

Atlantic. Ira is the protagonist but not the real hero. The hero, or anti-hero, is Jethroe Chone, the bodyguard, a semi-gangster from New York, polished to a kind of superficial respectability. *Close to the Sun Again* suggests *The Great Gatsby* retold, with the focus on Daisy's cousin. Ira Groome is not so much a new hero as an old man who wishes his life had been a very different novel.

The most complex of new Canadian heroes or heroines we keep to last. Marian Engel, who last produced a work of extraordinary craft called *Bear*, has now published *The Glassy Sea* (McClelland and Stewart, 1978). The heroine is a non-conformist, but it is absurd to say she is a winner—or a loser. Classifications are the tools of critics, not authors. Still they are useful. One can say, for example, that there are two kinds of writers,

those who deal in first person emotions and those who do not. The first are seldom distinguished by their control of their material. Ms. Engel is the dazzling exception. On this occasion, she is a writer of pure emotion, and she is wonderfully in control. A soul is laid bare—complex, tortured, female, triumphant. *The Glassy Sea* is as well crafted as the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The story is about Rita Heber, a young woman raised in an Irish Protestant home in Ontario. She joins a tiny Episcopal convent, leaves it, marries a community pillar, has a hydrocephalic son who dies, is divorced, becomes a promiscuous, hard-drinking wanderer, sobers up in a cottage by the sea, and returns to the convent. That could easily be the plot of the soapiest novel of the year. It is instead the raw outline of a work of pure art.

N O N F I C T I O N

In his autobiography, *No Man Alone: A Neurosurgeon's Life* (Little, Brown, 1977), the late Wilder Penfield, the masterful neurosurgeon of Montreal, told how, among other things, he found epilepsy might be cured by surgery, mapped the cells of the brain, found where memories are stored, and persuaded the medical world that neurologists, neurophysiologists, neurosurgeons, neuropathologists and neurochemists should work in concert. U. S. Grant, Lester Pearson, Winston Churchill and Benvenuto Cellini were four dedicated, great men who wrote lucid, fascinating accounts of their own productive lives. Penfield was another.

Wilder Penfield, microscope in hand, dominating a conference at the Montreal Neurological Institute in the early fifties.



John English's *Borden: His Life and World* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977) crisply outlines the life of Sir Robert Borden and illustrates his world with some marvelously evocative photographs, posters and advertisements. Sir Robert was prime minister of Canada during World War I. If you start with the assumption that Canadians are cautious, conscientious and conservatively dressed, he was a very Canadian hero; but as the present prime minister, who wears a boutonniere, has pointed out, there is no such thing as an All Canadian Boy.

Borden—a calm, kind, sensible imperialist—presided over a country swept by an intense and arbitrary Anglo-nationalism. He knew that not all Canadians shared the simple-minded sympathies of Sir Sam Hughes, minister of militia and defence, but was not able to prevail against such opinions.

"The war had bred not one nationalism but two," John English writes; and he notes that French Canadians bitterly resented Sam Hughes's jingoism and the appointment of a Methodist minister to recruit in Catholic Quebec. Their major grievance however was the decision by the Conservative government of Ontario to end instruction in French in the provincial schools. Sir Wilfrid Laurier bluntly asked how the Conservatives could persuade French Canadians to fight for a nation that did not respect the fundamental right of French Canadians to use their language. *Le Droit*, an Ottawa newspaper, was more candid: "Of what use is it for us to fight against Prussianism and barbarity [in Europe] when the same conditions exist at home?"