

## Book Reviews

*Powers, Possessions and Freedom: Essays in Honour of C.B. Macpherson.* Edited by Alkis Kontos. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. Pp. 178.

For those who were students of political philosophy in the early nineteen-sixties, the appearance of this volume is bound to have a special significance. For some of us it might even come as a bit of a shock. It is hard to believe that C.B. Macpherson, whose new work is as fresh and challenging as anything being written in the field today, has reached retirement age. Or that nearly twenty years have passed since his magnificent *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* burst with such dazzling impact upon our genteel but somewhat moribund discipline. (At that time, it is worth recalling, the question "Is political philosophy dead?" was being solemnly debated.) Its impact was perhaps even greater at universities elsewhere in the world than at the University of Toronto where Macpherson's ideas were to some extent familiar through his teaching. At Oxford, I know, the publication of *Possessive Individualism* stirred immediate excitement, acclaim and condemnation: Macpherson had blown the dust from the history of political thought and turned it once again into a vital and controversial area of study.

In a famous review, Sir Isaiah Berlin perfectly expressed the feeling of so many scholars upon first encountering Macpherson's major work: "The sensation of suddenly feeling that one is sailing in intellectually first-class waters is wonderfully exhilarating."

While readers of this *festschrift* are unlikely to find much in it to excite feelings of exhilaration, it is nevertheless a most worthwhile collection. For those primarily interested in Macpherson's own political thought, two of the ten essays included in it are particularly important. These are the essays by William Leiss on "Marx and Macpherson: Needs, Utilities, and Self-development" and by Steven Lukes on "The Real and Ideal Worlds of Democracy." Leiss presents both a thoughtful critique of Macpherson's use of certain key concepts and an original analysis of the similarities and differences in the treatment of needs in Marx, Mill and Macpherson. Lukes points to some fundamental difficulties in Macpherson's attempt to con-

struct a non-market theory of liberal democracy, which he sees as arising from Macpherson's use of the terms "essential human capacities" and "maximization of powers". Other critics of Macpherson have focused on these points and Lukes adds nothing that is new, but his essay is a concise and lucid restatement of the grounds on which objection might be made. As is traditional in volumes of this kind, there is also a bibliography of Macpherson's publications, assembled by Victor Svacek.

The remaining essays vary greatly in topic and treatment. The contribution of Shlomo Avineri, "The New Jerusalem of Moses Hess," is a fascinating piece on a little-known contemporary and admirer of Marx who came to a different conclusion: he ended up as a militant Zionist; E.J. Hobsbawm writes with his usual range and erudition on "Pre-political Movements in Modern Politics;" Charles Taylor analyses the cracks in the logical foundations of what he calls the "primacy-of-right" theories in an essay titled "Atomism;" Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., Carole Pateman and Judith Shklar ably discuss some standard topics in the history of political thought; and Alkis Kontos contributes a review of Friedrich Durrenmatt's play *The Visit*, which he interprets as a parable on the unmitigated horrors of capitalism.

For this reader, the most enjoyable and instructive essay in the book is an enigmatic work by Christopher Hill on "Covenant Theology and the Concept of 'A Public Person'." After meticulously tracing the idea of a public (or representative) person in English sixteenth and seventeenth century theology, Hill concludes that he could find "no significant trace" of the idea in seventeenth century political thought and that its modern influence "seems to be nil." In a field where even mere coincidence is sometimes hailed as evidence of the influence of one thinker upon another, this surely is a salutary reminder that the results of research need not always be positive.

Finally, congratulations must be offered to the University of Toronto Press for the very fine quality of its editing, design, typography and binding. It is good to know that books of this technical excellence can still be produced. The result is a fitting tribute to a great scholar.

*University of Western Ontario*

*S.J.R. Noel*

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*The Invasion of Canada 1812-1813.* By Pierre Burton, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980. pp. xi, 363. \$19.95 cloth, \$24.95 slipcased.

The first question most Americans would ask upon seeing a substantial volume, entitled *The Invasion of Canada*, would be "invaded by whom?" It would occur to very few that their own country was the culprit. For many

Americans, the War of 1812 is something about which Tschaiikowsky wrote an overture or even possibly a struggle named after that piece of music. What then can an American "reviewer" say about a book that should but probably will not be much noticed in the United States. It can be hoped, even anticipated, that a briefer edition of this and the volume that is to follow, similar to the one volume paperback edition of *The National Dream/The Last Spike*, will be produced. This latter edition, the only one available through an American publisher, was extremely useful in courses dealing with Canada and had some popularity with the reading public. A comparable edition on the War of 1812-1814 must await Berton's second volume and assume that it will be as well-researched, well-written and well-balanced as this one.

Berton states that "The Canadian way—so difficult to define except in terms of negatives—has its roots in the invasion of 1812-1814, the last American invasion of Canada. There can never be another." For Americans hoping to understand the constant search for identity, this book could provide an excellent first introduction, except that by definition, it includes little on the origin and attitudes of the Francophone Canadians. As for Berton's assertion "there can never be another (invasion)," certainly not in a physical sense, but there have been several others, at least Americans are often so reminded by modern nationalists like Berton, in economic and cultural terms. An American reader has to speculate whether the second volume will show Canada as inept and the U.S. in as good a light as they are shown in reverse order in this volume. If so, then Berton will have achieved a major success. Readers in the United States will find this volume full of details about events most of them have never heard of. For citizens of this country who know anything about the War of 1812-1814, there are three major events: the great American victory at the Battle of Lake Erie, the burning of Washington by British troops, and the defeat of the British at the Battle of New Orleans. Berton's treatment of these incidents is much anticipated by this reviewer.

His superb research staff, specifically Barbara Sears, whom he generously recognizes, have dug deeply into American research and writing on the war and its background. Presumably there are some in Canada who find this detail boring and perhaps unnecessary. In fact, it is this detail which sets the stage so well from the American viewpoint that this reviewer finds attractive. New insights for a regular course on the Historical Geography of North America have been gained. Harrison, the Battle of Tippecanoe, the Indians, especially Tecumseh, the Black Swamp and Detroit all take on a new relationship under Berton's organization and style. We all learn something about the sparsity and character of settlement in the Indiana-Michigan-upper Canada area; in the same way that the characterization of the two Van Rensselaers and Wadsworth tell us something about people and power in New York State at this time. Both of these insights are tied to people and

events in Washington and the attitudes of those on the frontier. But these are pluses beyond the main thread of the book.

Undoubtedly there will be some in Canada who will find errors of historical fact, interpretations they don't like, or fault with length, detail and style. The fact is that this volume is first-rate history, written in an attractive style with a fine sense of pace throughout. The reader is left waiting for the second volume. For an American, the sequel will tell much about Berton's ability to handle the myths and the realities of this misunderstood and often misinterpreted war.

It will be very difficult for Americans, with Quebec so much in the news, to realize the importance of this war on the emergence of Canada. It is vitally important to them to know the other half of Canadian tradition and their part in creating it. Berton's claim that "in a psychological sense as well as political we are Canadians and not Americans because of a foolish war," and his successful explanation of this thesis should help Americans to understand better their northern neighbours.

*University of Vermont*

*Edward J. Miles*

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*The Passionate Observer: Selected Writings.* By Donald Creighton. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980. Pp. 211, \$19.95.

Donald Creighton died December 19, 1979. His last book was a novel about Canadian nationalism, *Takeover* (1978), that he had long wanted to write. *Takeover* was an interesting exercise: but the characters were a little wooden, as one might perhaps have expected from a man for whom history was the living reality.

Creighton was a great historian, probably the greatest writing in Canada in English. His *Macdonald* is the finest biography ever published in Canada, written from immense and meticulous research, and with a sense of period so vivid as to be almost palpable:

. . . the drive back to the Stone Mills, in the dark December evening, was a triumphal progress. Down by Adolphus Reach, the inevitable crowd of faithful Conservatives had assembled; and Macdonald, cheerful, irreverent, elated with whisky and triumph, mounted the platform of Teddy McGuire's saloon to address the crowd. He was back in his old district, joking with his old neighbours, talking to old friends and acquaintances who already rolled his stories, and escapades, and burlesques about their palate like a well-loved spirit. For five minutes or so they shouted with laughter while he imitated the ridiculous sing-song manner in which a poor worthy Quaker clergyman, well known in the district, used to intone his interminable sermons. A young man, Canniff

Haight, who had driven the sleigh back from Picton, stood watching the platform, and the flaring lights of the hotel, and the laughing faces of the spectators. Long afterwards he remembered: and it was out of episodes such as these—at ferries and by road sides, in hotels and village inns, in city halls and on rural hustings—that the incredible Macdonald legend began to grow. (pp. 172-3, *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician*)

The present book, *The Passionate Observer*, is Creighton's own selection. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review of his articles; one would have liked that, a weighted, pondered, annotated compendium of all his pieces, both fugitive and academic. Still, this is Creighton's own choice, and it seems churlish right now to quarrel with it. Creighton even at his mediocre is good, and his best is splendid. One or two things are dated, but much of the book is delightful. "Wine, Spirits, and Provincial Politicians," is on the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, but valid for just about any other provincial liquor board in Canada:

Prohibition is a dead issue, and the prohibitionists have vanished. But they have had their revenge—a curious revenge, which, of course, they never intended—on the peoples of Ontario. (p.7)

His reviews of books, here, mostly for the *Globe and Mail*, have the same quality of civilized authority that one gets from reviews in the *Spectator* or the *Observer*, on "Arnold Bennett's Young Wives," or on Somerset Maugham. There is intelligence, culture and vigour in his writing; one feels refreshed and regenerated after his pieces, as if one has rubbed shoulders with the larger world.

Best of all are his biographical sketches of colleagues whom he admired or liked, Charles Stacey, Harold Innis, Bartlett Brebner, Eugene Forsey. There do not exist any better personal sketches of them. As with all of Creighton's friends, they are done a little *couleur de rose*; one would prefer that Creighton painted with a little more shadow.

That is not a weakness with one other portrait, a man whom Creighton cordially hated, Professor Frank Underhill. Even so it is more judicious than the attack Creighton made on Underhill in the form of a Presidential Address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1957. This one, "The Ogdensburg Agreement and F.H. Underhill," wears better its historical qualities, for it does indeed purport to be history. What lay behind this description of Underhill were profound personal resentments. It is a true sketch; the problem only is, it is not the whole truth.

He [Underhill] seemed incapable of realizing how much his provocative language and indiscreet behaviour had exasperated and wearied some of his closest associates. He himself was very quick to resent any derisive or satirical attack on his own views; and, when this happened, he would sometimes remark, his face flushing with anger, that his critic was "getting nasty." His

readiness to take offence was coupled with a curious insensitivity to the feelings of others; he found it difficult to understand how people whose opinions he had ridiculed and whose patience he had tried to the limit could some day come to feel that they had had more than enough. (p. 135)

Ramsay Derry, who was Macmillan's editor when Creighton published *Canada's First Century*, has written a charming introduction to this present book, with personal touches that everyone who knows Creighton will recognize. Creighton loved literature and remembered poetry; I have rarely met anyone to touch him in his knowledge of French and English literature. If you gave him a line of Browning or of Victor Hugo, the chances are that he would be able to quote not just the next one but the next several. His taste in music was deeply felt and discriminating. The last opera Creighton saw was Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*. It was a marvellous performance of a ravishing opera; the first Act ends, as readers may remember, with the Marschallin, Princess von Werdenberg, breakfasting with her young lover Octavian, reflecting about her life, how she is growing old, and sees the time when her lover must leave her, that their love will pass, as all earthly things must, to a natural and inevitable end. Creighton was greatly moved by the end of this first act, as a man ought indeed to be, and it is a place to leave him, slowly dying of cancer as he was, listening to those splendid cadences, Strauss's music, Hofmannsthal's poetry, the Marschallin's elegiac resolution.

*Die Zeit im Grunde, Quinquin,  
Die Zeit—die ändert doch nichts an den Sachen—  
Die Zeit, die ist ein sonderbar Ding . . . .  
In den Gesichtern rieselt sie, im Spiegel da rieselt sie,  
in meinen Schläfen fließt sie  
Und zwischen mir und dir da fließt sie wieder  
Lautlos, wie eine Sanduhr . . . .*

What is fated must come, Mignon,  
Time—be it late or soon, matters not—  
Time, how strangely it goes its way . . . .  
It ripples through our faces, through the mirrors,  
It flows across my temples  
And between you and me it flows  
Silently, steadily, like sand in an hour glass . . . .

Dalhousie University

P.B. Waite

*New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction.*  
By Lawrence N. Powell. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980. Pp xiv + 253. \$15.00.

During the Civil War in America, Union military victories inevitably created



problems for the occupying forces of restoring order to the agricultural economy and of providing work and relief for captured and refugee blacks. The Federal Government initially established contraband camps and farms for black workers and their dependents, and later it flirted with the idea of confiscating lands abandoned by wealthy southerners and distributing them among loyal white southerners and black freedmen. After 1862 the Government also encouraged northern entrepreneurs to lease or purchase captured plantations and employ former slaves as free wage workers. In the five years following 1862 between twenty thousand and fifty thousand northerners accepted the invitation and became planters. A minority responded out of patriotic and philanthropic motives, but most entered their new vocation primarily for personal gain. High cotton prices, low labour and land costs, and generous assistance from the army made the risks of cotton planting seem negligible, the rewards enormous. Consequently, thousands of northern fortune seekers streamed into the South, confident they could grow cotton more cheaply and efficiently than slave owners and certain their enterprise would fatten their own purses while benefitting the regional economy and its black workers. Northerners, one prominent investor enthused, would literally "show the Southern people . . . how to cultivate cotton." (p. 6) Lawrence N. Powell's *New Masters* offers a fascinating account of this northern planter movement, its early successes and its ultimate demise.

The movement of northerners into southern planting was an uncoordinated but crucially important feature of the larger northern sponsored effort to remake or reconstruct the South. Central to reconstruction was the replacement of plantation slavery by free labour capitalism. While the Government created the appropriate legal and political frameworks for this transformation and while northern teachers and philanthropists worked to uplift and educate former slaves, the northern planters hoped to demonstrate by their own successes how free labour production functioned and to convince southerners of the error of their past ways. Most northern planters, however, had little prior agricultural experience. Typically, they were well-educated men in their thirties, with backgrounds in business or the professions, who saw in planting a way to recoup losses suffered since the outbreak of the war. Undaunted by their lack of agricultural expertise, they believed that success would flow almost automatically from implementing free labour principles, from giving workers a personal stake through wages in performing efficiently and industriously.

Fortunately for the newcomers, southern planters also wanted to recoup their losses. They generally welcomed the men from the North and encouraged their investments. Although sectional animosities occasionally barred cooperation between the two groups, in most instances northern and southern planters joined hands in the pursuit of profit. Many southern planters were only too happy to rent lands to northerners and let Yankees manage the difficult transition from slave to free labour. Moreover, by rent-

ing to northerners, impecunious southern landowners received desperately needed income which permitted them not only to survive but also to retain ownership of their impoverished estates. Implicit in the welcome given to Yankee planters, however, was the understanding that traditional racial relations would be preserved, and nothing more quickly soured relations between Yankees and southerners than their urging freedmen to act as equals. Most newcomers, although initially sanguine about the freedmen's capabilities as free labourers, soon came to share the southern planters' racial views.

Powell's most interesting chapters investigate the interplay between Yankee planters and their black employees. Few northerners were untouched by the racism that pervaded American society in the 19th century, but most of those who took up planting believed that former slaves, despite their past poor performance, would respond quickly and positively to the rewards and penalties of wage labour. If paid good wages at frequent intervals, black workers, the Yankees held, would learn to work industriously, grow cotton efficiently, and improve their material condition. The few blacks who failed to learn those lessons quickly would starve of course, but the Yankees' experiences in the North with the Irish and other working people suggested that most of the black poor would prefer working to starving.

Former slaves, however, followed a different script. After lifetimes of unremitting toil, most freedmen wanted to own land and become independent, self-sufficient producers. Failing that, they sought greater freedom from supervision and more free time for familial and leisure activities than their new employers wished to concede. Freedmen worked hard in fits and starts like most preindustrial people, and they resisted the Yankee's imposition of steady, tightly supervised gang labour. Not work itself, but its pace, purpose, and remuneration were the issues. The freedmen's work ethic, a combination of the new sensibility about the value of time along with older habits of feigning illness and malingering, drove Yankee planters to distraction. As their hopes for quick fortunes evaporated, northern planters blamed blacks for their disappointments. After a year or two of planting, many northern planters mouthed the same racist complaints for which they had earlier criticized slave owners.

The movement of northerners into the South slowed dramatically in 1866 and turned around in subsequent years. The major cause of this reversal was the collapse of the promise of instant riches before the combined effects of falling cotton prices, insect infestations, floods, and labour problems. Men who had made money from planting in 1864 and 1865 lost vast sums in the following two years. Hard times rekindled sectional hostilities, and many partnerships between southern planters and northern renters ended with nasty law suits and cries of betrayal. Already reeling from economic setbacks, the northerners felt the wrath of their southern neighbors whose sense of outrage and sectional defensiveness was fanned by the enactment of the



Military Reconstruction Acts of 1867. In these circumstances most Yankee planters fled the South, many penniless and deeply embittered against southerners of both races.

The experiences of the northern planters speak volumes about the failure of the larger Reconstruction experiment. The victorious North had hoped to remake the South and uplift its millions of former slaves by transplanting there its own political economy. Northern planters were to show southerners how prosperity could be attained by recognizing black liberty and legal equality: freedmen would outproduce slaves and all would profit from the resultant gains in efficiency and productivity. They were part of a recovery strategy designed to make most participants winners, but in the end most of them lost. As the Yankees' disappointments and failures mounted, few of them questioned whether the free labour experiment, even under optimal conditions, could have promoted an expansive economy, racial harmony, and black freedom. But conditions were far from optimal and the dream vanished. Most Yankee planters returned home blaming not their flawed assumptions but rather the treachery of their former partners and the racial infirmities of their former employees. They abandoned southerners to work out their own ill-starred destinies. The national Government followed the northern planters' lead shortly afterwards.

*Dalhousie University*

*John T. O'Brien*

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*A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada.* By Geoffrey Bilson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. vii, 222. \$15.00. Paper, \$5.95.

Imagine oneself in Quebec City in mid-June 1832. Over one hundred people were dying daily, and the gloom that hung over the city like a fog blended well with the thick smoke curling up from the 'anti-contagion' barrels of tar burning outside of the homes of the poor. The cholera had come, and it would come again, its threat lasting into the 1870s. Thousands died in the major epidemics of 1832, 1834 and 1849, death winding its way along the rivers and canals of Lower Canada into Upper Canada, or meandering into the port cities of the eastern coastline. In these years nothing was to be heard of but the cholera, and distance was no security. The first epidemic in Lower Canada saw the annual mortality rate climb from 37 to 45.7 per thousand, and soar to 74 per thousand in Montreal and 82 per thousand in Quebec. As Bilson argues, the impact of the disease coloured much of the social and political history of mid-nineteenth-century Canada.

*A Darkened House* is an adequate, often admirable, attempt to begin the difficult exploration of particular aspects of the social history of early

Canada. Charting the course of cholera's place in the nineteenth-century past, it outlines the tremendous toll taken by specific epidemics in various regions. Bilson provides an important chapter in the history of medicine and the institutional state, arguing effectively that the government's failings and the primitive state of the doctors' knowledge severely constrained the progress of public health until late in the nineteenth century; only then were the doctors able to consolidate their claim to special knowledge and professional status on the basis of 'scientific' advances in medical understanding. Until then, however, 'charlatanism' of every description prevailed; not until acceptance of the germ theory of disease in 1883 was cholera finally recognized as a contagious disease. Often this folk medicine was more effective and appreciated than that of the professional (but far from authoritative) healers, who of course charged liberally for their services. The people expressed their unambiguous regard for the selfless blacksmith who toiled among the indigent, or the 'cholera doctor,' Montreal's Stephen Ayres, in opposition to the cold shoulder these quixotic figures received from church and state.

In bringing all of this to our attention, in laying a foundation upon which we can commence to understand the cholera and its importance, Bilson has done us all a great service. But one cannot put this book down without sensing that something has been missed. The attempts to link the cholera to the political causes of the 1830s, for instance, are weak and undeveloped. We need to know much more about the ways in which the threat of disease cultivated French Canadian nationalism in the face of fear that the British were deliberately fostering death to undermine the *Canadiens*, and Mackenzie's endorsement of the English radical opinion that cholera was being used 'to frighten us out of reform' demands a closer look than it gets in a brief paragraph. Such dissimilar reactions among the reformers of Upper and Lower Canada may tell us much about the peculiarities of the rebellious experiences of the two nations. Similarly, Bilson seldom explores his evidence with the dogged persistence that one might desire: why were the poor the hardest hit in Halifax, but in French Canada the suffering of the destitute was surpassed by that of artisans living above the level of absolute want?

Finally, in the whole area of the plebeian resistance to cholera and to the modernizing doctors and boards of health attempting to isolate the disease and combat its tendency to drift into the homes of the well-to-do, we have a window into the realities and perceptions of social cleavages developing along early class lines. *A Darkened House* presents countless cases of 'the mob' turning out in opposition to or support of particular regulations. In the rural community of St. Eustache magistrates decreed that no cholera victim could be buried in the usual, centrally located plot, but must be laid to rest outside of the village. Angered by such arbitrary authority, the villagers assembled after the burial of two of their neighbours, and in a tumultuous assembly 'horrid to relate, they proceeded to dig up the bodies . . . the putrified car-

casses were placed on open carts, and carried in savage triumph through the village, communicating a stench intolerable as they passed along.' As the curé and the magistrates protested, the corpses were left in the sun for hours. When a ship feared to be infected with the cholera arrived in Niagara in July 1832 it was met at the wharf by 'a mob yelling we are not going to be infected.' The medical officer cheered on what the ship's captain referred to as 'the lowest orders of Niagara.' Just these two instances of popular resistance open up a vast terrain of analytic possibility, in which the crowd can be explored as a vehicle of patrician *or* plebeian initiative. But the historian who speaks to us in the vocabulary of 'the mob' will know little of this, for he has embraced an anachronistic language of derision that acquaintance with the recent literature of crowd actions would surely displace.

This book thus introduces us to, but does not probe, a central question of cholera, a question built upon tabulations of death but extending beyond it: what were the conflicting *mentalités* of the period in which cholera attacked, and that cholera must have influenced? A Parisian contemporary of cholera quoted by Louis Chevalier exclaimed in the aftermath of one epidemic: 'Ah, Paris! You are cured of the cholera, but you are close to civil war; you are still sick indeed.' Chevalier himself put the matter succinctly, noting that the cholera's impact was felt in realms sufficiently removed from the question of disease: 'Expressed in terms of life and death, too, were the class hatreds, seen in the murderous fury which seemed suddenly to grip the city.' The question, and various answers, need not necessarily be posed in exactly this kind of language in the pre-Confederation Canadas, but attempts to deal with cholera, not only as a disease of destruction, but as a factor in developing social tensions and cleavages remain, despite the contributions of *A Darkened House*, at the centre of the interpretive agenda.

McGill University

Bryan D. Palmer

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*C.D. Howe, A Biography.* By Robert Bothwell and William Kilbourn. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979. Pp. 397. \$19.95. Paper, \$9.95.

This long-awaited and much vaunted volume was probably the most disappointing book of 1979. Unfortunately the Canadian Historical Association has no award in that category, although it did see fit in a moment of fortuitous if unintentional irony to award the book its prize for bestwork in Canadian-American relations. The irony, of course, was no doubt lost on the authors who apparently would have been delighted to award Howe himself such a prize.

Howe, the American-born engineer who built on his World War II role in running the Canadian economy to become "the Minister of Everything" in

the King and St. Laurent governments, never comes alive in this biography. Instead we are treated to an eminently readable, although sometimes purple, piece of Liberal hagiography. Critical questions about Howe's career are posed only to be dismissed as the ravings of stodgy Tory nationalists or young, irrelevant leftists. Perhaps we had no reason to expect more from this commissioned volume, handsomely supported by C.D. Howe Foundation money. (While denying that the volume is an "authorized biography" (8), the authors do manage to thank the Howe family for co-operation and J.W. Pickersgill for access to "private" Howe papers.) Nevertheless both authors claim to be professional historians and thus must be judged by scholarly canons, not those of popular biography. By all such standards, this volume fails badly.

Biography has played a particularly prominent role in post-World War II Canadian historiography. While the rest of the English-speaking world witnessed the triumph of social and economic history, Canada has retained its loyalty to great men. Moreover Canadian biography resists even transitions in biographical writing. No psychological speculations ever sully its pristine, pre-Freudian pages. All of these comments unfortunately are typified by *C.D. Howe*.

The volume opens with a melodramatic flourish as our hero struggles for survival in the North Atlantic after being torpedoed by a German U-boat. "On that grey December day", our biographers intone, "the iron entered his veins." (13) And, if that introduction were not bad enough, there is also the conclusion where, despite Howe's fourteen corporate directorships (including the Bank of Montreal), we are expected to feel sympathy for their portrayal of a man lost without power— "sitting alone in airports . . . looking exhausted," with a "gruelling schedule," etc. In between those effective passages, the authors manage to ignore, or apologize for, or rationalize the following: the significance of the rise of the engineer in business and politics; government corruption and patronage; the implementation of "government by expert"; the growing intimacy of government and business, best represented by the "dollar a year" men and especially E.P. Taylor; the nature of post-war reconstruction (described best by Howe himself in 1943: "Our best work will be needed to keep the Government out of the hands of the socialists"); the role of various tax innovations, especially incentives and depreciation allowances, in fostering capital accumulation; the post-war sale of crown corporations at bargain-basement prices; the near-contempt of parliament which, after all, was certainly not "efficient"; and perhaps, above all, the whole issue of American imperialism. On all of these themes the authors apparently embrace Howe's vision of the future unreservedly. This is especially surprising given that they have one advantage that he did not: they live in that future.

Two final notes for a regional audience. First, Howe on national steel policy after it was pointed out that it favoured central Canada over the west

and the Maritimes and might lead to further depopulation of the margins: "Was not mobility of labour a good thing?" (237). Second, Howe's contribution to Dalhousie after the university, like so many of the corporations of the day, called on his aid. According to the authors, his major Dalhousie efforts led to two triumphs: "a splendid new science building" and the eventual presidency of Henry Hicks. Enough said!

*Dalhousie University*

*Gregory S. Kealey*

*The Visible Man.* By Robert Priest. Toronto: Unfinished Monument Press, 1980. Pp. 88. \$4.95.

Robert Priest's *Visible Man* is as fine a first volume of poetry as one is likely to read. By turns witty, profound and urbane in its own young language and experience, it is the record of a man who has not been seduced by the manner of others who have been on the scene longer than he, nor with a desire to counterfeit or duplicate their experience. Rather, it is a work of high originality both in language and imagination, and a number of its poems are simply memorable.

The experiences of Priest's poetry are almost all inner experiences—that is, with very little external reference beyond the actual common events that are processed in the computer of his imagination to present new stuff for poetry. In "Are there children", for example, Priest asks whether the violence of the deaths of children in Vietnam or Auschwitz is self-willed, whether each man does "in his own way/ plot a pogrom for his species/ or are we all, always mislead/ to war". Similarly in "Immigrants (they will enter you)", the simple external phenomenon of immigration is processed to become an almost universal image of penetration—the penetration of the nation by those who become indistinguishable from its stuff, "chanting like rain in rivers/ the song of their new lineage". These great doses of fantasy coupled with light facts can also yield such humour as "Mommies":

The prime minister has admitted  
 he needs his mommy  
 he is down on the floor of the house of commons  
 in agreement for once, with the leader of the opposition  
 has likewise admitted  
 that he needs his mommy  
 And the two of them are hoping  
 With the mingling of their griefs  
 to heal the world.

Priest's humour runs from light irony to bellylaugh, and at least partially betrays an impulse to song lyrics, an impulse that reflects his career as a rock

guitarist. The gentle irony of such a poem as "Childhood incidents" portrays the horrible noise that results when the poet, at the age of two, is given an old trumpet by a garbage man, and when a bobby (Priest was born in England) asks for the source of the noise, the crowd opens and points "it's him—it's little Robert Priest". Likewise, "Poem of the Two Tongues" is an erotic poem which puns on the lingual abilities and the linguistic disabilities of the two lovers (one English, one French) and, by extension, the nation.

Priest's eroticism is among the most refreshing qualities of his poetry. He is light and lighthearted, undaunted by the great bugaboo of sex that terrorizes and dominates so much modern verse. "The blood", for example, is, with delicacy and distance, about a bloodstain on a bed, while another poem explores the social implications, both humorous and serious, of its opening assertion that "the Canadians have admitted/ that they fuck". The group of four erotic odes (tongue, clitoris, penis, bum) have considerably more dignity and lyricism than one might expect at first glance.

Violence, the second of the two apocalyptic hobbyhorses of twentieth-century poetry, also manifests itself in a series of poems almost painful in their detail, yet again, handled with such delicacy and distance as to be rewarding. Such poems are "Target practice" (the bullseye "is the bright erupting dot/ of a hatred/ that practice only makes/ more perfect"); "An unidentified man" (a self-portrait of a pathological killer); "Lesser Shadows", a poem on assassins ("as night absorbs the lesser shadows America absorbs her murderers/ completely"); and the gruesome but clever punk-poem "why I had a heart".

Beyond these are many other very good poems including the well-crafted and witty "Advantage of the identity crisis", "Revolutions for Galileo", "Excuses (for Allende)", and others. Robert Priest is a careful and sensitive poet, one with a fine sense of language and of much of the absurdity of experience; his sensibility is never second-hand but exuberantly his own, and his ideas have a freshness that matches the liveliness of his expression. Robert Priest published *Visible Man* himself when other arrangements fell through; the book is distributed by him from 378B Markham Street, Toronto.

Dalhousie University

Richard Raymond

*The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad.* By V.S. Naipaul. Andre Deutsch, 228 pp.

Naipaul's latest book consists of four essays written between 1972 and 1975, a period he speaks of as "a creative gap". This is misleading; those readers who are expecting evidence of some sort of creative drought are going to be disappointed: the pieces, especially the dissection of Michael X and the



Black Power killings in Trinidad, are as finely focused as anything he has ever done. The account of the killings is a cynical, close-up and absolutely unrelenting examination of Michael de Freitas, a.k.a. Michael X, Michael Abdul Malik, sometime London pimp, drug pusher, gambling-house operator, enforcer for a London slum landlord, failed writer, commander of Malik's Black Liberation Army, failed revolutionary, failed leader, murderer. In a word, the ultimate loser.

Naipaul has researched Malik's bizarre career with the sort of thoroughness and perception we have come to expect from the author of *The Loss of El Dorado*. It is an altogether unpleasant, but nonetheless, fascinating story, and Naipaul uses Malik's ghost-written, rather disingenuous autobiography to shed considerable light on this man who seems to have become obsessed with his own self-conception. This is, to be sure, a rather important motif in the essay, and Naipaul offers several reasons which might explain the rise of a man who was, frankly, quite unremarkable.

How did this unoriginal, poorly educated, former Port of Spain idler, former London hood, rise to notoriety in the late sixties? In England, Naipaul writes, "there were people who had told him that he was a writer, even a poet". Michael believed them, as he would later believe a Trinidad seer who told him that he was destined to be the ruler of America's blacks.

Malik, the con artist, was himself conned by those who convinced him that he possessed some sort of distinctive charisma. He came to believe that he was, in fact, the future ruler of blacks, and he actually believed that he was "the Best Known Black man in the entire white western world". The exaggeration was, of course, typical of Malik. "Malik exaggerated the importance of his newspaper fame," Naipaul explains. "He was an entertainer, a play-actor." Moreover, "he failed to understand that section of the middle class that knows only that it is secure, has no views, only reflexes . . . the people who keep up with 'revolution' as with the theatre, the revolutionaries who visit centers of revolution, but with return air tickets . . ."

Malik eventually returned to Trinidad where he expected to form a new government. He was also going to do considerably more: he was going to found the first International University of the Alternative. This new university was going to be "an experimental laboratory of a new and sane life-style".

The story of Michael de Freitas' rise, growth and end on a Port of Spain scaffold one early May morning in 1975, which Naipaul sets alongside some penetrating criticism of Trinidad society, will not please too many Trinidadians. They can hardly be expected to accept Naipaul's description of their society as one which "is yet technologically untrained and without the intellectual means to comprehend the deficiency".

The remaining essays on Argentina (and Borges), Zaire's Mobutu and Conrad are equally penetrating and valuable. It is a country of sterility and waste, without a past and apparently going nowhere. The country, Naipaul implies more than once, lacks identity. Argentina is "a simple materialist

society, a simple colonial society created in the most rapacious and decadent phase of imperialism". This lack of identity is embodied in Buenos Aires, a phony city which "feeds on other countries and is itself sterile".

Argentina is dominated by the macho myth, ironically embodied in the person of Eva Peron, "the macho's ideal victim-woman", part saint, part seductress. Some of Naipaul's most severe criticisms are directed at the macho myth, which victimizes, dishonours and debases Argentine women who are largely uneducated, and are therefore reared for domestic service or early marriage. The bugging of women, Naipaul tells us, has special significance in Argentina. "By imposing on her what prostitutes reject . . . the Argentine macho . . . consciously dishonors his victim. So diminished men, turning to machismo, diminish themselves further, replacing even sex by a parody."

But Argentina is also a country of torture; and one shares Naipaul's abhorrence of the country's apparent complacency about torture. Torture seems to have become an Argentine institution, and Naipaul quotes this rather telling remark made by an Argentine labour leader: "a world without torture is an ideal world".

The essays on Mobutu and the nihilism of Africa and "Conrad's Darkness" are particularly useful for students of Naipaul's most recent novel, *A Bend in the River*. The eye of a careful novelist is noticeable everywhere in the essays, particularly in Naipaul's description of the squalor of Kinshasa. Naipaul's treatment of Conrad's fiction reveals his own ambivalence about the great novelist; it is, however, an instructive essay in which one novelist is trying to probe the essence of another, and in the process sheds rewarding light on the fascinating craft of novel writing.

This latest book will almost certainly remind some readers of Geroge Laming's well-known description of Naipaul's work as a "castrated satire". The book is indispensable reading for students of *Guerrillas* and *A Bend in the River*. But it's worth reading for other reasons: there is the invigoration of its brisk, piquant narrative as well as its terseness and incisiveness. And more than this, there is Naipaul's compelling cynicism and his ability to recognize and crystallize for the reader the bizarre, ironic contrasts in areas of human darkness.

College of Cape Breton

Harold Barratt

*Experience Into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks.* By Kathleen Coburn. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. Pp. 95. \$7.50.

It was Coleridge's misfortune that "a formidable, impossible polymath" like him should have been appropriated by the "literary," who could hardly be

expected to do full justice to his multitudinous interests, at least some of which were "far out." One of the consequences of this misappropriation, Coburn argues, was that Coleridge was regarded as a "freak" in non-literary circles. Also, the Coleridge that emerged from the literary intellectuals' presentation of him bore little resemblance to the "various dynamos" that go by the name of Coleridge. (p. 5).

As the Editor of the five volumes of *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Coburn can tell us authoritatively that a study of these documents provides a useful corrective. The Coleridge of the *Notebooks* is "a stronger Coleridge," for here we see his "rare capacity to experience, to recognize and participate in the experiences life brought to him and he brought to life." Also revealed here is his remarkable ability to articulate these experiences, "a certain toughness of mind," the gift for minute and searching observation, his uncertainties about himself, and his sense of contradiction between the world within and the world without (pp. 9-10).

However, the main thesis of the first of the three Alexander lectures, published as *Experience Into Thought*, is that Coleridge's intense sense of isolation sharpened his response to experience, stimulated his creative consciousness and mental activity, and developed his sense of the conflict between appearance and reality which, in turn, "fostered a capacity for asking questions, that went on developing throughout his life" (p. 23). One has the feeling that not only is his poetry the product of this creative response to isolation, his *Notebooks* and even his *Marginalia* are the result of his intolerable wrestle with a loneliness that ended only with his death.

In the second and the most successful of the three lectures, Coburn examines the drives behind Coleridge's taste for "other social rejects" such as Behmen, Bruno, Paracelsus, and such "intellectual odd-men-out" in his own day as Mesmer and Spurzheim (p. 29). He found in Behmen "some liberation from the 'fixities and definites' of the late eighteenth century application of Newtonian physics and Lockean psychology which had prevailed in his undergraduate days" (p. 34). Besides this opposition to mechanical materialism (Coburn does not, of course, use such Marxist jargon) Coleridge also found in him a vigorous assertion of what one may (though Coburn does not) describe as the "dialectical world-view." "It delighted Coleridge to read that all matter is in a perpetual evolution," for it implied that "all that is, is not necessarily right, but changing, and man participates actively, not passively" (p. 34). It is obvious that Coleridge derived some intellectual nourishment from this apparently mystical source.

Paracelsus appealed to him because he too, like Bruno, attempted to integrate man and nature, though with "less piety and more science" (p. 39). Besides, it was his "search for law, laws of mind and laws of nature, and the human processes behind discovery of them" that made Paracelsus interesting to Coleridge, not his conclusions (p. 39).

In Bruno he discovered a kindred spirit that was aware of the disparity between appearance and reality (p. 41). He admired his truculence and was impressed by his vigorous mind "struggling after truth, amid many prejudices" (p. 45). In short, Coleridge chose his intellectual "heroes and allies" for their "daring, their doubting and for the general snobbish and frightened neglect of their magnitude" (p. 48).

Coleridge's interest in Mesmer and Spurzheim (the physiognomist who examined the bumps on Coleridge's head and declared that he lacked the organ of Imagination) sprang partly from his identification with "oddities and outcasts" and partly from his "sceptical resistance" to "the prejudices of professional establishments" (p. 53). After all—and perhaps rightly—he had more faith in "imaginative amateurs" than in mere "professionals" (p. 48).

In the third lecture, which is devoted to Coleridge's "poetic and philosophic imagination," Coburn challenges the notion that the metaphysician killed the poet in Coleridge. In fact, "metaphysical ideas," she argues, are "actually incorporated" into that "lovely poem"—*Dejection* (pp. 63, 61). She also suggests that Coleridge could not complete *Christabel* because "he was identified all too personally" with her desolation. "So neither sufficient detachment on the one hand, nor the right kind of happy empathy on the other, was present" (pp. 64-65). Of *The Ancient Mariner* she says that "the alternating back and forth movement between these [the inner world of guilt, fear, remorse, penitence, disgust, utter loneliness, and the world of elements] is eloquent of that reconciliation of the internal with the external which is one of Coleridge's descriptions of arts" (p. 66). Such comments may not add substantially to Coleridge criticism but they do make him available to a wider public.

Turning to Coleridge's "philosophic imagination," she says that Coleridge was not a system-building philosopher, and quotes a marvellous Coleridge note: "But the fact is—I do not care two pence for the *Hare*; but I value most highly the excellencies of scent, patience, discrimination, free Activity; and find a Hare in every Nettle I make myself acquainted with" (p. 67). Coburn herself is reduced to "nettle-nosing" Coleridge's notes in the rest of the lecture and offers observations on what appeals to her imagination in the "chaos" of *Notebooks*, namely, his tentativeness, his willingness to change his mind, his original thoughts, the aphoristic nature of their expression, and his "self-persiflage." Though one can go on adding to this list, a Coleridge scholar must, unlike the Coleridge of *Notebooks* and *Marginalia*, stop somewhere.

One welcomes the publication of these lectures as an attempt to popularize Coleridge that may win for these volumes, which are now almost wholly the monopoly of professional scholars, a wider and less exclusive audience. However, it is difficult to suppress a "gnostic whisper" (CN III 4243) or two. For instance, Coburn makes a number of perceptive comments on the role of loneliness in Coleridge's literary life (p. 25), and compares his lonely charac-

ters with Wordsworth's solitaries, and ends this discussion with a paradoxical explanation: "Coleridge was lonely because he was a warmly gregarious man" (p. 25). However, she completely ignores the fact that loneliness, which was one of the consequences of the steady erosion of communal life consequent on the break-down of feudalism and the emergence of commodity production, acquired a new character with the development of industrial capitalism, which made it possible for one to be lonely in the midst of a crowd in a city. (One is reminded of Wordsworth in London in *The Prelude*. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine any of Chaucer's pilgrims as a solitary.) And this was the experience not only of Coleridge and Wordsworth but also of every major writer in the early nineteenth century. Unfortunately, though, the socio-cultural matrix of Coleridge's thought does not mean much to Coburn. Her elegant paradox, which seeks to offer a purely psychological explanation of a phenomenon that involves the whole of history, society, and culture, reveals, among other things, how philosophical idealism mystifies the human processes in the realm of scholarship.

Perhaps the time is ripe for "imaginative amateurs" to build on the solid foundations provided by decades of dedicated, painstaking and admirable scholarship. If this does happen and restores Coleridge to the average reader, the credit for it will, of course, go to Miss Coburn.

*The Central Institute of English  
and Foreign Languages,  
Hyderabad*

*S. V. Pradhan*

*Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages.* By Richard Firth Green. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. 253. \$20.00.

In order to better understand late medieval court literature, Richard Green compiles and clearly presents a wealth of information about the institutions, conditions of service, and customs of English and French royal and baronial courts from the mid-fourteenth through the fifteenth centuries. The strength of this book is its well-documented description of court life drawn from historical sources usually ignored by students of literature. Unfortunately, Green does not do as much with the information he presents as he could, because he is hampered by anachronistic assumptions about medieval writers' motivations and he is intent on countering the scholarly view that the bourgeoisie determined late medieval literary trends with the equally simplistic view that the aristocracy determined them.

Green assumes, for example, that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century court writers wanted to be full-time "professional" writers and to support them-

selves and gain recognition solely by their writing. Consequently, the conclusion he finally draws from his information on the conditions of court life is that "there is little doubt that in general the lot of English court authors in the late middle ages was not a very happy one. For those employed within the *familia regis* the chance of receiving encouragement in the form of a sinecure intended to relieve them of the pressures of official business was slim" (p. 203). Because of his modern bias, when it comes to analyzing the meaning of the material he presents on the social matrix of court poetry, Green emphasizes restrictions on the writer's freedom of movement, expression, and time; and he presents a nostalgic view of the independent "professional" status of the thirteenth-century *jongleur* or minstrel whose role, he claims, was "usurped" in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by the "amateur" court poets who, he also argues, did not want to be amateurs. In search for recognition as serious writers, these court writers abandoned the role of "love" poet, which so many courtiers could play, and catered instead to the aristocratic taste for practical literature aimed at moral improvement or political aggrandizement.

Green provides plenty of evidence to undermine his explanation of late medieval literary trends. For example, he notes that Baudoin of Condé was a minstrel, while his son Jean became a court poet; and in the first half of his book on the king's household, chamber, and "letters" at court, Green suggests many financial, political, and intellectual benefits of service at court that might attract ambitious men. Clearly, we are dealing, not with a usurpation by courtiers of the minstrel's role, but rather with a transformation of some vernacular poets, or minstrels, into courtiers. Although Green notes that the major vernacular poets in both England and France in the late middle ages were court poets, he does not explain why at this period, and not earlier, rulers saw fit to retain such men, or why such men were attracted to royal service.

The major weakness of Green's analysis of later medieval court poetry is his failure to consider its political and ideological contexts, that is, the political coalition of king, lesser gentry, and bourgeoisie for their mutual benefit and the accompanying propaganda exalting the king in various ways, especially as a promoter of the common or public good. These two contexts help to explain the late medieval phenomenon of vernacular court poetry and its preponderantly didactic themes. By exalting king and "polity" in instructional and polemical works (Green's distinction between the roles of poet as adviser and as apologist is a false one), vernacular writers, translators, and compilers advanced not only their own private interests, but also the interests of their rulers and of the "public" (the lesser gentry and bourgeoisie from which most court poets stemmed). French kings, especially Charles V, strongly encouraged this verbal propaganda, and English kings followed their example, usually decades behind. This disparity is the main problem with Green's use of historical information about the French royal



court to supplement inadequate information about contemporary English courts. Indeed, the many "striking" absences he notes in England of vernacular chronicles, translations of didactic works, royal library inventories and such may be explained by this lag in the verbal promotion of the monarchy in England. Recent monographs on political history as well as older studies of ideology, such as Bloch's *Les rois thaumaturges* and Kantorowicz' *The King's Two Bodies*, are missing from Green's otherwise excellent bibliography.

In his goal of proving that "It is the aristocracy, not the bourgeoisie, who are the *Kulturträger* of the fifteenth century" (p. 10), Green does not succeed, mainly because he short-circuits the whole argument. In the early pages, he gives a definition of the medieval ruling class that lumps gentry and bourgeoisie with barons (p. 9), and throughout the book he equates the court with the aristocracy and assumes that literature written by poets connected with the court, whatever their personal social backgrounds, catered to aristocratic taste. For all its inadequacies, *Poets and Princepleasers* is a ground-breaking book because it treats an historical subject which students of literature have shied away from for too long.

*Rutgers University*

*Laura Kendrick*