

If one wants to plunge into the essence of Canada, into what pages should one dive? In this issue of CANADA TODAY/D'AUJOURD'HUI we give you opinions, directions and spring boards.

We look at twelve new books, six in English and six in French. We list our favourite children's books, refer to basic Canadian reference works, offer a brief review of Canadian histories and historians and name significant works of eleven significant novelists. We have some categories with single occupants: the best book on snowmobiles and the most sophisticated Canadian cookbook. We have a splendid book on canoes, and a good one on canoeing. There are new and old picture books and pictures from two of the new. Enough for a long winter's read.

F I C T I O N

New in French

[REVIEWED IN ENGLISH]

Il n'y a pas de pays sans grandpère, ROCH CARRIER, Editions Internationales, 1977.

In the midst of a family that scorns him, Vieux Thomas, rocking and waiting to die, calmly reviews his life: his sunny youth, his work as a wood cutter, and the evolution of the world around him—the wars, the misfortunes and the slow struggle of Quebec. This long internal monologue is Roch Carrier's sixth novel, and it shines, like its predecessors, with tenderness, humour and power. The deep humanity of its main character, the simplicity of its plot and its use of popular idiom make it part of a fertile Quebec literary tradition.

FRANCOIS RICARD

La Traversée, NAIM KATTAN, Hurtubise HMH, 1977.

Naim Kattan, a quintessential Canadian, was born in Baghdad, studied in Paris and came to Canada some twenty years ago, where he taught at Université Laval and wrote for a variety of publications. Now head of the Canada Council's Literary Section, he continues to write novels, essays, plays, reviews and, in *La Traversée*, short stories.

La Traversee shows Naim Kattan's profound comprehension of Canada. The stories are set in various cities and provinces, and the precision of the settings suggests his awareness of the nuances.

The title, *The Crossing*, suggests the theme: travels both separate people and bring them together. In *Le Voyage*, a young couple who have met and married in Africa return to her native Montreal. Pierre, a Frenchman, has such understanding of Monique's family, her city and culture that she is overwhelmed: her privacy has been invaded. When Pierre leaves, she feels something close to relief. In *Le Prochain Avion*, a couple meet

inauspiciously in the elevator of Toronto's CN Tower, she on her way home to New York, he to his unnamed home city. They find romance but do not make love. She postpones her departure several times and at the airport confesses, too late, that she is not expected home until the following day. Why has she deprived herself, and the man, of natural pleasure? Has she lied? The reader must decide.

SHEILA FISCHMAN

Les Rescapés, ANDRE MAJOR, Editions Quinze, 1976.

The early writing of André Major—poetry and polemics—was published in the influential radical magazine *Parti pris*, the name of both the publication and a group that in the sixties advocated the creation of a secular, socialist and independent Quebec. Major eventually broke with the group, and has continued to write, primarily novels. This spring he received the Governor General's Award for *Les Rescapés*, the final volume in a trilogy subtitled "Histoires de déserteurs." The three parts should be read as a whole: then confusions become clear, riddles are solved, gaps filled.

The "deserters" are urban and rural characters, some banal but none a stereotype. The rural-urban dichotomy is well explored. Montreal sophisticates call Momo, the central figure of the trilogy, a "hick"; the city offers only transient salvation to his girl, Gigi—who becomes a callgirl and is murdered—to the estranged wife of Saint-Emmanuel's hotelkeeper and her sister, and to Momo. *L'Epouvantail* has been translated into English, with the title *The Scarecrows of Saint-Emmanuel*. Translations of the other two should soon follow.

SHEILA FISCHMAN