



# ing a literary mini-boom'

The Sunday Times Nov'90

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THE DIRECTORS OF  
SINCLAIR-STEVENSON LTD

invite you to celebrate

the launch of McClelland & Stewart in the UK

in the presence of

The Honorable Donald S. Macdonald,  
High Commissioner for Canada

at Canada House, Trafalgar Square, SW1

on Monday 11th February 1991

RSVP (responses only)  
Cultural Affairs  
Canada House  
Tel: 071-629 9492 ext. 2232

Drinks  
6.30-8.00 pm

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What could not have been predicted is the host of exciting new writers who have been enthusiastically taken up by British publishers over the last four years. Since 1987 there have been more than 25 of the famous Canada House Thursday evening Booklaunches to celebrate the UK publication of Canadian novels and short story collections. In the spring calendar for 1991 alone there were 4 booklaunches, 2 of them for first novels which were being published simultaneously in Britain, Canada and the US. There are several extraordinary new departures here. Not only is it true that for the first time ever most British publishing houses now feature Canadian writers on their lists but they also welcome new Canadian work as a good risk, not waiting for its reception to be tested on the North American market but publishing within a few months of its appearance. What this means is that contemporary Canadian writing has a high profile among British publishers and readers.

It is also worth noting the generous support that the Canadian Government's Department of External Affairs and International Trade gives to encouraging the work of Canadian writers in this country, by paying travel expenses for some writers to come to Britain for promotion tours. Publishing is an industry where visibility is crucially important, and it is certainly an attractive prospect to British publishers to know that there is a good chance that a Canadian writer could be on the scene for a full publicity programme at the time when a book is published.

One of the interesting consequences of the increased popularity of Canadian writing has been a new trade initiative. For the first time (another first!) a British publisher Sinclair-Stevenson is now distributing selected titles from the McClelland & Stewart list in the UK, so that Canadian books are directly available to the British market. McClelland & Stewart is Canada's oldest independent publishing house and this project has begun with 7 titles, including 4 novels. What is promising is the wide range of material being offered - from the history of the Irish immigrants in 19th century Canada, a book on Canadian Impressionism, a documentary account of The Sharpeville Six, to a novel set in Latin America in the late 1970s. The image of Canada projected here is that of a cosmopolitan multicultural society speaking for liberal causes. Let us also hope that the list will be widened to include New Canadian Library classics unavailable here like Hugh MacLennan, Rudy Wiebe and Ethel Wilson and translations of Quebec fiction by Marie-Claire Blais and Gabrielle Roy, in order to meet the demands of an expanding academic market in this country.

The current McClelland & Stewart list signals an interesting shift of emphasis in Canada's national self image - or so it appears from the British point of view. A distinctively multicultural awareness seems to characterise contemporary Canadian society and this diversity is well represented in its fiction. There has been a decisive movement away from traditional representations of Canada as rural or even bicultural, let alone dominantly Anglo-Saxon. Instead Canadians are reinventing their

Canadian identity in response to changing circumstances, demographic and political factors, so that Canadian identity functions not as a static historical concept but as a dynamic construction.

Of course a nation's identity and international recognition of this is a question of image making. It is also related to a country's confidence in its own cultural myths about itself. There is no magic formula for nationhood. Canada's evolving national narrative has always highlighted the challenges of diversity, focussing on individual difference through regionalism, bilingualism, and now multiculturalism, which includes growing recognition of its Native peoples. It is this image of a country of multiple coexisting identities that is being projected so persuasively through the works of a new generation of Canadian writers.

If we look at the profile of Canadian novels recently published here, we see a striking illustration of Atwood's paradoxical formula which describes Canada as 'home ground / foreign territory'. What she says of Canadians is true of any New World society: 'We are all immigrants to this place, even if we were born here.' The important difference is that Canadians recognise that their relationship to their country is an enabling rather than a disabling circumstance, for it opens up new spaces to accommodate change and the exploration of unmapped possibilities. Small wonder that so many of these novels are about travelling and crossing borderlines, moving into spaces previously forbidden, laying claim to unfamiliar territory.

## 'Van Herk's evocations of Canada's vast landscapes are a triumph of suggestive prose'

The Independent Oct 88, No Fixed Address by Aritha Van Herk

Aritha Van Herk's prairie novel *No Fixed Address* (Virago) offers a paradigm of travel fiction and a parody of male exploration narratives as her heroine, a young travelling saleswoman in Ladies Comfort underwear, drives restlessly around Alberta in her vintage black Mercedes and finally freaks out at the end into the fantastic territory of death up in the Yukon at the last frontier. The characters in Carol Shields's *Mary Swann* (Fourth Estate) are travellers through space and time, and



Carol Shields

'Her writing buzzes with insouciant humour, intrigue and perception'

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Mary Swann by Carol Shields