

Take a Look at the Books

[FICTION]

Canada has some excellent contemporary novelists — Brian Moore, Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Marie Claire Blais, and everyone (well, almost everyone) knows them.

It is the purpose of Canada Today/D'Aujourd'hui to tell its readers, at least occasionally, some things they do not know. Each spring it presents a list of current books and writers worthy, perhaps, of wider recognition. In the past we have focused on such as Margaret Atwood. This year we begin with Jacques Godbout, Richard B. Wright and Leo Simpson.

Hail Galarneau!, by Jacques Godbout, Longman Canada, Ltd., \$6.95. Almost a third of all Canadians speak French as their native tongue and Montreal is one of the great cities of the world. There is a cultural explosion going on in Québec; French Canadians express themselves in distinctive styles — in painting, in filmmaking, in writing and in living. Their vitality is veiled from most North Americans by the long reaches of geography and the mists of language. *Hail Galarneau!* is a fortuitous bridge, an excellent French Canadian novel rendered into English by Alan Brown, preserving the clarity of M. Godbout's style.

DAVID BLACKWOOD, *Wedding on Braggs Island*, 1972, 32 x 20. Page one: CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF, *After the Ball Chez Jolifou*, 1855, 36 x 24, Mrs. W. C. Pitfield Collection

Let us begin at M. Godbout's beginning: "This really isn't the afternoon to start trying to write a book, believe me. I mean, how can a person concentrate with an endless string of customers sniffing their way to the counter? Today they're mostly Americans on vacation. They've come here to experience la belle province, the big difference, 'the hospitalité spoken here.' They've driven through Ontario. I must be their first Québécois, their first native. Some of them even try out their French on me. It's really quite touching! I let them make idiots of themselves. I don't encourage them, but I don't do the other thing either. I mean if Americans learn French in school and come here in the month of August to try it out, they have a perfect right. It's always a good idea to put your education to the test. Take my own case now, the education they inflicted on me wasn't even worth the buggy-ride. That much I've proved, whether I was looking for work or just looking around — or simply trying to be happy."

The narrator is Francois Galarneau, whose roadside stand bears the neon sign, "Au Roi Du Hot Dog", brother of Jacques, successful writer of TV scripts, lover of Marise Doucet, whose bottom is round as a pair of apples, son of his father who spent his days and years fishing and drinking beer aboard his boat, *Wagner III*. ("He hadn't built the boat himself, whatever he said, he could

