

# There's a joke here somewhere

Book review by Julie Green

After reading Max Braithwaite's *Lusty Winter*, the question that remains is one concerning his seriousness in writing this book. The impetus for this question starts with the plot and it seems the answer lies there too.

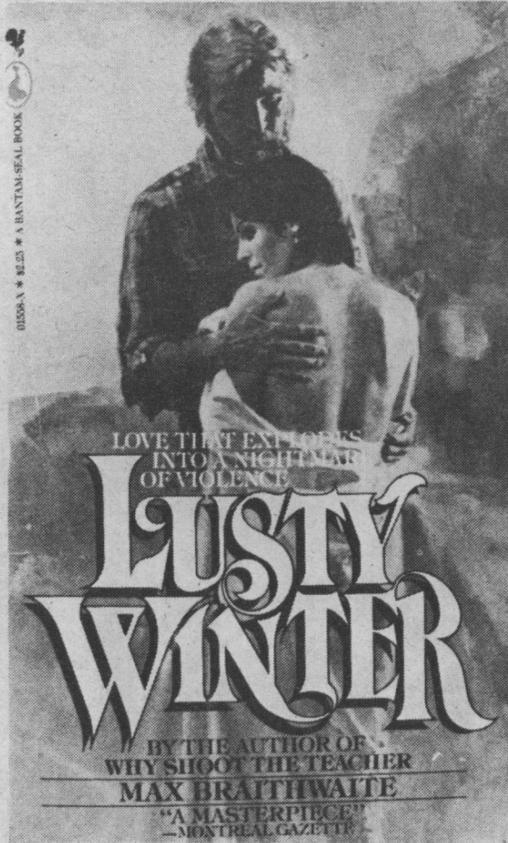
George, the main character of the book, is a retired schoolteacher who decides to leave his wife and city life, for a retreat, built on a lake somewhere in Ontario. Here he decides to pursue his hobby of photographing wild animals in their natural habitat. So far so good.

The trouble both with George's life and with the book's plot begins with the appearance of a snowmobile club that roars past George's cabin one afternoon. The frequency of the snowmobilers' visits and the noise they make disturbs George's peaceful hideaway and he develops an overwhelming hatred of this intrusion.

Quickly, George is driven mad by these weekend snowmobilers and he plots vengeance in a number of bizarre ways. He postulates stringing piano wire from one tree to another, or planting landmines under the snow to blow them up, for example. A visit to the police to find some legal course of action against the snowmobilers proves unsuccessful. George becomes frustrated with the lack of concern shown by the police so he assaults one of them and is thrown in jail. Later, the influence of a powerful friend facilitates his release.

Resuming his life in the wilderness, George's final confrontation with the riders becomes a bloody axe-wielding session which is almost fatal for one rider. George fears further involvement with the police because of the incident and contemplates taking his own life. Miraculously, his wife appears at his cabin and as the story ends, the reader is unsure whether to laugh or sigh with relief.

Now, this fantastic plot might have worked if the



reader was sympathetic to George's plight. But we aren't — George behaves like a paranoid old fool and

his irrationality makes the situation worse. George's motive for wanting to be rid of the snowmobilers is also easy to lose sight of, since it is obscured by his blind hatred of the machines.

Though we find it difficult to sympathize with George's confrontation, it is easy to sympathize with George's qualms about growing old. He is obsessed with the trappings of youth: a trim figure, virility, stamina. He feels young and does not want to be thought of as a senior citizen and his concerns seem to be real.

After the first few chapters it requires no effort to second guess the twists of the plot and it is very disappointing to find that you are often right. The writing of the first few chapters is too glib by half and the result is some very contrived and hackneyed prose. Once Braithwaite settles down, however, his easy, flowing conversational style, for which he is known, returns.

My other complaint about the book concerns not its author or content but the crass commercialism used to sell it. The cover says that the book is a tale of "love that explodes into a nightmare of violence," and pictures George and a scantily clad young woman, thirty years younger than him. Not only does the plot not explore love, except in an obligatory and fleeting romance carried on with a woman from a nearby town, but it (the love) is unconnected to the violence. Furthermore, the women characters in the book are all within five or ten years of George's age. The book's title is beyond me, though it too is a gimmick. The action does take place in winter, but only traces of George's "lusty new life", as the cover says, are examined.

Braithwaite, winner of the 1972 Leacock medal for humor, and author of the popular *Why Shoot the Teacher*, is not humorous here. That is, unless the whole thing is a joke, in which case I'm laughing with him.

## English Dept co-sponsors readings

Maria Campbell, Writer-in-Residence at the University of Alberta for the academic year 1979-80, will be giving a reading this Thursday, January 17 at 12:30 noon in room AV L-3 of the Humanities Centre.

Widely acclaimed for her memoir, *Halfbreed* (McClelland & Stewart, Bantam/Seal), which has been used in college courses across Canada and in the U.S., Japan and Mexico, Ms. Campbell has also written books for children, radio plays and film scripts. Among her books for children are two non-fiction works, *People of the Buffalo* and *Riel's People* (Douglas & McIntyre) and the first two books of a quartet of Indian legends, *Stories for Ahsini*, *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit* and *Tiger Lily* (McClelland & Stewart). Her film, *The Red Dress*, premiered in March 1979.

Ms. Campbell is spending her year as Writer-in-Residence working on the third *Ahsini* book and a novel based on the lives of five generations of Western Canadian native women.

Ms. Campbell's reading is the first of a series sponsored by the English Department and the Canada Council. Future readings will be as follows:

Thursday January 17 12:30 noon

Maria Campbell — writer-in-residence  
*Halfbreed*, *People of the Buffalo*, *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit*

\*Monday January 28 12:00 noon

Eldon Grier — painter & poet  
*Pictures on the Skin*, *The Assassination of Colour*

Thursday January 31 12:30 noon

Glen Sorestad — poet & publisher  
*Prairie Pub Poems*, *Ancestral Dances*

Tuesday February 12 12:30 noon

George Bowering — poet & novelist  
*Touch: Selected Poems*, *Allophanes*, *Protected Footwear*, *A Short Sad Book*, *Another Mouth*

Thursday February 14 12:30 noon

David McFadden — poet & novelist.  
*On the Road Again*, *The Great Canadian Sonnet*, *A New Romance* (winner: CBC Poetry Contest, 1974).

Thursday February 21 12:30 noon

Leona Gom — poet  
*Kindling*, *The Single Tree*

\*Wednesday March 5 12:00 noon

THE FOUR HORSEMEN — sound poetry/performance  
Raphael Barreto-Rivera, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery, bp Nichol  
*Horse d'oeuvres*, *Live in the West* (recorded at U of A)



Maria Campbell leads off reading series.

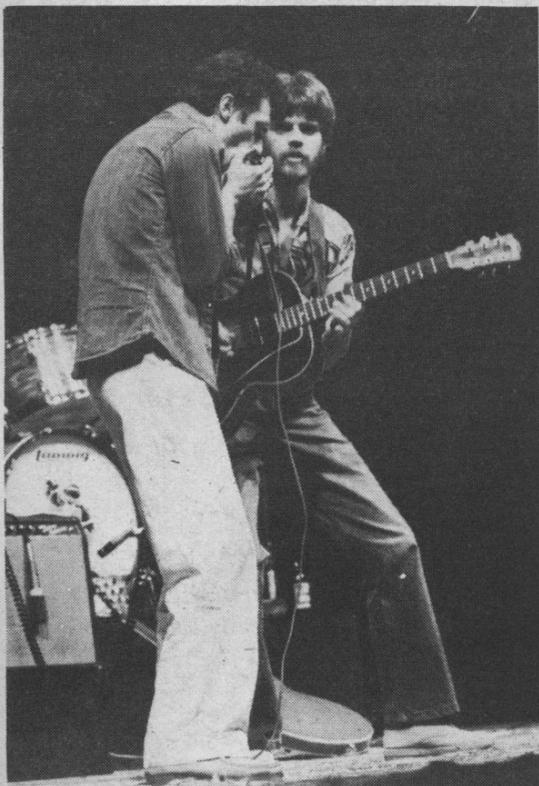
Thursday March 13 12:30 noon

Kevin Roberts — poet  
*West Country*, *Deep Line*

Thursday March 20 12:30 noon

Jack Hodgins — novelist  
*Spit Delaney's Island*, *The Invention of the World*, *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*

The Readings are sponsored by the English Department of the University of Alberta and the Canada Council. They are open to everyone. The two readings marked with an asterisk are sponsored by the Students Union, the League of Canadian Poets and the English Department.



Gord Kidder and Brent Parken of Hound Dog played the blues last Friday in SUB.

photo Peter Nagainis

## Life in the slow lane

Movie review by Marni Stanley

*Going in Style* is a wonderful comedy that moves as though its director was as old, and slightly arthritic, as his stars.

It is the story of three old men, Al (Art Carney), Willie (Lee Strassberg), and Jo (George Burns) who appear to be dying of boredom on a park bench in Brooklyn. To relieve the tedium the three decide to rob a bank and when that is accomplished with at least temporary success, they follow it up with a trip to Vegas.

The characterizations are simple, Al is the lovable ham, Willie is the straight man, and Jo is the wit and brains of the trio, but each actor brings so much to his role that the audience ends up smitten. It is hard to forget Strassberg's moment of youthfulness, Carney rolling the "bones," or Burns telling the bank clerk whom he is pointing a gun at that her hair looks nice.

The three stars get a lot of support from the minor characters, most notably from Charles Hallahan as Pete, Al's oversized and overworked nephew, who

becomes the benefactor of all the goings on. His face, which has about as much definition as your average potato, manages to convey a great deal of feeling while preventing all but the most determined romantics from lapsing into sentimentalism. There is also a nice comic characterization of a 'slick as snake oil' F.B.I. man by Anthony Call.

If this film has a flaw it is in the breadth of range. I could not decide if I was watching a very dramatic comedy or a drama with a bit too much humor. Whatever it is, *Going in Style* is a very touching film. Its laughs rely to a reassuring extent upon wit and it never bleeds you for pathos. Director Brest's pacing is sure, right through to the wry almost anti-climactic ending, and the wonderfully detailed sets give great extension to the characterizations.

*Going in Style* doesn't ask that much of its audience and it gives a lot so if you are looking for some good viewing why not take it in. You don't have to be a Gray Panther to enjoy it.