

Books in Review

by D. B.

Dreadlock by Lew Anthony
Bantam-Seal 1982

Dreadlock is a unique novel. For the first time (at least to my knowledge) we have a James Bondian sort of character spawned in the Great White North. The man is Michael Shuter, handsome, rugged, an \$80,000-a-year Vice-president in charge of security for Toronto's Holidair airlines. He drives a Bricklin, reads the *Globe and Mail* every day, listens to Gordon Lightfoot, and his favourite sport is, of course, hockey. When a girl asks what turns him on, he replies: "The usual. Good food, good hockey, the occasional bad woman. I'm your typical, garden-variety Canadian."

Shuter is also your typical garden-variety romantic hero. An ex-R.C.M.P., he quit after becoming disillusioned with the corrupt practices taking place within the force. It just so happens that he had recently married, the daughter of the owner of Holidair, thus his new job. To round out the romantic scenario, Shuter's wife contracts some rare disease and subsequently dies.

We are introduced to Shuter sometime after these events have taken place; he is now fully recovered from the loss — although he'll "always love her" — and considering the events, "dad" has been rather lenient in the work department lately. Consequently, Shuter has discovered, and is beginning to enjoy, a rich, single, and leisurely lifestyle.

It is at about this time that *Dreadlock* beings. The story revolves around a Canadian politician's daughter and her mysterious disappearance in Jamaica. She went to Jamaica on a Holidair flight, and because her father is a friend

of the owner, Shuter is assigned to discover her whereabouts. Shuter, with his altruistic self-professed "Galahad complex," follows a trail of bodies, marijuana and Rastafarians, to uncover a terrorist plot of international dimensions.

The plot is standard thriller material but it manages to sustain interest in a number of ways. It has the amount of action and suspense essential for a thriller, coupled with a certain degree of levity which prevents the novel from sounding too serious.

The characters are fairly simple, but none of them lack a personality. Shuter is the archetypal hero-nice guy, much in the way of a Jim Rockford or a Thomas Magnum, tough when he has to be but really just a "good ol' boy." There is a cook who is a leading authority on literature — albeit unknown to the general public. He throws dinner parties for people like Northrop Frye, who he considers to be a "promising young Shakespearean," and he comes out with statements such as "There is a strange inability on the part of some Canadian academics to understand the character of Polonius. They insist on regarding him as some sort of Scandinavian Falstaff."

When in Jamaica Shuter teams up with a Rastafarian called Ras Daniel. He wears his hair in Dreadlocks and is the lead singer in a reggae band; he also has a degree in philosophy. Through Daniel the reader receives an explanation of the Rastafarian movement and the country itself. As these examples point out, the characters make up for their lack of emotional depth, with other interesting facets of personality.

I referred to a couple of T.V. stars earlier on because that is exactly the type of feeling evoked when reading this novel: It reads like a movie or a T.V. show. In most cases this would probably be taken as a derogatory remark; however, in this case it could perhaps be a compliment. The book was written under the pseudonym Lew Anthony by free-lance writer Robert Miller and movie producer Bill Marshall. Obviously Marshall's movie experience has been applied in the making of this novel.

Dreadlock is the first in a projected series of Lew Anthony novels and I expect that it will lead to success — at least to a certain extent in Canada. It's a good light read, something to take to the beach (or of course if you're snowed in, which I suppose is more relevant). It is the type of novel you can feel almost immediately in touch with because your central character may be talking of Wonderful Mons' career in the C.F.L. or, at the other end of the scale, drawing an analogy from the Beothuk slaughter in Newfoundland.

Murder at the Red October
by Anthony Olcott
Bantam-Seal 1982

Ivan Palych Duvakin, the security man in a second-rate Moscow hotel, discovers the body of a murdered American in one of his rooms. Duvakin, intent on relieving himself of any responsibility and fearful of state authorities, contacts the police who in turn involve the K.G.B. When heroin is found, Duvakin is drawn — unwillingly — deeper and deeper into a growing web of intrigue.

So begins Anthony Olcott's first novel *Murder at the Red October*. Olcott has tried to create a "thriller" dealing with the black market and, more importantly, the various enforcement organizations which attempt to control it and other criminal activities. Olcott's law enforcement agencies are fraught with corruption and bureaucratic in-fighting; they are clothed in secrecy and Duvakin, as the unwilling pawn, is constantly confused as to who he is working for and what organization they belong to.

As a so-called "thriller", this novel leaves much to be desired. First of all, the plot is rather sketchy in spots. Duvakin is hired by one of the mysterious organizations mentioned above to infiltrate the drug ring where the heroin supposedly originated; his mission is to locate the laboratory where the drug is refined. The ease with which this is accomplished — he literally walks into a party where Moscow's top criminals seem to be congregating — seems highly implausible; one would imagine that a

somewhat more precautionary attitude would be adopted by Moscow's equivalent of the mafia; moreover, if the K.G.B. (if in fact that is who he is working for — it gets confusing to the point that the reader is not quite sure) can send in a poorly qualified amateur to do the job, knowing exactly where to send him, then why don't they send in an experienced, qualified agent? This lack of attention to plausibility detracts greatly from the novel.

Perhaps the flaws in the plot could be overlooked if the novel offered more in the way of action. It seems to me that a novel written in the "thriller" genre — that is a *successful* book in this vein — can take liberties with its plot if it compensates by heightening the readers' pulse periodically. Unfortunately, the action and thrills are few and far between; moreover, the suspense tends to become more like impatience, waiting for something...*anything* to happen.

Olcott was a student in Russia for two years and it shows in his work. His descriptions of the seedy underside of Moscow seem to ring true. Here is a city where people queue up for hours to pick at a meagre selection of groceries — coffee and oranges appear to be a luxury. There is a large gap between the haves and the have-nots, and Olcott spends a great deal of time pointing this out.

Duvakin, his protagonist, is a case in point. He wanders around Moscow wearing a dirty and tattered overcoat, and cracked plastic shoes; at one point, when Duvakin is given a new coat, he reveres it as almost a gift from heaven. Olcott's creation of Duvakin with his bleak and oppressive view of Moscow, his fear of the authorities, and his preoccupation with his cracked plastic shoes and shabby coat are possibly the saving grace of the novel.

It seems that Olcott's mistake was trying to write a thriller. He appears much more comfortable when describing everyday life in the Russian city. A Ludlum or a Forsyth he is definitely not. Perhaps if Olcott writes a novel dealing with a more conventional plot — the everyday life he seems more comfortable with — he may produce a far better work.

Unlucky season off to a good start

by Tom Wilson

La théâtre Français d'Edmonton opened its thirteenth season at the Faculté Saint Jean Wednesday night (Oct. 20) with the musical comedy *Cré Sganarelle*. The play was a very funny spoof put on by Le Cercle Molière, a polished theatre group originally from Saint Boniface, Manitoba. Le Cercle Molière was founded in Saint Boniface in 1925 and it is the oldest french Canadian theatre troupe still active in Canada. The professional acting job by the groupe accounts for the national success of the play, as well as for its success Wednesday night.

The story is very simple. It is based on an old play written by the french playwright, Molière. The original name of the play is "Médecin Malgré Lui". In the original play, Sganarelle, the main character, is mistaken by two of the Kings men for a doctor, and they force him to appear in the King's court. Once there, he must find a cure for the King's daughter who has suddenly become mute. Playwright Claude Dorge modifies this plot slightly by situating the play in modern Western Canada, changing the role of the King to that of a Mafia chief, and the roles of the King's men to gangsters.

Fine acting plus good production under National Centre of Arts producer, Hedwige Herbiet, combine to make this play a winner. La Théâtre d'Edmonton's thirteenth season is off to a great start. The next production at the Faculté Saint Jean is "La Mandragore" (The Mandrake) by Machiavelli, on the first of December; bring your French-English dictionary.

Tous les prochains critiques seront écrit en français aussi.

(All other critiques will be written in French as well.)

Up and Coming

Thursday night October 28th Workshop West presents 1985 by Myrna Kostash, at the Citadel Rice Theatre.

Friday October 29th English and Canadian Studies present "A Tribute to Henry Kreisel" from 8:00 to 11:00, also readings by Eli Mandel, Robin Mathews, and Henry Beissel.

Also Friday: "Eminent American jazz trumpeter Bobby Shew" will give a concert in SUB Theatre at 8:00 pm. He appears again on Sunday in Convocation Hall. The latter performance is free.

If neither of the two previous items appeals, the Canadian Authors' Association presents "An Evening with Alex Mair" Friday at 8:00 in the Faculty Lounge in the Education Building.

Until Thursday at the Centennial Library some fine pencil sketches by Ernest Lindner are on display; until Friday some photographs by Jim Steele are showing.

FIVE STAR FIGHTS INFLATION!

Now the smooth taste and mellow quality of our best-selling rye, Seagram's Five Star, is an even better buy.

COMPARE THE GREAT NEW VALUE OF SEAGRAM'S FIVE STAR AT YOUR LOCAL STORE.



Serve Seagram's and be Sure.