap his lack of political correctness in writing "history from the top down" with these profiles of our great (and not so great) men. But he is undaunted and unrepentant, offering a simple justification: "Individual prime ministers of Canada are, like it or not, the most powerful people in the country." *Touché.*

The 10 profiles in *Right Honourable Men* are interpretive, analytical, and largely self-contained. Through them Bliss aims to discuss some arguments about the thematic evolution of our politics. "*Right Honourable Men*," he writes in the introduction,

> is about the movement of history, politics, and power from the top down in society, as an elite-driven, deference-based British colonial system has matured into a chaotic, individualistic North American democracy.

He concludes (noting the fate of the Charlottetown Accord) that a new populism is forcing leaders to recognize the limits to power.

It sounds good. But (in common with his subjects) Bliss doesn't entirely deliver on his promises. The profiles do stand alone — unfortunately — as the promised thematic discussion emerges only errati-

cally. The book lacks a consistent, unifying line of argument or discussion.

What it doesn't lack is strong opinion. Bliss is not timid in expressing judgements about our prime ministers. Arthur Meighen he puts down as "born to be a lieutenant, not a general," and Brian Mulroney "ought to have been born in Boston about 1900 — he would have made a great Irish mayor." Not surprisingly, there's a degree of historical revisionism here. With a number of his subjects, Bliss criticizes the interpretations of earlier historians and presents his own somewhat different slant.

This adds a bit of spice for the general reader and may well stir up debate among academic historians — if they haven't already heard it all before. It's not surprising that Bliss would rate Mackenzie King and Pierre Trudeau as our two greatest prime ministers, but it is surprising that he would not also include Sir John A. Macdonald. He's placed in the second rank with Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir Robert Borden, and Lester Pearson. To Bliss, it seems, Macdonald's scandals and pork-barrelling politics outweigh his role as nation-builder in establishing Confederation and building the transcontinental railway. It comes dangerously close to judging Macdonald by contemporary political standards.

On the other hand, Bliss's attempt to elevate the reputation of Mackenzie King is debatable for different reasons. At great length, Bliss criticizes the "shabby" treatment Col. C. P. Stacey gave King in his book, *A Very Double Life: The Private World of Mackenzie King*, which was the first to reveal the prim prime minister's contacts with prostitutes, relationships with married women, and involvement with spiritualism. Attacking Stacey for "vulgarizing the image of the man who was Prime Minister of Canada from 1921 to 1930 and 1935 to 1948," Bliss argues that "King's life is not a Jekyll and Hyde epic" and that he was a success both as a politician and a human being.

Most Canadians likely grudgingly accept the ranking of King as a great prime minister, mostly for his political success in governing so long. Few will find credible, as a supporting reason, Bliss's depiction of King as a social reformer, particularly when the text makes clear he pushed through old age pensions only under pressure from Progressive Party and left-wing MPs during his 1925 minority and in the 1940s brought in unemployment insurance and family allowances to counter the rising popularity of the CCF (forerunner of the New Democrats). And not many Canadians (outside Quebec) can yet feel anything but contempt for his weak, waffling ("Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription") leadership during the Second World War. Bliss may succeed in encouraging his colleagues to rehabilitate King; but from the point of view of the rest of us, Mackenzie King will probably remain a boring, timorous, weird man who happened to be one of our most politically successful prime ministers.

This is not really a new debate. That's one of the key problems with the book: the paucity of new perspectives. The unity struggles of Laurier and Borden, and their success in advancing Canadian independence; the populist appeal and incompetence of Diefenbaker; the failure of Pearson, the great diplomat who lacked the necessary toughness of a prime minister; the controversial greatness of Trudeau in fighting separatism and reshaping Canada with a new Charter of Rights–dominated constitution; the political sleaziness and constitutional debacles of Mulroney — it's all here, but without the enrichment of new political or biographical insights. Bliss, as expected, recounts Macdonald's troubles with drink, but other revealing anecdotes are skimmed over (such as the possible affair between Laurier and his law partner's wife) or confined to footnotes (such as Pearson's testy relationship with his ever critical wife, Maryon), material that would present rounder, more human portraits of our prime ministers.

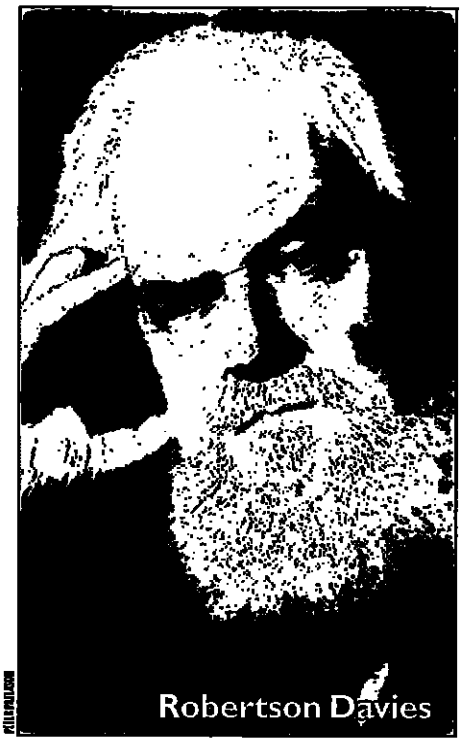
Bliss also fails to adequately elaborate his central theme: that Canada has evolved toward a new populist democracy. The historical basis of the trend, with its major turning points, is not clearly described. Only scant mention is made, for example, of the populist Progressive movement that bedevilled Mackenzie King's first term. Part of the agrarian reform movement that

swept the Prairies, the Progressives fought to cut down big party politics and return power to the people through constituency control, and through introducing elements of direct democracy such as recall and initiative. This movement permanently influenced the political tradition of Western Canada: out of it grew the United Farmers of Alberta, Social Credit, CCF (NDP), and now the Reform Party. What Bliss seems to regard as "new populism" is not that new in the West.

Michael Bliss has achieved his basic goal. Readers with scant knowledge of Canadian history will likely find *Right Honourable Men* interesting and useful. But those familiar with our history will not learn much new about our key prime ministers. It's disappointing that Bliss did not aim higher: with more research and analysis he might have produced a significant contribution to our historical literature. ○

A Snob Story

THIS NEW ROBERTSON Davies novel belongs ostensibly to the murder-mystery genre. A saintly Anglican priest drops dead in the midst of a religious service. Did he die of natural causes, or by poison? Few readers will have trouble guessing the resolution to this matter early on in the book. And it's really not that important — the untimely death isn't much more than a pretext for a certain Doctor Jon Hullah, a Toronto physician, to write a secret journal about (among many other things) his lifelong friendship with Father Charles Iredale, the dead priest's assistant. In the course of Hullah's narration, he makes numerous allusions to that infamous, little-read classic, Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), an encyclopedic, ever-expanding work (in six editions, each substantially longer than its predecessor). Under the guise of analysing a peculiarly Renaissance malady, Burton, with enormous erudition, dissected and satirized every aspect of his world.



Doctor Hullah emulates Burton's *Anatomy* in a number of notable ways. His narrative is just as long as the *Anatomy*. It is just as erudite — like Burton, Doctor Hullah has opinions on any number of subjects (music, theatre, acting, clothes, architecture, and Freudian psychology). It's just as unabashedly digressive, with mini-essays on the history of Toronto, on Anglican ritual, on Platonism, on dreams,

THE CUNNING MAN
by Robertson Davies
McClelland & Stewart, 352 pages, $29.99 cloth
(isbn 0 7710 2581 5)

Reviewed by Eric McCormack

"etc., etc." (as Burton was fond of saying). It's as ironic in tone (there's even a mini-essay on irony itself!) — not much is sacred, even less is spared.

Doctor Hullah even contemplates writing his own *Anatomy*, which he plans to entitle, in honour of Burton, *The Anatomy of Fiction*. One of the most amusing parts of *The Cunning Man* consists of his notes on this project:

> I'm going to apply modern medical theory to the notable characters of literature. Why did Micawber lose his hair? ... What did Jane Eyre, as a governess in a gentleman's house, get to eat? ... We know that Jane Austen was fond of port; does it show up in any of her heroines? ... What conclusions can we draw about the menstrual cycle of Emma Bovary? ... What was the dental condition of the crew of the *Pequod*?

This send-up of postmodernism continues intermittently over the course of many chapters.

But *The Cunning Man* differs from Burton's book in several significant ways. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is, of course, not a novel and so does not have to concern itself about a plot. If the plot of *The Cunning Man* is a little confusing at times, we forgive its putative author, Doctor Hullah. He's a physician, after all, and sees himself as a social historian and commentator, not a novelist.

Which brings me to the matter of characters. Burton's *Anatomy* has only one "character" — Democritus Junior, its eccentric, garrulous, witty, at times acerbic narrator (arguably the spokesman for Burton himself). Doctor Hullah is certainly as garrulous as Democritus Junior, and can be witty and acerbic. Here, for example, is what he says of the interviewing techniques of Esme Barron, a journalist who plays a minor, but important, part in the novel: "She ... does not dig very deep, because if she did so she might blur the clarity of the 'story' she will eventually write for her paper." He is incisive on the perils of teaching the arts at universities, "... where there are so many people, young and old, who love art less than argument."

But Davies's narrator differs from Burton in one very noteworthy way: Doctor Jon Hullah is a snob, and proud of it: "... in my experience snobbery sometimes means no more than a rejection of what is truly inferior." In his journal, and in his conversation, he rarely stoops to use an ordinary word where he can find an impressive one. He's a consummate name-dropper. He has a vaguely condescending air towards everyone, and often sounds like some P. G. Wodehouse caricature of the English upper classes — a pompous Bertie Wooster. He reveals no hidden depths — in fact, he's complacent enough to fit the 17th century better than Burton.

Well, there you have it. For me, at least, *The Cunning Man* is a brilliant portrayal of a type — the old-fashioned Toronto snob the rest of Canada loves to hate. Doctor Hullah is often amusing and knowledgeable and astute. The best of company. At other times, he makes us squirm at his pretensions. "A very queer duck, indeed," says one of his female friends about him, half admiringly. It's hard to disagree with her judgement. ○

Constructive Criticisms

THE OTHER COUNTRY: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro
by James Carscallen
ECW, 500 pages, $40 paper (ISBN 1 55022 163 9)

MARGARET ATWOOD'S FAIRY-TALE SEXUAL POLITICS
by Sharon Rose Wilson
Mississippi University Press/ECW, 350 pages, $45 cloth (ISBN 0 87805 639 4)

Reviewed by Jinnean Barnard

MARGARET ATWOOD AND Alice Munro have made substantial contributions to Canadian literature. Equally prodigious is the criticism — essays, reviews, articles, conferences, etc. — devoted to analysing and interpreting the works of these two writers. Two recent books, James Carscallen's *The Other Country: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro* and Sharon Rose Wilson's *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*, stand apart from much of the existing Munro and Atwood criticism in their strikingly comprehensive treatment of the respective authors' works.

The deceptive simplicity of Munro's short stories is unmasked in Carscallen's study of patterns in her writing. Carscallen's disclosure of the intricacy and complexity of these patterns — in structure, character, naming, images, etc. — draws the reader both into his text and back to Munro's stories. *The Other Country* will appeal to readers who want to learn about Munro's work without wading through difficult theoretical language and concepts that leave them feeling bewildered and beleaguered. In his foreword, Carscallen states that he has "tried to write in plain English" and has "not counted on knowledge that a general reader would not possess or have readily available."

In *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale*

Sexual Politics, Wilson examines Atwood's tactic of using fairy tales to subvert traditional patterns and make political statements about male-female relationships and power politics. For example, Wilson writes that

> Atwood displaces the original plot line so that the silent or marginalized subtext of the female experience is central ... she makes the daughter and mother's feelings and motivations in [the fairy tale] "The Girl Without Hands" the focus of *Life Before Man*.

Wilson reveals the hundreds of fairy tales and motifs that occur and recur in Atwood's writing and, most interestingly, in her artwork. (A number of Atwood's drawings and illustrations are reproduced in the book, which includes 21 colour plates.)

The appendix of *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics* demonstrates the comprehensiveness of Wilson's research. It provides a long list of "Tale Types," including "Wild and Domestic Animals" and "Supernatural or Enchanted Husband (Wife) or Other Relatives" (one of my favourites), and "Motifs" such as magic, under which the subjects range from "Transformation: man to crow" to "Magic Shoes Bear Person Aloft."

Carscallen's findings about Munro and Wilson's discoveries about Atwood are often similar. Carscallen suggests that Munro's writing incorporates truth and reality in a system he calls "sense and sensibility." For Carscallen, "Sense is a relation in which two elements, while remaining distinct and different, join neatly together at the same time." For example, truth "fits" reality. But sensibility is the "world, or anti-world ... in which there are no truces or constitutions, no games with rules ... no 'fit.' "

Sensibility casts into doubt the "relation of image to meaning." Wilson writes:

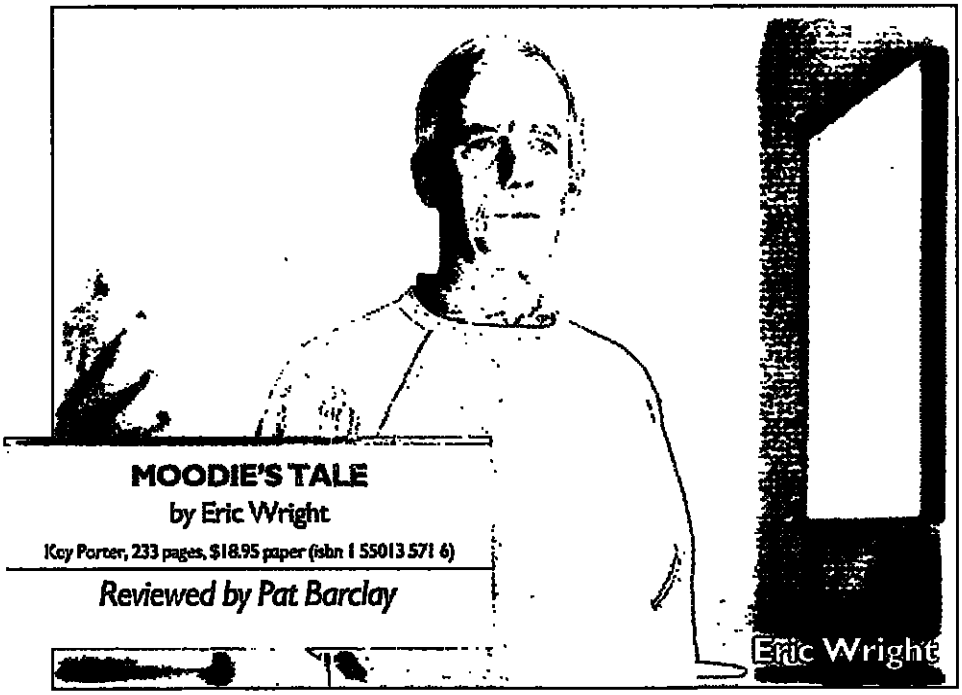
> As in the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom" ... *Bodily Harm* breaks the fictional frame supposedly separating dream or fiction and reality, suggesting the "truth" of fiction or multiple stories of "truth."

Carscallen and Wilson suggest that for both Munro and Atwood, reality as we experience it is a combination of sense and sensibility, fiction and truth.

The two critics also suggest that the writing of Munro and Atwood resonates with other stories. History, myth, the Bible, folklore, and other sources provide "contextual resonances."

A major distinction between Carscallen's and Wilson's work is the way in which they treat the concept of the author. Carscallen maintains that "When it comes to works of literature ... an author's conscious intention is not what matters." Accordingly, his analysis is text-based. Wilson places greater value on the author's interpretation of her own work and thus includes quotations from taped interviews, phone calls, and letters in the surfeit of information she provides about Atwood's work. I wish she hadn't. In describing one of Atwood's paintings, Wilson writes: "Atwood says the woman in Plate 4 is Mary, Queen of Scots, Anne Boleyn, or 'someone like that.'" Or, referring to the untitled collages in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* Wilson quotes Atwood as saying that she "did the watercolour bit and used the other stuff as collage material." Wilson's analyses and interpretations are invariably more informative than Atwood's casual comments. ○

The Grooves of Academe



MAYBE IT'S ALL THOSE years I spent as a close observer and sometime participant in the groves of academe, but I found *Moodie's Tale*, the new novel by Eric Wright, decidedly delicious. In William Moodie, the young Cambridge graduate with an M.A. from Canada's "Simcoe University" (where he researched a thesis on "the insect imagery of Keats's 'juvenilia' "), Wright has created a protagonist who can conduct the reader through the convoluted maze of academic life just as surely as a clever guide can lead a party of fishermen into the wilderness and bring them out again well entertained and perhaps wiser for the experience. It would not be all that surprising, in fact, if *Moodie's Tale* became an underground handbook for anyone contemplating — or currently enmeshed in — an academic career.

Hard up for a job and willing to tackle anything, Moodie becomes a teacher of business correspondence and remedial English at "the W. C. Van Horne Institute of the Technological Arts." There he rises rapidly as the Institute sprouts wings and metamorphoses into a "real" university.

William's surprise at his own success helps make him as likeable to the reader as he is to nearly everyone he meets:

> [He] had always suffered from a chameleon-like appearance of receptivity to ideas, and even ways of life, that were unthinkable to him. Religious maniacs sensed a convert; lechers invited him to hunt in pairs; travelling ladies found him safe, while across the carriage, travelling salesmen winked at his cleverly concealed satyriasis. All the world claimed him as kin.

Well, *almost* all the world. When William is appointed Vice President Academic, for example, the dean of consumer studies (a former cabinet-maker) resigns in a temper to return to teaching:

> He did not wish, he said, to work for some young asshole who knew nothing from nothing except about story books. Next thing, he said, they would all be teaching Winnie-the-goddamn-Pooh.

En route to the top, William encounters eccentric colleagues (such as the Anglo-Saxon specialist who got his job by concealing his past and who obsessively stitches quilts in his spare time, and the 42-year-old male virgin whose visits to a psychiatrist have rather spectacular results), makes friends with an enterprising student who has the workaday world totally figured out, and acquires an agreeably unentangled sexual life with an ambitious young woman from "Clothing Design."

Then, following a section of the novel appropriately headed "Snakes, and Ladders," William's life journey makes a sudden sharp turn. Ahead lie action and fulfilment as he finds the answer to the "immigrant's question" and encounters the "real" Canada.

Wright approaches this novel with an ironic detachment and a satirical eye worthy of Stephen Leacock. When he moves into William's discovery of himself, however, *Moodie's Tale* becomes genuinely adventurous. Maybe, in the process of writing it, Wright became as interested in his hero as is everybody else. O

Two Lives, One Voice

THE TITLE OF JOAN Barfoot's new novel is a synopsis of the story. Two childhood friends, now nearing 70, look back on their lives and choices while arranging a visit with one another. But it is not *that* simple. Charlotte has remained single and is looking back on one particular relationship, a decade-long affair with a married man, Andrew, that took place 30 years ago. Claudia, recently widowed, is examining her marriage to the philandering Bradley. This initial irony — that one friend's romantic adventures were of the sort that made the other's marriage a minefield — is an indication of the point/counterpoint design of the book.

CHARLOTTE AND CLAUDIA KEEPING IN TOUCH
by Joan Barfoot
Key Porter, 260 pages, $19.95 paper (isbn 1 55013 557 0)

Reviewed by Rita Donovan

Stylistically, the chapters alternate between the points of view of Charlotte and Claudia until the last chapter, when the women finally meet. This style highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the novel.

At first it is enticing: the reader dips into the mind of Charlotte, then Claudia, and then weighs their thoughts. The technique allows the author to display the blind spots in each character's understanding of the other. As well, individually, the women have astute comments to make on the nature of love and on their choices in life. Charlotte is more pragmatic, or so it would seem from her decisions and observations, yet she is the one who stakes out her former lover's house, hiding in the bushes hoping to get a hint of how Andrew's life turned out. Claudia, the traditional wife and mother who maintains a home for her four daughters in the midst of her husband's cruel lies, is revealed to be far cooler and more practical than we might ever have imagined. Indeed, the most interesting revelations in the book are those in which the women imagine one another's lives in light of their own experiences. Claudia writes to Charlotte: "You are so lucky, not to have to hold on to certain feelings through sheer *will*. In for the long haul, it's so *necessary*." And Charlotte thinks of Claudia's marriage: "... Bradley didn't care enough about Claudia's reality to temper his."

In fact, Claudia neatly opens up the two principal avenues of choice she and Charlotte have taken while confronting one of Bradley's countless mistresses:

> I understand you're in the midst of a romance, and that does, I expect, tend to obscure the vision somewhat. But I hope you can see that I'm in the middle of a marriage, which is something quite different ....

Still, it is clear that Claudia and Charlotte find they have much in common despite their choices. Ironies, parallels abound.

Unfortunately, the structure of the novel begins to creak under the weight of all these manipulations. The narratives of both Claudia and Charlotte are relentlessly present-tense and stylistically interchangeable. As well, something that might be mentioned once, or couched if repeated, is juxtaposed, bumped up against, and overlaid to the point where it actually distracts the reader. When Charlotte thinks about saints, for example, Claudia follows soon after — too soon after — with a reference to saints. This is perhaps meant to simulate the psychic connectedness of the women, but the reader sees the author at work.

Claudia's reference to her "secret" is a more important example. She actually has one, a big one, and we have it dangled in front of us. It is supposed to play off the childhood secrets the girls used to share (their breast size, etc.). The trouble is that the word itself is bandied about too often and too lightly by the women. Charlotte is described as being a "secret" (to Andrew's wife). Charlotte and Claudia talk about the "secret" to keeping a marriage going. All of this diminishes the potential of Claudia's real secret, which, when revealed, is merely stark in its ugliness.

In the final chapter Claudia visits Charlotte and the rhythm of the novel changes. Two points of view must now share one chapter (although each retains individual segments), and the effect is that of a split screen, with the reader shifting back and forth at an accelerated clip.

Emotional whiplash? Perhaps that's it. Yet despite their closing comments on friendship and their proposed "sort of like a marriage — only without the sex" living arrangement, Charlotte and Claudia seem possibly less self-aware than they were at the beginning. This is too bad. Each had important things to say about love, sexuality, and aging, but somehow the more they explained the less they convinced. ○

Final Act

UNCOMMON WILL:
The Death and Life of Sue Rodriguez
by Lisa Hobbs Birnie and Sue Rodriguez
Macmillan, 180 pages, $24.95 cloth (isbn 0 7715 9091 1)

Reviewed by Anne Denoon

MY HEART SANK AS I read the first page of *Uncommon Will*, for I immediately found myself inside the head of a Vancouver neurologist, Dr. Andrew Eisen, as he prepared, in August, 1991, to inform Sue Rodriguez that she had ALS. Though Lisa Hobbs Birnie's rendering of the doctor's state of mind may well be accurate and based on his own account, I've always had a personal aversion to this omniscient style of reportage.

Fortunately the rest of the book concentrates on the thoughts and emotions of Rodriguez herself, who is credited as co-author. Birnie also provides a complete and fair account of the complex legal, medical, social, and ethical issues raised by Rodriguez's fight for physician-assisted suicide, one that should cause the knees of both right-to-life and right-to-die advocates to pause in mid-jerk. In the process, she demonstrates a truth that probably eludes most of us, as it certainly did Rodriguez when she began her battle: "the law is not ... [a] benevolent social care-giver; nor does it provide sanctuary for personal suffering." But it is Birnie's unflinching yet respectful treatment of the parallel public and private agonies of Sue Rodriguez that makes the book truly haunting.

When she was diagnosed, Rodriguez was the 41-year-old mother of a seven-year-old. She was civilly but firmly estranged from her mother and siblings, her marriage to a younger man had ended six months earlier, and she had just lost her job. She was a complex, demanding person, whose identity, according to her grief counsellor (who spoke with Birnie at Rodriguez's insistence), was "based on anger," despite her public metamorphosis into a stoic Right-to-Die poster girl. (That Rodriguez would later, on television, describe the aforementioned Dr. Eisen as "cold" and "insensitive" may explain why Birnie felt it necessary to document his inward compassion.) *Uncommon Will* shows that Rodriguez's struggle was motivated, at least in part, by a deep need for control, recognition, and perhaps even a kind of love that eluded her in life. She herself saw it as a matter of personal autonomy, and understandably viewed the legal interventions of pro-life activists and physicians, the Catholic Church, advocates for the disabled, and — unkindest cut of all — a few fellow ALS patients, as presumptuous and possibly even vindictive meddling. Despite tremendous emotional pain and physical weakness, she faced down her opponents, and, when necessary, her allies, such as John Hofsess, founder of the Right to Die Society.

Birnie became close enough to her subject to weep as she returned home after their final meeting, in which Rodriguez revealed that her suicide was imminent, but she pulls no punches when describing Rodriguez's tragic end. Almost to the day of her death, she nurtured her rage: towards her mother (who could not even bring herself to speak to her daughter on the telephone during her final weeks), her husband (who had returned to live in the family home, but found a new girlfriend during his wife's last months), and "those institutions" — such as the law – "that would contain her." But whether Sue Rodriguez's final act was the product of resolute courage or angry despair, or of both in equal measure, Lisa Hobbs Birnie's achievement is to show her as fully human. And the power of *Uncommon Will* is the dreadful, nagging question it inevitably poses for each reader: "What would I do, in her place?" ○

Cures Worse than the Disease

BANKRUPT EDUCATION:
The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada
by Peter C. Emberley and Waller R. Newell
University of Toronto, 189 pages, $40 cloth, $17.95 paper (ISBN 0 8020 0435 0 cloth, 0 8020 7224 0 paper)

THE ROAD TO EQUITY:
Gender, Ethnicity and Language; Impolitic Essays
by Brian Lee Crowley
Stoddart, 173 pages, $17.95 paper (ISBN 0 7737 5640 X)

Reviewed by Ted Whittaker

HERE ARE TWO SLIM, owlish volumes proposing sweetly reasonable solutions to emotionally governed crises in our social and intellectual life.

Peter C. Emberley and Waller R. Newell's *Bankrupt Education* is not the diagnosis and prescription the Canadian educational system requires. Many public schools are adequate, passably teaching reading, writing, and math and doing a pretty good job of fostering co-operation and of discouraging violence and racism. But the authors look at the public schools from a certain height. They decry destreaming, for example, on the grounds that little star-screwers will be frustrated by having to learn at the rate of the less intel-

ligent and may be saddled with the responsibility of helping them along.

This is a crock. Parents who want to make sure their didkums' abilities are being fully developed provide an extra mental stimulus at home. Many teachers are thrilled, not threatened, by smart students and give them extra work to do on their own. In Toronto, the current stress on co-operative learning and team initiative is more salutary than malignant. Very few students deprecate those who, even if they cannot understand everything, at least try to, and work hard anyway. And big achievers often find their way into "extended French" or even "French immersion." This is streaming by another name.

Civilization and the dangers to it concern Emberley and Newell greatly. The middle third of their book is a potted history of western educational thought:

> ... Canada was a Victorian founding, not an Enlightenment founding. The primacy of rights was mitigated by a certain primacy of groups. To see this, we can compare Thomas Jefferson's optimism about the joint progress of scientific and moral enlightenment with George Etienne Cartier's altogether more Burkean and Hegelian notion of organicism in both the natural and social worlds, implying that a pattern of historical community must sometimes take precedence over the universal rights deduced by Newtonian reasoning.

That ignorance of these Dead White Males is general today does not prove much about the schooling of children. Nineteenth-century children likely didn't learn a lot about the great DWMs either, except as their thoughts were filtered meagrely through the words of classroom teachers. But, the authors claim, they received a moral education.

The last few chapters of *Bankrupt Education* take us back to the foundations of Canadian education. They are the book's most convincing pages, a gentle argument against what Emberley and Newell fear most — what they consider progressive education's millenarian thirst for individual perfection — and in favour of the ideals of symmetry and balance.

Despite the horrid possibility that the heads of today's teachers are filled with Marx, Freud, Levi-Strauss, the Frankfurt school, the structuralists and the deconstructionists (against all this I'd give long odds), kids in school are shown how to behave morally. They still learn to think, if they pay attention. They can't spell, their grammar is bad, and they don't know where a far-off country is unless some TV-illustrated crisis is occurring there (score three for Emberley and Newell); their knowledge of the past is woeful, but so was mine at their age. They are a lot more sensitively aware of other cultures than kids used to be. For all its goofiness and misplaced enthusiasms, progressive education is doing something right.

In *The Road to Equity*, Brian Lee Crowley would debunk what he considers social superstitions: men's violence is worse than women's violence; disadvantaged minorities need and deserve affirmative action to right the wrongs of social, economic, and educational inequality; men earn more than women, an instance of inequality that must be rectified; the Canadian constitution is a political instrument to help right these and other wrongs.

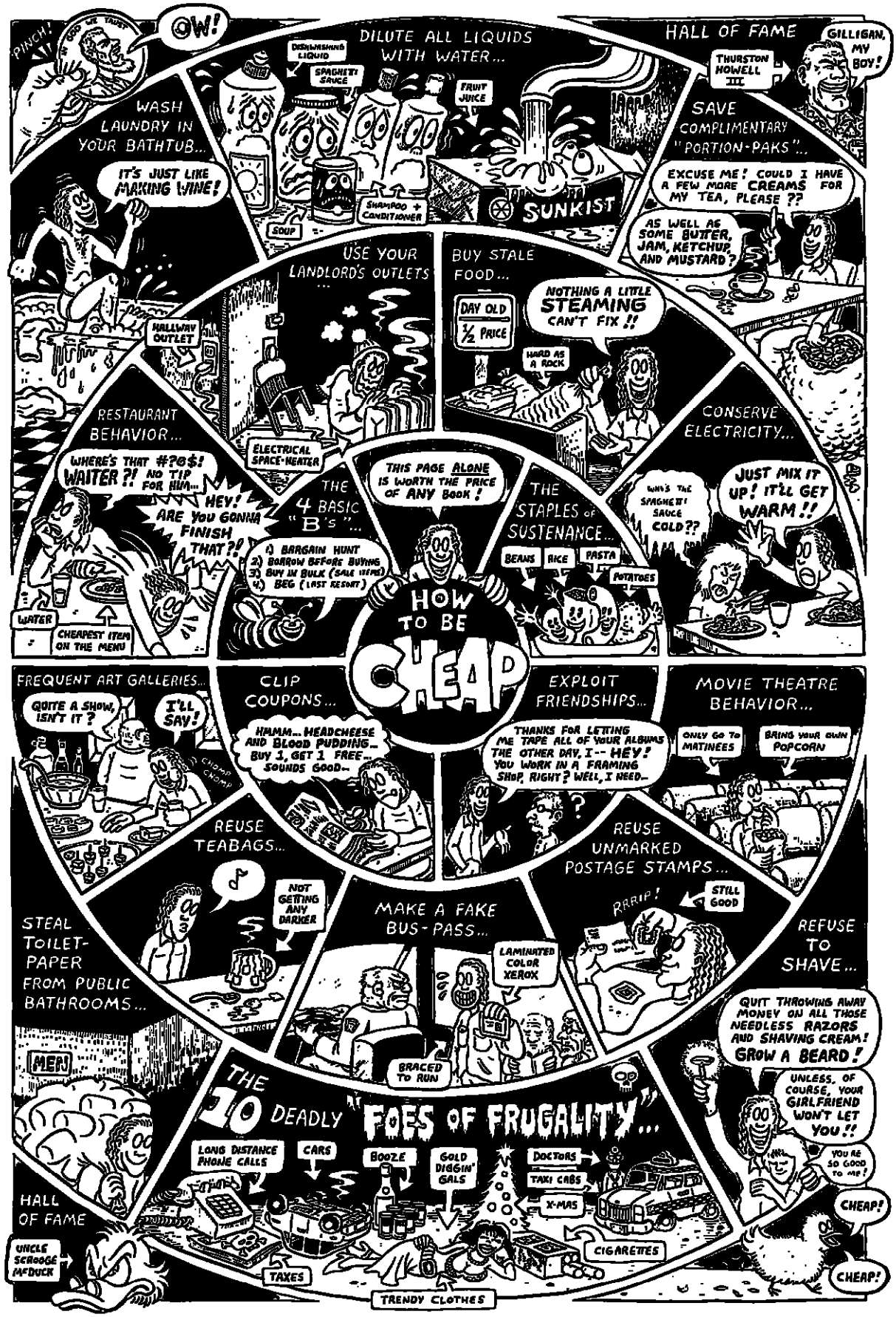
Crowley's mildly qualified libertarianism allows him to admit the limited worth of pressure groups, but he blithely insists that the law must treat everyone equally and individually. However, laws are often made to benefit their makers and are changed as a result of collective agitation that alters the perception of justice and thereby the political climate. He observes that pay-equity advocates, judging from the perceived absence of an abstract, just, and equitable distribution of income, illogically posit discriminatory injustice where income is concerned. (I'd hate to hear him on the subject of welfare.) And where language and ethnicity are at issue, he would have our constitution do sweet nothing:

> The practical solution is to renounce substantive visions altogether ... every idea of what Canada is and can be is recognized implicitly but solidly in the still and quiet air of a delightful constitutional silence.

The corollary proposal that there can then be a minimalist government and legal system to which each citizen may equally and freely appeal against force and fraud is a facet of the Big Lie. We do not live in a from-the-beginning situation. We are heterogeneously linked, with greatly varied access to power, with widely disparate initiatives and desires.

Rather than generously countenance the levelling, regulatory, public power of government to discourage mischief and succour frailty, Crowley would merely supplant this function by general access to the free market's opportunities. (The last chapter of *The Road to Equity* summarizes the thought of another DWM, the free-market economist, social theorist, and Nobel laureate Friedrich Hayek.)

Privileged citizen of a young, improbable, fortunate country largely owned by foreigners and in grave danger of fracture, Crowley remains improbably optimistic about the force of voluntary associations — especially markets — for the general good, "when they operate against the backdrop of a proper set of legal institutions." O


HOW TO BE CHEAP
OW!
PINCH!
WASH LAUNDRY IN YOUR BATHTUB...
IT'S JUST LIKE MAKING WINE!
DILUTE ALL LIQUIDS WITH WATER...
DISHWASHING LIQUID
SPAGHETTI SAUCE
FRUIT JUICE
SHAMPOO + CONDITIONER
SOUP
SUNKIST
HALL OF FAME
THURSTON HOWELL III
GILLIGAN, MY BOY!
SAVE COMPLIMENTARY "PORTION-PAKS"...
EXCUSE ME! COULD I HAVE A FEW MORE CREAMS FOR MY TEA, PLEASE??
AS WELL AS SOME BUTTER, JAM, KETCHUP, AND MUSTARD?
USE YOUR LANDLORD'S OUTLETS...
HALLWAY OUTLET
ELECTRICAL SPACE-HEATER
BUY STALE FOOD...
DAY OLD
½ PRICE
NOTHING A LITTLE STEAMING CAN'T FIX!!
HARD AS A ROCK
RESTAURANT BEHAVIOR...
WHERE'S THAT #?@$! WAITER?! NO TIP FOR HIM...
HEY! ARE YOU GONNA FINISH THAT?!
WATER
CHEAPEST ITEM ON THE MENU
THE 4 BASIC "B's"...
1) BARGAIN HUNT
2) BORROW BEFORE BUYING
3) BUY IN BULK (SALE ITEMS)
4) BEG (LAST RESORT)
THIS PAGE ALONE IS WORTH THE PRICE OF ANY BOOK!
THE STAPLES OF SUSTENANCE...
BEANS
RICE
PASTA
POTATOES
CONSERVE ELECTRICITY...
WHY'S THE SPAGHETTI SAUCE COLD??
JUST MIX IT UP! IT'LL GET WARM!!
FREQUENT ART GALLERIES...
QUITE A SHOW, ISN'T IT?
I'LL SAY!
CHOMP CHOMP
CLIP COUPONS...
HMMM... HEADCHEESE AND BLOOD PUDDING... BUY 1, GET 1 FREE... SOUNDS GOOD...
EXPLOIT FRIENDSHIPS...
THANKS FOR LETTING ME TAPE ALL OF YOUR ALBUMS THE OTHER DAY, I-- HEY! YOU WORK IN A FRAMING SHOP, RIGHT? WELL, I NEED...
MOVIE THEATRE BEHAVIOR...
ONLY GO TO MATINEES
BRING YOUR OWN POPCORN
REUSE TEABAGS...
NOT GETTING ANY DARKER
REUSE UNMARKED POSTAGE STAMPS...
RRRIP!
STILL GOOD
STEAL TOILET-PAPER FROM PUBLIC BATHROOMS...
MEN
MAKE A FAKE BUS-PASS...
LAMINATED COLOR XEROX
BRACED TO RUN
REFUSE TO SHAVE...
QUIT THROWING AWAY MONEY ON ALL THOSE NEEDLESS RAZORS AND SHAVING CREAM! GROW A BEARD!
UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOUR GIRLFRIEND WON'T LET YOU!!
YOU'RE SO GOOD TO ME!
CHEAP!
CHEAP!
THE 10 DEADLY "FOES OF FRUGALITY"...
LONG DISTANCE PHONE CALLS
CARS
BOOZE
GOLD DIGGIN' GALS
DOCTORS
TAXI CABS
X-MAS
CIGARETTES
TAXES
TRENDY CLOTHES
HALL OF FAME
UNCLE SCROOGE McDUCK

Briefs

Fiction

LYNNETTE D'ANNA's personal struggles have clearly played a valuable role in her development as a novelist. She claims that writing her first book, *sing me no more*, facilitated her inner healing and helped her deal with her own abusive relationships and substance addiction. Although less personal, her second novel, **RagTime Bone** (New Star, 183 pages, $16 paper), echoes with similar preoccupations. It depicts a complex web of relationships and sexual discovery, and is compelling in its drama, moving in its honesty, and satisfying in its outcome.

D'anna focuses on three main female characters, Pearce, Sage, and Rita, whose lives become deeply entangled. In a world where homosexual and heterosexual passions collide, Pearce and Sage share an intimacy until Pearce abandons her. Taking advantage of Sage's vulnerability, Rita pursues her, only to learn that Sage's indecision about her sexual orientation will lead to perpetual conflict. Each character has suffered either emotional or sexual abuse as a child. A lack of affection or stability later leads them to rely, even if only for brief periods, on alcohol or drugs. D'anna crafts a convincing story, knowing where to draw the line between what is realistic and what is sensational.

A master of dialogue, D'anna creates characters who are strikingly real. Her one over-indulgence, a primary emphasis on graphic sexual detail, seems an unnecessary tactic in an already powerful and moving story.

Carolyne A. Van Der Meer

RICHARD CUMYN's **The Limit of Delta Y over Delta X** (Goose Lane, 202 pages, $14.95 paper) is an uneven collection of 13 short stories, written in prose that is at times precise and exacting, at others heavy-handed and laboured. In "Ladies' Ball," for example, we learn too late that David is mourning his lost youth; it's never made clear why David quit baseball as a child, or how the game is relevant to his adult life. As a result, what's lost is the poignancy of David's final epiphany:

> His cheek felt chilled against the scuffed hill of sand, the cool, packed earth of his childhood. The sting of the hardball was in his palm again. He stretched, reaching for his boyhood again, mourning the long, dry span of lapse.

"A Transaction" is equally unsatisfying: only in the final paragraph of the story do we discover that the mysterious "she" who shouldn't have been out walking alone at the story's beginning is the daughter of Dixon Carlisle, the main character. Flat out on his back in metaphoric agony, Dixon realizes "It was never going to be the way it was. His daughter was not coming back. She was dead."

To be fair, Cumyn has a good ear for dialogue; and both "How Do You Expect to Make Your Way," an examination of the cyclical nature of child abuse, and "Anyone for Anything," a brilliant glimpse of what the neighbours are up to, show how effective his work can be when he allows his characters to speak for themselves, rather than foisting his own weighty conclusions on us.

Debbie Howlett

Non-Fiction

THE Saskatchewan writer David Carpenter describes his new book, **Writing Home** (Fifth House, 177 pages, $14.95 paper), as a miscellany of essays bound together only by his conviction that "all ... writing, all consciousness, is in some way defined by the place we call home." The title of one, "Geopiety," is fittingly borrowed from religious terminology and reflects this reverence for place. In it, Carpenter relates Dennis Lee's notion of Earth versus world to the ages-old concept of eros vs. logos. Another essay examines Prairie writing of the 1920s and '30s for evidence of matriarchal vs. patriarchal viewpoints. Elsewhere, Carpenter talks of the role of writer vs. author. Concern with the balancing of "earth" and "world" forces, in their many forms, runs through the book.

Carpenter adopts "the plain style" to reflect his belief that "book-talk needs to be restored to the common reader." Short, lively opinion pieces and literary criticism alternate with personal memoirs. There's a captivating account of a visit to Saskatoon by Raymond Carver and Richard Ford and the goose-hunt they are taken on in a virtual hurricane.

Carpenter casts a fresh eye on the work of many Canadian writers, including Atwood, Richler, Davies, Laurence, Mitchell, and Sinclair Ross. The "wilderness" writing of French-born Georges Bugnet, an early settler in Alberta, is also explored for its geopious wisdom.

If subtlety is occasionally forfeited in the interest of plain talk in *Writing Home*, what is never lost is an honest passion for writing and the place that David Carpenter calls home.

Helen Hacksel

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM, guest conducting the Toronto Symphony in 1956, made the rare gesture of spontaneously turning to the audience and telling them "It's always a pleasure for me to conduct your orchestra. It is one of the best-trained orchestras in the world and I hope that you appreciate your great conductor, Sir Ernest MacMillan." It

is doubtful that the audience did then or that Canadian music lovers remember MacMillan with sufficient fondness even today. But as a conductor of the Toronto Symphony for 25 years and of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir for 15 years, as a conservative composer of music in diverse genres, as an estimable organist and pianist, as a prolific writer, as principal of the Toronto Conservatory of Music and dean of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, and as an arts administrator of seminal import, Sir Ernest MacMillan (1893–1973) exerted more influence on the musical life of this country than any Canadian before him.

In **Sir Ernest MacMillan: The Importance of Being Canadian** (University of Toronto Press, 320 pages, $35 cloth) Ezra Schabas, the former principal of the Royal Conservatory of Music, fails despite all of his admirable research (and his fondness for exclamation marks) to give us a fully satisfactory sense of MacMillan. Music lovers (and who else reads biographies of conductors?) would especially like to know what made Macmillan's interpretations special and how they differed from readings by other conductors. Nevertheless, Schabas's biography, with its dry but lucid prose, and its admiring but reasonably objective stance, does offer a coolly fascinating document of the cultural, political, and academic life in which MacMillan succeeded so well, and to which the conductor/administrator contributed so prodigiously. As an informative history of the 20th-century Canadian music scene, and particularly of the TSO and Toronto conservatory, Schabas's work will serve as a valuable document. And ineluctably, most readers will come to recognize that MacMillan was much more than an earnest leader of now stylistically outdated Bach passions; he was a precocious musician of rare intelligence and cogent force.

Richard Perry

Poetry

IN **Swerve** (Arsenal Pulp, 152 pages, $12.95 paper), Sheri-D Wilson catapults poetry out of its strictures, placing it noisily on stage. Lines here are barely contained, and as readers we juggle shifting fonts, propelled by the impetus of complex rhythm and rhyme.

This book includes highly theatrical performance pieces: "Hung Drawn & Quartered," which follows Mea Culpa Carmen and Lord Trustworthy as they "circumnavigate shifting oceans of human bondage in their Relation-Ship," and "Taboo X Two," featuring Salmon and Boeing Bird in telepathic near-misses, about which "The key word is CAMP, and I do mean IT UP." The writing is kinetic and engaging, though the political edge sometimes gets overwhelmed by commotion.

In her "Poem-o-logues," Wilson's tough wit finds a clearer social positioning. "The Brain Wash" challenges the deadened imagination and conscience that precipitated the Gulf War media event. "The Mamas of Dada" has an overtly feminist agenda:

The Mamas of Dada
The Womans Man-ifesto
Surrealling at their best-o
No more machismo manifesto
O No
The Mamas of Dada are writing
their
names
It's time we heard the surrealling
dames, names
("The Mamas of Dada")

Wilson is passionate and provocative, never dour. *Swerve* swerves, but it doesn't miss.

Charlene Diehl-Jones

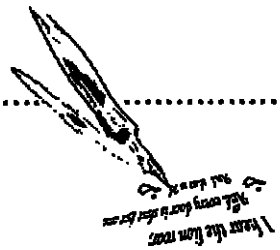
FOR YEARS, the plight of the Prairie farmer has been well documented in the mainstream media, but economics is generally the major focus of such stories. With **ed and mabel go to the moon** (Oolichan, 76 pages, $11.95 paper), the Winnipeg-born poet Aaron Bushkowsky attempts a more meaningful analysis of the situation, and the result is a highly readable and moving series of linked poems.

By concentrating on the relationship of one married couple to their Prairie farm and to each other, Bushkowsky accomplishes much more than a journalistic record of economic despair: his compassionate, detailed portraits of his characters' inner lives reveal a world of simple dignity, small joys, and occasional heartache, in which the land itself acts as a third person. Indeed, the way the poet captures this intense relationship between the couple and their environment (in poems such as "dusting" and "mabel's sunset") shows considerable artistry. The effects he creates are subtle and quiet, invested with the same shimmering stillness as the Prairie itself: "the mirage ranges / rearranges floats softly / across pastures."

However, this stillness also keeps the poems from reaching a high level of lyric intensity. The unpunctuated style, while achieving some nice rhythms, sometimes becomes prosaic. And the poet's use of simile and metaphor rarely results in a truly memorable line.

Nevertheless, Bushkowsky's honesty, his ability to engage the reader in the lives of his characters, his flair for colloquial language, and his obvious affection for the subject ultimately give *ed and mabel go to the moon* an emotional depth that overcomes its few stylistic weaknesses.

Tim Bowling



BY MAURICE MIERAU

Thin and Rich

AS WE ADVANCE FURTHER INTO THE nasty '90s, there seem to be more and more Canadian poets who don't have a very clear idea why they are writing poetry, but continue to publish relentlessly. And in the absence of nationalism, tradition, talent, or passion, the literary presses roll on, spending their grant moneys with the regularity of German trains.

Laurence Hutchman's **Foreign National** (Agawa, 78 pages, $10.95 paper) fits the mould of competent banality that exhausts the language and the attention span. There is interesting material in Hutchman's exploration of his past, but there doesn't seem to be any dedication to poetry as an important form for this material. In "The Garden" Hutchman has to tell us that "the angel rose in a Biblical vision," in case we miss the reference. Dogged literalism has a way of infecting even simple attempts to reproduce dialogue, as in "Frank," which is set in the Billy Bishop Legion in Vancouver: "I regretted ... resented the absence of family / and so looked to *them*" a character says. This stiffly artificial, soap-operatic dialogue is so flat on the page it's almost funny.

In "The Farm" Hutchman borrows his language from a tourist brochure: "Follow the river among the gold gleaming islands / to the quiet shores of Prince Edward County / north to this rocky land." "A Child's History of Stamps" attitudinizes in the most obvious, romantic way: "Yet it was not the faces, but the politics of stamps: / the Hungarian Revolution painted / on faded brown cloth, blood staining the print."

"Don't overdress words," someone mouths in "The Weight," and this obsession with avoiding the ornate and sticking to the plain results in a measurable shallowness. Everything here is reducible to prose, and often it comes prepackaged that way to save the reader the trouble of decoding it. It's not that Hutchman can't write, either. "Elegy for Clara" has some eloquent moments, and the last poem of the collection, "Midnight," contains some elegantly written prose: "Already the drum of the clock is fading and the piano plays softly like a cardiogram." The real question is why this isn't part of a larger piece of prose. Occupying a poetic form should be a bit like a military exercise, carried out smoothly but with grim commitment. I don't see any evidence of commitment here.

In Katherine Beeman's epigraph to **Direct and Devious Ways** (The Muses' Company, 80 pages, $10 paper) she quotes — apparently with a straight face — a young John Berger on "the world struggle against imperialism." The back cover also informs us that Beeman is "an active member of the Confederation of National Trade Unions," so we know that we'll be treated to some obsolete ideology recycled as Art. Just as second-rate novels often make excellent films, though, obsolete ideologies can still take on new life as poetry. While this may be true in theory, Beeman is preoccupied with her intellectual clichés at the expense of any poetry that might otherwise have resulted.

In "Different positions," Beeman describes "the first time at seventeen ... no words other than what I'd read in *Seventeen* or the *Ladies' Home Journal* / They weren't my words ... dissatisfied with the forms and the words but knowing no others." Here Beeman sets up an opposition between the bourgeois, inauthentic language of *Seventeen*, etc., in describing a first sexual experience and the inexpressible poetic grittiness of her real-life experience. Funny thing is, poetic grittiness sounds just as inauthentic and clichéd as the magazines did: "Sweet surges of the sea against stones, filling the canals." This is a familiar intellectual contortion of the left, and it is rooted in a deep contempt for popular culture: unfortunately the left has no oxygen of profundity with which to fill the pop-culture vacuum.

In "Winning prizes" Beeman tries to write a poem about Sylvia Plath — a task that is fraught with danger:

Bright young girl of the '50's
who wrote English like the English
four books of poems
letters home and a journal with
omissions.

The banality of the language suggests nothing so much as banality of feeling. Beeman stirs up more excitement for Milton Acorn in "Choices for the evening" than she ever could for Plath — "Now you share the ground / with Villon / and with Brecht." Holding up Milton Acorn this way is a comparison that will surely only be made in Canada, but at

least there are signs of life here.

The tired lefty posturing continues in "To Roque Dalton," where Beeman notes that "Revolution / is serious business / a dangerous game. / Poetry, more so." Sheltered North American "revolutionaries" are always delighted to hear that some revolutionary martyr also wrote poems. It makes poetry seem *relevant*, and that's comforting, even though it is a relevance entirely alien to our own shopping-mall culture.

Judith Krause, like Laurence Hutchman, shows a definite talent for prose and no commitment at all to the genre she's writing in. **Half the Sky** (Coteau, 88 pages, $9.95 paper) has the characteristic monotony of what some critics have called the "Prairie anecdotal" mode, which apparently refers to writers and readers whose attention spans are too short for anything but one-page poems.

"Hands" is a very prosaic meditation on a "phobia" about hands that is vaguely literary in origin: "Mine are big for a woman, with stumpy fingers prone to / puffiness. Not graceful or long nailed, rather / hands built for work, hard work ...." There are a few pieces, such as "Reasons," that are effective because of simple, repetitive rhetorical structure: "because I am three years older than you / because my mother says she likes you / because I'm not scared to live alone ...." But there are many more poems — like "Scare, "Sharing the Rent," and "Wings" — that make you wonder what made the writer and editor call these very short stories poems. In a few cases the poems are not even good anecdotes.

Krause does have potential as a short-story writer. "Connections" is dire and amusing, almost like Raymond Carver as filtered through Robert Altman:

He'll complain about his second wife's lack of financial acumen and ask me out for dinner. The man sitting across the aisle will interrupt. He performed my best friend's abortion and atones for his past by attending religious retreats for alcoholics. Soon I'll be on his list of patients and want to talk about how we are all one, reborn and eager to stay connected.

Anne Cimon's **No Country for Women** (Mosaic, 96 pages, $10 paper) suffers from some uneven editing, but here is a poet who occupies her form with some assurance. Especially in the first section there is some greeting-card language, as in "Curl of Smoke": "A wisp of smoke, a wish of love, / curls in the present / leading to the future unknown." But Cimon hits her stride after the first few pages. She has an enjoyable dry wit, and she is often moving; the language can be simple, repetitive, and even anecdotal, and she still makes it work. I quote "Emily and Others Like" in full here to show Cimon's epigrammatic wit and concision at work:

No one seeks the spinster:
dry seed, worm glow
recluse of discipline.

Lost in her garden of thorns,
she longs for praise
and wild purple roses.

Tracks in the Snow (Oolichan, 78 pages, $11.95 paper) is something like Ralph Gustafson's 30th book of poetry; it has that sureness of touch that comes from real talent and much practice.

Gustafson's world view is starkly but not suffocatingly pessimistic. In "Sufficient for the Day," "we are on our own, rattled into oblivion." Even when he deals with folk materials, Gustafson doesn't romanticize; in "Snorri's Saga," he describes how an Icelandic poet is "cut ... down in the cellar, unarmed. / Defenseless. Poetry useless this time." In the face of this bleakness, Gustafson still has a poetic energy reminiscent at times of William Carlos Williams:

Solution to Acrostic #65

"Canadian politics had been reduced almost entirely to symbols and illusion, serving to confuse and confound the public. What the political and business leaders said they were doing more often than not seemed out of step with what they actually did."

Above the Law, by Paul Palango (M&S)

The earth's four corners lean. All over
The fairground kids ride summer
rides,
Trains rock round, arrive on time!
("The Day Dawn Came")

Philip Gardner's **Talking to Ghosts** (Breakwater, 63 pages, $9.95 paper) is more old-fashioned than any of the other books in this review. Gardner, an expatriate Englishman who's now teaching in Newfoundland, reads almost like a '50s modernist; his work is bound up in a rich linguistic past. The collection has a bit of a grab-bag feel to it, but there is a definite commitment to the form.

Gardner's ear for language is musical and sensitive. In "For Earle Birney in St. John's" he writes: "Lays of a last / Wandering minstrel, wreathed / In the spring leis of our applause." It's a pleasure, in the self-denying linguistic desert of Canadian poetry, to see someone using a word that sends you to the *OED* as "leis" did for me. Gardner has chosen not just a difficult word, but the perfect one — and that's the only excuse allowed.

While some of the work here seems introspectively nostalgic in a way that shuts out the reader, there is also much to enjoy. Gardner has done the right thing with his ghosts, bringing them into the present with the richness of his language. ○

BY MAUREEN McCALLUM GARVIE

States of Chaos

"EVERY WORD HAS ITS GHOSTS — MEMOries, mirrors, and scraps" declares an epigraph in Diane's Schoemperlen's **In the Language of Love** (HarperCollins, 320 pages, $24 cloth). Out of such "scraps" Schoemperlen creates a kinetic collage in 100 meticulously crafted chapters, each drawn in order from 100 stimulus words of a 1910 psychological test — words such as "child," "swift," "carpet," "scissors," "sleep." A chapter may focus in at any point in the life of the central character, a youngish woman named Joanna (Schoemperlen began her career in the West before returning to Ontario; Joanna takes a similar path); yet the narrative advances steadily, taking us through to a sense of resolution.

Following several fine books of short stories (the last, *The Man of My Dreams*, was nominated for the Governor General's Award), *In the Language of Love* continues Schoemperlen's preoccupation with the heart. And although the last chapter is "Fear," a final curtsey to fate, this book moves beyond the sadly unsuitable men and wry, disappointed women of many of the stories to Joanna's memories of her mother, father, lovers, husband, and son. Besides the 100 words, the novel makes use of other lists and miscellaneous means of ordering chaos, including a self-help book Joanna once read that said "being happy was largely a matter of deciding to be happy." Not easy in the world these characters come from, a post-war Canada of bad weather and tasteless meals, a culture so banal that women like Joanna's mother are angry all the time, with nothing to pass on to their daughters but bitterness and the two central clichés of Canadianness: clean your plate as other children in the world are starving, and keep your underwear tidy in anticipation of being hit by a bus.

Joanna leaves home to cut a better deal: a career as an artist, love, middle-class comforts, lots of sex. She moves from the sexual transcendence of a desperate affair to a stable, loving marriage and motherhood. A decision to be happy, an act of will, becomes a spiritual shift from a place of sorrow and anger to a state of grace. Joanna makes the decision, knowing she must protect it from a Canadian God who, when he gets around to it, may yet ask her who she thinks she is. At 320 pages, *In the Language of Love* is a substantial work, a bid to take Schoemperlen closer to the pantheon of Atwood, Munro, Shields, and Gallant. My feeling is that, for all her skill, she must ultimately move on to broader, deeper ground to get there.

I regret that Charles Foran must put up with two reviews by the same critic; I have already reviewed his novel **Kitchen Music** (Cormorant, 343 pages, $14.95 paper) in another publication. Fortunately I admired it, though coming to it a second time, I had reservations about its parallel plot-lines. Foran's previous book, *Sketches in Winter*, a memoir of Tiananmen Square's aftermath, was enthusiastically reviewed; his first novel, the stories of a Toronto man, Patrick Keane, and his "companion," a Vietnamese woman named Hia Thi Loi, is also impressive.

Pat and Hia go to Ireland ("Vietnam is too difficult," Hia says), to Dingle, the village where Patrick's father died 30 years before. Both seek in an older culture something unavailable in a new country. Patrick accepts Hia's belief that he is emotionally damaged by his fatherlessness; in Dingle's rented rooms, pubs, and docks, its landladies and fiddlers, he finds a past, and a voice in the esoteric fiddle music that was his father's passion. But Hia too has a past to recover, a tragic and violent one; her escape was made at the expense of her mother's life. As Foran tells this story in counterpoint with Patrick's progress through Celtic *angst*, the brilliance of the writing manages to impose a cohesion between the two. But it is imposed, not organic: part of the problem for me is the opening, a puzzling scene of Patrick's father, Michael, battling the sea and his own wild, destructive spirit, which is fuelled with alcohol, followed by Patrick's childhood recollection of mangling pop tunes with his Québécois mother. I was well into the third or fourth scene before the tale took hold.

Surface Tension (Guernica, 324 pages, $15 paper), by the Montreal writer Marisa de Franchesci, follows in flashbacks the story of an Italian-born woman from her emigration to Canada as a child to the point that her son leaves home to study in Italy. The early scenes have a grim — almost Grimm — edge, as Margherita's parents and her cousin Tito struggle in the clutches of a witchy great-aunt to make a life. We progress to the greasy agonies of late '50s teenage mating-

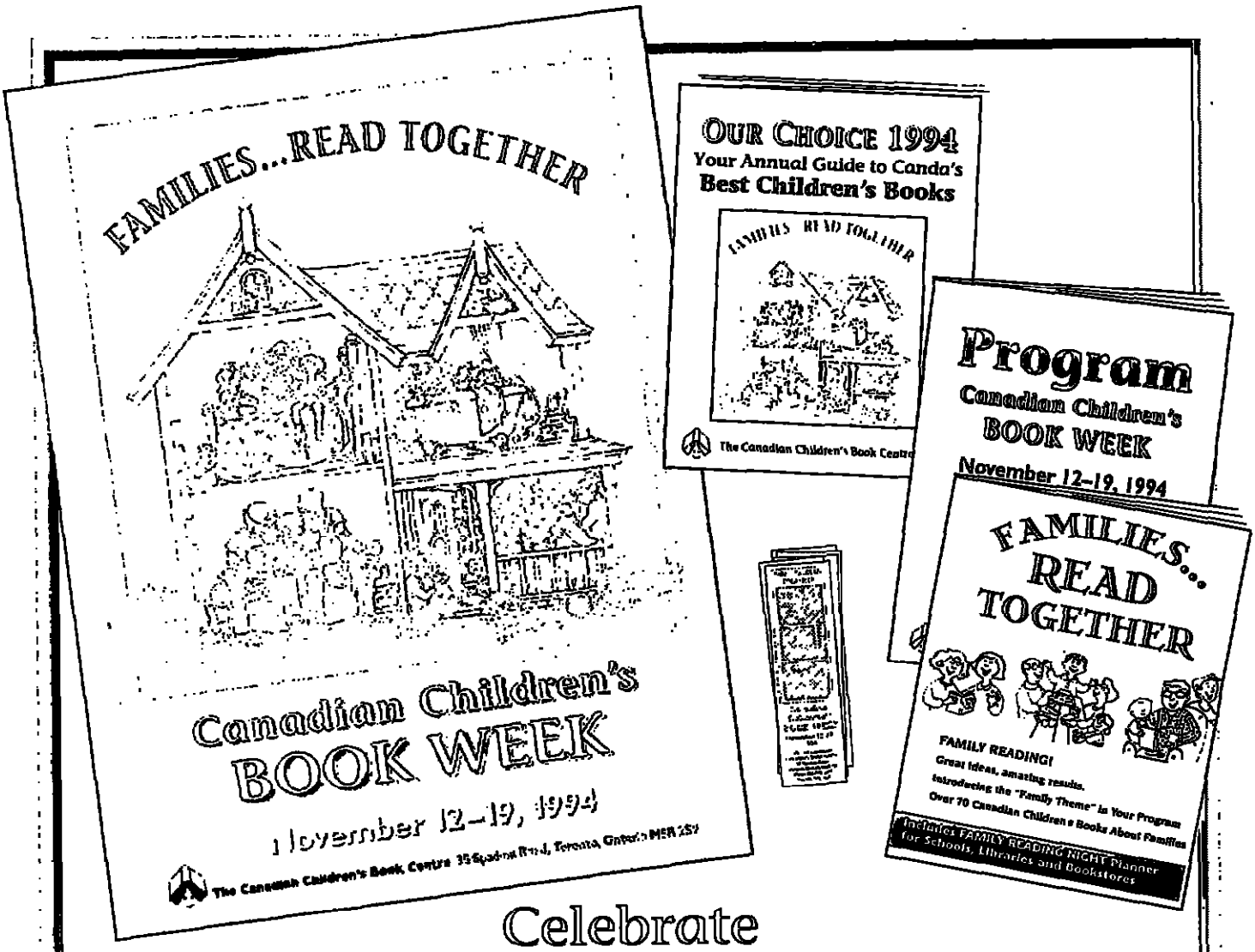
rituals, and then, unfortunately, with the great romance of Margherita/Margaret's life, skirt dangerously close to Harlequin country. Romantic Italian interludes verge on travel journalese as Margaret finds true love in Daniel, a subtle, sexy Italian lover. But then there's Steve, her insensitive bourgeois husband — a "good man." Guilt makes her too kind: with his nude mesh underwear and obsession to control, Steve is awful, and though he's a successful accountant, he can't add up the weeks between his wife's ostensible impregnation and their son's birth. (Guernica's copy-editing can be just as sloppy.) There is, however, promise here: the scenes of sexual abuse — brutal, lascivious men pressing attentions on a baffled child — are skilfully handled, and integrated well into the psychology and actions of the central character.

Ann Love's **Grizzly Dance** (Key Porter, 281 pages, $18.95 paper), a straight-up mystery, is set in Tsehki Junction, a tiny Yukon community near the borders of British Columbia and Alaska. Tsehki is not, Love points out, "Carcross or Teslin or Bennett ..." but a fictional place drawing on strong memories. Her Warren Tasker is a young RCMP corporal assigned to weekend duties in his old home town, but even before he gets there, he finds trouble — a Native demonstration outside the local mine. Then there's a suspicious death: Blake McIntyre, pony-tailed environmentalist, floats into town in his overturned kayak, tangled in illegal nets. The sergeant in charge, due shortly to retire, calls it an accidental death, but more incidents follow: the looting of the doctor's office, the theft of explosives from a locked supply shed. Tasker, at first keen to break the case, is dismayed when his chief suspect turns out to be a pretty Native girl on the rebound from a rocky past.

Love's story develops through a series of continuous flashbacks as Tasker lies in a hospital years later. The switches between present and past are so methodical they tend to feel mechanical, as does a denouement that bunches loose threads together. But Love's eye and ear for small-town detail is sure, as is her backdrop of a deeply scarred Native community beginning to heal itself from the abuses of white medicine and justice.

The bears in *Grizzly Dance* are agents of fate; so too are the polar bears in Antanas Sileika's **Dinner at the End of the World** (Mosaic, 212 pages, $14.99 paper). In his apocalyptic parable, set further north and in the not too distant future, Sileika conjures a party on the shores of Hudson Bay where cars have drawn up until the muskeg is dry enough for travel. They are fleeing the heat: the threatened consequences of the greenhouse effect and the dying ozone layer have come to pass, the polar icecaps have melted and the equatorial countries have been fried off the map. As the group sits yarning and drinking gin around a roasting polar bear, with a snow machine spewing melting snowflakes, the carnivalesque mood is spoiled by the appearance of Victor, self-appointed dustman of civilization. He comes dragging a litter of quintessential detritus, old Twinkie wrappers and aerosol sprays, as well as, he says, a can of nerve gas sufficient to depopulate the earth. And if before dawn he doesn't hear something to convince him life is worth saving, he will use it.

Through the night the pilgrims try to save the world with tales of sex and love, endurance, corruption, and dissipation in Toronto, a Club Med resort, and Lithuania. The old Scheherazade schtick here works in a way reminiscent of Brian Fawcett's parallel texts, with frame and stories reflecting back and forth. The tales display the impressive range of Sileika's descriptive powers (a father describes putting his child to bed as "trying to force a jack-in-the-box with a very strong spring into its home"; succumbing to sleep, the boy lies like "a soldier shot in the field"). The plot, such as it is, involves the willing suspension of disbelief — *e.g.*, if they've run out of road, what are all these travellers going to do for gas stations? All pedantic cavils aside, a good time is had by all, and it's a great way to use up those spare short stories. ○



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BY JANET McNAUGHTON

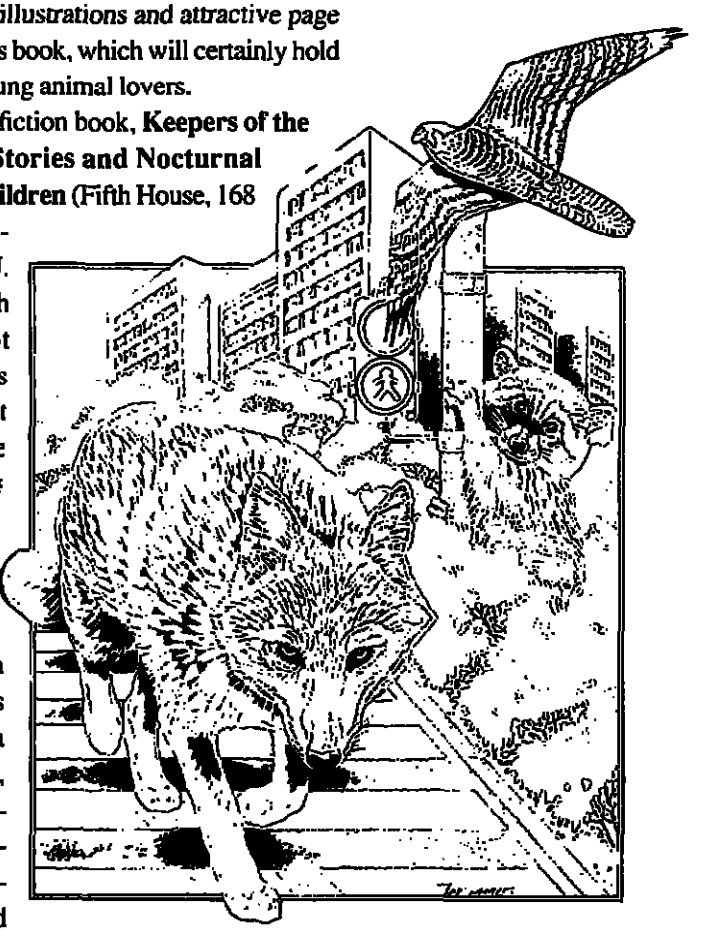
Environmentally Friendly

CHILDREN'S BOOKS TEND TO BE regarded as a backwater of mainstream literature. But the mixed bag of books that landed on my desk with this assignment reflects the current preoccupations of Western culture as clearly as any magazine article, television show, or movie I've seen recently. All but two of these seven books address some aspect of environmentalism.

Non-fiction books with an environmental focus are *de rigueur* for the well-equipped child of the '90s, much as educational View Master reels were in the 1960s, so it isn't surprising to find three such books here. I must confess a special affection for the subject matter of **Snakes** (Key Porter, 64 pages, $19.95 cloth, $14.95 paper), by Eric S. Grace. Even so, *Snakes* is easily the most enjoyable non-fiction children's book I've read this year. Grace communicates his deep enthusiasm for snakes in a comfortable, first-person style that makes for effortless reading. Full-colour photos and occasional line drawings illustrate the book throughout. Topics include snake anatomy, evolution, morphology, and behaviour. I learned, among other things, that although snakes evolved from lizards, a legless lizard is not a snake. Grace falters only when he strays too far from his subject. Early in the book he discusses dinosaurs as if they were reptiles, but dinosaurs are now regarded as a separate class of animals. This one flaw aside, *Snakes* is a superior offering.

In **Coyotes in the Crosswalk: Canadian Wildlife in the City** (Whitecap, 72 pages, $10.95 paper), Diane Swanson looks at 10 species of wild birds and mammals that make their homes among people. The book is filled with interesting facts: for example, how coyotes have expanded their range into eastern Canada as other predators decline, and the fact that newborn rats are helpless for about two weeks. Sidebars give short anecdotes about animals in Canadian cities, including raccoons in Toronto and peregrine falcons in Montreal, that bring the animals closer to home. Douglas Penhale's realistic black-and-white illustrations and attractive page borders add to this book, which will certainly hold the interest of young animal lovers.

The third non-fiction book, **Keepers of the Night: Native Stories and Nocturnal Activities for Children** (Fifth House, 168 pages, $16.95 paper), by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, is not really a children's book at all, but rather a book to be used by adults working with children. Each chapter begins with a Native North American tale that inspires discussion of a nocturnal activity, followed by questions for the children and exhaustive background information for adults. There are also detailed introductory guidelines, suggested activities, and follow-up projects. For example, the story "Moth, The Fire Dancer" introduces the study of nocturnal insects, which children are then invited to explore through games and night-time nature walks. Because the activities are nocturnal, this book will probably be most useful to people working in children's camps.



***From* Coyotes in the Crosswalk: Canadian Wildlife in the City**

There are two novels in this lot, and the contrast between them is instructive. Marion Woodson's **The Amazon Influence** (Orca, 167 pages, $6.95 paper) is very much a book of the times. Fourteen-year-old Nick Price is the son of an environmental

activist living on an island off the coast of British Columbia. The girl who attracts him, Allison McKeghnie, turns out to be the daughter of the man who runs the logging company that Nick's mother is trying to stop. The two teenagers seem destined to remain apart until both Nick's mother and Allison's father are subject to a series of harassing pranks. Nick and Allison join forces to solve the mystery, helped by magic from a medicine stick that Nick's divorced father sends him from the South American rainforests.

In spite of the trendy trappings, this book is essentially a mystery and on that level it works quite well. All the clues point to a logical culprit, but Woodson throws in enough suspects and red herrings to keep readers guessing. She also creates a vivid sense of place. Her main characters are well developed, though the secondary ones are a bit one-dimensional at times. But fundamentally, this book makes good reading.

Also set in B.C. is Catherine Anthony Clark's **The Golden Pine Cone** (Harbour, 189 pages, $14.95 paper), a reissue of a fantasy originally published in 1950. Bren and Lucy, a brother and sister living in the Kootenays, discover a tiny golden pine cone with magical powers. An enchanted dog helps them realize that they must return it to the spirit Tekontha, the rightful owner, lest it fall into the hands of any number of evil lesser spirits. The two selfless children set out on their quest, encountering all manner of magic along the way. This is a completely satisfying book. Clark's magic world is finely detailed and fully realized, her characters wonderfully real. If such a book were written today, it would no doubt contain an overt ecological message. But Clark manages to convey respect for nature without being heavy-handed, and the book benefits from her subtlety.

At first glance, **Madame de Toucainville's Magnificent Hat** (Red Deer College Press, 32 pages, $14.95 cloth), written and illustrated by Sue Bland, does not look like a book about environmental issues. The story is set in Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley at the turn of the century. Lucy de Toucainville glories in her many hats, each decorated with feathers, until she learns that millions of wild birds are slaughtered to provide feathers for women's hats. After that, she vows never to buy another hat, even if it means she will no longer win first prize in the annual Bonny Bonnet Contest. It seems that life will lose its savour without outrageous hats, until Lucy learns that splendid millinery can be created without feathers.

This straightforward little story draws on a footnote in ecological history: millions of birds were slaughtered, and some species even hunted to extinction, just to provide plumage for hats. Children will relate to Lucy's struggle to correct this wrong at a personal level. Young readers will also be encouraged to know that harmful and frivolous waste such as this can end. Bland's illustrations are drawn in a colourful folk-art style that suits the time period of her story.

A message, even when skilfully presented, can make reading a lot like eating food because it is good for you. Kids still need books that are light and colourful and fun — Jello reading. Which brings us to Robert Munsch's newest offering, **Where Is Gah-Ning?** (Annick, 32 pages, $14.95 cloth, $4.95 paper). Little Gah-Ning decides she wants to go to nearby Kapuskasing, but her father objects: when people go to Kapuskasing they spend lots of money. Gah-Ning tries to go to Kapuskasing many different ways, finally succeeding in the most absurd way possible. In a note, Munsch explains that the story grew out of his friendship with the real Gah-Ning, who lives in Northern Ontario. Hélène Desputeaux's illustrations are, as always, brilliant both in colour and design. Among many adults who take children's literature seriously, it is now fashionable to dismiss Munsch's work as light-weight and formulaic. But silliness matters in children's books, and repetition works. *Where is Gah-Ning?* may be just another Munsch book, but sometimes another Munsch book is just what we need. O

My Idea of Risk

THERE'S A KIND OF FALSE Risk Syndrome that afflicts the media when it comes to discussing contemporary literature. We admire fiction that takes risks, and for good reason: the willingness to challenge the limits of acceptability and convention distinguishes a serious writer from one content to stay within the bounds of a comfortable formula. And of course we can vicariously share in this adventurousness by reading the latest book that critics proclaim "daring" or "fearless."

The false assumption is that a writer takes a risk simply by dealing with extreme subject matter, especially if it involves graphic sex or violence. But just check out your local newsstand or turn on the TV; such material is a staple of magazines, films, and talk shows. It's what sells — whether between covers or projected on a screen, whether treated with sensationalism or restraint.

Of course, writers can and do take such highly charged subjects and handle them in a way that's insightful and thought-provoking. But real risk often has less to do with *what* is dealt with than *how* it's dealt with. Those stylish, witty narratives of serial killers, necrophiliacs, and deranged vegetarian cross-dressers that get awarded so many merit badges for audacity are invariably written from a detached point of view. In this, they're perfectly conventional: the standard mode of Western culture is dissociation. You can write (or read) about anything, no matter how outlandish or horrifying, if you have sufficient emotional distance; as the German writer Christa Wolf wrote, "... those who feel nothing have all words freely at their disposal." Given this situation, it's far more daring to be graphic about *feelings*, rather than about sex or violence, although to do so is never seen as risk-taking. If done well, such fiction may be called "poignant," but not "brave"; if its appeal to the emotions is too blatant it's likely to be dismissed as "sentimental," a term that conjures up hurtin' songs, gushy greeting cards, and Steven Spielberg films at their most manipulative. In other words: inauthentic and clichéd.

"Sentimental" was not always a term of disparagement; when the word was first introduced in English in the mid-18th century it meant "characterized by or exhibiting refined and elevated feeling," and the exhibition of feelings in fiction was not only accepted but fashionable. It wasn't long, though, before the word lost its cachet and became an expression of derision. (It also became increasingly identified with the female sex; one 19th-century argument against giving women the vote, for instance, was that by nature they were prone to "sentimentality.")

We tend to draw a distinction between sentimentality (false) and emotion (genuine), but the difference between them isn't easily defined (Somerset Maugham once said that the former is "just sentiment that rubs you up the wrong way"). I recently reread *Jane Eyre*, for example, and was struck by the emotional rawness of the exchanges between Jane and Rochester after the existence of Bertha Mason has been revealed. Could a 1990s writer pull off such powerful scenes, or would they seem histrionic and, well, sentimental?

Nowadays it's difficult to write fiction that directly addresses characters' intense feelings — great griefs and overwhelming passions — because empathy and emotional engagement have gone out of style. What's kept at bay is vulnerability — our own, as well as that of the characters. Most modern fiction keeps readers at an emotional remove, either through irony or circumspection or uninflected minimalism. And as in films, where there's a kind of can't-top-this mania for special effects and entertaining spectacle, in fiction the appeal of novelty has superseded that of engagement. So the latest "daring" best seller tends to explore sensational terrain, but without affect. It's revealing that Martin Amis admiringly described Will Self, the "bad boy" of BritLit whose *My Idea of Fun* is a prime example of False Risk Syndrome, as "a very cruel writer — thrillingly heartless, terrifyingly brainy." Compare this with what the critic B. W. Powe wrote of Margaret Laurence:

> ... we read her for the insights she has into the people she knows. ... She is not afraid to be old-fashioned or gutsy. She is not afraid to sound sentimental or confused. Her books have feeling, hard-won and true.

The Diviners, Laurence's most controversial book, was published 20 years ago. If it were making its début now, I doubt that reviewers would regard it as "risky": the characters aren't entertainingly bizarre, the prose is unadventurous, and even the sexual explicitness is run-of-the-mill by contemporary standards. But what the novel offers is indeed "feeling, hard-won and true." And in a voyeuristic culture that replaces engagement with ironic and distanced (if obsessively detailed) observation, such intimacy is daring. ○

Barbara Carey's most recent book is The Ground of Events *(Mercury).*

CANLIT ACROSTIC #66 ..... 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. Interfered
191 108 143 9 71 156 120

B. Effusive one
13 46 177 155 107 11

C. Clive Roots title (2 wds.)
116 10 53 136 102 34 142 93

172 79 152 122 161 103 188 66

D. Eric Wright novel (4 wds.)
129 90 187 83 153 109 37 192

67 115 61 160 58 19 132 174

141

E. Wyoming river
1 73 185 117 134 110 43 123

164 14

F. Put on the ____
154 124 89 145 62

G. Kind of riot
183 106 45 118 166 190

H. Jock heavens, for example (2 wds.)
86 69 182 195 95 7 82 47

178

I. Multi-talented one (4 wds.)
169 40 64 81 74 57 99 189

48 149 112 32 165 194 88

J. Composer Charles ____
159 193 119 84

K. Stealing
38 179 96 90 65

L. Paid attention to
2 180 55 175 63 105

M. Dead ____
113 100 87

N. Kenneth Harvey novel
140 27 91 25

O. B.C. region
52 22 170 128 8 181 23 104

P. Distinct in kind
20 41 125 35 163

Q. Dancer Kain
12 176 56 15 131

R. Children's magazine
5 42 173

S. Naturalist and painter J. ____ ____ (2 wds.)
18 162 24 4 130 184 76 137

147 30 77 36 49 51 167 16

T. Spawning female salmon
94 158 29 70 168 111 151

U. Unit of work
133 75 26

V. Held tightly
21 59 85 44 146 138 101

W. Represented
6 72 31 78 126 139

X. Pitcher
3 121 150 97

Y. Mason Wade opus (3 wds.)
148 39 28 186 80 68 171 114

99 33 135 17 144 54 92 60

127 157

Guiding Lights

LATE IN 1982, I WAS SURPRISED to get a letter from Alden Nowlan, the New Brunswick poet and literary *paterfamilias*, saying how much he'd enjoyed this or that piece of mine over the years. He was by then in his final illness, which killed him when he was only 50. So this was also one of the last of his innumerable acts of kindness — at least relatively speaking, for he was a voluminous correspondent. There are, for example, more than 12,000 of his letters in the Nowlan Papers at the University of Calgary library. Literary ones of course, but also letters to Gershon Legman, the bibliographer of erotica, letters to the *Globe and Mail* society columnist Zena Cherry, one letter to Barbara Amiel, and another from John Diefenbaker. There are also exchanges with George Richards Kingsize Clothes, where he seems to have done his shopping, and with credit card companies, with which, it seems, he liked to quarrel.

Such are some of the tidbits to be found in *The Alden Nowlan Papers*, compiled by Jean M. Moore, edited by Apollonia Steele and Jean F. Tener, and published by the University of Calgary Press as part of its series "Canadian Archival Inventories." (The book also features a fine bio-critical essay by Robert Gibbs.) In the 1970s, when academic institutions had big acquisitions budgets, Calgary was among the most aggressive buyers of writers' papers. As a result, this series of fat but inexpensive paperbacks (the Nowlan costs only $16.95) shows the full range of Calgary's initiative, which includes Western writers such as Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, W. O. Mitchell, and Aritha Van Herk on the one hand, and Alice Munro, Brian Moore, Clark Blaise, and Mordecai Richler on the other.

But thereby hangs a controversy in the field of Canadian literary research, a field that has long suffered from want of some basic tools and standard editions.

Most cultures have a "union list" of the literary and historical manuscripts held in the country's various public collections. Ours, the *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories*, published by the National Archives, appeared in two volumes, followed by a number of supplements — the most recent one appeared more than a decade ago. In short, the momentum has been lost and there seems no hard evidence of recovery. What happened instead is that from 1981 to 1991 the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council supported a program called Canadian Studies — Research Tools. SSHRC gave money to various institutions (the Anglican Church of Canada as well as assorted universities) to publish detailed "finding aids" to what were once called collections or holdings but are now universally known as *fonds*. The University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, and more than one constituent part of the University of Toronto were among the beneficiaries, but Calgary was the most ambitious.

Some people in the archival field thought the money too much, considering the small number of published books that would actually be distributed. They felt that the special-collections departments of university libraries should do with their finding-aids what McGill, for example, does with its in-house guide to the Hugh MacLennan papers — simply Xerox one copy at a time, on a pure demand basis. Eventually, these people hope, all such information, from all Canadian institutions, will form an electronic data-base, thus making a reality of the old *Union List* ideal. A study group of the Canadian Library Association is looking into the possibility.

Until then, we make do with the individual finding-aids, not only the in-house ones like McGill's for MacLennan, or the professionally published ones that have come out of Calgary, but also those that fall between the two extremes in the degree to which they resemble books: for example, Debra Barr's *Guide to the Papers of Earle Birney in Canadian Repositories* (1987), which the University of Toronto rare books library produced cheaply and neatly in a Cerlox binding.

Personally, I find these guides not only useful but fascinating on their own terms. As is the case with a fully descriptive (or "authored") bibliography, they can provide shadow criticism of the author in question, even a sometimes quite vivid shadow biography. Alas, I never met Alden Nowlan. But now, reading the catalogue of his incoming and outgoing mail, both personal and professional, and detailed descriptions of his manuscripts large and small, complete with facsimiles of his handwriting and typing, I feel renewed sympathy for his life and his work. And I cherish the tactile experience, which may or may not be lost if the whole business of bibliographic guides ever goes to CD-ROM. O

Douglas Fetherling's most recent publications are a novel, The File on Arthur Moss *(Lester), and* Selected Poems *(Arsenal Pulp).*

Double Standards

I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM Britain, where it has happened once again. This time it concerns Alan Paton, the South African novelist, author of the international classic and plea for racial equality *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Paton was the president of the South African Liberal Party and was long revered for his opposition to apartheid and oppression. The white crusader pleaded for Nelson Mandela when the ANC leader was on trial, he was welcomed by liberal-minded people everywhere, given platforms in the best universities, churches, and assemblies in the world. A new biography by Peter F. Alexander, however, reveals that Paton was not the knight in shining armour that we had thought.

Paton was in fact an authoritarian father bitterly disliked by his children. At the reformatory where he taught, he administered 2,000 strokes of the strap and cane a year to the inmates. They were terrified of him. He was also chronically unfaithful to his wife, seeking out prostitutes wherever he could find them. As a teacher he used anything to hit his charges, including cricket bats. The girls in the class were victims of his cruel, relentless, and brutal sarcasm. When he was injured in a chemistry experiment in school and driven away in an ambulance, the pupils threw their hats up in the air and cheered.

So, as I say, it has happened again. Yet another radical, liberal, socialist, or leftist author has been shown to be hypocritical and dishonest, writing books that preach and propound one type of ideal, but in their personal life and private utterances demonstrating quite another set of attitudes. I encountered this in sickening doses with H. G. Wells, whose novels and works of non-fiction earned him the reputation of a revolutionary socialist and feminist. In fact he was a racist and an anti-Semite, an abuser of women, an uncaring and manipulative father, a plagiarist, and a fraud. Wells's sometime friend, sometime enemy George Bernard Shaw was another hero of the left because of the views he expressed in his plays and essays. Yet when the playwright returned from one visit to his beloved Soviet Union and a reporter asked him about the forced starvation in the Ukraine (millions were murdered by Stalin's commissars), Shaw responded by throwing a tin of Russian meat at the journalist.

Both Wells and Shaw were, of course, inspired by Karl Marx, father of the modern concept of class struggle and revolution. "The Jewish Nigger Lassalle fortunately departs at the end of this week," Marx wrote about a visitor. "It is now completely clear to me that he, as is proved by his cranial formation and curly hair, descends from the Negroes ... The obtrusiveness of the fellow is also Nigger-like." Marx went on to defend slavery in the West, claiming that there would be anarchy without it. As for Jews, this self-hating monster asked, "What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money." The list goes on.

It is not only writers on the left who operate by such double standards, of course, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they do make a habit of it. One of the reasons for this is that authentic conservatism is founded on important notions such as natural law, instinctive correctness, order and structure, and old but never tired beliefs such as consistency of word and deed. The Marxist dialectic and its less extreme little siblings separate our personal from our political life and hence give us more room for moral manoeuvre. Thus, when Lenin told H. G. Wells that he "did not care" how Wells treated his wife as long as he wrote books that advocated feminism, he personified the attitudes of those who separate personal morality and political ideology. Brecht knifed a mistress and threw her down the stairs, but championed East Germany and proletarian drama — he was forgiven everything. The lionized Jean Genet made remarks about women and Jews that were murderous in intent. But Genet advocated world revolution, the Black Panthers, and the Palestinian cause, and so was somehow considered to be on the right side. There is a double standard at work, and not only in literature. President Kennedy's immoral actions were hidden by a liberal press corps for decades; we know that a Nixon or a Reagan would not have received such generous treatment.

In Canada the situation is not fundamentally different, but it is painted in a brighter, friendlier colour, less red than pink, less black than dark grey. Which brings us to those Canadian novelists, poets, and playwrights who applaud socialism, liberty, and reform in their writings but act like utter reprobates in their personal life. Hypocrites. Should I name them? Come on now, be serious. One hint of such an accusation and this venerable publication would be awash in libel suits. History, however, will judge; and if you are really curious, just ask around. O

Michael Coren's latest book is The Man Who Created Narnia *(Lester), a biography of C. S. Lewis.*

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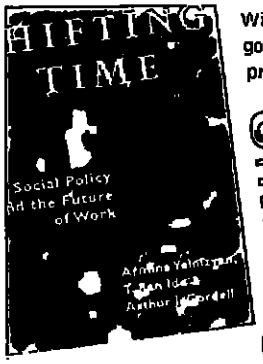

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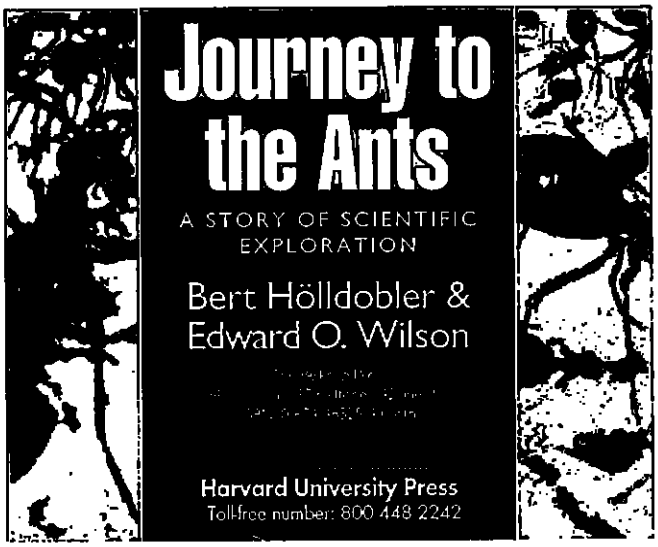

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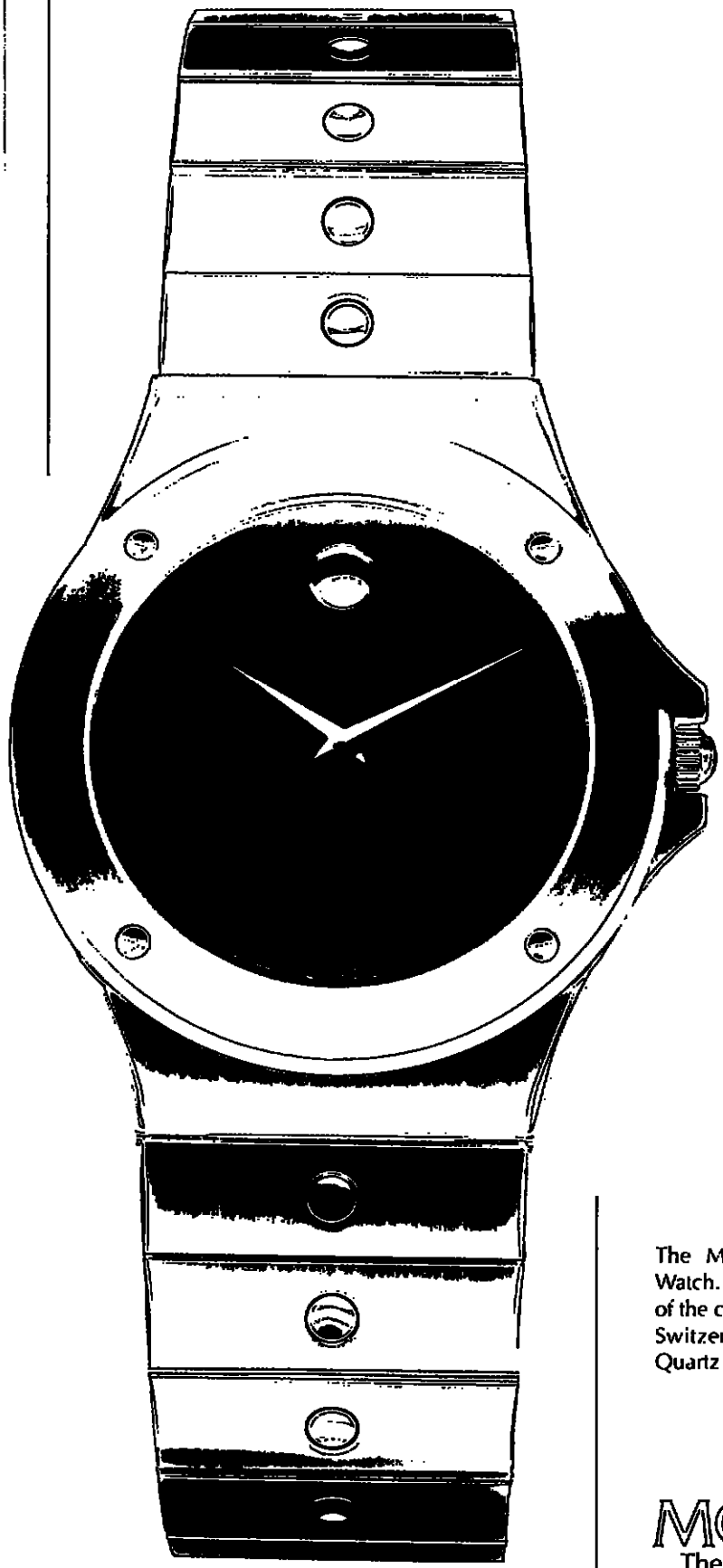

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