

# Aunty High Over the Barley Mow

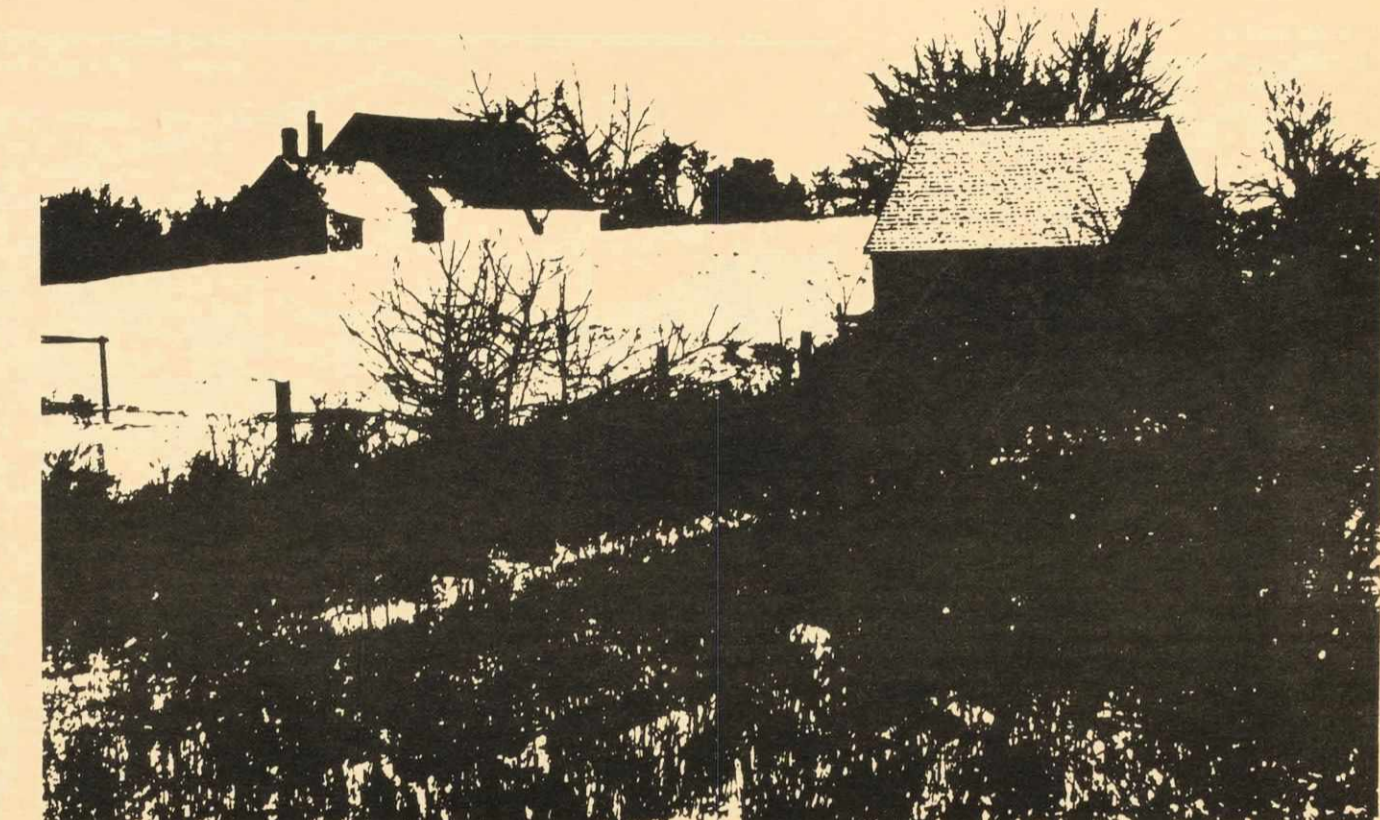
by Judith Pratt

**Aunty High Over the Barley Mow** by Dennis T. Patrick Sears; McClelland and Stewart - \$12.50

Dennis T. Patrick Sears' newest and last book, **Aunty High Over the Barley Mow**, is a first-person narration of the youth and early manhood of an Irish-Canadian facing adolescent hazards in the backwoods and small towns of rural Ontario. With a certain aptitude, Sears captures the flavour of emerging adulthood, but the universality of the theme, as seen in Alice Munroe's **Lives of Girls and Women**, escapes Sears. Hence the book, despite some vivid and poignant description, leaves no lasting impression.

Sears employs flashbacks to focus events occurring in the youth of Padraic Fallon and in so doing achieves a depth akin to despair, since the promising youth of Patch crumbles after the death of his sister, and the bottle replaces his affection for Bride. This brother-sister relationship survives first the desertion of the mother and then the accidental death of the father, yet constantly carries with it the unmistakable taint of incest. Sears, in both narration and flashback, refers to this relationship and seems to place part of the onus for Patch's failure on his unfraternal love.

From the beginning of the book, Patch and Bride, with their Irish heritage nagging at them constantly (the title of the book refers to an Irish childhood game), exhibit an individual spirit in isolation from both their peers and their seniors. Perhaps it is this isolation which makes such character insights and descriptions believable in a youth of his early teens. The faces and personalities of the local folk are clearly defined with a rural beauty which can be easily appreciated. "Abel Coventry was a lean string tie knotted in a bunch at the place on his throat where his Adam's apple protruded and gipped up and down every time he swallowed or gathered a mouthful of cut plug to spit into the cracker box of dry sand over near the great heater. He wore his reading glasses up on his forehead where a little vein jumped and wriggled when Abel was studying hard on something—especially money." Yet when describing such processes as haying and mowing, Sears, through Patch, becomes too



Dal Photo/Deleirey

technical and too verbal, and the purity of the countrified astuteness and intelligence seems marred.

The world of the soil and of the wilderness is portrayed with a starkness and vividness which, when contrasted with Sears' few attempts to transcend to the plain of aestheticism of the Canadian landscapes, achieves a permanent impression.

"The ground was sour and shallow, the skin of it stretched tightly over the chalky bones of limerock protruding here and there among the prickly—ash and black haw like the ribs of a starved mule." This is contrasted with Patch's attempt to appreciate the sheer beauty present on the same farm. "The timothy field, when ready to mow, was a shadow—changing spread of greeny—blue through which the winds waved and curried and great cottony cumulus clouds played with their shadows far below as they crossed from sou'-west to nor'-east as stately as any galleon bringing

Peruvian gold to Spanish Cadiz." Sears seems to occasionally step outside of the narrator's circus of events and confusedly attempts to instill the book with a sympathetic response to beauty in which Patch, who fights, swears, loves and hates with the fury of a relatively unintelligent country lad, appears as an awkward alien.

The author's strength in this book lies in his character descriptions and colloquial dialogues, although there are occasionally very vivid and lyrical descriptive passages. "Somehow Lila and I got out on the street where the perfume of lilacs and horse—chestnuts was as fragrant as the subtle scent Lila was wearing. . . . The sun had just set, leaving a lavender blush on the western horizon through which writhed dark, rolling clouds like locomotive smoke." In the context of the story, on this, Patch's first date, such an appreciation of external beauty can be understood and, although largely a book of

action and dialogue, such passages tend to magnify the depth of feeling which few people allow rural Canadians.

Although his first novel, **The Lark in the Clear Air**, achieved some fame in Canada, it is doubtful whether **Aunty High Over the Barley Mow** will attract any substantial

following. The scope of the narrative, although ripe with vivid accounts of love, hate, jealousy and indignation, is here perhaps overly confined within the frame-work of the emerging awareness of the narrator, although an expressive frame for authors such as James Joyce, not so inhibited in their scope of information. Sears seems hesitant to permit Patch Fallon an even allowance of consciousness and emotional response and in conclusion does not seem to attain a balance between Sears as author and Patch as narrator.

## Bureaucratic Zoo

### / Cover Your Ass

**The Bureaucratic Zoo** by James Boren, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977, 119 pages, \$7.95 and **Cover Your Ass, Bureaucrat X, Hurtaig Publishers, 1977, 9 pages, \$8.95**

Consensus has it that the only jobs which will be available in Canada for a long time will be with the government. Middle class university students are, of course, the persons who will be filling these positions. So, chances are unless you want to be unemployed for the rest of your life (there is hope by the way) you are going to become a bureaucrat. Something to look forward to, eh?

These two books were obviously prepared with you in mind. Boren, aka, Mr. Mumbles, defines and destroys bureaucrats with orbital dialogues and photographs exposing bureaucrats in inaction. The pics reveal them for the animals which, of course, they are.

Bureaucrat X, a civil servant for most of his life, exposes Canadian

bureaucracy at it's best, or is it, it's worst? His book has been "designed for the bureaucrat and the potential bureaucrat." With this thin volume you can learn how to dress, talk, become disillusioned, take tranquillizers, abuse citizens and much more. A short glossary of bureaucratic terms is provided to give you an advantage in those government job interviews.

Both books are at times very perceptive and wildly funny although at other times they tend to read like a government report. Nevertheless not a bad gift for your brother in the civil service. And remember, "Bureaucrats are not opposed to cutting red tape as long as it is cut lengthwise."

## Act of God

by Mark Simkins

Charles Templeton's first effort at the novel ended up a religious novel a la Arthur Haileysque. His novel would be better off still an idea in Pierre Berton's mother's head.

It is not a bad idea, a suspense

novel about a discovery of the bones of Christ, but it fizzles out under Templeton's plot indecision and cardboard characters.

The beginning of the story is pretty gripping. I kept waiting for all hell to break loose when the discovery was announced. It does in a very limited sense, but it doesn't affect more than a few characters in the book. (the squirrly love interest commits suicide, the cardinal commits murder etc.)

Templeton's main characters, Cardinal Maloney and Harris the archaeologist are interesting because they are extensions of the religious and sensual aspects of Templeton himself.

Ultimately, the novel comes out a second rate detective novel with some religious details and a failure at that too. It's not worth the ten bucks plus from McClelland and Stewart and it's definitely not the great Canadian novel. Back to the old typewriter, Charles.

## Educational TV

Evaluating Educational Television

and Radio, Tony Bates and John Robinson (eds.), The Open University, 1977

"I presume that the readers of this book will also find their own places to dip into it, and their own ways to read it," writes Wilbur Schramm in the forward to this book. How true. With over 400 pages filled with academic's papers one could hardly do otherwise, even if they possessed a passion for the field of mass communication.

The book is a collection of 90 articles which were selected and edited from the papers and presentations submitted to the first international conference devoted exclusively to the evaluation of educational television and radio.

While being a fairly comprehensive account of the current state of research, it points out the major problem of mass communication research, that being, the field's cross-disciplinary nature. This is of course one of the stimulating points of communication research but it does reveal the lack of focus and academic direction which exist at present in the field.