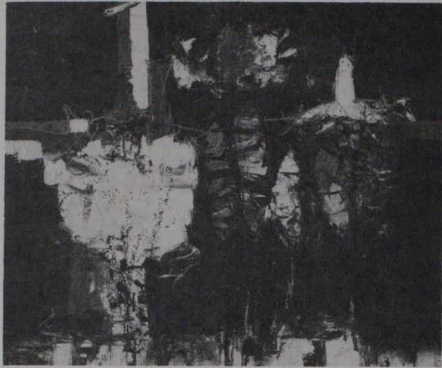


Cover picture by Jack Shadbolt is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. The art scene in Canada is reviewed by William Withrow on page 7.

# Canada Today



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# French winters, les étés anglais

By Henrietta Partridge

I arrived in Montreal ten days before Christmas on the shuttle service from New York. A blizzard in Montreal delayed the flight. Seen from above, the mountains dividing the United States from Canada were bony rib after bony rib of an extinct rhinoceros. The occasional forest, the occasional lake. All were smothered in snow. The airport was covered in it. Caterpillar yellow snow ploughs were driving around and hoovering it up.

I had never before encountered such bitter cold. During the short walk from the plane to the terminal, my fingers and ears turned orange and blue and I thought they might drop off from frostbite. The snow nearly came up to the tops of my boots and they reached up to my knees. But the terminal itself was as hot as a Turkish bath with currents of hot air being blasted throughout the building by an extremely efficient central heating system.

The taxi was equally overheated. I settled myself on the back seat sweating profusely and almost unable to believe that the snow lying in deep drifts on the ground and falling through the air could possibly be real, and that I was not in some surrealistic, newly invented three dimensional movie.

English people arriving in North America are confronted with the confusing situation of landing on a continent where, although English is the spoken language, its usage is not the same as in England. The differences between skillet and frying pan, suspenders and braces, sidewalk and pavement may seem slender, but such subtleties lead to misunderstandings compounded by the fact it is difficult at first to imagine that one is well and truly abroad.

English people acquainted with the French language and arriving for the first time in Montreal are not only faced with this situation, but also with a spoken French — the official language of Quebec — that seems at first to have less relationship with the French spoken in France than the English language has with English as spoken in North America.

I spoke to the taxi driver in French. It was a mistake. He could understand me. I could not understand a single word he said. He spoke Joulal and Joulal was no more French than Greek to me then. Joulal is the French Canadian patois and sounds like Geordie must to a Parisian who has never been north of Newhaven.

As skillet is an older word than frying pan, so "chalupe" is the older French for a rowing boat. Both are obsolete in



Winter on The Mountain, Montreal. Henrietta Partridge is an English writer who recently returned to London after living two years in Montreal. The article comprises her personal impressions of life in this region of Canada, as seen through a perceptive newcomer's eyes.

Europe and both are still used in the New World. Joulal is a mongrel language; a cross between seventeenth century French, English and American. A steamed hot dog is called un " 'ot dog stemé," and "mon 'ockey est bien tapé" means "my ice hockey stick is properly bound with tape."

After 20 minutes driving through suburban wastelands sheeted in snow, we crossed the St. Lawrence River, drove through downtown Montreal, and then the taxi driver turned to me and said in English: "Where did you say you wanted to go?"

"Rue St. Claud," I said. Most French Canadians are bilingual. Not all English Canadians can speak French.

Montreal is not a large city, though it is the largest in Canada. It is inhabited by French, English and by more recent immigrants: Italians, Greeks, Poles, Chinese, Hungarians etc. etc. And Montreal is an island. On the island there are two mountains. One is simply called "The Mountain" and it belongs to nobody and to everybody. It is beautiful, steep and wild. Chipmunks and grey squirrels live there; maple trees and conifers grow there. In the winter, people ski and sledge, and in the summer they lie on the grass in the shade of the maple trees and read or talk or do what they like with wild flowers (trilliums, blue grass, wild raspberries) growing round them.