

Put Your Hands Together For Hellman's Book

by Peter DeCourcy

Cormorant Books continues to find and publish new writers of exceptional talent and freshness. Perhaps most well-known is Nino Ricci's Governor-General Award winning *Lives of the Saints*. The latest release from Cormorant is a first novel by Robert Majzels. At the risk of sounding like the cover-blurb machine, Hellman's Scrapbook is an intelligent, at times witty at times horrific first offering. Majzels' gifts will be obvious to any reader.

The protagonist, David Hellman, is institutionalized after attempting to burn off his hands in rebellion against his ability to lose himself completely in another person's consciousness by holding his or her hand. He views his omniscience as a curse, to which he slowly becomes addicted to.

He writes a journal and a series of letters secretly within the institution, disguising his work as a scrapbook of 'human interest' newspaper articles.

Hellman's writing remains constantly within the shadow of his psychiatrist's oppressive presence, the patient's actual omniscience countered by Dr. Caulfield's appearance of omniscience. Hellman rewrites the hero from J.D. Salinger's *Catcher In The Rye* as the fallen image of rebellion, using the Doctor to aggressively asserting power against his patients. In a humorous digres-

book
Hellman's Scrapbook
by Robert Majzels
Cormorant Books, Inc.
456 pages - \$14.95

sion, he analyzes Holden Caulfield as driven by an incestuous lust for his sister's virginity.

Hellman begins recalling the events leading up to his self-immolation, beginning in the Jewish quarter of Montreal, vicariously living the Holocaust through his father's hand. The restroom at the synagogue becomes a concentration camp wash-room controlled by a whip-wielding Kapo. Against this backdrop, Majzels successfully rekindles the horror of the Holocaust.

David slowly emerges into the world, through school and their sadistic playground games and working the ring-toss game at the World's fair. He experiences drug-induced inner voyages at a fallen frat House, the workers' struggle against both the union and management at Contentional Steel and, finally, to the Philippines in search of the mythic Mariling Makiling, (an Earth goddess figure) where he fights with anti-Marcos revolutionaries. There is the pattern of imprisonment and small subversions established in the concentration camp retreat.

Hellman's journey from regional minority to a third world discourse mirrors our society's move to a post-colonial, polyvocal discourse. Through the layers of intertextual col-



Robert Majzels's Hellman's Scrapbook includes hellish versions of Holden Caulfield to create a witty and horrific first novel. Check all windows twice before reading.

lage, David and the reader both overcome guilt, seen through the burning of his hands as a final attempt for him to retain a single unified consciousness. He writes, "Dr. C. wants to make me whole again. What if GOD IS: A memory sharp as a papercut."

David rebels against Caulfield's attempts to make him whole and fails to suitably define God as a positive essence. He rejects the singularity that Caulfield and God represent,

beginning, instead, a new and hopeful cycle of shared consciousness.

This is an ambiguous and ultimately rewarding novel with consistently accurate characterization and a dynamic energy which does not dissipate throughout. Majzels has successfully combined both a philosophical enquiry and an exciting fictional journey. As such, *Hellman's Scrapbook* deserves to be as successful and as widely read as *Lives of the Saints*.

More Hits 'n' Bits

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made a definite statement about the North and the painter's national pride. Don't look for postcards for sale of this painting. Chances are a smaller version will need a truck to take it home. This collection can be seen Nov. 9-13 at the Student Centre Art Gallery. There will be an Open House with free wine and cheese on Nov. 10 from 8:30-8:30.

Every year, we are painfully reminded of crimes against humanity. The Montreal massacre of 14 women commanded world attention, thanks to a very sophisticated mass information system and the "White Ribbon Campaign" against violence. But the Holocaust of slavery include racialized poverty - which kills millions of Blacks every day - is hardly remembered, let alone talked about. The Pan African Movement Canada presents **The Slavery Inferno**, an exhibition of the shameful instruments of Slavery. Its objective is to expose the stereotypes about Afrika and racialized slavery, poverty, and "development." The Nakumbuka movement was launched last year by way of walking in chains from Osgoode Hall to Nathan Phillips Square. The display is at the Student Centre Art Gallery from Nov. 2-8. Admission is free, so now you've got no reason to go. Don't forget to wear the Nakumbuka button, in memory of those who died in slavery. The button is available at the African Student Association, located on the third floor of the Student Centre.

Charles Morowitz's adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's classic **Hedda Gabler** is presented at the Black Box. Hedda, directed by grad student Stephane Kirkland, will journey through hallucinations, day-dreams and conflicts of late 19th century Norway. It opens Nov. 24 and runs until the 28th. The performance starts at 7:30; there are two matinees on the 25th and 27th at 1:00. Tickets prices are \$10 for adults, \$7 for students and seniors and \$5 for each person in a group. Previews are Sunday, the 22nd (PWYC) and Mon. the 23rd, \$4. For more information, call the box office at 736-5157 or the Theatre Department, 736-5173. The Black Box is in the cockpit of any airplane, used for scientific studies on crashes.....um, no, sorry, it's located in the Fine Arts Building.
— Eric Alper

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Italian Author's Work Gets Lost in Translation

by Christine Sismondo

Gianni Celati read from *Voices from the Plains*, a collage of thirty vignettes, on Oct. 22 at the 1992 International Festival of Authors.

The festival, in its thirteenth year, is attended by more than 80 renowned authors and is known as "the world's largest literary celebration."

The English version of the title of *Voices* is somewhat misleading. The Italian edition is entitled *Narratori delle Pianure*, meaning *Narrators from the Plains*, as the book is fashioned after Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The tales are meant to come from different narrators, on a pilgrimage along the Po, the longest river in Italy which flows through the central industrial and agricultural district.

The images presented in his work range from the bleak descriptions of suburbs consumed by a "residential silence" in which "the time passing can be felt because the silence slows it down so much that it never seems to pass at all." There is also a "very old and toothless man" who answers the eternal question of "how everything that exists began."

Celati demonstrates his wide range, as he writes about the personalized inner struggles of his characters, as well as being able to engage in philosophical discussions of larger questions.

However, this book is not as engaging as his most recent release, *Appearances*. The openings in *Voices from the Plains* are slightly awkward. This is partially due to the translation, unable to reproduce all the subtleties of the original language.

Appearances is a collection of four short stories which, as the title suggests, explore the differences between illusion and reality. It is in this format

that Celati can truly display his subtle genius in character development. He manages with apparent effortlessness by describing their habits, actions and surroundings. The first novella's character, Baratto, remains entirely mute during the majority of the text, only muttering some confused thoughts on the first and last pages of the story.

"The distinction between appearance and reality" is to some degree an accurate representation of the seemingly irreconcilable contradictions of Italian societies. Italy is often perceived as rural and agrarian, untouched in many facets by modern times, while at the same time a booming industrial market.

Perhaps most fascinating in this collection are the thoughts offered

author
Gianni Celati
reading *Voices from the Plains*
International Festival of Authors
October 22

about the meaning of books, words and criticism. The entire story "Readers of Books Are Ever More False" is dedicated to such as cause. It concludes with:

"Everything that is written is already dust at the very moment it is written and it is right that it should be lost with altogether dusts and ashes of this world. Writing is a way of passing time, paying the homage that is due to it: It gives and takes and what it gives is only what it takes - so the sum is always zero, the insubstantial.

"We wish only to be able to cel-



Gianni Celati (above, below, and all around) was in Toronto recently to promote his new book.

brate this insubstantial thing and the void, the shadow, the dry grass, the stones of crumbling walls and the dust we breathe."

The Trees Will Grow On You

by Tim Hanna

music
The Screaming Trees
Sweet Oblivion
Epic Records

The Screaming Trees present a problem. Seattle bands attract all the possible blessings and bashings of the regionalist American hype. They could be: 1) Another metal band turned good ole boys in flannel shirts. 2) Ex-punks as rebel saviours for the 90210 generation. 3) Hair-slinging Rock Gods still sucking the Sixties air of the Pacific Northwest.

Well, *Sweet Oblivion* is all of this, and none of this. The Screaming Trees reaffirm, and shake, the American regional cannon pretty hard. The album represents a true Seattle sound without the tackiness of the more sensational bands. It has all the components - Stooges influenced Seventies metal, neo-Sixties droning guitars, and just plain rock and roll.

Great songwriting, and more experimentation sets them apart from the sound of Seattle. Robert Plant vocals rise side by side with three-part harmonies, with funky drumming setting the groove. The more pop sounding songs like "Nearly Lost You" almost sound like a cross between Soundgarden and the East-coast pop band of a Buffalo Tom. Add a little sunny Meat Puppets guitar, and you've got a pretty wild album.

Sweet Oblivion is brought out in the moody songs. These pop-metal songs show a much more mature and honest interpretation of the Seattle sound. The band is seen as writing long rock and roll odes, rather than a video soundtrack for Lollapalooza.

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