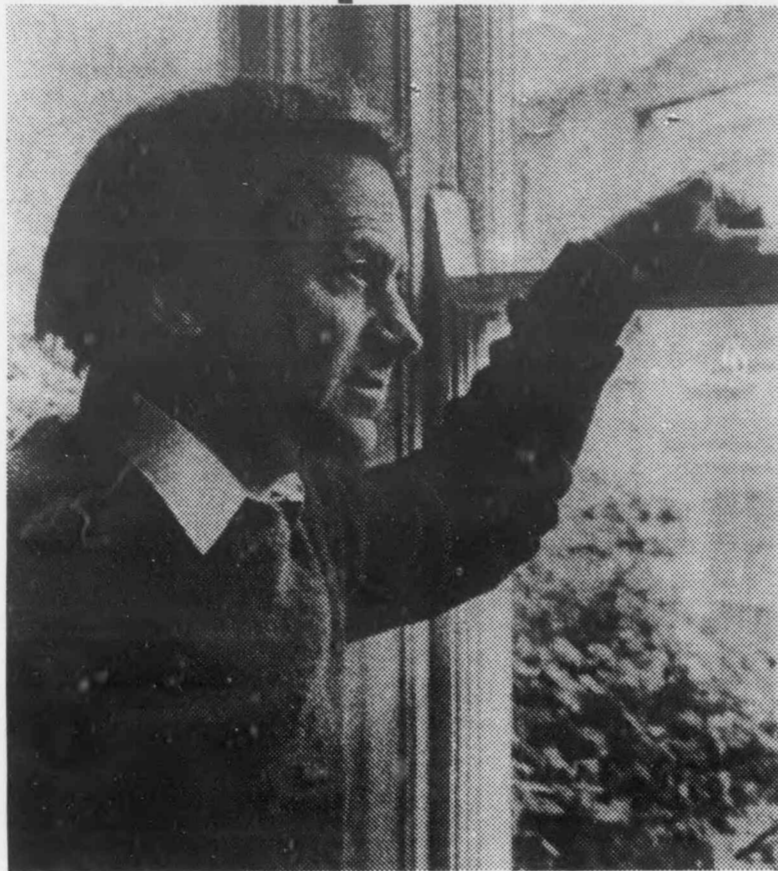


# READING INTO NORMAN LEVINE



by Sherry A. Morin

On Tuesday afternoon, a small but cozy congregation of literature-lovers gathered in Memorial Hall to sample some reading by acclaimed author, Norman Levine. Levine, the first Writer-in-residence at U.N.B., read from and spoke about several of his works as part of a current nationwide tour. Of all places visited or to be visited on his cross-country tour, Mr. Levine confided, "This is the place I wanted to be". The audience seemed especially endeared to him after this and received him warmly, including his comments on the book *Canada Made Me*. This was an irony, as the first time the novel was released to the Canadian public (in 1958) it was received with a very cool reception because of its harsh criticism of Canadian moral and cultural values.

Levine feigns to take an existential approach to literature; this "wannabe"-existentialist quest probably comes from reading a lot of Nietzsche in his youth. He claims that he "never tries to explain to the reader", that he doesn't use many adjectives, that the reader brings his or her own experience to the text. "Energize it with your own experience," urged Levine. However, despite Levine's adamant claims that he refrains from painting mental pictures, I found quite the contrary.

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Levine's writings are his meticulous descriptions. True, he doesn't seem to use many adjectives, but he does seem to employ a wealth of very descriptive verbs. He describes objects with the same care that most authors use to characterize people in their novels. This is a nice twist as it allows Levine's inanimate objects to seemingly take on lives of their own. For example, in one of Levine's untitled pieces, the narrator in the story described how he imagined a sports car doing a striptease. An image like that is not easy to illustrate through words; but be assured, Levine "pulled it off".

Another interesting feature to be found in Levine's writing is that a clever metaphor will often become a motif that reappears again and again on the page, but in increasingly subtle forms. For example, the eyes of a confused female character are compared to the "helpless" eyes of a visually impaired person who suddenly removes his or her glasses. A

few lines after Levine made this comparison came the cluster of words, "She said, her words blurred..." In other words, after comparing the woman's disoriented spiritual state to visual impairment, Levine continued to stress the metaphor, (somewhat slyly) through his use of the unlikely adjective, "blurred", to modify a noun like "words".

In listening to Levine read, I found that if I hadn't paid close attention, I would easily have been lost. Levine seems to virtually "trip" from event to event, yet he does it gracefully. He flits from one character to another, from image to image, almost in a Joycean stream-of-consciousness kind of style, but not quite to those extremes.

Perhaps one of the nicest parts of the presentation was unplanned. Levine was murmuring to the crowd, "There's nothing here. It just goes through your fingers..." and as his words trailed away, suddenly the faint sounds of music became audible. I could hear the cascading scales being played by a clarinetist who was probably practicing in a nearby room (Memorial Hall, where the reading was held, also houses U.N.B.'s Fine Arts Department). I don't know if Mr. Levine could hear the music, but it was a nice touch for those of us at the back of the gallery.

Something else happened that was also surprising, but not quite as pleasing. The gathering ended in a rather abrupt, unorthodox manner as the crowd (mostly students) hastily began to stir and walk out before any questions were asked of the author. I couldn't help but feel guilty of some sacrilege as I left my seat, after being somewhat awed by Levine's strong presence.

If you're interested in finding out more about Mr. Levine or his writing style, you might look into one of his books. Three of these, *From a Seaside Town*, *How Stories Mean* and the infamous *Canada Made Me*, were displayed and on sale at Levine's public appearance.

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# Art Views

By Jethelo E. Cabilete

Greetings, tidings and salutations to everyone. This is Art Views, a column on theatre, art exhibitions and concerts that happen on and off campus. Reviews and upcoming events will be reported here, to keep you up to date (sort of a literary Siskel and Ebert routine, only without the visual effects). Anyway, this week we take you to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery on Queen Street, and the "Timeless Humanism" of Fred Ross.

Fred Ross was born in 1927, in Saint John, New Brunswick. It was during his teen years, that his fascination with art blossomed; inspired by the example of Saint John Vocational School teacher, Ted Campbell, who was himself a well known artist. Borrowing from images, art and symbology from a wide range of periods and countries (eg. Italian Renaissance and modern American Pop Art), Fred Ross placed them into contemporary themes, creating evocative figures and imagery. Much of his paintings and sketches were done using live models as the basis for his work.

The exhibition, *A Timeless Humanism*, traces Fred Ross' beginnings as a fledgling artist under Ted Campbell, to his most recent works in the 1980's. Many of his early pieces dealt with social realist themes, influenced by the stark realities of the Second World War. However, Fred Ross never completely placed his work under the label of political criticism. The essence of the works from 1940-1954, was of the somberness of life, reflected in the unsmiling faces and depth of feeling conveyed in the eyes of the pieces. For instance, *City Slums* is a huge sketch depicting the despondency and harshness of life in the city as the artist saw it. Yet all the light in the world is not lost, as in the case of the mother and child in the left

hand of the piece who seem hopeful in spite of their surroundings.

Other early paintings and sketches reflect real life events, such as the sketches of Ted Campbell, Annual School Picnic and Boys in a Graveyard. Several are depictions of symbols and images of society, like Mexican Christ and Harlequin and Four Dancers. All of them though, convey a depth of feeling and moodiness of the human spirit, with bright colours in contrast to the surrounding darkness.

As the works progress past the early 1950's, the themes begin to change. More colour appears in the pieces and the concepts change to still life and lighter imagery. *Girl on Rockinghorse*, *Summer Morning and Dancers* in the Studio reflect this trend toward a softer focus. His still life paintings (eg. *Still Life with Mandolin* and *Still Life with Gladioli*) are rich in their colour and tone, giving them a life-like quality. All in all, "A Timeless Humanism" is a tribute to the heritage of New Brunswick art and to the artist, Fred Ross, who expressed his vision of life in his work.

On the upcoming agenda, the UNB Art Centre has a new exhibition line-up for the month of October. Next month, *Spotlight on the Collection: Sculptured Works*, will highlight the various sculptures that are part of the UNB Permanent Collection. The exhibition displays the different media that are used in sculptures, such as clay, wood, stone, plastic and steel. Also, *Alexandrya Eaton's*, and the flower *smiled...*, will continue until October 17. Don't miss out on this vibrant and uplifting exhibition. Stay tuned in later issues for more information.

Soooo, as the setting sun burns its way over the horizon, the cry of the stressed-out, sleep-deprived, malnourished student can be heard throughout the city; PARTY!!!

Until next time, stay cool.

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