

A LITERATURE OF OUR OWN

In both official languages, literature is thriving in Canada, with a fast-growing readership at home and abroad. Helping in this growth has been assistance from the Arts and Cultural Industries Promotion Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and from the Canada Council for the Arts. They have provided support for travel, translation and trade fair promotion, enabling Canadian authors to gain exposure and recognition around the globe. The result has been a reputation for excellence.

In English Canada, local authors used to be overshadowed by more famous writers from Britain or the United States. Now they themselves cast a long shadow. Of the six nominees for the 2002 Man Booker Prize, for example, three were Canadian: Yann Martel, Rohinton Mistry and Carol Shields. The winner was the 39-year-old Martel, of Montreal, Quebec. His *Life of Pi* was described by Britain's Manchester *Guardian* as an "edge-of-seat adventure" and an "extraordinary, one-off achievement."

Shields and Mistry are both repeat Booker nominees, while Michael Ondaatje won the prize in 1992 for *The English Patient*, later an Oscar-winning film. And then there is Margaret Atwood, who received a Booker in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*; her works have been translated into 20 languages. Of equal stature is Timothy Findley, a Chevalier of France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, who died in 2002. All have received travel and translation grants from DFAIT and the Canada Council for the Arts.

In French Canada, writers have been at the forefront of the extraordinary awakening of the past half-century. Among the major

names: Anne Hébert (winner of the 1982 Prix Fémina), Marie-Claire Blais (winner of the 1966 Prix Médicis), Roch Carrier (currently National Librarian of Canada), Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, novelist-dramatist Michel Tremblay (an Officer of France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres), Acadian Antonine Maillet (the first non-citizen of France to win the Prix Goncourt in 1979) and many more. Most federal support for French authors has been channelled through the Government of Quebec, but DFAIT has helped particularly with travel and translation expenses.

Touring the globe

Writers can gain international exposure by attending launches for translations of their works, going on promotional tours and reading at book festivals. DFAIT provides travel grants to help authors attend those events.

Such a grant helped Yann Martel travel to Britain in May 2002 to attend the launch of the U.K. edition of *Life of Pi*. A second grant took him to the Edinburgh International Book Festival (the world's largest) in August. As a result of the exposure and the Booker win, foreign-language rights to *Life of Pi* have so far been

sold to publishers in Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Italy.

Canada was a featured country at Edinburgh in 2002, and DFAIT provided travel grants to a number of other authors. Among them: Michael Crummey, a Newfoundlander now living in Kingston, Ontario; Andrew Pyper and Michael Redhill, based in Toronto, Ontario; Newfoundland novelist Wayne Johnston; and children's author Irene Watts of Vancouver, British Columbia.

Another Canadian reading at the Edinburgh Festival was Alistair MacLeod, a sensation in Britain for his poignant writing about life on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. His first novel, *No Great Mischief*, won the 2001 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, which at £100,000 is the largest literary prize in the world (see *Canada World View*, Issue 12, pp. 10–11). Later in 2001, DFAIT assistance enabled MacLeod to participate in Ireland's Kilkenny Arts Festival. A further grant helped him travel to Lyon, France, in 2002 for readings from his work after the French publication of *No Great Mischief*.

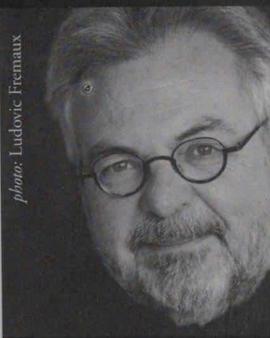
Six Canadians are among the 125 authors nominated for this year's

photo: Neil Graham



Carol Shields

photo: Ludovic Fremaux



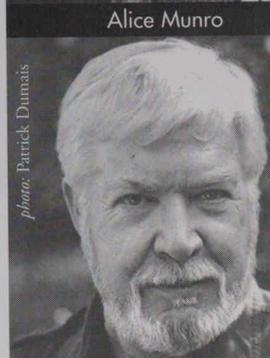
Michel Tremblay

photo: Jerry Bauer



Alice Munro

photo: Patrick Dumais



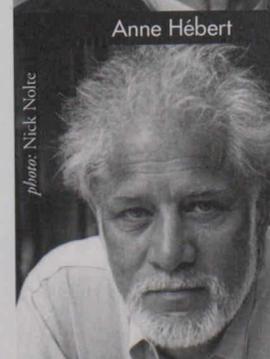
Timothy Findley

photo: Gilbert Duclos



Anne Hébert

photo: Nick Nolte



Michael Ondaatje