

ut literature, religion and politics

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who tears off all of a McDonald's restaurant with a submachine gun. But at the same time you have to remember a human being did that. It is that you always have to come back to. Somewhere the workings of a human being broke down, for one reason or another, to allow there to be that man who did that in that restaurant. Even with those terrible things which are unimaginable, you have got to always remember: a person did that.

And sometimes, to clear up the other half that is implicit in that question, you have a whole mass of people doing it together, as you had in everybody turning to Hitler, and as I feel, you have in everybody turning to Mr. Reagan.

Q: Your last three novels all have at their centres, catastrophic events, the first and second world wars and now the great Deluge. What draws you to telling stories about terrible times and terrible things?

Findley: I guess because they always act as a catalyst. Catalytic events that force people into confrontation with themselves and with others. I don't consciously think of it as a device but probably some part of the storyteller in me says it's a good clean way to get to the hard and fast currency of fiction very quickly.

Q: You have spend much of your life in the theatre as an actor and now you are known chiefly as a writer of prose. How do you see the theatre now, in the light of these later achievements in fiction?

Findley: Sadly. I'd like to have written more plays and I'd like to have been more involved in the theatre. I haven't because of financial reasons and other reasons which are too complicated to go into, but they basically have to do with this: When you commit yourself to the theatre you have to go live in the theatre. I had just left the theatre as an actor and I wasn't about to move back under any circumstances.

But aside from that I did quite a bit of theatrical writing for television. That taught me a lot about playwrighting. Now that I'm making my living more as a writer, and I feel confident I can go on making my living as a writer, I want to go to the true theatre. I want to write more for that medium.

This is very much bound up with the fact that I have found the one thing that I think every writer has to find. That is a director who is like a second me. When it comes to understanding the words I put on paper that person would be Robin Phillips. He absolutely understands, instinctively.

I have also had that experience with Mary Gold Charlesworth. She directed the original production of *Can You See Me Yet?* That had the same effect on me as I'm describing with

Robin Phillips. It's as though she had been sitting in my mind, sort of tapping her toes, saying, 'Come on' as I wrote.

And you need that. A writer does need a director who's going to be able to take the play and absolutely open it up. It is so rare that you find that person that I feel immensely privileged to have found that person at least twice.

But the trouble is neither of those people are around. Also I have to write another novel and then perhaps I can work on a play, and then another novel, and then work on another play. It has to be that way; that's the financial reality of my life. If I was John Murell I would be writing another play to make money and seeing what I could do with a novel in between.

Q: I often wonder if the live stage today is a relevant art-form because its audience is so small.

Findley: Doesn't matter.

Q: How do you feel about that idea?

Findley: You've just heard how I feel. That's bullshit. I don't mean you're talking bullshit. I mean the idea that theatre is irrelevant is bullshit. It has to be bullshit. Nothing will ever replace the value of the theatre. You can't lost touch with the imaginative contact made between the reality of those artists who are right there and our reality sitting there watching them.

The play is there: it exists. Chekhov, let us say. You can't change that play but the chemistry between the live people involved changes. All the live people, the artists on the stage and the people in the audience; there is nothing like that. Nothing will ever replace that truth. That is why it has such immense value. It is the only art form left in which everyone participates at the same time. Everyone can walk out of that theatre changed, maybe forever, artists and audience alike.

Q: Why do you think the audiences are so small then?

Findley: Because they have become appallingly lazy. Everybody has made too many gifts to everybody of headsets and gilded eyes. "Sit and stare at me," and, "Sit and listen to me. I'll do all your thinking and I'll do all your talking and I'll do everything else." Madness! And it will be the death of us all.

Q: You are a member of two groups, Artists for Peace, and Amnesty International...

Findley: ...And PEN as well. They're involved with imprisoned writers. Artists for Peace is composed of artists of every kind: actors, writers, painters, composers, etcetera. The main concern of that group is every aspect of the world at peace. It is not politi-

cal. We are not a bunch of raging idiots dedicated absolutely to the idea that only one side is right and one side is wrong, like many peace groups are. I think the value of Artists for Peace is that so many creative people are involved in it.

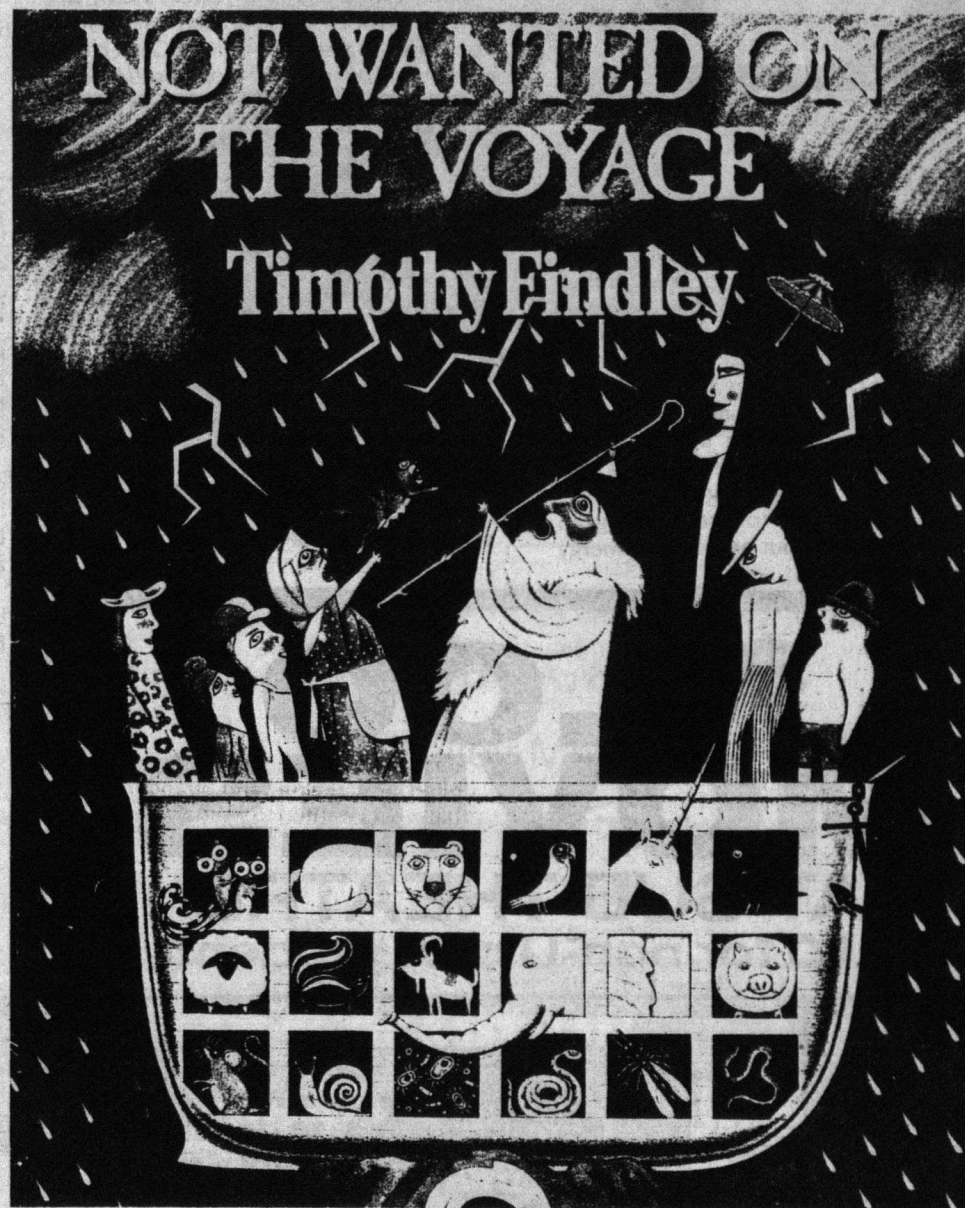
Amnesty International is an immensely important organization which works for the care of prisoners of conscience. They are not concerned with prisoners who, for instance like the IRA, have committed acts of violence to gain their ends. They're of no interest to Amnesty at all. Quite rightly.

But prisoners of conscience, who are only in prison because of what they believe or as a consequence of what someone else believes, they are our concern. What you do as a member is you literally sit down and you write a letter on behalf of an individual per-

son. And you send copies of that letter to the Prime Minister, or the President, or the King, or whoever happens to be in whatever country is concerned. You exert immense pressure on the governments involved. Amnesty has been responsible for the release of hundreds of political prisoners and the saving of lives of others.

Timothy Findley's new novel *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, is available from Viking Press and retails for \$18.95. *Dinner Along the Amazon*, his new collection of short stories is available from Penguin Paperback for \$6.95.

review of *Not wanted on the voyage* on p. 8.



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