

Timothy Findley talks about literature

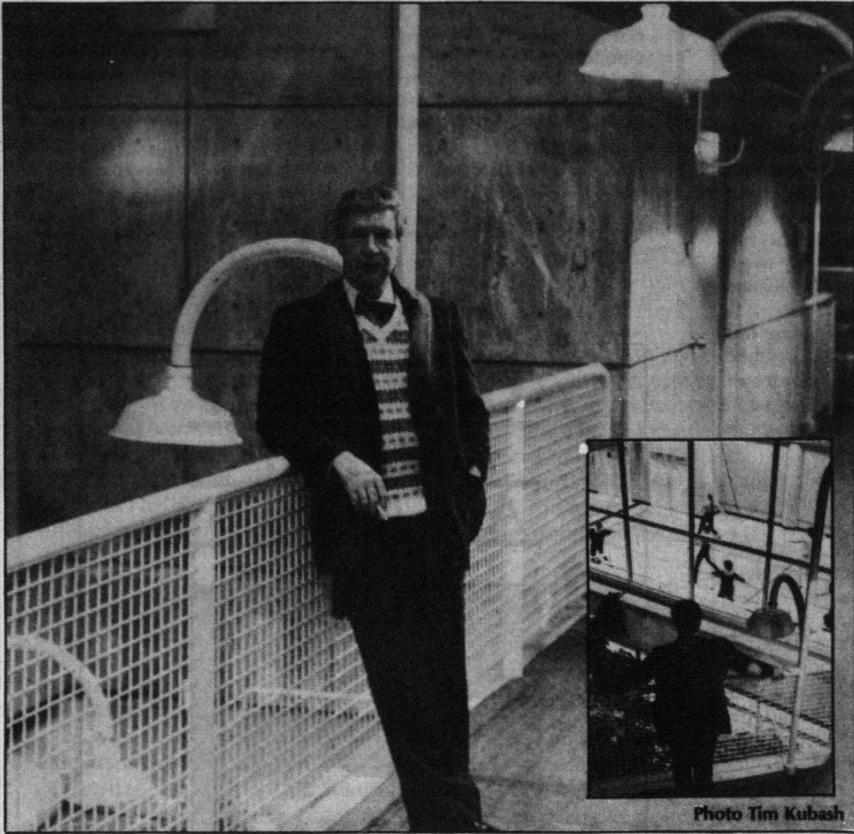


Photo Tim Kubash

Findley read from *Not Wanted on the Voyage* last Thursday at Grant MacEwan College.

interview by Geoffrey Jackson

This last Thursday Timothy Findley came to read from his new novel, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, at Grant MacEwan College. It was a highly entertaining reading, with Mr. Findley clearly showing through his style and manner his earlier training as an actor. After the reading he was kind enough to give the *Gateway* this interview.

Q: I've read that your new novel, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, began as a story about one of your cats, who became blind in its old age. How does a story of a blind cat transform itself into an allegory of the Deluge?
Findley: Well, absolutely by chance. This is the thing that's amazing. When it started out, the cat was living with a woman on a farm in southern Ontario in about 1910. (this is important because that woman ultimately became the basis of the character, Mrs. Noyes). In that novel the blind cat and the woman were deserted by the husband in the midst of a storm. About the time I was to have the husband disappear, I began to have a problem writing the book, just an ordinary, everyday problem.

I was in Toronto at a conference of women writers. At that conference Phyllis Webb read a poem she had written:

And you, are you still here
 Tilting in this stranded ark
 Blind and seeing in the dark.

[Phyllis Webb, *Leaning*]

That was like a hammer blow. I don't know how or why this should be but I then realized, with the juxtaposition of the words 'blind' and 'seeing,' and 'stranded' and 'ark,' that what I wanted to write about was Noah's ark. The blind cat and this lady would be on the ark. It just came, 'bam!', like that.

Q: *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is not an historical novel of Noah's time nor is it really a fictionalization of Genesis. How do you see the connections between your book and the Bible?
Findley: Mostly through anecdote. I read, of course, the two and a half or three books of Genesis that it takes (it's not much) to tell the story. But I then went to the Talmud, and the Talmud is marvelous because it's told and written in anecdotal form.

In many ways this helped give me the form

of the novel, the sense of what Noah would be like, of what leeway you could take with the story as it was told in the Bible. Because some things are sacred, meaning absolutely sacred.

In reading the Talmud I discovered that, in the Jewish tradition, there is this wonderful leeway you are given all around the circumference of a story. Basically I felt the freedom to take that story and just march with it, to take it anywhere I wanted it to go. As soon as I started writing I new, for instance, I didn't want it to be an allegory told absolutely as a story of today. I would have found that repulsive.

Tim in the book is in a state of flux; it's flowing past us as we read. Noah is very much the Noah of the Bible, of the Medieval English plays. And he is the Noah of William Blake. Blake never drew Noah, but if you look at his Job, Job is the model for my Noah. Yaweh, as Blake saw him in his engravings, is the Yaweh I've put on paper.

Mrs. Noyes [Noah's wife] remains an Edwardian farmwife, and Lucy, the Lucifer character, is a Japanese Geisha girl. I get very much the feeling that Japeth is a warrior from all times. One minute he appears to be a Roman gladiator and the next moment he appears to be almost a soldier of the French revolution. The wonderful aspect was that time is always; time is any moment in history you want it to be. One character can be representing one period, and another character representing another.

Q: Your book is about the end of the world. With all visions of the apocalypse there is something compelling about the 'End.' Is there a certain morbid fascination developing around the idea? An attractiveness?
Findley: Yes, and also I think, an excuse, Geoff. When people now speak of the Apocalypse they think exclusively of the bomb and therefore that there will be no Apocalypse till the Bomb falls. Now everybody is saying, "Yes, it's going to fall and. Oh God, it's all going to come crashing down to an end," but they associate that exclusively with the Bomb.

In this book the Apocalypse is shown as being with us now. It is my belief that it is. Now that is not playing to the fashion of apocalyptic thought and all that stuff. It is saying something almost going against that current of Apocalypse as a nuclear thing. Nuclear war is appalling and I am very much against the nuclear build-up, but I almost feel like a fool saying that. What idiot wouldn't be? That is a way of avoiding the Apocalypse that is.

That Apocalypse is Africa, it is Central America, it is South America, it is parts of Asia. It is parts of North America, only not so noticeably. It is out attitudes that are apoca-

lyptic. That is the Apocalypse. There it is. Now.

But we're still alive and something can be done. That's why it is not negative to think about the Apocalypse. Don't be defeated by it. Everybody is rushing to the end — that's what I think you're saying too — that it is now become almost trite.

Q: Like a fad, almost...

Findley: Yes, "We're all going to die. So what?"

Q: Your answer helps me to understand the way you've ended *Not Wanted on the Voyage* much better now. I had trouble working the book out, thinking of it in terms of an allegory of the nuclear threat.

Findley: Yes, because it really has nothing to do with the Bomb at all. The Bomb is merely one of many things.

Q: I think I would like to ask you a question about your new collection of short stories, *Dinner Along the Amazon*. Actually two questions. First, the earlier stories deal very much with the world as seen through the eyes of children. Through the stories I felt there was a progression to a more adult style of consciousness. Is this a coincidence or were you deliberately...
Findley: No, you're the first person who's ever said that.

Q: Really? It seems so obvious to me...

Findley: And now that you say it, of course, it is very obvious. No, it wasn't deliberate, but it obviously was the way everything emerged. Certainly I wasn't a child when I was writing about the kids, but the first part of life that I wrote about was childhood. It was the central event of life in the first things I wrote. And then adolescence was the central event. So, in a sense, yes, absolutely. Because the people at the end of the book, while they are younger than I am now, they are the next stage in the progression that happens in that book.

Q: The second thing that struck me about the stories was that I felt there was a theme of compassion running through all of them. None of the characters struck me as being seen without some measure of sympathy, some degree of understanding. Do you think there is such a thing as an evil man, a man underserving of sympathy or understanding?
Findley: I don't really.

Q: I never see them in your books.

Findley: No, and obviously there's a very good reason for that. I can't think like that. There's a difference between being, say, insane doing something maniacal. Obviously, there's something grossly ill about someone

who tears with a subr you have to that. It is t to. Somev being bre another, to did that in terrible thi have got to that.

And son that is imp whole ma you had in as I feel, y Mr. Reaga

Q: Your l centres, c second w Deluge. W about terri

Findley: I catalyst. C into confr others. I c device but teller in me the hard a quickly.

Q: You ha theatre as chiefly as a the theatru achieveve **Findley:** S plays and I in the thea reasons ar complicate have to d yourself to the theatre actor and I any circum

But asid theatrical v me a lot al making my confident writer, I wa to write m

This is v that I have every writ who is like understan person we lutely und I have al Gold Char producer the same e

TRAVEL CUTS

LAST MINUTE SEATS AVAILABLE!

TORONTO
\$349⁰⁰
 DEC. 19 - JAN. 3

VANCOUVER
\$139⁰⁰
 DEC. 21 - JAN. 6

Canadian Universities Travel Service

Main Floor SUB 432-2592

The travel company of the Canadian Federation of Students

THE ICE PEDLAR

CUBED, CRUSHED
50 lb. and 25 lb.
PARTY ICE BAGS

- PLASTIC FLEXI GLASS 7 oz. liquor glasses: case of 1,000 - \$27.99
- Plastic wine, beer and liquor glasses
- Plates, napkins, table covers, etc.
- Beer and wine ice tubs for rent
- Free delivery on large and small orders
- Ice sculptures, large, medium, and small
- Liquor Dispensers Rental
- Liquor and beer tickets
- Plastic 9" white plates, 250 pk., \$17.95
- Wholesale prices on cases of party supplies

12136 - 121A Avenue
 Edmonton, Alberta
 Phone:
 455-8203

ACCORD STENO SERVICE

Typing & Photocopying S

North end of HUB Mall
433-7727

**Having a Party?
 Need Catering?**

Call Kelley Maki at 432-20

L'Express

L'Express
 Students' Un