

It's pleasant reading

Northern Journey

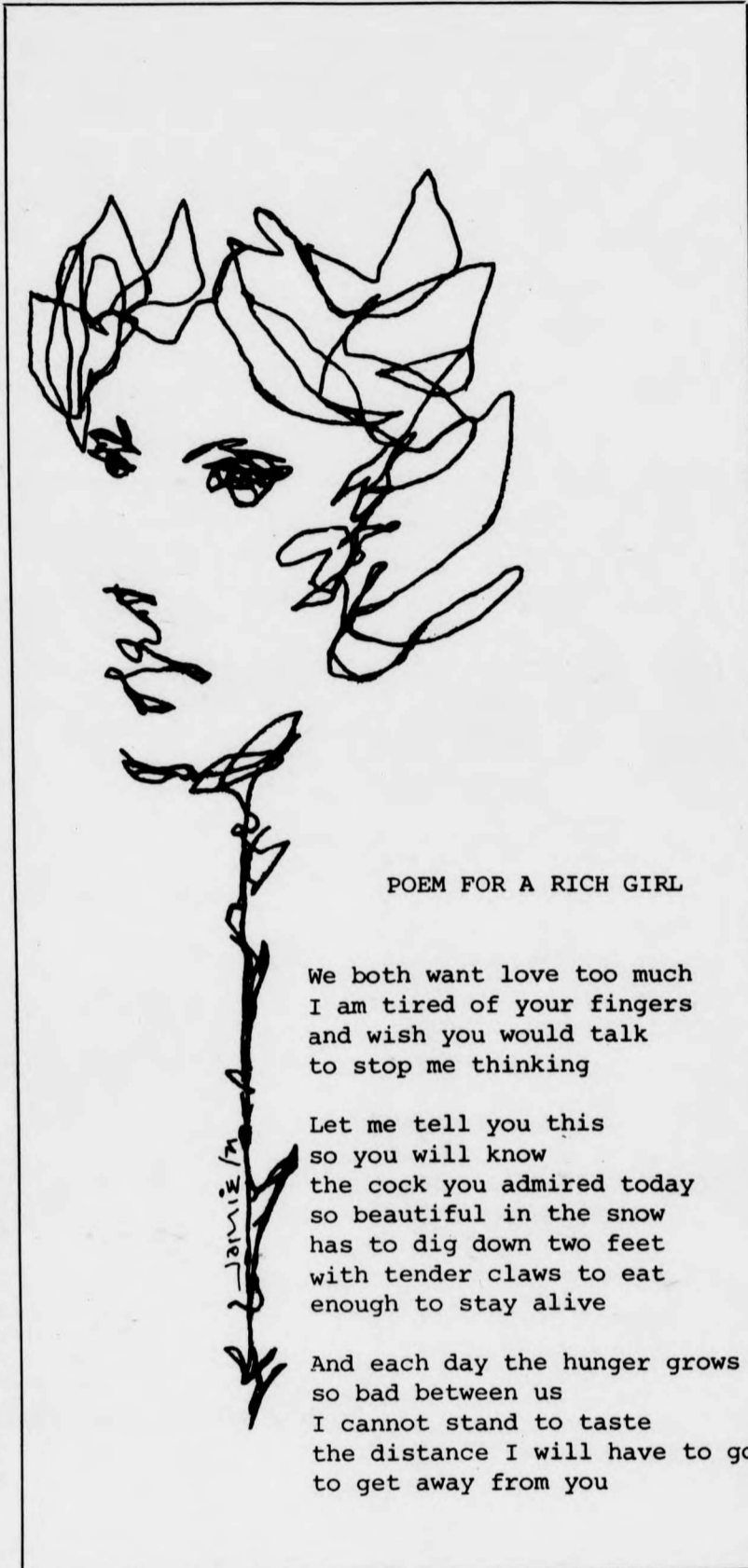
By JOHN OUGHTON

Northern Journey is a promising attempt to further what co-editor Fraser Sutherland calls the "small, rather fragile island" of Canadian literature. The book's contents vary from a "polemical essay" by Sutherland entitled In Defence of Laura Secord (and cultural nationalism), to concrete poetry, to the first chapter of Fetish Girl, a novel by Sylvia Bayer which claims to be "the first book ever written for rubber fetishists." Sutherland and his co-editor Terrance MacCormack have crammed a wide variety of authors and styles into the 110 pages of Northern Journey. Some of the more famous names included are Birney, Souster, Al Purdy and John Glassco; younger hit names on the literary charts like Pat Lane, Lionel Kearns, George Johnston and Lionel Kearns also appear.

In Defence of Laura Secord, Sutherland offers some points about Canadian culture which if not exactly original are well worth repeating. The main thesis of the essay is that Canadian culture is worth encouraging, whether its products are aimed at a mass audience or the more rarefied atmosphere of the culterati. Sutherland, who states that he'd like to "view scenes of sexual abandon set in Lunenburg," writes in an engaging and mostly logical style. Although it's hard to take some of his asides seriously, such as his assertion that "a serious poet could probably learn a good deal" from Gordon Lightfoot's songs, Sutherland's main arguments are well constructed.

The book is pleasant to read. Good use is made of the photo-reproduction method employed; the format contains a variety of typefaces, drawings, photographs of the contributors in the first edition of a "collect Canadian Writers Card" series and a feature-length cartoon entitled Jim Canada. The latter item is one of the best comic comments on biculturalism to have yet appeared — the text reads like cereal-box Franglais with lines like "you save, sergeant but I could not pay the fine suddenly, I have to pay for my hypothetical farm."

At the list price of two dollars, Northern Journey is a good buy. One might wish that the editors had been a little more selective in their quality control; the calibre of a couple of their own poems and the story Something of Eagles by Raymond Souster, compares badly with the rest of the material.



POEM FOR A RICH GIRL

We both want love too much
I am tired of your fingers
and wish you would talk
to stop me thinking

Let me tell you this
so you will know
the cock you admired today
so beautiful in the snow
has to dig down two feet
with tender claws to eat
enough to stay alive

And each day the hunger grows
so bad between us
I cannot stand to taste
the distance I will have to go
to get away from you

However, there are some outstanding items — particularly Pat Lane's poems and John Metcalf's story Going Down Slow — which more than balance the anthology's weaknesses. The book is in general

put together with humor and obvious care; it's a good effort by any standards, Canadian or otherwise, and we can only look forward to hearing more of the editors and their contributors.

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