When the leader is ill pushing, shoving begin

Rigorous yet readable study

When Illness Strikes the Leader The Dilemma of the Captive King By Jerrold M. Post, M.D. and Robert S. Simmons Yale University Press, 243 pp, \$25

BRIAN KAPPLER THE GAZETTE

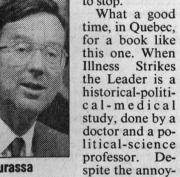
cores of pundits had dozens of theories about why Robert Bourassa chose this particular time to pull the plug; one that made sense said that he couldn't keep his would-be successors in line any longer.

Bourassa is fine, you understand. The doctors have done well with his cancer, and the prognosis is good. (And of course everyone earnestly hopes this is true.)

But, we are further told, he's no kid anymore, he has been brushed by the wings of the angel of death, his family wants him to stop and smell the flowers, etc., etc.

Well, whatever. The point is that in our times, where only the media are more invasive than medicine, there are still some secrets. And every leader, everywhere, needs to be seen as being healthy

That's because politicians, at least as predatory as piranha fish, devour their wounded. When Bourassa's prognosis was poor, the pushing and shoving began, and has proved hard



epigrammatic subtitle, the book manages to be both readable and rigorous. Post and Robbins analyze

dozens of cases from around the world, most of them from the last 50 years, to seek patterns and trends at the bedsides of the mighty. Their historical prose, most of it abstracted from secondary sources, is lean, precise, and re-freshingly free from ideological cant of either left or right.

There's some good gossip: Brazil's President Tancredo Neves, for example, was smuggled from one hospital floor to another disguised as a corpse, because the hospital was infested with nosy news-

There are medical marvels: "In 1951, at the age of /o, (winston) Churchill was a virtual walking textbook of pathology. . . . He had significant illnesses affecting his

heart, brain, lungs, gastrointestinal tract, skin, and eyes. His medical history included several attacks of pneumonia, a heart attack, a major stroke . . . and intermittent severe depression. On Oct. 27, 1951, this aged, ailing leader was once again elected prime minister."

And there are some conclusions, sometimes over-written and sometimes self-evident:

■ A leader's disabling ailment can lead to abuses of political institutions.

■ Drugs used by an ailing ruler may in fact make him less capable, and so increase the power of his cronies and/or his doctors.

A stricken leader's retinue often deems the leader's grasp on power, and on life, secondary to their own continued grasp on power.

Personal physicians chosen for their social or political connections may provide inferior medical care in a crisis;

Facing loss of power due to terminal illness, leaders may do nutty things

Leaders tend to refuse life-extending treatment if it would weaken their grasp on power.

And so on. Each such lesson is il-

lustrated with clearly-explained ex-

The authors conclude by asking why succession is handled so poorly in so many different types of regime, and by proposing some guidelines, beginning with effective institutions to provide scrutiny in the public interest.

Yet they barely mention that the most effective such institution of all is surely the invasive media horde that follows modern democratic leaders around.

It's hard to imagine any Western democracy today letting itself be ruled by an ailing president's wife, which is more or less what hap-pened when Woodrow Wilson was in decline (no Hillary jokes, please). It's even hard to imagine any current leader getting the gentle treatment FDR got; while "that man in the White House" spent years in the wheelchair, virtually no photos show him in one. The press kept his

Indeed, today it's hard to imagine much secrecy in any medical crisis in political leadership; if anything we now suffer from overkill – remembers all those little diagrams of Ronald Reagan's nose?

The net effect of the media's nedical nosiness, no doubt, is to force leaders out sooner, rather than later. Or perhaps that can be stated more gently: the net effect is to give leaders a chance to stop and smell the flowers.

Brian ment Hill reporter and later national editor of The Gazette, is now Show and Living editor.

Modern and traditional work together

E G T

Hanganu designs new church at Townships abbey

he architecture of the new church will set the atmosphere," explained Dom Jean Vidal in hushed tones as we sit in a tiny room in the Benedictine abbey on the western shore of Lake Memphremagog where he has lived for the last 40 years. "We must finish it for the youth. They need permanence, especially at this moment of the

Our quiet conversation is suddenly interrupted by an electronic beeping, which seems strangely out of place in the tranquil surroundings of the picturesque abbey where he serves as "guest master." Dom Vidal reaches for the paging device hidden by his traditional dark robes, anxious to stop the annoying sound. "As you can see, we are also modern here," the monk said with a friendly smile.

The Benedictines' particular combination of traditionalism and modernism is echoed in the latest addition to the architecture of St. Benoît du Lac. The magnificent church has been designed by Mon-

treal architect Dan Hanganu to accommodate the monks and their numerous guests, who have worshipped in a cramped and difficult-to-find oratory for decades. The crisp, rec-

tangular volume

of the new edi-

fice projects boldly from the

older abbey to-

ward the water.

Both traditional

and modern, it

reflects motifs

and details from

the existing context; however, the

volumes of the new building are

purer, larger, and less broken up

than the existing abbey, itself an

unusual polyglot of architectural

is sheathed in smoothly cut granite

blocks (quarried locally at Beebe) and roofed in copper, the church's

spacious interior is warmly colored

brick, pierced by periodic projec-

tions of the building's steel frame.

Subtle reminders of the abbey's history, however, are also visible in

the interior. The foundations for

the abbey church were laid by

1961, determining the new build-

ing's footprint, as were concrete

arches still visible amid the brick-

work. In many ways, Hanganu's

new church is the completion of a

project started long ago.
Although St. Benoît du Lac was

founded as early as 1912, it was not until 1939 that Dom Paul Bellot,

the architect and monk, designed

the romantic granite monastery that established the charming ar-

chitectural ambience of the lake-

side abbey. In 1963, a large guest

house designed by Dom Claude-

Marie Côté was added to the monastery, intended to shelter the

hospitality, and to guide youth. As a result of their commitment to

hospitality in particular, the con-

struction of the guest house was

given priority over the church

when funds were available for ex-

\$5 million toward the church

Since 1988, the abbey has raised

The interior of Hanganu's church, too, is a brave essay in Modernism. Whereas the exterior

ADAMS

BUILDINGS

they've never had, including gifts from the McConnell Family Foundation, the Bombardier family, Alcan, Bell Canada and other donors. Construction of the new building began in October 1990. Still, the abbey needs an additional \$900,000 to complete the church as envisioned. Unfinished as it stands, the

building offers a clear picture of the architecture to come. Most visitors will enter the new church from the main wing of the guest house, north of the new addition; indeed, the church functions in the ensemble as a kind of shared space between the hostelry and the monastery, which is home to more than 65 monks. The architecture of the existing buildings established the axes largely responsible for the apparent order and sense of compatibility between old and new. Entries, views, circulation, and even the placement of the organ have been carefully orchestrated by Hanganu to resonate with the existing systems of movement in the complex architectural grouping.

Like many of Hanganu's other projects, such as Montreal's Pointe à Callière archeology museum, the church is a masterful composition in lighting and materials. The large volume of the church itself is illuminated by dormer-like windows that pierce the copper roof at intervals of 13 feet, leading the visitor's eye towards the altar at the eastern end of the nave, nearest the lake. Here two rows of unabashedly Modern stainless steel wires hang 50 feet from the soaring ceiling, marking the focal point of the altar amidst dim lighting conditions.

By contrast, the entry end of the nave, with choir above, is dramatically lit by a huge round window, 20 feet in diameter, whose shape symbolizes a tree or the backbone of a fish. "It works both ways," explains Hanganu, who travelled extensively throughout Europe studying the architecture and unique symbolism of Benedictine abbeys

in preparation for the commission. Many details of the new building show the architect's sensitivity to the humble, contemplative life experienced by the Benedictines. A row of tiny, gold tiles will run

call

throughout the church, differentiating profane and sacred space. Stained-glass windows which were a gift of the French government to the monks at St. Benoît du Lac will adorn a chapel. At selective corners in the church's interior, bricks are removed from the established pattern, resulting in a sawtooth effect, seemingly inspired by the complex brick patterning found in both the guest house and the monastery. To the architect, these "missing" bricks, which add a decorative element to the relatively austere interior of the church, reflect the

monks' choice to retreat from sec-"The missing bricks are like the

Benedictines, stepping back, removing themselves to make a difference," Hanganu said.

The beautiful surrounding land-scape is also a part of the design of the new church. While the guest house will act as entry for most of the year, the building's western elevation comprises a monumental tripartite entry, to be used only at Christmas and Easter when the abbey welcomes as many as 450 additional visitors. During these two special days, the western wall will literally open up, and an exterior courtyard will become part of the total experience of the sacred space.

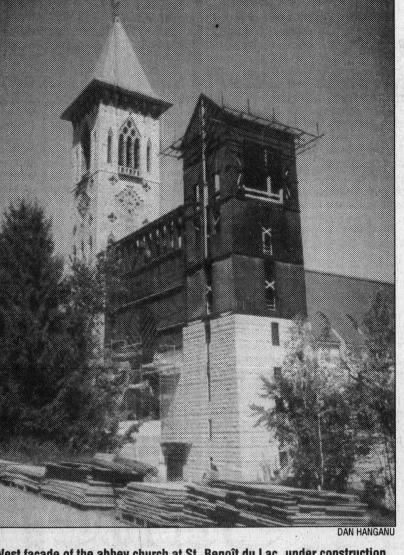
Two other significant features of this elevation, both boldly Modernist, further connect the church to its natural context. Traversing the main gable of the church between the two towers is an open metal walkway. This bridge provides the monks with breathtaking distant views of the mountains, lake and forest, and immediate views of the guest house, church, and monastery. Equally interesting is the view provided visitors of the monks using the walkway; as pairs of Benedictines cross back and forth between the towers on the bridge, as they often do already, their moving figures enliven the building's facade.

The monks' custom of walking two by two also determined some of the building's interior dimensions, such as the width of the side aisles in the church, which are just large enough to comfortably accommodate two men.

The new tower to the south of the bridge provides access for the monks from inside the church. It, too, is industrial, rather than romantic, in inspiration. Ascending the mesmerizing, open-metal stairway inside the tower is like entering an Escher drawing. The tower provides dynamic, spectacular views of the surrounding landscape.

The new abbey church at St. Benoît du Lac is a superb example of Modern design that is sensitive to and inspired by its historic setting. Traditional and modern, romantic and industrial, the new building will surely attract even more visitors to this popular retreat. It will, as Dom Vidal suggested, "set the atmosphere."

Annmarie Adams is an assistant professor of architecture at McGill



West facade of the abbey church at St. Benoît du Lac, under construction.

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Gift for language and love of literature propel novel

English Music, by Peter Ackroyd (Penguin, \$7.99)
Ackroyd's brilliance lies in his

ability to perform technical acrobatics without ever losing his lyrical gift. (In Hawksmoor, for example, he provided two batches of serial murders, one in the 18th century and the other in the 20th; they were not only hauntingly linked in their locale and their characters, but each was impeccably written in period style.) In English Music, Ackroyd turns literary chameleon to deliver a stirring hymn of praise to English culture.

The narrative concerns a young boy growing up in London in the 1920s and '30s with his father, who reads and talks to him instead of sending him to school. The father is a faith healer whose talent actually lies in the psychic powers of the son. The boy is prone to falling into dreamy fits which take the form of chapters written in the styles of such writers as Lewis Carroll, Dickens and William Blake.

This is obviously a novel for readers who share Ackroyd's deep love of traditional literature, and are prepared to see his imitations as tributes rather than gimmickry. The bonus is a tender story of family love and a boy's intellectual awakening.

Scaring Myself Again: Far-Flung Adventures of a TV Journalist, by Allen Abel (Harper Perennial, \$14,95)

Abel's owlish face and literate

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The Gazette

monotone are well-known from his documentaries on the CBC's late, lamented Journal; Globe and Mail readers know his writing, too, from his days as a sports columnist and the Globe's man in China. And what a fine writer he is, conveying the frustrations and moral ambiguities of his often painful job with

He takes us on assignment to

death from bad driving. gree in astrophysics and the ability to speak Chinese, writes not about geopolitics, but of the people immediately around him - the courageous locals recruited on the spot to translate and drive for visiting journalists, the cameraman and sound man whose faces we never see and

large number of visitors welcomed by the monks each year. Benedictines live by three important mandates: to pray, to offer

keen grace and humor.

film Kurdish refugees in Iran and Canadians fighting the oil fires in Kuwait. Glamorous? Abel wouldn't deny it. It's also uncomfortable, frustrating, boring and hair-raising, as the CBC crew members argue with officials (and each other), wait helplessly for the right conditions, shoot miles of tape for a blink of good footage, and risk

Abel, a worldly fellow with a de-

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