

# BOOK REVIEW

## A FASCINATING INSIGHT

Marjory Whitelaw, ed., *The Dalhousie Journals*, Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1978, 212 pages, Cloth, \$17.50.

When Thomas McCulloch's "Stepsure Letters" appeared in *The Acadian Recorder* in 1821, Nova Scotians found themselves the target of Mephibosheth Stepsure's trenchant comments on their lethargy, their drinking habits, their get-rich quick mentality, and their failure to cultivate the soil. As McCulloch had intended, his fictionalized letters drew a considerable response from the public, provoking local gatherings to discuss at length the identity of the Tipple, Holdfast, Gosling, or Scorem in their midst. In their encouragement of mixed farming as the economic base of Nova Scotia, Stepsure's satiric sketches reinforced "Agricola's" 1819 letters on agriculture written for *The Acadian Recorder*, and envisioned an agriculturally-based society in Nova Scotia dedicated to hard work and the rewards of the soil.

With the publication of *The Dalhousie Journals* by Oberon Press, another dimension is added to our understanding of colonial Nova Scotia and the society which provoked both "Agricola" and Thomas McCulloch to write of the domestic problems and possibilities of the province. George Ramsay, the 9th Earl of Dalhousie, was the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia from 1816 to 1820. During that period, he travelled extensively, actively involving himself in the political and educational life of the province. As he moved around Nova Scotia, he recorded his impressions of people, places, and issues in a journal which is sometimes fragmentary, sometimes hurried, but always stimulating. An open and intelligent man, Lord Dalhousie emerges from the pages of his journal as sensitive to the needs of the colony. Yet what he has to say on the peregrinations of the Council, the state of the economy, and the social attitudes

of many of the new settlers provides a valuable perspective on the cultural and historical development of Nova Scotian society before 1820. While keeping in mind that Dalhousie's viewpoint is that of a conservative and politically-affiliated man, the reader of his journals cannot help but be struck by the way in which Dalhousie's description of farming patterns, agricultural decline, and rural behavior corroborates the impressions created by "Agricola's" letters and McCulloch's literary sketches:

The character which the people of this part (the Annapolis Valley) have generally obtained is by no means favorable—living poorly and chiefly upon rum or worse ardent spirit; they are idle, insolent and quarrelsome. All in debt. They have no faith in one another. They are strongly tinctured with Yankee manners, ideas & principles—canting & preaching constantly, they have no thought of Religion or morality.

The state of agriculture here is wretched. They depend entirely on large crops of hay cut upon the marsh & dyke lands; on potatoes, and cyder made without any knowledge of the art, from heavy crops of apple trees, of every variety sweet & sour. Everyone, however, tho' ever so poor, has his horse & gig, or "shay"; at the Church service of the Established Church and that of the Anabaptists we counted 70 of these buggies hung up to the rails or trees near.

Not only does Lord Dalhousie provide an insight into the economic and social patterns of colonial Nova Scotia but also into personalities and institutions still familiar to Maritimers. He knew the Uniacke family intimately and describes the early years of the mansion Nova Scotians now know as "Mount Uniacke". Two other houses presently run by the Nova Scotia Museum—

Ross Farm and Prescott House—enter the pages of Dalhousie journals, and the growth pains of King's College and Dalhousie College receive candid treatment. The controversial founding of Pictou Academy under Thomas McCulloch does not, however, and one wonders about the significance and meaning of such an omission from Dalhousie's journals. Certainly, everything else from rum-drinking to bookselling does find its way into his entries, and his strong penchant for "originals" results in a series of cranky, eccentric, or humorous people weaving their way in and out of his writing.

Dalhousie's journals were written not for publication but as *aides-mémoires* to his official correspondence. As a result, there is much that is personal as well as public in the entries, and it is to the great credit of editor Marjory Whitelaw, that the journals have been skilfully edited to show the private as well as the public side of the man. Her introduction further explores this dimension of Lord Dalhousie's life by providing background on his upbringing in Scotland and by introducing comments from men like Sir Walter Scott who knew him on a personal basis. The whole book then—journals and introduction—gives Nova Scotian readers a fascinating insight into a man and his relationship to their historical development. One can only hope that Oberon Press will someday be persuaded to issue this book as an inexpensive paperback (with an index) so it will be accessible to students in Maritime courses. With "Agricola's" letters, McCulloch's "Stepsure", Howe's *Rambles*, and Haliburton's "Sam Slick", *The Dalhousie Journals* enrich our understanding of our past.

Gwendolyn Davies  
Mount Allison University

## FOLKLORISTS RIDING TIGERS

Kenneth S. Goldstein, ed., *Canadian Folklore Perspectives*. St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, Bibliographical and Special Series No. 5, 1978. vii, 68 pages.

The four essays in this collection have, as Kenneth S. Goldstein's Introduction remarks, an "extraordinary unity." They all concern the politics of folklore study in Canada today, from Atlantic Canada's ambivalent reaction to being studied as a rural backwater, through Quebec's embrace of its *patrimoine*, to the federal government's multiculturalism policy and its attempts to manipulate the nation's perceptions of its culture. The essays also show four folklorists riding tigers, in the shape of eager public interest, university and government support, which they must somehow guide in a constructive and scholarly direction.

Neil V. Rosenberg's article "Regionalism and Folklore in Atlantic Canada" is quietly iconoclastic. He reviews the development of folklore research in the region and regrets the tendency of past studies, through their concentration on separate ethnic groups in limited geographic areas, to create a false sense of the "uniqueness" of the folk tradition of the Atlantic provinces. He argues instead for a balancing of the picture through studies of acculturation which may show that there are unities in Canadian folklore which transcend our currently over-emphasised regional boundaries. His essay includes a useful survey of folklore and local

history publications, the proliferation of which is an index of the increasing interest in the folk culture of the region.

Elli Kõngäs Maranda's overview of French-Canadian folklore scholarship is also concerned with folklore's vexed status as a symbol of regional, and even national, identity: folklore has become intimately associated with *patrimoine* in Quebec where folklorists are faced with an enormous popular demand for information which they must supply without lessening their scholarly integrity. Maranda points to significant, politically-related gaps in the Quebec folklorists' coverage of their province: the anglophone minority is ignored as is "the dialectic of the traditions" in bilingual areas.

This failure to consider assimilation and acculturation because of folklorists' interest in the older, "purer" traditions, is a charge made by Rosenberg and taken up in greatest detail by Carole Henderson Carpenter who examines the politics of federal government involvement in Canadian folklore studies. Her essay traces a quarter century of government patronage of culture, culminating in the "mosaic" concept of Canadian culture and the role of the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies in researching, publishing and displaying the distinctive cultural traditions of Canada's ethnic groups. The common view of the three academic folklorists represented here is that a serious lack is being created by the CCFCS's failure to

carry out equivalent research on the traditions of the contemporary Anglo-Canadian majority, thus losing the chance to make cross-cultural comparisons and inadvertently strengthening the common opinion that folklore is what other people have, a thing of colourful costumes, quaint beliefs, exotic foods and strange accents, rather than being a living, everyday process in which we all share.

The volume contains one example of work by a member of CCFCS in Ban Seng Hoe's report on Asian-Canadian folk culture. Hoe studies factors causing the decline of certain folklore genres among people of Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian origin and then describes the role of ethnic community organizations in promoting selected examples of their folk tradition as a means of representing their group to the majority culture. He delineates the socio-political contexts in which folklore performances such as the Chinese "lion dance" are becoming vehicles of communication and exchange with the larger society.

These essays should be of interest to anyone concerned with the politics of culture in Canada in which folklore plays an important, though rarely well-understood, part.

Martin Lovelace  
Ottawa

# UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND PROTEST

Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement 1919-1927. A Study in Canadian Regionalism*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1979, 340 pages.

During the first sixty years of Confederation the relationship of the Maritimes to the rest of Canada was, to say the least, unsettled. In that short space of time three regional protest movements (Nova Scotia's repeal campaign in the 1860s, a secessionist movement in Nova Scotia in the 1860s, and the broader Maritime Rights protest of the 1920s) gave expression to a widespread sense of regional injustice and betrayal.

In this excellent study, Ernest A. Forbes of the University of New Brunswick analyses a postwar regional protest movement which not only gave vent to Maritime resentments, but also proposed explicit reforms that would have helped to fulfil the promise of Confederation for this region had they been implemented. Meticulously researched, this book contributes substantially to our understanding of Maritime underdevelopment and regional protest. It is, in fact, much more than an introduction to the Maritime Rights campaign. Instead, as its sub-title suggests, it is a case study in Canadian regionalism and progressive reform in late 19th and early 20th century Canada.

Forbes's purpose is to show how the local particularism and historic disunity of the 19th century Maritime community evolved into a powerful regional consciousness during the first quarter of the 20th century. During these years the heterogeneous Maritime region with its diverse cultural, religious, and economic influences, gradually assumed a regional sensibility that stimulated inter-provincial cooperation and unity. In the 1920s this regional concern culminated in a progressive reform protest that should put to rest the traditional stereotype of the "conservative" Maritimes and its "parochial" political tradition. Implicit in Forbes's analysis, too, is a distinction between the earlier secessionist movements of the 1860s and the 1880s and this new regionalism which extended beyond a single province and brought together a variety of interest groups in common cause. But this distinction can be overdrawn.

During the repeal campaign of 1886 in Nova Scotia, for example, Premier William S. Fielding actively encouraged Maritime Union, and at one point even contemplated creating a secessionist party out of the two old-line parties. Nevertheless, the Maritime Rights crusade demonstrated much greater unity and cooperation among the provinces than ever before.

What explains the emergence of this new Maritime regionalism at the turn of the century? Forbes points to three important developments: the loss of political power that accompanied the development of the Canadian West; the loss of regional autonomy in the operation of the Inter-colonial Railway and the concomitant undermining of a regionally-oriented freight-rate structure; and the emergence of a progressive reform impulse that bridged traditional divisions and intra-regional conflicts in the search for reform.

By placing the movement in this broader context, Forbes avoids the mistake of seeing Maritime Rights as essentially a political response of the Conservative party to the postwar depression. In fact, one of the characteristics of early 20th century progressivism was its bipartisan nature. Forbes shows clearly how regional concerns predominated in the postwar politics of each of the parties. Like their Conservative counterparts, Liberal politicians Hance Logan, E.M. Macdonald, W.E. Foster, and P.J. Veniot all gave active support to Maritime Rights. Similarly, Forbes argues, regional consciousness had a significant impact upon the short-lived Farmer-Labour coalition. The Farmer-Labour movement collapsed not because of the "conservative" character of Maritime politics, but because the class interests of farmers and labourers were subsumed in a broader movement for regional rehabilitation. This was particularly true of Maritime farmers, whose interests were often incompatible with those of the Western Provinces, and who thus were more comfortable with a regional response to their difficulties.

This is not to say that proponents of Maritime Rights were without differences. In a particularly entertaining chapter, Forbes outlines the cleavage involving Halifax newspaper editor

W.H. Dennis, who advocated pressuring the Federal Government in support of Maritime Rights through the national party caucus, and Halifax financier F.B. McCurdy, who called for a new federalism which would allow the region greater control over the tariff. In the end the Dennis faction came out on top, thereby ensuring that the tariff would receive little attention from proponents of Maritime Rights during the 1920s.

While the tariff issue was given short shrift, Forbes nonetheless gives high marks to the Duncan Royal Commission of 1926 on Maritime Claims. The Commission's recommendations concerning financial arrangements, transportation, and to a lesser extent port development, he argues, were sensible and practicable responses to the region's difficulties. If implemented in their entirety, he concludes, they would have done much to redress Maritime grievances. Unfortunately, the King Government followed the Commission's recommendations only as far as was necessary. King's intent was simply to pacify the region and defuse the agitation. In the long run, Forbes concludes, the failure of the Federal Government to implement the Duncan Commission's recommendations led to the disillusionment and cynicism that pervades contemporary Maritime political culture.

While there is little to quarrel about in this absolutely fine book, implicit in the analysis is a celebration of the reform ideology which underlay Maritime Rights. But what of the movement's limitations? Did Maritime Rights collapse simply because of the indifference and evasiveness of the Federal Government? Is it not possible that a coalition of interest groups operating under the banner of regionalism is by its very nature susceptible to pacification? And finally, would a renewed regionalism committed to progressive reform be any more likely to ensure equitable advantage for the Maritimes in our day than it did in the interwar years? All of these are interesting speculations that emerge out of an equally interesting work. Indeed, for anyone interested in regionalism and reform, Professor Forbes's incisive and thoughtful work is must reading.

Colin D. Howell  
Saint Mary's University

## A NOVA SCOTIA PANORAMA

Alice Hale and Sheila Brooks, eds., *Nearly An Island: A Nova Scotian Anthology*, St. John's: Breakwater Press, 1979, 189 pages, paper.

*Nearly An Island* is subtitled "a Nova Scotian Anthology." Its title derives from a phrase used of Nova Scotia by Ernest Buckler in *Window on the Sea*, a book which is used by the editors for quotations to punctuate sections of the text. The selections are gathered to present a variegated picture of the Nova Scotian character and, to paraphrase Buckler, of the way its spirit prevails against "the clench of stone."

The editors, Alice Hale and Sheila Brooks, have relied upon a sound idea in building up for the reader an impression of Nova Scotian "life and character." This, in theory, is the best way to attract the general reader and is also the strategy appropriate for catching and keeping the attention of students in high-school and first-year university (one hopes the anthology will be widely adopted as a textbook in Nova Scotia). The actual working out of the idea seems to me well done. Not only are the flagrant old-fashioned romanticists excluded, the newfangled ones are not shown in their most complacent moods.

Every anthologist of Nova Scotia and Maritime writing has to deal with the fact that the older generation prefers genteel traditions in writing while the younger seems to have accepted the latter-day proletarian school of writers almost at face value. Although the "younger" writers are every bit as bourgeois in origin as their predecessors, their obsession with the philistinism of the genteel tradition has led them to adopt if not proletarian, at least anti-

bourgeois poses. As Fraser Sutherland once put it:

The philistine above all fears to be mocked, and the artist is always the mockingbird. How can such a rare species as the artist survive in the Maritimes, save by becoming a hermit or, at the other extreme, pretending to be one of the boys in such traditional pursuits as collecting unemployment insurance and swilling Moosehead ale in the corner tavern?

The editors of *Nearly an Island* clearly see the need to present something of the literary riches that preceded the decay of the genteel and the rise of the pseudo-proletarian vision. And it seems to me that they fulfilled their stated intention "to reveal the blood and spirit of what has been written by Bluenosers who have done something else besides 'eat, drink, smoke, sleep, ride about, lounge at taverns, make speeches at temperance meetin's, and talk about "House of Assembly." ' ' At the same time, their allusion to Haliburton's view of the Bluenose does not mean that they have decided to be academic rather than popular. What one commends in fact is their full-bodied notion of what constitutes popular taste.

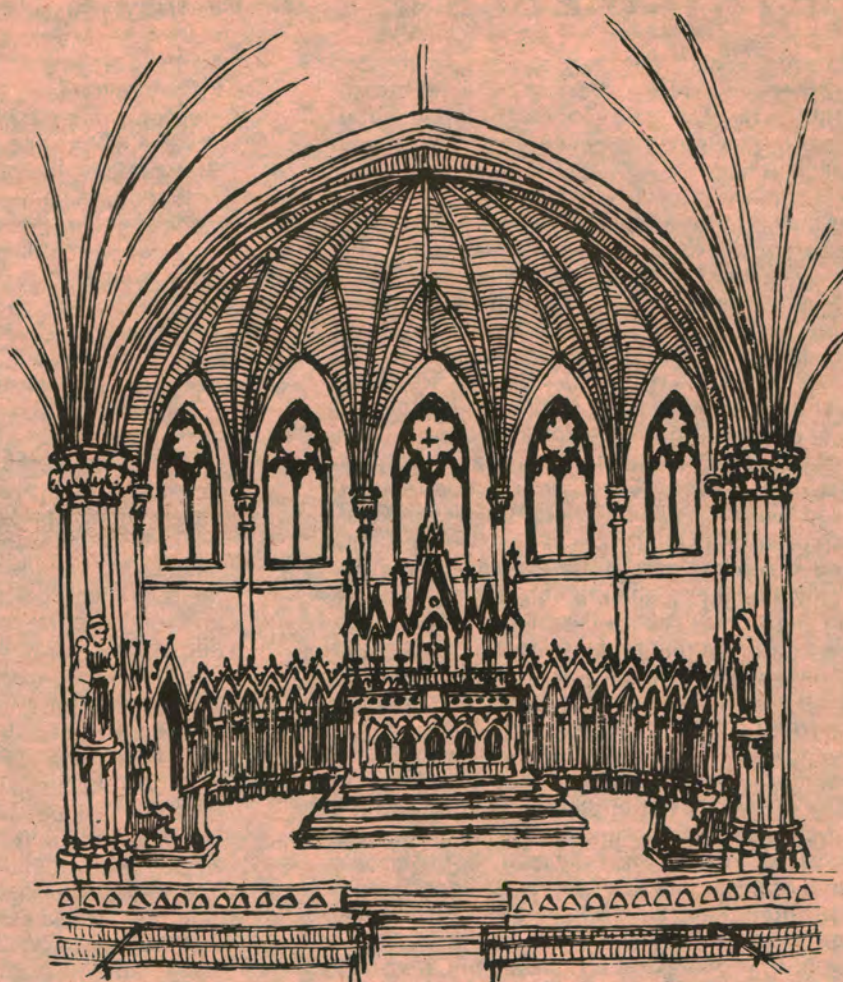
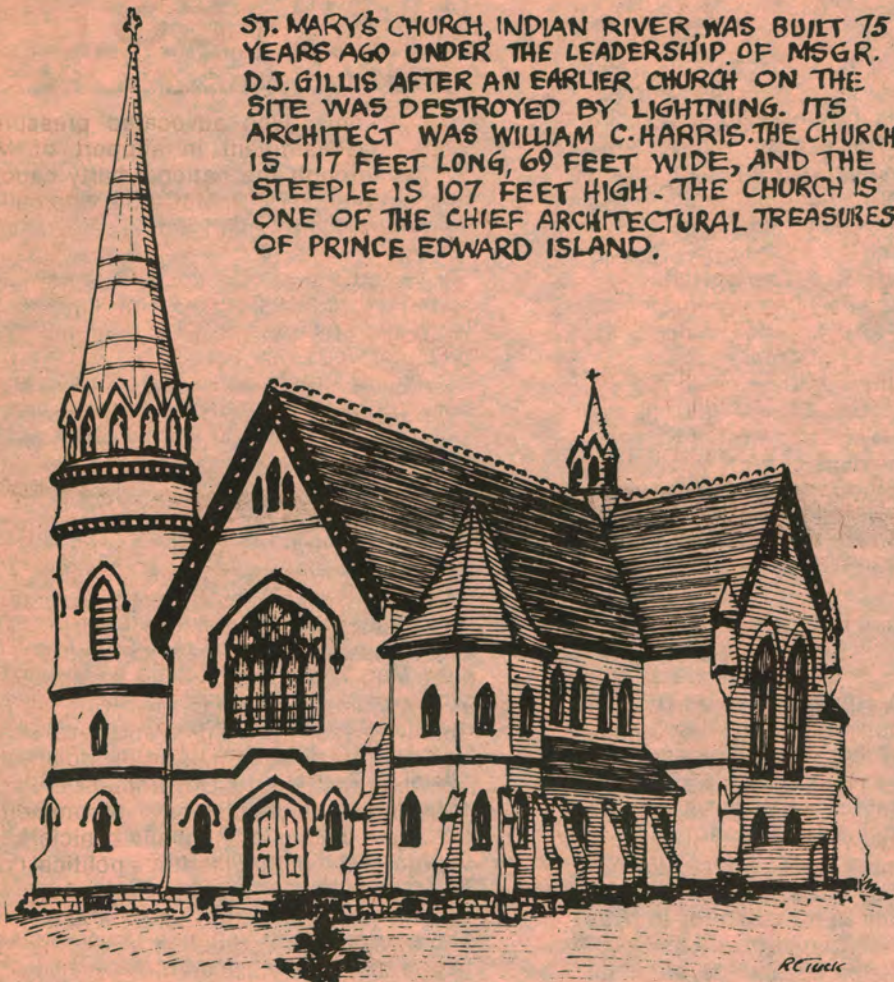
Not only is there a challenge to the literary tavern view of the typical Nova Scotian, the class and race limitations of the old polite school are also avoided. The whole first section reflects the world of the coal miner, another that of the fisherman, another the farmer. Yet the approach is not self-conscious: the aim is to reflect the Province's life and character, partly as a

heritage and partly as a recognition that a good portion of the potential school audience for the anthology comes from mining, fishing, or farming communities. This approach has nothing to do with the self-pitying efforts of educated urbanites to "identify" with "those who never made it." There is instead a strong representation of minority types, a reminder to the urban white anglophone that the Nova Scotia character as a whole is a little broader than his own. There is no over-simple winner-loser contrast of the sociological polarities of our society. Rather, there is a fine use, especially in the final section of poems, of an image of interwoven threads to suggest that literature has a role in weaving a durable consciousness of the interdependence of the varied strands in our social fabric.

While the purist might object that the anthology is not arranged on historical principles, it seems to me that the editors made a wise decision in preferring a strategy that would be more likely to ensure them a youthful audience as well as an audience of teachers. The most finicky teacher ought to be satisfied that there are great chunks of the more "important" writers: Buckler, MacLeod, Nowlan, etc. As for the general reader, especially the reader who has been putting off his reading of Nova Scotia authors, *Nearly an Island* is a good general introduction in a single volume that many have been looking for.

Kenneth MacKinnon  
Saint Mary's University

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, INDIAN RIVER, WAS BUILT 75 YEARS AGO UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MSGR. D.J. GILLIS AFTER AN EARLIER CHURCH ON THE SITE WAS DESTROYED BY LIGHTNING. ITS ARCHITECT WAS WILLIAM C. HARRIS. THE CHURCH IS 117 FEET LONG, 69 FEET WIDE, AND THE STEEPLE IS 107 FEET HIGH. THE CHURCH IS ONE OF THE CHIEF ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND.



ST. MARY'S, INDIAN RIVER, P.E.I. By Robert C. Tuck

## THE HARRIS LEGACY

R.C. Tuck *Gothic Dreams: The Life and Times of a Canadian Architect*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1978, 252 pages, Cloth

Robert C. Tuck's biography of architect William C. Harris (1854-1913) is an important book for all Canadians, but is especially so for Nova Scotians and Prince Edward Islanders who take a serious interest in their culture. Canadians generally need badly to be made aware of the way that our native-trained architects have contributed to our cultural heritage. But Maritimers specifically need to know about and maintain the Harris legacy in architecture.

Tuck's is a lucidly presented account of "Willie" Harris's life, his character, his career, and also the character and careers of his ecclesiastical, domestic, and public buildings. The author's research effort must have been immense and yet he does not burden the narrative with digressions of more interest to the specialist than to the general reader. The book could be more expensively, but not better, illustrated (better paper might have helped the black and white photographs). The result is a moving, readable, and yet well-documented account of a man and an artist of considerable significance.

Tuck himself is clearly one of the most qualified persons who might explain the importance of Harris for us today. For he himself is very much inside the same artistic, ecclesiastical, and cultural traditions that helped provide Harris with inspiration. One senses the continued influence of the early nineteenth-century English ecclesiologists in Harris and Tuck. We associate this movement in New Brunswick with Frank Wills and the Medleys. The coming of the Harris family to P.E.I. and Nova Scotia guaranteed the presence in the rest of the Maritimes of the creative alliance of the religious and aesthetic impulses. While we may admire the severity of a meeting house like the one at Cross Roads, P.E.I., we often regret the way that our puritan inheritance has placed the religious and artistic sides of our nature in opposition. The Harris family was an antidote to our strong dose of puritanism. Their relations with their Baptist neighbours at Long Creek provide Tuck with an episode that not only illustrates the sec-

ularism of the last century but also is one of those touches that gives the book life and humour.

Willie Harris was a man of gentle disposition, his artistic genius arising from a shy reflective nature. He was neither gifted with the sociability that seems to have been of assistance to his brother Robert in his career nor with the assertiveness that seems to have been required to sell his art to the philistines of his day. Harris, as related by Tuck, becomes lovable but failure-prone. If his humanity helped him to respond artistically to the needs of his patron, it was also of a kind that made him imperceptive to their motivations. As a result, he often failed to win competitions because he never coddled the patron's desire for a showpiece. This was so from the time of his entry in the Winnipeg City Hall competition until the period of his failure to have his All Saints Cathedral design accepted. It was this last experience that defines best not only Harris's character but also the character of turn-of-the-century Canadian cultural self-confidence.

Harris's achievement rests primarily on the thirty or so parish churches in P.E.I. and Nova Scotia (the only one in New Brunswick is at Clifton Royal); and secondarily on his domestic and public buildings (which, if not as stylistically innovative as his churches, were well executed and retain their period charm). Tuck's achievement is to show that Harris perhaps accomplished even more than that. Harris's spiritual achievement is made clear to the reader as Tuck relates how the bachelor architect struggled on against the great odds of Canadian artistic indifference without losing his determination to maintain a high-quality output. The author's periodic reminders in the book of the poor way in which some Harris buildings have been maintained (certain parishes are not without blame in this neglect) suggest that the struggle for the recognition of Harris's achievement has still a long way to go.

Cowan MacInnes  
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

## THE THEATRE SCENE

It gave me much pleasure this summer to revisit the musical *Anne of Green Gables*, just ten years after seeing it on the West End stage in London, England. This time I went to its home at the Confederation Centre on my first visit to Charlottetown. I was surprised at the polish and freshness of the production fifteen years after its première. The infectious enthusiasm of the cast, the quality and vigour of the singing and dancing, match anything I have seen in more cosmopolitan centres.

Unhappily I could not say the same for Jim Betts's musical adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, renamed and updated as *On a Summer's Night*. Betts might have done better to retain at least some of the original text, since the banality of dialogue and lyrics excised every ounce of magic and humour, reducing it to the pedestrian and dull. Not even experienced comic actors Doug Chamberlain and Ken Wickes could rescue it, though Wanda Cannon, also a captivating schoolmistress in *Anne*, managed to lift her final song, "You'll Never Want to Go Away", out of the otherwise indifferent musical score.

The Festival offered a remarkable variety of entertainment this year, also including *Les Feux Follets* on main stage and revues *Eight to the Bar* and *The Family Way* on Stage 2. In addition there were two one-man shows, George Merner as Churchill in *Winnie* and Brian McKay in *Come to the Hills*, not to mention other musical performances. Even two small communities, Victoria and Georgetown, boasted professional summer stock companies with popular plays in repertory. The Victoria Players, for example, offered *Sleuth*, *The Last of the Red-Hot Lovers* and *The Fourposter*.

Nova Scotia and in particular Halifax might well take note of such enterprise. Here we have nothing approaching summer repertory, with the possible exception of T.A.F.I. and Kipawo at Wolfville; though Kipawo's quality is variable and T.A.F.I. but a shadow of what it once was. Neptune imported *Eight to the Bar* from Lennoxville, passing it off as a main-stage production, and then in conjunction with Theatre New Brunswick presented *The Return of A.J. Raffles*, with John Neville in the title role, first at Fredericton and then at the Rebecca Cohn

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## THE THEATRE SCENE continued from page three

Auditorium. The Neptune surprisingly vacated its own cosier, and surely more suitable, theatre for this witty, tongue-in-cheek Victorian entertainment by Graham Greene, performed with élan and polish.

Meantime Neptune Theatre itself housed some other productions: *The Owl and the Pussycat*, a comedy presented by a new company, "Stage East", and Theatre Arts Guild's unwieldy tribute to the Gathering of the Clans, *The Highland Heart in Nova Scotia*. Two new musicals attracted some attention. *North Mountain Breakdown* by Paul Ledoux and Al Macdonald was one of the brighter efforts of another new company, the Bit Players, at Theatre 1707 on Brunswick Street. The same theatre also housed Sandy Moore's delightful *Held Over*, which premiered at the Crypt Theatre, and also played in others parts of the Province and P.E.I. If Sandy's further plans materialize John Neville might well find he need look no further than Halifax for a summer musical; to me the score of *Held Over* demonstrated the potential for more musical talent and invention than *On a Summer's Night* at Charlottetown.

Those of us who welcomed the initiative and quality of Neville's first season at the Neptune will be very disappointed with the announcement of the second. The only really bright spot is Ibsen's great drama *The Master Builder*. We are to see three plays which have been given local production within recent memory: the Ayckbourn formula-comedy *How the Other Half Loves*, the somewhat mawkish *Butterflies are Free*, and a minor Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, which the visiting Young Vic Company gave a lively production at the Cohn just three years ago. I am puzzled why *The Shrew* is to be presented at Christmas, Neptune denying themselves a large portion of their student audience. Again Canadian drama gets short shrift: after the shapeless *Les Canadiens* and the excruciating *Heroes*, the low points of last season, a "country and western rock-style musical", *18 Wheels*, is to tour the province before opening the new season. I am sorry Halifax's only truly professional theatre is so neglecting Canadian drama: are Tremblay, Reaney, Fineberg, French, Freeman, Ryga, Symons, Bolt or any of the up-and-coming new dramatists, if seen at all, to be left again to the little theatres?

## FIDDLEHEAD TREATS

Ralph Cunningham, *Lovesongs and Others*. Fredericton, N.B. Fiddlehead Poetry Books No. 260, 1979. 71 pages, paper \$4.50.

Sharon H. Nelson, *Blood Poems*. Fredericton, N.B., Fiddlehead Poetry Books No. 246, 1978. 79 pages, paper \$5.00.

Sandra Nelson Rempel, *Images of Glass*. Fredericton, N.B. Fiddlehead Poetry Books No. 269, 1979. 67 pages, paper \$4.50.

Probably the poems of Sharon H. Nelson and Ralph Cunningham are most clearly at opposite poles in terms of style and content. Ralph Cunningham writes poems so embedded in image and metaphor that content seems remote from the concern with word spinning. Sharon Nelson, on the other hand, though not unconcerned with language seems burdened with message. Sandra Nelson Rempel is content to impart a philosophy not too demanding in verses which, though not without complexity, avoid obscurity and ambiguity. All three poets write poetry of good quality that satisfies to varying degrees.

Ralph Cunningham's *Lovesongs and Others* is not the sort of poetry to pick up after a hard day's work. The poems demand careful reading, image following image with such haste that often before one metaphor has been absorbed another forces it aside and imposes its own claims. A predilection for participles and possessives, for nouns become verbs, for startling juxtapositions is apt to discourage all but the hardy. Lines such as "and lake's companion's as equivocal as freighters/monitored by re-unforming cromlechs of the waves" are dismaying, but don't give up. A poem like "Mennonite" has its rewards in lines such as "a blackhat in a buggy drives/with bonnet wife that wraps a woolen child," and the ballad-like

Perhaps Neville will feel more adventurous when he can unload the millstone of debt plaguing the Neptune. One way he has chosen to fill the theatre is to bring in star names. It is possible that some will flock to the theatre for the wrong reasons, to see Tony Randall rather than Chekhov, Mia Farrow rather than Ibsen. But if only a few discover the riches of master dramatists by this means it may be worth it.

The arrival of Theatre 1707 and of Theatre East, with some claims as the "alternate" theatre to Neptune, throws up the old question of professional and amateur status. Even if a company can afford to pay its players and even if they are all Equity members, the mark of professionalism is in the quality of production. To earn such status new groups will have to prove their superiority to community theatres which are "amateur" in the sense that most of their members have other employment, but which can use long experience and dedication to their art sometimes to achieve unusually high standards. At the same time Halifax theatregoers will welcome ambitious enterprises, such as Theatre 1707's daring choice of *Mother Courage*. Whether the company has the resources and expertise to encompass the sweep and power of Brecht's epic drama, or whether it is a case of fools rushing in, remains to be seen.

The Mulgrave Road Cooperative Theatre Company has toured as many as forty centres in N.S. and P.E.I. with its *Coady Co-op Show*. The Company had the good sense to engage talented local playwright Chris Heide to work into dramatic form the story of Father Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins, founders of the credit union and cooperative movements in Nova Scotia. And at the Leading Wind Theatre in Chester, Leo and Dora Velleman presented a sophisticated N.S. melodrama *The Secret of Sarah Jane*, as well as *The Mikado*, for rod puppets. These are but two of the unusual and remarkable enterprises that could be viewed around the Province this summer.

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"Around the Corner and Up the Stairs" is a delightful poem in a vein he might do well to cultivate.

Susan Nelson Rempel's poems in *Images of Glass* make fewer demands on the reader but I don't see that as a fault. She writes of seasons, of love, of moods and loneliness in a fair variety of forms including sonnets and in images that are fresh and vigorous. There is a tone of self-righteousness in the first few poems, notably "Sailing with the Wind" or the lines from "Give me a Hill":

I would rather toil  
A path like vapour  
Leading to a lilting  
Of Lonely climax  
On a hill  
that seeks no liaison  
with lowlands.

But generally her view of life and love is buoyant and she asks only that

Some gripping  
At the bone  
In taut persuasion  
Is what we ask  
Of fortune  
To license  
Us together.

Sharon H. Nelson's verse in *Blood Poems* is much darker altogether. Of Polish-Jewish background she writes of the modern experience of Poles and Jews in the Hitler period; of Jews in America in one particularly interesting poem called "the woman's testimony" and on the ironies of oppression as in "Chanaleh." But she also writes about being a woman and a poet, of the art of poetry and of poetry and

## A SENSE OF COMPASSION

Kent Thompson, *"Shotgun" and Other Stories*. Fredericton: The New Brunswick Chapbooks, 1979, 107 pages, \$3.00 paper.

These ten stories, all of them previously published or broadcasted, treat a wide range of subjects and span a variety of themes. If they may be said to possess one quality in common, it is their sympathetic concern for the average person. Indeed, Thompson is most successful when he urges us to share his sense of compassion and to reflect on the misery that is everywhere around us.

Without resorting to sentiment, he writes of the trauma and pain of marriages breaking down ("Because I am Drunk," "Two Photos") and of individuals struggling with their doubts and fears ("I Live in Canada," "What Costume Shall the New Man Wear," "Problems of Truancy"). One story exposes the inhumanity of a too-rigid moral code ("Among Women"), while two others touch with understanding on the problems of ageing ("Perhaps the Church Building Itself," "Shotgun"). In each instance, we not only identify with the victim, the person from whose perspective the story is told, but stand reminded that many others are suffering a similar fate.

The author of two volumes of verse (as well as two novels and many stories), Thompson possesses both a poet's eye for detail and the ability to communicate his experience in vivid terms. His stories are skillfully set in the places he knows best: the small town in Indiana where he grew up, and, more frequently, Fredericton, where he now lives. All of his narrators report in the first person, a method which works well enough in any given story, but which, unfortunately, presents difficulties when applied to an entire collection.

A problem is that as one reads story upon story, the narrators begin to sound disturbingly alike. They display the same casual attitude, speak with the same detached, unemotional tone, and exhibit the same curious tendency to dwell on the trivial. All of them, in short, have the same personality. Again, however, this weakness is only evident when the stories are considered together; when read individually, nearly all of their main characters remain thoroughly convincing.

"Shotgun" and *Other Stories* is to be recommended on two fronts: while it is first and foremost both interesting and worthwhile reading, at a reasonable price, it is also part of a new publishing project which deserves to be supported. "The New Brunswick Chapbooks" have in the past produced volumes of poetry, but this represents their first venture into fiction. If it succeeds, it may mean the establishment of a much-needed outlet for the work of Atlantic-area novelists.

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myth. These are extremely strong poems. The tone is assertive, restless, questioning, disturbing. For her "no place is quite Odessa/no place quite home" in the words of one of her characters. It is difficult to quote a line or two. Sometimes the poems have a narrative quality that makes each part dependent on the whole; often the mood is the result not only of the way in which each phrase is related but also of the way the poem appears on the page as in "still life" where to extract the lines

they are lovely  
these cut flowers  
mute  
as anything torn from root

is to violate the unity of the poem and to give a mere taste of the richness of this collection.

Cunningham, Rempel and Nelson all deserve the *Fiddlehead* treatment. Nelson, still only 31, is certainly someone to watch.

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