

BOOKS

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

Scores 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 to stop.

What a good time, in Quebec, for a book like this one. When *Illness Strikes the Leader* is a historical-political-medical study, done by a doctor and a political-science professor. Despite the annoyingly 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 bedside of the mighty. Their historical prose, most of it abstracted from secondary sources, is lean, precise, and refreshingly 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 newsmen.

There are medical marvels: "In 1951, at the age of 76, (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 illustrated with clearly-explained examples.

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 happened 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 secret.

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 medical 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 Kappler, formerly a *Parliament Hill* reporter and later national editor of *The Gazette*, is now *Show and Living* editor.

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

PAPERBACKS

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 keen grace and humor.

He takes us on assignment to 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 death from bad driving.

Abel, a worldly fellow with a degree 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 the wife left behind to worry.

— Barbara Black

ARCHITECTURE

Hanganu designs new church at Townships abbey

"The 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 world."

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



ANNMARIE ADAMS
NEW BUILDINGS

The crisp, rectangular volume of the new edifice projects boldly from the older abbey toward 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 styles.

The interior of Hanganu's church, too, is a brave essay in Modernism. Whereas the exterior 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 projections 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 building's footprint, as were concrete arches still visible amid the brickwork. 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 architectural ambience of the lakeside abbey. In 1963, a large guest house designed by Dom Claude-Marie Côté was added to the monastery, intended to shelter the large number of visitors welcomed by the monks each year.

Benedictines live by three important mandates: to pray, to offer hospitality, and to guide youth. As a result of their commitment to hospitality in particular, the construction of the guest house was given priority over the church when funds were available for expansion.

Since 1988, the abbey has raised \$5 million toward the church



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

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

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 secular life.

"The missing bricks are like the

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

The beautiful surrounding landscape 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 University.

CHELATION THERAPY BY A DOCTOR

NOW IN MONTREAL

As practiced in the United States for the treatment of chronic degenerative diseases (arteriosclerosis, angina, arterial deficiency and other diseases).

Services are not covered by the Régie d'assurance-maladie du Québec.

Treatment in Montreal
1-800-268-6408
In Quebec City
418-651-6408

The Lunch Hour Concerts

Sept. 23

Richard Roberts (violin) and Lauretta Altman (piano)

Reception Hall 5B.16
12:30 - 1:30pm

Free admission and open to the public.

DAWSON COLLEGE

3040 Sherbrooke St. W.
Westmount, Quebec
H3Z 1A4
Directly accessible via Atwater metro.

VICTORIA HALL GIANT BOOK FAIR

SAT., SUN.
SEPT. 18/19
10 A.M. TO 5 P.M.
4626 SHERBROOKE WEST

The Gazette

For home delivery, call
987-2400.

Canadian Cultural Programmes

ART HISTORY DIVISION
MONDAY SEPT. 20 AT 1:30

ELEANOR MILNE

Dominion sculptress & stained glass designer will give a slide illustrated presentation & commentaries about

HER SCULPTED FRIEZE WORK, & STAINED GLASS WINDOWS IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

ARCHITECTURE DIVISION
MONDAY SEPT. 27 AT 1:30

MELVIN CHARNEY

World renowned Architect and Artist will give a slide illustrated presentation and commentaries about his

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND MODERN ART
FOCUS: URBAN PROJECTS

CINQUIÈME SALLE AT PLACE DES ARTS

Tickets on sale at Place des Arts 842-2112, Reservations and information: 937-7937

Sponsors: President of C.C.P.

The Canada Council

The Gazette

Sec. of State

"Magnificent" — *The Sunday Times*

"One of the finest Canadian novels ever written." — *Maclean's*

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

will read from

The English Patient

at McGill University
Leacock Building
Room 132
855 Sherbrooke St. W.
6 p.m. - 7 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 21, 1993

WINNER OF:

- The 1992 Booker Prize
- The Governor General's Award
- The Trillium Award
- Time magazine's #1 Book of the Year



VINTAGE CANADA

Sponsored by

The McGill University Bookstore
398-7444

Wedding, engagement announcements & pictures

There is a charge for publishing wedding and engagement announcements and pictures. For information please call:

987-2334

The Gazette