

# Entertainment Outlook

## No pea-soupers in French Canadian stories

By JEANNETTE URBAS  
Anthologies tend to reflect the preferences and, in some cases, the biases, of their individual editors. In the introduction to *Invisible Fictions*, Contemporary Stories From Quebec, Geoff Hancock makes no bones about his intentions. "Readers who look for realistic settings, historical backdrops or sociological character studies will be startled," wrote Hancock. "These stories are fantastic, surreal, gothic and grotesque. The writers do not describe the Quebec you thought you knew. No pea-soupers, no maple syrup, no separatist politics." If you do not know much about Quebec or have only the customary basic (mis)conceptions, you will obviously be enlightened only in a certain direction.

The editor makes a further distinction between realism and the scope of this anthology. "Reproducing 'reality' in prose...limits a writer to time, space, and the concrete." In

these stories, the writers stretch the limits of language, creating imaginary, topsy-turvy worlds in which "strawberries are malevolent, grass comes to us from another dimension, crabs and lobsters move in on human reproduction, and trains bare their teeth."

There are 36 stories by 25 authors, of different generations. The translations - by Sheila Fischman, Betty Bednarski, Basil Kingstone and others - flow smoothly and render faithfully the flair and verve of the original texts, from the very simple to the exceedingly complex.

Some of the authors, like Rock Carrier, Michel Tremblay, Yves Theriault and Jacques Ferron, are already known to the English reading public; others are newcomers. Women are somewhat under-represented. There are seven, or eight - depending on how you count the twin-sister collaborators, Claire De and Anne Danurand.

However, it is difficult to estimate whether the proportion is due to the editor's selection or the fact that fewer women in Quebec practise this kind of writing.

A science-fiction writer, Elizabeth Vonarberg, introduces some interesting concepts about male-female relations in her story, *Cold Bridge*. The protagonist (female) wants to acquire the language of the Marrois, the people among whom she finds herself. The first lesson deals with the gender of names and she learns that they are all neuter; masculine and feminine are determined by who is speaking.

### NEW BREED

In the surreal story, *Metamorphosis*, by Clair De and Anne Danurand, a woman, after being raped, takes violent revenge on the rapist with her claws after she is transformed into a lobster. She then gives birth to a thousand male and female lobsters, 98 per cent of whom survive, to become a new breed of humanity. "The lobster men and women became known and respected for their wisdom and their calm. Males and females alike worked for a return to nature and water, they negotiated and pacified."

The stories in this anthology, published by House of Anansi (437 pages, \$14.95), are more concerned with a geography of the mind and emotions than a precise physical location. Quebec is not specifically mentioned until page 299, three-quarters of the way through a collection of 437 pages. But there are fleeting references throughout to the faded social myths of the past and

the inadequacies and uncertainties of being Quebecois at any time. In "Metamorphosis", the astonishing survival rate of the lobster progeny is cause for ironic comment: "A new revenge of the cradle you might say." In Michel Tremblay's *The Ghost of Don Carlos*, Isabella del Mancio, who is crazy about spiritualism, complains to the prime minister at a dinner party about the absence of a particular medium she is anxious to contact: "I finally get to this miserable country and I'm told this gentleman doesn't want to see me on the pretext that he has a severe migraine. Don't people know how to live in this country?"

### NOT ANCHORED

The majority of the stories are not so specifically anchored to Quebec. They move about freely in time and space and, were it not for the subtitle of the anthology, *Contemporary*

Stories From Quebec, in most cases there would be no clue to the authors' origin.

If you enjoy the fantastic, or are curious about it, Geoff Hancock's collection of stories spreads out a royal feast for the imagination. One even suspects at times that the grotesqueness of reality may surpass that of the inventions of fiction as, for example, in the story by Yves Theriault, where an Inuit hunter woos his bride in the traditional, primitive fashion but makes love to her for the first time in their igloo to the voice of Elvis Presley coming from a battery-operated radio!

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## ASK DICK KLEINER

### '39 blockbuster stands alone

Dear Dick: I always enjoy "Gone With the Wind" and Clark Gable when I see it. I heard a rumor that a sequel to "Gone With the Wind" has been made. Is this true? If so, who are the actors? - K.B., Douglstown, New Brunswick

Dear K.B.: There was some wild talk awhile back about a new version of "GWTW" - not a sequel, just a re-make - but, happily, cooler heads prevailed and it never happened. I don't think it ever will, either.

• Dear Dick: Could you possibly tell me who Elizabeth Taylor replaced in the movie "Elephant Walk"? - L.A.L., Ogdensburg, N.Y.

Dear L.A.L.: She replaced Vivien Leigh. The picture had actually begun filming, in Ceylon, when Leigh suffered a nervous breakdown. Taylor, who had previously rejected the role, was persuaded because of the emergency to rush in and take over the role.



Clark Gable Elizabeth Taylor

• Dear Dick: We need an argument settled. I say Jerry Lee Lewis is the piano player from north Louisiana who has been married at least 10 times and been involved in other wild events. The other Jerry Lewis is an actor, who asks for donations to St. Jude's Children's hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Is that right? - D.F., Tickfaw, La.

Dear D.F.: Not 100 per cent. You're right about Jerry Lee, although I have

lost track of his wives. He's the wild performer who is a cousin of evangelist Jimmy Swaggart. The other Jerry Lewis is a comedian/actor - Dean Martin's ex-partner - but it is Danny Thomas who is the St. Jude's fund raiser. Jerry is usually associated with raising money for fighting muscular dystrophy.

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- 2 tbsp. mustard seed
- 1 tbsp. salt
- 1 quart vinegar
- 1 1/4 lbs. brown sugar

Using medium blade, put onion, raisins, garlic through food chopper. Peel peaches; cut in small pieces. Add to first mixture with remaining ingredients. Bring to boiling point; boil slowly, stirring occasionally, 1 hour, or until thick and rich brown in colour. Pour into 3 hot, sterilized pint jars, filling to the top; fasten covers at once.

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