

books, music, etc...

History of hatred

by Ryan Stanley

Yugoslavia. It used to be the name of a country. Now people say it like the name of a disease. The Balkans, however, are used to that. For centuries the condition has been considered chronic and incurable, and only when they threaten to spark a wide outbreak, like today, do legions of foreign doctors, disguised as diplomats, scurry to help, armed with plenty of assumptions but few helpful prescriptions. At times (again, arguably, like today) the doctors' intervention has made matters worse.

The region in Europe's south-east corner that gave the world the Count Dracula legend, Adolf Eichmann, the First World War's Nicolae Ceaucescu and the bloodiest and most enduring post-Cold War conflict is accustomed to receiving the world's scorn. The Balkans' two principal claims to fame are etymological: their name has been adapted to a synonym for political chaos, and their warriors, in the 1990s, resurrected 'genocide' as a household word.

Robert Kaplan, in "Balkan Ghosts," is one of the most recent Western observers to attempt an honest reappraisal of the people and politics of the Balkans. And while he, too, carries his prejudices, his book paints a rich, complex and ultimately sympathetic portrait of human existence in the region, and illustrates powerfully how insufficient are the facile formulas by which outsiders have traditionally described and scoffed at the trouble of Albanians, Croats, Greeks, Macedonians and their neighbours. In doing so, he achieves the additional feat of writing a wonderfully readable book, lyrical and reflective, reminding us that just as the subjects of his book deserve more respect and cultures, so does good travel writing merit greater recognition as real literature.

Kaplan is no stranger to the world's trouble spots. He has reported from over forty countries for several magazines, and his books are notable for being meticulously researched, and this most recent ends with seven pages of bibliography. Kaplan travels widely in his pack, especially old ones, and consults them frequently, including lengthy passages of background material paraphrased from other writers.

The essential fabric of "Balkan Ghosts," however, is the author's interviews with nuns, artists, construction workers, journalists, old women in churches, petty bureaucrats, and directionless youths, in

which he records the conflicting morass of historical lessons that make up Balkan truths. Some of these truths can, to Western eyes, be unfathomable. Franklin Roosevelt and George Bush, for example, are vilified for selling out Romania to the Russians, while Ronald Reagan is exalted for protecting the country. Croatian clerics who presided over the forced conversions and executions of hundreds of thousands of Serbs are remembered as martyrs. A Bulgarian diplomat asserts that Macedonia, a land with a historical pedigree of at least two thousand years, simply does not exist in any authentic way. An Albanian blames his Serb neighbours for the rats in his garden.

In the Balkans, people know their medieval history as if it were current affairs. The Ottoman Empire blends into the Soviet. Modern dictators are identified with ancient saints. But if Kaplan's book has a message, it is that knowing one's history is not the same as coming to terms with it, and that the Balkans suffer from a particularly nasty case of this sort of denial. Thus, one who credits the fascist Ustashe movement of Croatia with 60,000 murders is a Croat patriot, while another who accuses them of 700,000 deaths is a Serb nationalist. Pitched street battles are still fought over the numbers. In the words of a Bulgarian Foreign Minister, "Here, we are completely submerged under our own histories."

Kaplan is at heart a liberal. He lays much of the blame for modern-day ethnic cleansing on Tito, the Yugoslav Communist leader after World War Two, who "kept the wounds fresh" with "systematized poverty." The suggestion, of course, is that money in one's pocket leads to love for one's neighbours, a premise not all students of war and peace, or Ireland, or 1930s Japan, would agree with. Such blind spots, however, don't hurt Kaplan's product much.

After reading "Balkan Ghosts," the Bosnian war doesn't seem any closer to ending. In many ways the obstacles to peace appear more daunting than before. What has evaporated, however, is the impenetrable darkness which suffocates the stereotypical Balkans like a monk's blanket. Yes, Kaplan related enough tales of slaughters, massacres and pogroms to turn the stomach and, when considered alongside today's headlines, to lead one to believe this region cursed with a particularly potent form of evil. The end result, however, is that we see real people grappling with their pasts, a great many of whom have given up the search for scapegoats and want only to turn the page.

"Balkan Ghosts" was first published in 1993, and this paperback edition arrived in the spring of 1994, too late to be reviewed before the *Gazette* went to bed for the summer. This review is, therefore, not very timely, but the book is. Those who seek to solve the Balkans' problems for them, in the treacherous quest for political credit, would do well to read it, as would anyone who thinks their country, or whatever group they identify with, has succeeded in exorcising all of its historical demons.

Redefining the dictionary

by Lisa Lachance

"A living language must keep pace with improvements in knowledge and the multiplication of ideas."

—Noah Webster, 1817

This quote from Mr. Webster is presented on the first page of this volume. It may seem ironic to some that the man who first began to publish words to make them accessible should be used to introduce a type of dictionary radically differing from his style. Some may even question the idea of publishing a different type of dictionary or that a different one is even necessary. Feminist dictionaries in general are created to either offer definitions of words used in reference to women or when describing women's life experiences, and/or to present new definitions that reflect women's relationship to words.

Amazons, Bluestockings and Crones: a feminist dictionary
Cheris Kraemore and Paula A. Treichler
Pandora Press, London

The dictionary does not follow the format of regular dictionaries. Instead, interspersed throughout the dictionary are feminist sayings, sexist sayings, stereotypical expressions and words explained through a collection of diverse quotes. Some words such as "mammy" are given an historical context, while others have a biting edge to their response, e.g. "humour" being a woman's "means of survival." Not all of the quotes are from people considered famous feminists or are used in a manner that is completely serious. My favourite example is Zsa Zsa Gabor in 1960 saying that husbands are "like fires. They go out when unattended."

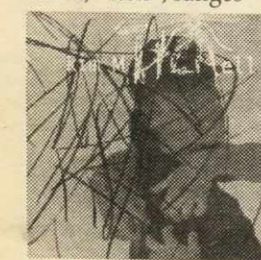
I really enjoyed this volume. It is quick and funny, while providing definitions for words that I hear commonly but have been unable to define. My only two criticisms of "Amazons, Bluestockings and Crones" are that I think the spirit of the volume can only be captured through reading a large portion of definitions, and two, that some of the definitions are too abstract to be used as a regular resource. Nonetheless, I hope that all women and men students search for alternative perspectives and resources. This volume in particular is one of those choices.

This book is available for borrowing by the entire community from the library of the Dalhousie Women's Centre. It was donated to the DWC by the Dal Women's Studies Society in March 1994.

If it's Itch, scratch it

If there is a Canadian rocker who has always been a half-step behind his peers, it's Kim Mitchell. We can all hum along to "Go for a Soda" and "Patio Lanterns", but how many of his albums can you boast of in your collection? Exactly.

Mitchell's latest effort, "Itch", ranges



from the mellow and introspective ("Wonder Where and Why" and "The U.S. of Ache") to a cut with a definite Red Hot Chili Peppers edge ("Acrimony"). In between there is Kim's scratching, wailing guitar accompanied by Kim's scratching, wailing lyrics. Songs like "Lemon Wedge" and "Cheer Us On" are reminiscent of Kim's

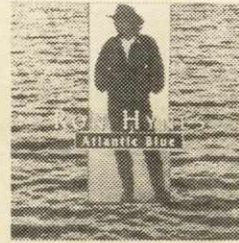
Canadian soulfulness. Perhaps the best tune, "Your Face or Mine" combines Mitchell's hard-rocking style with a reality-check kind of message. While I personally liked this song, it doesn't measure up to some of his past successes.

In fact, that is probably the downfall of this album. It can boast of a bounty of support songs, but it lacks the headliner tune that would bring the album together. This is one of those "stretching the borders of my artistic repertoire" kind of CD's. If you're not already a big Kim Mitchell fan, this collection will probably not convert you. My advice is to let Kim "find himself" on this album and buy one of his older ones.

Sam McCaig

Good and blue

After perusing the latest discs that came into the office ready to be reviewed, I thought



perhaps Ron Hynes new single "Atlantic Blue" might hold some promise. After hearing good things about this artist, my listening to the tune was a make or break as to whether I would buy the CD.

"Atlantic Blue" is a maritime ballad sung with feeling and sincerity. The lyrics are superb. A big thumbs up for Ron Hynes with "Atlantic Blue"; I will buy the disc next week.

April whine

April Wine, Canada's own version of Def Leppard,

released their new album, Frigate, earlier this year. I figured some poor sap should review it, so I became that sap.

Perhaps this album would have been a big hit, if... it was released ten years ago. When these guys try their hard rock edge it sounds like a cheap Bon Jovi knock-off. They are at their peak when they sing ballads, but heck, they all sound the same anyway. This is a case of some aging rockers trying to squeeze some more dollars out of their name. They



should have just sat back and relived the glory days rather than throwing together this crap.

A big thumbs down

Jefferson Rappell

"Loud as Hell." That is how posters advertised Saturday night's gig at the Grawood featuring Big Sugar. And loud as hell they were.

We arrived at the Grawood at 10:00 and was greeted with a line-up of anxious people waiting to get into the bar. This line was going nowhere, and the people at the front of the line told us that they had been waiting for an hour.

The last time I (Jen) saw Big Sugar was at the Double Deuce (the old Double Deuce) when they opened for the Lowest of the Low. At the time I recall wondering who was opening for who. This time it was pure Big Sugar. Big Sugar is a power blues trio from Toronto (although they were a foursome on Saturday), whose first album came out in 1992 and have been gaining in popularity ever since. Gordie Johnson

Big Sugar: Sweet, but not Lo

heads the band's with powerful blues. If you've heard their music on the radio, you know how good it is, but it doesn't even come close to their presence live on stage. They stepped on-stage at 10:30 to cheers from the

excited crowd. When you see Gordie live, you realize that he is just 'too cool.' His slicked back hair and dark shades allow him to sink into his guitar and create a symbiotic relationship of pure power. His playing is an interesting blend of Stevie Ray Vaughan blues virtu-

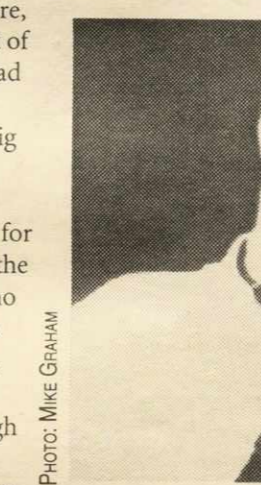


Photo: Mike Graham

osity and Neil Young guitar wailing. He plays with almost complete abandon, but is never indulgent. The music was great, but the place was so packed that it was hard to breathe and see. However, it was by no means difficult to hear the band. The P.A. system seemed to have been set up so that the optimum lis-

tening position was outside in the line-up. The music of Big Sugar is strong enough that it doesn't need to be buried under volume. These problems aside, the show was amazing. They played all of their new material, a superb Neil Young cover, some unreleased material,



Photo: Mike Graham

and their standard repertoire. They played for about 90 minutes, including a two song encore. For five bucks it doesn't get much better. The band is incredible, and if the Grawood can continue to book such great acts, this will prove to be a great year for live music in Dal.

Jen Eney and Michael Graham

