

# CANADA

TODAY / D'AUJOURD'HUI

## Books

REFLECTIONS ON FICTIONS AND FACTS

In this issue CANADA TODAY/D'AUJOURD'HUI looks once more at recently published Canadian books.

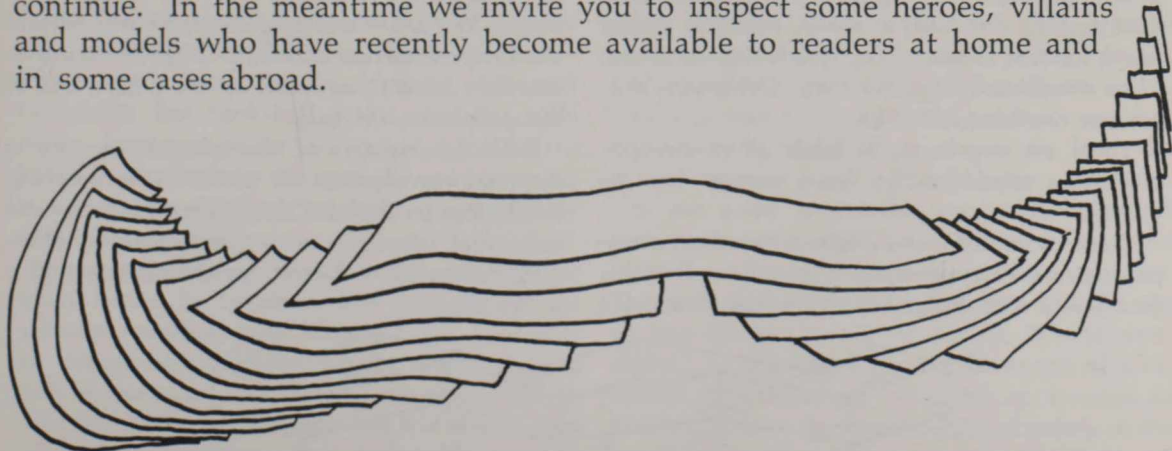
There are about four hundred Canadian publishers, but this gross figure is misleading; most are small and none approach the size, range or profits of their American counterparts.

To a remarkable degree Canadians are awash in the culture of the United States or, one might say, of North America. They watch M\*A\*S\*H, read *Roots*, drink Cokes and eat Twinkies. They also read American books and magazines; eighty-three per cent of all books sold in Canada are of foreign origin, mostly from the US.

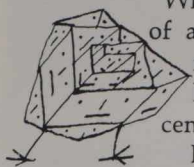
Canadians, the old as well as the young, need heroes, villains and models of their own, and the Canadian publishers supply them, sometimes with difficulty. First of all their financial positions incline them to few adventures. They are ill equipped (and seldom tempted) to compete, with their own lines of paperbacks, against the ubiquitous racks of drugstore best sellers from the US. Their market is almost exclusively Canadian and small. (A Canadian book which sells more than one hundred thousand hardback copies—such as Peter Newman's *The Canadian Establishment*—is the phenomenon of its decade. One which sells ten thousand is considered to have done quite well.)

In recent years the Canadian government has made significant moves to support the printing of Canadian books. The Canada Council gives grants to authors—obscure poets as well as eminent personages such as John Diefenbaker—and to publishers of books and magazines. Not everyone approves. Jean Paré, publisher of *Actualité*, argues that “free money takes the wiseness out of publishing.”

Still, most concerned Canadians believe that government aid solves more problems than it causes, and support for authors and publishers will probably continue. In the meantime we invite you to inspect some heroes, villains and models who have recently become available to readers at home and in some cases abroad.



THE FAR SIDE OF THE STREET. Bruce Hutchison. Macmillan of Canada, 1976.



Why should you read these memoirs of a provincial Canadian newspaperman? Because they are an excellent group portrait of twentieth-century, English-speaking Canadians.

Mr. Hutchison writes with warm detachment of people and places, great and small. He is modest—an attribute as rare among newsmen as among politicians—and was a clear-eyed observer of many historic occasions.

His modesty is of first importance. Press men frequently exaggerate the significance of events and officeholders, since their own glory is a reflected light. Who could boast of intimacy with the dullest minds in Parliament? If Mr. Hutchison boasts at all, it is softly in the least self-assertive way, and he is always courteous. Only once does he let his distaste shine through, and then he does not name its object: "I spent what should have been a peaceful Sunday . . . listening to a peculiarly noxious fellow who laughed with contempt at Canada for playing at war."

Does this mean that he ignores the shortcomings, limitations, illusions, follies and con-

fusions of the mighty? No, not at all. Since he deflates his own accomplishments, he can be realistic in recounting those of others.

There are candid and intriguing pictures of prime ministers—Lester Pearson, John Diefenbaker, Mackenzie King, Pierre Trudeau; of heads and chiefs of state—FDR, Harry Truman, Queen Elizabeth, John Kennedy; and of the less celebrated, mostly Canadian, who are often as interesting as the renowned—the small-town people in British Columbia, newsmen in Winnipeg, politicians in Ottawa, wives and husbands in the prairies, rich men and poor men in the east, wise and foolish people coast to coast.

The great virtue of Mr. Hutchison's book is that it gives the reader a Brueghel-like picture of Canada in the twentieth century—crowded with small-scale, finely-drawn, brightly-coloured people, at work and play against a vivid, homey, cluttered background. This is not, probably, his primary intention, but he does it beautifully; and in doing so he defines the English-speaking Canadian with a definition as long as the book.

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*"Quebec is still small enough, and the Québécois still enough of a family, for the patriot to love all of it, to create sentimental songs about it, and to make emotional political speeches about it. It's very personal."* — PETER DESBARATS.

RENE: *A Canadian in Search of a Country*. Peter Desbarats. McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

RENE LEVESQUE: *Portrait of a Québécois*. Jean Provencher, translated by David Ellis. Gage Publishing Limited, 1975.

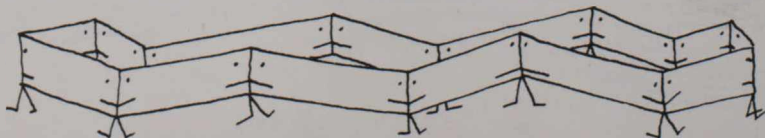
René Lévesque is Quebec's recently elected premier and the founder of the Parti Québécois—the political force dedicated to the peaceful separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada. Like Bruce Hutchison, Lévesque is a Canadian newsman past the first flush of youth, a kind of patriot and a kind of idealist. Like Hutchison, he is also an extraordinarily typical man. Otherwise they are not the least bit alike.

There are two essential kinds of newspeople. Hutchison is of the type born curious but detached.

There is a true story about another newspaperman who approached a friend one day, his face white with indignation. He had been on a

bus, when an old, obviously poor woman got on. She had only a nickel, and the fare was seven cents. "Not a single person on that bus stepped up and gave her two cents," he said. Asked why he hadn't done it himself, he was totally taken aback. By nature and profession, he had become the firmly detached observer. It did not occur to him that he was, as much as the others, one of the people on the bus.

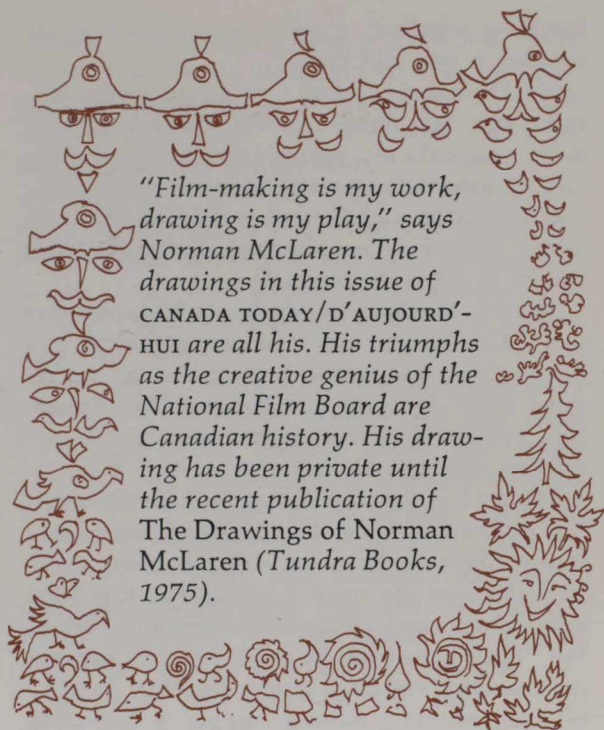
René Lévesque is of the other kind, who is inevitably involved in the events he is reporting. Established as French Canada's most popular and influential television news commentator, he became, abruptly, a Liberal party minister and a policy shaper.



Peter Desbarats's *René* is the shorter and spritlier of the two biographies. Desbarats presents vivid scenes and subjective judgments. He begins by gathering the "Five Wise Men" around Gérard Pelletier's dinner table on the warm and velvety evening of May 16, 1963. The "Quiet Revolution," the postwar burst of Quebec's self-assertion, had become less quiet. Young militants were planting bombs in Westmount mailboxes; but the men at the table were advocates of peaceful reforms—Lévesque, Quebec minister of natural resources; Pierre Trudeau, a law professor at the University of Montreal; Pelletier, editor of *La Presse*; Jean Marchand, the trade union leader who directed the French-language television producers' germinal sixty-three-day strike against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; and André Laurendeau. They had been meeting since 1961. The meetings were unstructured, informal, sporadic and not notably harmonious. In Trudeau's phrase, "There were no orders of the day, just the disorder of the night."

On that May night fourteen years ago, Laurendeau towered above the others in prestige—he had proposed the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism and would be its co-chairman; but Lévesque set the tone, skipping from idea to idea with the enthusiasm of a college boy, though he was forty and looked older. Trudeau spoke seldom; but when he did, he often cut Lévesque's flow with caustic thrusts.

Laurendeau would soon die, but the others would bloom. Trudeau would become Canada's prime minister and champion of confederation and pick Pelletier and Marchand for Cabinet posts. Lévesque would leave the Liberals, form the Parti Québécois and champion separation.



"Film-making is my work, drawing is my play," says Norman McLaren. The drawings in this issue of CANADA TODAY/D'AUJOURD'HUI are all his. His triumphs as the creative genius of the National Film Board are Canadian history. His drawing has been private until the recent publication of *The Drawings of Norman McLaren* (Tundra Books, 1975).

This book offers vivid pictures of all. As Hutchison defines Ottawa and the west, Desbarats gives us the ambiance of modern Quebec in episodic and sometimes confusing flashes—the Quebec of Trudeau and the federalists as well as of Lévesque and the separatists.

The reader who lacks full background might first read Jean Provencher's *René Lévesque*. It provides relevant detail about Lévesque's family and childhood and about the politics of Quebec, as well as quotations from Lévesque's writing as boy, youth and man.

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ONE CANADA, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, The Years of Achievement 1956 to 1962*. Macmillan of Canada, 1976.

Most political autobiographies are paste-ups of old speeches and/or platitudes. A precious few—for example U.S. Grant's *Memoirs*, Winston Churchill's full bookshelf and Lester Pearson's *Mike*—are works of art and insight. Mr. Diefenbaker's *Memoirs*, two volumes out and one to go, is sui generis—forceful, emphatic, partisan, tendentious and impolite.

Volume 2, like volume 1 (which covered the years before he became prime minister), is not without speeches, platitudes and the full texts of unremarkable official papers; but it is also full of splenetic life. It reflects the title, which is also the theme. Mr. Diefenbaker has always seen himself as a citizen of an indivisible country,

which includes Quebec despite his party's traditional weakness there. "No matter where I spoke, I felt that I was speaking to all Canadians. I gave them a picture of the kind of Canada I wanted to achieve, from the north to the south, from the east to the west. . . I told my Quebec audiences: 'I'm not going to promise you anything except that your rights shall be maintained. In many cases, in too many, you've been denied equality. That will end as far as I'm concerned.' I did not go into Quebec to tell the people, 'You're wonderful.' . . If I were to say to the people of Vancouver or Calgary or Winnipeg or Toronto or Halifax, 'You're the most wonderful people in the world,' I know what my audience would do.

Everyone who had a wallet would reach to see whether it was still there."

Mr. Diefenbaker is still a politician, unabashed, eighty-one but unmellow. He has always seen politics not only as a proper calling but as a noble one. A man who sees nobility in his goals—however personally ambitious they may be—has two things going for him: His means reflect his ends and he is apt to be original.

Peter C. Newman, of *Maclean's Magazine*, has said, "This old man never forgets or forgives . . . if you don't understand that, you don't understand Dief." It seems possible that Dief remembers, in vivid black and white, any classmate who did him wrong in kindergarten.

Volume 2 is remarkable. Let us count the ways. It is jammed with detail, interesting more often than not because the author's extraordinary interest in his own life story is contagious. It is filled with opinion and emotional judgments. Phrases like "Their object was to annihilate me" abound, and emotions are more interesting than insights. Mr. Diefenbaker is partisan but not in dispensing the back of his hand, and his measuring sticks are consistent. Consider a few random quotations:

"Personages whom I included in the Cabinet . . . over the years had done everything they could to prevent my becoming Leader. I did not quarrel with their past activities. I believed—wrongly however—that in the Cabinet their plotting would cease."

"I had spent most of a lifetime contending against those less enlightened forces in the Conservative Party who in their blindness actually seemed to find some comfort in defeat at the polls, election after election."

"I was watching the Honourable Jack Pickersgill while Pearson was reading his motion. Jack



was in a state of ecstasy. He was the only Member I've known who could strut sitting down, and that's what he did that day. He was so proud of his contribution to the production, it was obvious he wanted to be singled out as, if not the father, at least the stepfather of it all. . . . I could barely believe my ears. I turned to Donald Fleming, my desk mate, and said, 'This is the complete end of opposition to us.'"

The *Memoirs* are also remarkable as a publishing phenomenon. Canada Council gave the University of Regina a very large grant to get the work under way, and Mr. Diefenbaker received a \$100,000 advance, the largest ever paid in Canada. The investment was sound. The first volume sold sixty-seven thousand hardback copies, and this and the third are expected to sell eighty thousand each.

**LADY ORACLE.** Margaret Atwood. McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

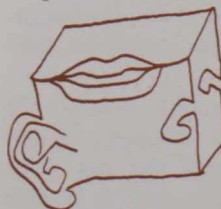
**BEAR.** Marian Engel. McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

**BUTTERFLY WARD.** Margaret Gibson Gilboord. Oberon Press, 1976.

**HER OWN WOMAN.** Myrna Kostash, Melinda McCracken, Valerie Miner, Erna Paris & Heather Robertson. Macmillan of Canada, 1975.

Liberated women writers (if that is a proper phrase) have recently published a variety of remarkable conclusions about the state of the sexes. Two of the four books above seem to suggest that the end result of emancipation is isolation. The third is a triumph of feminine introspection; the men are simply irrelevant. It is reassuring to consider the fourth, a collection of interviews by women of proclaimed raised consciousness, which takes a more sanguine view of the survival of harmonious couples. In the authors' words, they were "all bored with the books coming

out of the women's liberation movement that harped on the theme of woman as victim."



Let us begin with *Lady Oracle*. The woman is Joan. Joan was a very fat girl, with a slim, chic, upwardly mobile, frustrated mother, who wore long white gloves and eventually drank too much.

Joan, in time, cuts her weight in half and develops a double life. She writes (secretly, under an assumed name) popular, gothic romances about

rich, strong, ruthless men and poor, wispy, lovely, dependent women. She lives, if one can call it living, with a series of feckless fellows. One, a mildly comic creation, is her husband, vaguely academic and continuously in pursuit of hopeless causes. (If they are not hopeless per se, they become so when Arthur gets involved.) Another is an older refugee, a member of the lesser Polish nobility; and the third is a mad, mad artistic poseur, who creates gallery exhibits by freezing and subsequently displaying the carcasses of city animals killed by cars.

Joan's men are unchangeably childish and annoying, to both Joan and the reader. They are seriously out of place. Joan is a full-blown figure. Her aunt is a lesser creation but still robustly human. Her mother is a mere sketch, but even she has the shadow of a third dimension. The men are not even two-dimensional. They are stick figures. There are, of course, real-life childish men, as there are childish women, and there are men who are richly comic in their masculine conceits—Dickens has a dozen; but to be interesting they must be human.

Joan fakes her own death, leaves her men more or less behind and goes to Italy. At the end of the book she has taken up with a faceless, nameless young newspaper reporter. He is not one-dimensional. He is invisible.

Marian Engel's *Bear* is a small work of great craft, a *tour de force* in the primary sense, a feat of artistic strength. There is no real attempt (or need) to depict the men in the life of Lou, an archivist. They are footnotes to her past.

Lou is assigned to spend a summer cataloguing the library and papers of the old Cary home, a small, eight-sided Victorian mansion on an island in the north. The house and furnishings are charmingly inappropriate to the place, and there is a bear tethered out back. There has always been a bear out back—generations of bears kept by the original owner and his descendants.

The archivist is a modern, liberated woman. She has lacked love, although she and the head archivist have a tacit arrangement, by which they have a physical exchange once a week. Another man in her life is a retired scholar, as carefully cultivated as a hothouse grape. She and he eat steak *au poivre* and sip the best affordable wines, as if their behaviour were being edited for an article in *Gourmet*. She goes north to leave such men behind and in time finds two new lovers, one brief and casual, one not. The casual one is the rough-hewn man who runs the store and gas-line station on the lake. The other is the bear.

There seem to be some judgments in Ms. Engel's story. There is, perhaps, a conclusion that

Canada is essentially a land of rock and water and natural people. Attempts to make it European (or anything except Canadian) have not changed its essence. This is a book about the degree to which a human being can be alone. Lou was on an island before she ever came to the north woods. Lou is a woman. She is a major creation. She is natural, alive and lonely. The keeper of the store on the lake is a man. He is a minor creation. But he too is a natural person, alive and lonely.



Margaret Gibson Gilboord's *Butterfly Ward* is the first work of a brilliant writer. She writes about women in emphatic isolation—many in the women's wards of an asylum for the insane; and she writes with extraordinary insight, sympathy and precision. Her men are, unfortunately, fragments. Her best stories are those in which there are no men at all. In some, such as "Considering Her Condition," the man, though nicely etched, exists only as a bystander. In her weakest story the protagonist is a man, supposedly a father and a frightened husband, but he sees and reacts to the world with the conditioned reflexes of the women in the asylum ward. These stories are powerful and disturbing. In them, the gulf is not so much between the sexes as between the sensitive (or the insane) and the less sensitive (or the normal). It is a gulf as impassable as the line between butterflies and bats.

*Her Own Woman* is about women, clearly established as persons of accomplishment, and it is written by young women of talent. It is pleasingly diversified; the interviewees are liberated people but not militantly monochromatic. Most have satisfying and mutually respectful relationships with particular men. The women include the more or less famous—Judy LaMarsh, a former Cabinet minister; Abby Hoffman, the track star; Madeleine Parent, the labour leader; Esther Warkov, an artist; Margaret Atwood, the author, poet and critic; and Barbara Frum, Canada's top radio personality—and the obscure—Edith McCracken, the interviewer's mother; Kathleen, a remarkably invulnerable young woman, whose last name is not revealed; Rita MacNeil, a singer and composer; and Barbara Greene, a maker of radio documentaries.

The sum is a good deal more than the parts. None of these women are victims. Their vitality and individuality underline the hopeful truth that stereotypes of both sexes exist in bad art, not in life. We can let Madeleine Parent express the fact that *liberation* and *alienation* are not synonyms. She is speaking of Kent Rowley, the man she

married more than two decades ago: "We were companions in all our struggles and we respected each other. He was the first man to ask me to organize and when I said, 'Do you think I can do it?', even though it was the only thing on earth I wanted to do, he said, 'Of course you can, as well as anybody else. There's nothing you cannot do.' Kent isn't afraid to stand alone, and having stood alone myself so often as a child, I

recognized and understood that ability."

The interviews are all of a high quality, but those of Kathleen by Myrna Kostash, Esther Warkov by Melinda McCracken, and Barbara Greene by Erna Paris are exceptionally good. The works of these five journalists and three novelists suggest that a very substantial number of Canada's best writers are, indeed, their own women.

## Quebec Literature Today

by François Ricard

Due to various social, economic and political factors, the literature of Quebec reached its current maturity around 1965. Today the province annually produces, in proportion to its population, perhaps the largest number of literary works in the world. Considering the relatively limited readership in Quebec, the literary life of the province is remarkably lively and intense. The literary industry, both in form and in substance, is centred in Montreal, a city which, unlike others of similar size in France and other Francophone countries, both looks and acts like a literary capital.

Of the numerous Quebec publishing houses, the most important are principally, if not entirely, devoted to literary works: L'Hexagone, Parti pris, Quinze, Leméac, Hurtubise H.M.H., Fides and so on. A multitude of literary and cultural magazines are produced (*Liberté; Etudes françaises; Voix et images; La Barre du jour; Critère; Jeu, cahiers de théâtre; Hobo-Québec; Livres et auteurs québécois; Stratégie; Brèches; Les Herbes rouges*). There are writers' associations, a system of scholarships and government assistance, which is one of the most generous and best organized in the Western world, and the *Rencontre québécoise internationale des écrivains*, which in the fall of each year brings together European, American, South American and Quebec writers.

But despite all the literary tools, Quebec literature still encounters serious problems, the most obvious of which is the sale of books. Although editors and writers are heavily subsidized, they still lack readers. The reasons for this are many: an inefficient distribution system in part in the hands of foreign distributors, the competition of books by French authors, the dumping of American books and periodicals, public indifference, the effects of television and, at times, the uneven quality of works published. Add to this the absence of foreign outlets, especially in France where a Quebec book hardly sells, and one arrives at the conclusion that despite its productive-

ness and apparent (but largely artificial) prosperity, Quebec literature remains marginal at best, supported in large part by the state but functioning more and more in isolation. However, this situation, which is common in the majority of Western countries, is perhaps less than desperate. The writers themselves are increasingly more conscious of this and are looking for solutions, like the recent founding of *l'Union des écrivains québécois*.

This being said, let us look at the current production in the fields of poetry, novels, theatre and essays.

The largest number of books published are volumes of poetry. These include works of established and internationally recognized authors, like Gaston Miron, Fernand Ouellette, Jacques Brault, Paul-Marie Lapointe, Roland Giguère, Rina Lasnier, and those of younger poets, like Pierre Nepveu, Michel Beaulieu, Nicole Brossard, Paul Chamberland, Michel Garneau, Renaud Longchamps, whose works explore all avenues of today's poetic life from the classical to the innovative, from protest to satire.

But it is the novel that has made Quebec literature known abroad, due in large measure to the works of great value published by Anne Hébert (*Kamouraska*), Marie-Claire Blais (*Une liaison parisienne*), Jacques Godbout (*L'Isle au dragon*), Réjean Ducharme (*Les Enfantômes*), Hubert Aquin (*Neige noire*), Jacques Ferron (*L'Amélanchier*) and Roch Carrier (*Le Jardin des délices*). Of the younger writers, there are several strong original novelists, like André Major (*Histoires de déserteurs*), Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (*Les Grands-pères*), Jacques Benoit (*Les Princes*) and Yvon Rivard (*Mort et naissance de Christophe Ulric*). The Quebec novel today is extremely diversified, both in form and content. French models are less admired than American or South American ones. And the view of Quebec which arises from these novels is that of a modern society, pluralistic, anx-



by Paris and American schools. Second, there is the large number of works inspired by the political question and the problem of nationalism, which have preoccupied intellectuals for many years. Of the essayists, the most important include Vadeboncoeur (*Un génocide en douce*), Fernand Dumont (*Chantiers*) and Marcel Rioux (*La Question du Québec*.)

In a general sense, for fifteen years the question of nationalism has been central to Quebec literature, which has been openly, consistently and almost without exception autonomist. Autonomism, until 1976, was an ideology of opposition and of struggle against the established order. Does the election of the Parti Québécois pose a major problem to writers now? What will be their position in relation to this new power? This is what will be seen in the coming years, in the course of which an important reorientation in Quebec literature will probably emerge in the context of a new political climate. It will be more interesting than ever to follow its evolution.

#### POETRY

- Brault, Jacques. *Poèmes des quatre côtés*. Noroît, 1975.  
 Garneau, Michel. *La Plus belle île*. Parti pris, 1975.  
 Lapointe, Paul-Marie. *Le Réel absolu*. L'Hexagone, 1971.  
 Miron, Gaston. *L'Homme rapaillé*. Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1970.

#### NOVELS

- Blais, Marie-Claire. *Une liaison parisienne*. Editions Quinze, 1975.  
 Ducharme, Réjean. *Les Fantômes*. Gallimard, 1976.  
 Godbout, Jacques. *L'Isle au dragon*. Seuil, 1976.  
 Hébert, Anne. *Les Enfants du sabbat*. Seuil, 1975.  
 Major, André. *Histoires de déserteurs* (trois volumes). Editions Quinze, 1974-76.  
 Rivard, Yvon. *Mort et naissance de Christophe Ulric*. Editions La Presse, 1976.

#### ESSAYS

- Dion, Leon. *Nationalismes et politique au Québec*. Hurtubise H.M.H., 1975.  
 Rioux, Marcel. *La Question du Québec*. Parti pris, 1976.  
 Vadeboncoeur, Pierre. *Un génocide en douce*. L'Hexagone/Parti pris, 1976.

#### MAGAZINES

- Liberté* (six livraisons par an). 5724 Côte-Saint-Antoine, Montréal.  
*Voix et images* (trois livraisons par an). C.P. 250, Succursale N, Montréal.

ious about its lot, and disturbed by the deep crisis of values common to Western society.

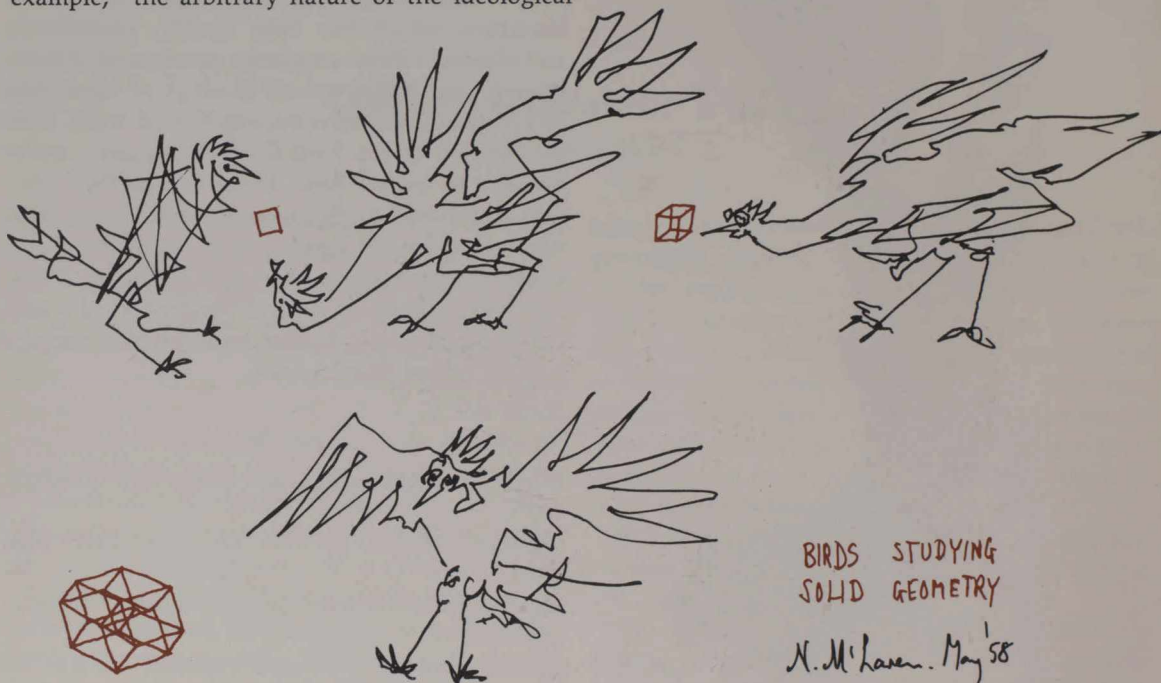
The birth of theatre in Quebec is relatively recent, but dramatic production in the course of the last years has been extremely rich, thanks to such writers as Michel Tremblay, Jean Barbeau and Michel Garneau. These writers have attempted to achieve a synthesis between the most contemporary experimental theatre and a new realism based on the use of popular language called "joual" by some. But the theatre in Quebec, as elsewhere, is detaching itself more and more from its purely literary base; and the ideas of *script* and *playwright* are being energetically challenged by new dramatic groups interested, above all else, in collective creativity and the various forms of pop theatre. These companies, which are numerous throughout the province, are in the process of seriously renewing the art of the theatre in Quebec.

Finally, in the field of essays, two things should be briefly underlined. First, there is the considerable development of the social sciences and of literary criticism, where one again finds all the theoretical and methodological diversity inspired

CANADIAN FICTION, *An Annotated Bibliography*. Margery Fee, Gail Donald and Ruth Cawker. Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1976.

This excellent bibliography is designed specifically for teachers and librarians. Novel and short story annotations are primarily descriptive, though frequently reflecting a critical eye—for example, “the arbitrary nature of the ideological

outbursts tends to multiply confusion in an already disjointed narrative.” Novels are indexed by title and subject; short stories, by author and title.



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