

The death of

Ian Adams
The Trudeau Papers
McClelland and Stewart, 1971,
108 pages,
\$5.95, cloth.

There are facts and statistics all over the place in Ian Adams' first novel, *The Trudeau Papers*, a not always unlikely account of the accidental explosion of nuclear warheads over western Canada and the subsequent American occupation of the southern prairies and of southern Ontario. There are facts about corporate copper and aluminium demands and production. There are facts about casualties, military logistics, non-selective herbicides, foreign-owned industrial complexes in Canada, missile types and northern U.S.A. missile defense systems. And all these facts are reported with meticulous precision by Adams' narrator-chief character, Alan Jarvis. But Jarvis is more than a journalist. He is also a CIA man and an important guerilla commander in the People's Army of Liberation fighting determinedly in central and southern Ontario against Vietnam-like Yankee Marines whose helicopters and herbicides turn the countryside into hell.

Most important, though, is Jarvis' function as a journalist cum laude for such publications as the *National* magazine. Adams' narrator has taken it upon himself to prepare some sort of account of the happenings in Canada before and subsequent to the accidental nuclear explosions (Incidentally, it scared the bile out of me to read an account of the nuclear annihilation of Edmonton and Saskatoon.). This account he calls *The Trudeau Papers*, and he vaguely justifies their creation by hoping that they will be read by European politicians who will step in and save Canada from the horrid clutches of the American Army and Air Force.

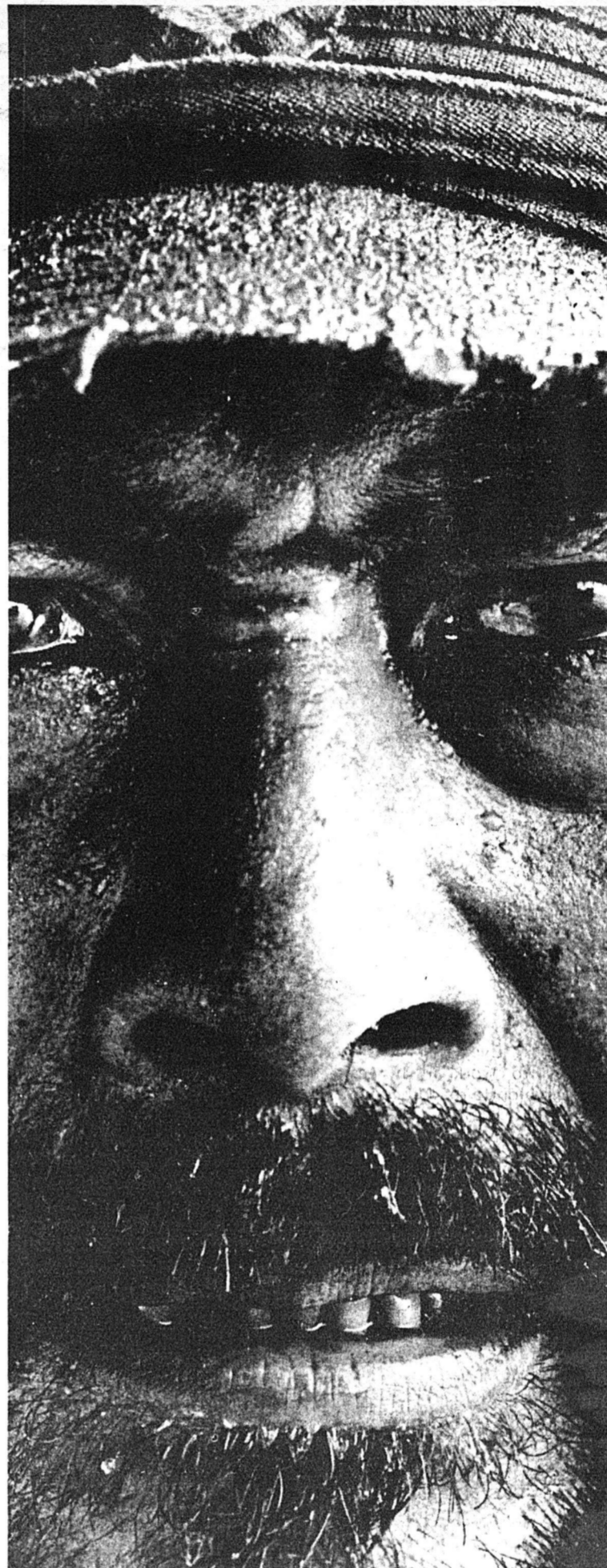
Jarvis is at home with all the facts he presents in his diaristic narration because he is a journalist first and almost finally, as is his creator, Mr. Adams. Actual accounts inserted into Jarvis' narrative of the inadvertent explosions of American and Russian hardware over such startling places as Beaverlodge and Saskatoon and the subsequent political and social anarchy, are carefully, almost drudgingly presented. A journalist flies over the desolated areas along Alberta's Highway Number Two and we get the report. A journalist watches the Red River Massacre in southern Manitoba and we get the report. In fact, until we get Jarvis the hell out of the west and into Ontario as a guerilla fighter we're always getting reports. That's probably because Ian Adams the author knows how to do reporting pretty well by now. But this is a novel, not the manuscript of some part of the Senate Committee on Poverty's report! However, from time to time in the first forty pages (such as with the Radek

incident) Adams' journalism yields to vivid and imaginative narration (but usually only for a page or so).

The result is that when he begins to get inside his character, Alan Jarvis, in this journalistic vein, Adams renders that character with bathos. For example, Jarvis explains to his anonymous readers, "My commitments to the CIA had left me with the feeling that I had already surrendered my life to a formula. I believed that I had become subhuman; grinding out my days for an evil, corrupt, and all-powerful bureaucracy from which there was no escape." Sometimes the bathos is downright annoying. As when a harmless middle-aged U.S. border guard shrieks, "Why? Why?" to an evil American Marine who is shooting Canadian refugees as they swim across the Red River to the U. S. bank trying to escape the nuclear desolation of Winnipeg and the Red River valley.

The introduction of Jarvis' true love, Brigitte de Montigny, also falls into this bathetic tone. Jarvis and Brigitte have "lived together in a small house in the country." Later, on central Ontario battlefields, Jarvis experiences only "intense pain" as he remembers such scenes as Brigitte's "hair damp from the early morning mist" and Brigitte's son with "soft red stains of raspberries around his mouth." Quite understandably.

Some of Adams' ascerbic comments about the media are exactly right, of course, but he presents his criticisms too generally. "The largest and most successful newspapers, magazines, and television stations enjoyed a gentleman's agreement not to reveal or publicly question each other's conflicts of interest or extra-corporate holdings," begins Jarvis. "The men who ran these organizations operated on a firm set of nineteenth century attitudes, coupled to an obsessive sense of prudery." What we need to know as readers of a novel is where are the "surface tensions that (keep) alive the mythical bubble of a free society and a free press?" He almost shows us when he talks about the *National Geographic* magazine and its having ignored the Civil War in Spain in lengthy features about Spain written during Franco's battles. What happens, because of this journalistic milieu, is that Adams' analyses come across as superficial. The unfortunate truth, though, is that the superficiality is unnecessary. It emerges because of Adams' narrative difficulties in the first half of the book. We can be told that "the resources the Canadian government had earlier sold to the United States had, like most of the economic concessions previously given the U.S., made a handful of wealthy Canadians even richer and left the majority with nothing," but if you're going to call *The Trudeau Papers* a novel, Mr. Adams, you must show us these things.



In the second half of the *The Trudeau Papers* Adams moves out of his journalistic straight-jacket and begins to show. He indeed can evoke a world of people instead of a world of loosely knit facts and names. He indeed can describe the absurd and impersonal forces that hack away at the human spirit. Instead of poking at the essence of his people with simplistic and adolescent phraseology such as, "and I believe at that moment I began to take the burden of my own life into my hands," Adams gives us more of such episodes as that in the bleak Saskatchewan town of Outlook. He starts to take us "down into an interior animal darkness, an escape into a long fitful sleep that seemed full of

madness." Standing by the South Saskatchewan River Adams' narrator, Alan Jarvis, puts down his journalistic pencil and takes up the novelist's pen.

Adams has got a theme -- a big one -- and it's not as cliched or naive as it might seem:

For I have come to the conclusion that there are no solutions, no ideologies, no doctrines no transcendental faiths, no religious consolations left. One by one we have rendered them all bankrupt. The world is old, worn out, no longer able to sustain our meddling. And there are too many men and women like myself who have already perceived that.

Now we meet the ideologues like Comrade

canada

Angelica and Comrade Pelletier -- strongly drawn, energetic equivalents for all those journalistic abstractions of the first half of the work. It's true that the complex factual information necessary to the account of guerilla warfare in southern Ontario *has* to come first. But the first half of the book cannot match the vividness of the second half. Some Angelicas or Michaels nipping about and popping off Yankee Marines in the Alberta and Saskatchewan badlands would have done the job better.

Angelica and Jarvis' journey across the war-torn southern Ontario landscape, the Vietnam of North America, is good writing. It's new territory for Adams and he smudges his narrative sometimes by overplaying such images as the death of the osprey by the poisoned lake. But the important thing is that the osprey is doing the telling now -- not some cluster of statistics and a ambiguously objective journalistic paragraphs.

But I had seen the osprey slowly dying out there over the lake, and to me it seemed impossible the earth would ever be able to cleanse itself again.

Other episodes in the second half are equally as well done -- the Don Jail episode where Jarvis is clubbed by CIA men, the well-developed scene in Nelson Bar, the portrait of the dead Marines in Ontario's Algonquin Park. And almost as if he had decided to outdo himself and his earlier reporting of the war in Vietnam (*Macleans*, 1967) Adams shows us guerilla warfare with terrifying precision -- warfare going on only a few hundred miles north of Toronto.



Adams' homework on "guerilla warfare" has been thorough. So too has his homework on "revolutionaries" allowed him to describe not only the romantic pallor of the gun-toting activist but the stern dogmatism of the puritan ideologue. Pelletier and his tribunal of fanatic morons are described more vividly than any other group in the novel. This achievement makes me think that Adams' first novel has taught him a lot about writing.

Adams has to learn not to resort to convenient, contrived, swift explications to de-knot the complexities of parts of his plot line. It's too stark having Cameron pick Jarvis up suddenly on a lonely, radiation-scoured road in central Saskatchewan. It's too formalistic having CIA agent Hyland act as the final foil for Jarvis.

This is Adams' first novel. The established critics would use the word "uneven" to describe the narrative aspects of this short work. But the unevenness is promising here because Adams has moved a long way. He has left the journalism of his *The Poverty Wall* (1970) and, I suspect, is anticipating a more balanced, more narratively even work in his upcoming *The Sunroom*. *The Trudeau Papers* is a transitional work. If it isn't, Mr. Adams should return to full-time journalism because he's damn good at that.

By David Schleich

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