

Book review

Madame Curie changed the 20th century

By ALLAN GOULD

In the world of science - certainly in the world of scientific geniuses of the female persuasion - there is surely no more famous and fascinating personality than that of Madam Marie Curie of France (born Manya Skłodowska in Warsaw, Poland).

As the discoverer - with her equally brilliant husband, Pierre - of both radium and polonium, she has intrigued the world for most of this century, and with good reason: As a woman of science; as the first female Nobel Prize winner in a non-literary field (and the only woman to ever win two of those esteemed honors); as the mother and mother-in-law of Nobel Prize winners Irene and Frederic Joliot-Curie; as the person who changed the course of the 20th century in both warfare (the atom bomb) and health (cancer treatment).

Now, the late great genius is the subject of a biography that is nearly worthy of her glory, *Grand Obsession - Madam Curie and Her World* (Doubleday, 496 pages, \$27.50), by Rosalyn Pfaum. And, although things run down somewhat after the tragic accidental death of Pierre and Marie's own premature passing, there are enough interesting occurrences in the lives of her children to keep the book moving through its impressive length.

In fact, there is a fearful symmetry to this book, since it opens with the 10-year-old future Nobel Laureate covering before, and hating, the Russian overlords of her Polish youth in 1877, and concludes eight decades later with the communists of Soviet Russia heaping grandiose praise on her son-in-law after his death. And what decades these were, for both the Curie/Joliot families and for us all!

For ironies abound throughout the book. Madama Curie cared not for the suffragettes nor the feminists, in spite of her inspirational life in science. Her daughter Irene, on the other hand, joined numerous women's groups and saw herself as a spokesperson for the cause. The same goes for politics. Madam Curie was far too obsessed with her research to care about world politics, while both Irene and Frederic were active communists, and major strugglers against Nazi evil.

OBSESSIVE

Still, it is the obsessive nature of Manya Skłodowski's passion for learning - from her illegal studies at "The Floating University" of dissident Polish intellectuals, to her drive to become the first woman Ph.D. in science in Europe, as well as the first woman pro-

fessor at the Sorbonne - that modern readers will find irresistible. So, too, with the man she would meet, fall deeply in love with, and make such extraordinary scientific discoveries with, Pierre Curie.

Has there ever been a marriage made in scientific - and romantic - heaven more than this one? Marie and Pierre Curie loved each other with a depth of feeling that recalls Romeo and Juliet, and was matched only by their mutual love for scientific research.

And it's on the latter where Ms Pfaum's research truly shines. She captures the literal explosion of physics knowledge during the first four decades of this century, from Roentgen's discovery of X-rays to the world-wide race to create the atom bomb during the Second World War. (It is hilarious to read that "lead-lined clothes were advertised to prevent the penetration of layers of Victorian petticoats and to protect feminine modesty" when X-rays first hit the news.)

It's astonishing to read of the way the world's press haunted and even harranged the Curies, once they made their initial discoveries - and this was decades before radio, TV and People Magazine! An American wanted to name his horse "Marie;" the French newspapers had a field day, a la Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, with a (still questionable) affair that the freshly widowed Madame Curie (may have) had with another scientist; and the great - and very shy and private - scientist was forced to make a number of trips to the United States to raise money for further experiments.

TEAR SPATTERED

When Pierre is suddenly run over by a horse and carriage, the reader's heart nearly breaks to read the "tear-spattered" note written by the bereft 39-year-old widow: "What a terrible shock your poor head has felt, your poor head that I so often caressed in my two hands... Everything is over...; it is the end of everything, everything, everything."

Yet, what pleasures we get to read of Madame Curie's boat trip to the U.S., where she became engrossed with the way the light in her giant closet would come on automatically, to the point where her friends "found Marie sitting inside the wardrobe, in the dark, trying to figure out how the light functioned." Forever the scientist; forever the need to discover and know all!

-Allan Gould is the author of 13 books, the latest being the co-authored *Child Finder*, about this country's greatest tracker of missing children.

Money will come if you work



ASTRO-GRAPH



BERNICE BEDE OSOL

Conditions that have a bearing upon your financial well being look very encouraging for the year ahead. You may be able to make more money than you have previously, but you'll have to work for it.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 19) A good will investment could pay off in handsome dividends a little further down the line. Follow your instincts today if they take you in this direction. Aquarius, treat yourself to a birthday gift.

PISCES (Feb. 20-March 20) The enthusiasm you display for things in which you're vitally interested will encourage others to get involved in them as well. It won't be necessary for you to use the hard sell.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) If there is something you really want or need that someone else can help you acquire, this is the day to make the request. Your benefactor should be receptive.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Conditions look very promising for you today in any involvements or dealings you have with close friends, especially if you're collectively working on something that's new or novel.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) Situations you feel can improve your financial position should be given top priority today, even those that thus far are untested and unproven.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) Because you'll optimistically look for the bright side today you're not apt to have too much trouble finding it. No adverse influence will dare cast a shadow over your affairs.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) Someone you've gone out of your way to help recently could repay you in a generous manner today. This individual has been chaffing at the bit to square up the account.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Your social acceptance will be peaking towards a high point today and persons with whom you'll be involved will find you a pleasant companion with whom to share time.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) This could be a red-letter day for you where your ambitious interests are concerned. Lady Luck might engineer something very big on your behalf.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) Your wit and wisdom serve to make you a fun person to be around today and you'll leave a favorable, lasting impression on

persons who meet you for the first time. They'll want to see you again.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23-Dec. 21) Don't be upset today if something important to you suddenly gets all changed around. Shifting conditions tend to work in your favor and you should come out on top.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) There's a possibility good news will be trying to get through to you today. Be sure to thoroughly check your mail and return all phone calls you find on your answering machine.

Waving the flag

A mere 25 years ago Canada was without a national flag. It was on until February 15, 1965, after months of boisterous debate, hundreds of designs and decades of discussions that Canada hoisted its own flag.

Canada's official flag from 1967 to 1965 was the Union Jack, although the Red Ensign, official flag of the British merchant marine, was also flown. The acceptance of the red maple leaf as a national emblem dates well back into the last century. In 1921 the royal proclamation granting Canada a coat of arms sanctioned red and white as Canada's official colours.

Serious attempts to adopt a national flag was made in 1925 and later in 1946 when a parliamentary committee sifted through 1500 designs. All to no avail.

When the 60s rolled around Canada had gained considerable stature as a world leader. With a 100th birthday celebration due in 1967, the lack of a truly Canadian flag posed potential for considerable, national embarrassment. We really lagged behind the rest of the world.

Parliament tackled the issue in the Flag debate which raged from June until December 1964 and included some 250 speeches. The conflict centered not on the need for a new flag but on what it should look like. Conservative leader John Diefenbaker argued that the design should honour the founding peoples. Prime Minister Lester Pearson thought not, and referred the matter to an all-party committee which recommended the design we know today.

At 2 a.m. December 15, 1964 the House of Commons, in a vote of 163 to 78, accepted the new design. Its

IT'S YOUR HISTORY

technical description is, "A red flag of the proportions two by length and one by width, containing in its center a white square with width of the flag, with a single red maple leaf centered therein."

If you are interested in flagging down more information on the Maple Leaf, or any other Canadian emblems, contact the National Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N3.



National Archives of Canada. PA 136156

NC

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HALTON ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

The Halton Roman Catholic School Board offers an optional French Immersion Program to its English language students entering Grade 5 in September 1990.

A parent information meeting is scheduled as follows:

Halton Hills - Tuesday, January 30, 1990
7:30 p.m.
Holy Cross School
222 Maple Avenue
Georgetown

for further information, please contact:

Michele H. Longlade
Program Consultant
632-6300, Ext. 214

Please note that this is not a registration meeting.

Mr. D. Schrenk
Chairman of the Board

C.G. Byrnes
Director of Education