

## Author Nino Ricci Visits Campus



by Lillith

As she introduced Nino Ricci to a large crowd gathered to hear an excerpt from his soon to be published second novel *In a Glass House*, Professor Mary Rimmer recalled that when she was a lecturer at Concordia University, Ricci had been pointed out to her as a "promising young writer" in the Masters program in Creative Writing. As this was not an unusual way to describe students in the program, Dr. Rimmer paid no special attention to her friend's remark. Ricci's thesis, however, did garner a lot of special attention. His novel *Lives of the Saints*, after being rejected by several publishers, was accepted by Cormorant Books (a small press in Ontario) and won a fistful of awards, in Canada and internationally, including the Governor General's Award for Fiction. The book was widely and favorably reviewed and spent a long period on the top of *The Globe and Mail* bestseller list. *Lives of the Saints* is in its ninth printing, but Ricci said, "Well,

you've got to look at how many are in each pressing before you get too excited...but its done well."

Ricci responded to a question at the reading about whether winning the Governor General's Award was a blessing or a curse with a laughing comment about the prize money, but also an acknowledgment of the respectability and legitimacy it gave to his position as a writer so early in his career. I asked him when I called him last week at this home in Toronto whether he felt "sophomore pressure" in following up a highly successful first novel, and he characterized the pressure as indirect: "I don't have people in my office while I'm writing, sort of standing over me. When the first book came out I was well into the second one, so that helped...because I was already on a certain track and I've been following it. There's a tendency on the one hand to think, 'Well, God, this book is different, maybe what people saw in the first one, they won't see in this one' or on the other hand to think, 'well, I'm just going to do this one differently just to spite them'...In the

final analysis though, I have standards that I've developed over the years and those are the ones that count."

The second novel *In a Glass House* picks up the story of Vittorio Innocente after his arrival in Canada with his half-sister, and focuses on the re-establishment of his relationship with his father, who had immigrated from Italy four years earlier. The section Ricci had chosen to read from described Vittorio's early experiences at school and his feeling of being an outsider fearful of humiliation. The section demonstrated Ricci's ability to believably recreate the perspective of a child and displayed his characteristic attention to detail.

Ricci conceptualized this project as a study of the relationship between Vittorio and his half-sister, but it evolved into a trilogy. This was related to the development of what had initially been background information into a self-sufficient story. He was also concerned with having a manageable section of the story to present as his thesis as he

gradually realized, "I'll never graduate if I try to tell the whole story." He saw a shift in focus between the separate sections, with *Lives of the Saints* focusing on Vittorio's mother, *In a Glass House* focusing on his father and the final section of the trilogy dealing with Vittorio's relationship with his sister. He also identifies separate thematic issues, as he characterizes the influences of *Lives of the Saints* to be a medieval world view, as well as its elements of Catholicism and a tradition of folk stories, while *In a Glass House* is more influenced by elements of the modern world.

Ricci developed the atmosphere of his novels out of a variety of influences, ranging from the stories heard from his Italian parents and the large Italian community in his hometown, Leamington, Ontario, his own travels and research in Italy and his experience teaching in Nigeria for CUSO in 1981-83. Nigeria was an influence not only as a setting in a section of *In a Glass House*, but "in a broader sense, some of *Lives of the Saints* drew on my experience in Nigeria. It seemed to me a culture that had a lot of similarities with rural Italian culture in terms of the mix of standard religion and religious beliefs that are normally classified as pagan or superstitions...Also, the more "so-called traditional lifestyle with the weekly markets, and the pace of life seemed to me familiar in some ways, with the world my parents came from."

I also discussed the trend towards classifying works as "world literature" that fit imperfectly into categories like Canadian literature or American literature, in light of his cosmopolitan background and the fact that he draws on such diverse influences. He describes such categories as "always having been artificial. Perhaps more so now, because people tend to move international both because they move around a lot more and because they move around a lot more and because we have access to so much more information about the world—you're as likely to be reading (Gabriel Garcia) Marquez as you are to be reading Can. lit.—you're exposed to a much broader tradition and inevitably, influenced by it."

Ricci now considers himself a full-time writer. I asked him if he ever considered returning to academic life. He said that "when I did a masters degree I thought 'OK, now I'm going to enter the elite of academia' and once I was semi-within it I saw what a petty world it can be. From a distance it looks so much more noble...I think it was my first department meeting that decided me against pursuing a career in academia. I always did want to write and I think at some point, I will probably teach off and on, perhaps as writer in residence, just to have some continuing contact with the world."

Although he's now "in spirit" working on the concluding volume of the trilogy, Ricci is in the final stages of editing *In a Glass House*, which is to be published by Cormorant this fall.

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## Caribbean Circle News

by: Aurelius Gordon

Caribbean Nite '73-'93 - Twenty years of rhythm, reason, and rhyme.

On Saturday, March 20, the Caribbean Circle will present the 20th annual Caribbean Nite in the Student Union Building Cafeteria. The event which is scheduled to commence at 7:00 p.m. will feature a delicious Caribbean dinner, a colourful and spectacular cultural show, and a grand dance to end the evening. Dr. Joy Mighty of the Department of Business Administration of the University of New Brunswick will be the feature speaker.

The Caribbean Circle is an Organization of students from the Caribbean, South, Central, and North America, and the general student community of the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University. Founded in 1973, the organization has as its objective the enhancement of the academic, social, and cultural environment of the university community. THE SPIRIT OF THE CARIBBEAN - that unifying force which transcends all linguistic, geographic, racial, cultural, and religious boundaries, is the heartbeat of the Caribbean Circle.

Caribbean Nite 73-93' will give our guests the opportunity to capture the eclectic character of this region of the planet through exposure to its unique cuisine, music, songs, ideas, dances, fashion, and poetry.

Patrons are advised to purchase their tickets early as the number is limited in accordance with the Fire Marshal's regulation. Tickets cost \$10.00 (adults) and \$5.00 (children under twelve) and are available from the following persons and locations: i) VEDA BOWLIN - treasurer of the Caribbean Circle, ii) KEITH YHAP - President - Fredericton Caribbean Association Tel: 457-1557, iii) Members of the Caribbean Circle, iv) THE HELP OFFICE-STUDENT UNION BUILDING. Tel: 453-4955, v) THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ADVISORS OFFICE - ALUMNI MEMORIAL BUILDING Tel: 453-4860.

NOTICES: Caribbean Circle SKI TRIP to Crabbe Mountain - Saturday February 27. Departure is from the SUB at 9:00 A.M. The fee per person is \$25. Please Contact BASSEY HAYNES Tel: 450-6683 for further information. ii) REHEARSALS for Caribbean Nite 73-93 - Sunday February 28 at 2:30 in the SUB Ball Room - 2nd floor.

Rehearsals continue at the same venue from Monday 1st to Friday 5th March at 7:00 p.m. Members are urged to come to rehearsals with items needed for performances. Please contact AURELIUS GORDON: Tel: 458-5776, BASSEY HAYNES Tel# above, GORDON PORTER Tel: 458-0680, MAUREEN RITCHIE Tel: 457-2642, ANNA VAN LOON Tel: 454-0080, and VEDA BOWLIN - 455-7834, for further information and/or to put forward your suggestions.