

# Michael Ondaatje woos with words

continued from p. 13

*we are together  
and I love this muscle  
I love this muscle  
that tenses*

*the accelerator  
to my cheek*

and:

*We've each had our stomachs  
kissed by strangers  
to the other*

*and as for me  
I bless everyone  
who kissed you here*

But of course Ondaatje's poetry far exceeds the realm of Eros: he demonstrated this in "The Linguistic War between Men and Women." ("He spills his maddened seed/ onto the lettuce"). Well, perhaps his humor, his transposition of things familiar to things strange (yet intriguing), and his ability to portray a vivid scene (Ondaatje is a filmmaker, too, and film references are abundant in *Secular Love*) were best revealed on Monday as he read from the fourth ("external") viewpoint in *Secular Love*, titled "Skin

and joins

Boat." In a prose piece called "7 or 8 Things I know About Her/ A Stolen Biography," "The Bread" portrays a neon advertisement as an absurd source of inspiration, sex, and even worship:

*Four miles out of Topeka on the highway —  
the largest electrical billboard in the State of  
Kansas... 'Meet you at the bread', 'See you at  
the loaf', were common phrases... Aroused  
couples would park there under the stars on  
the open night prairie. Poets... were taken to  
see it... Slice after slice fell towards the earth.  
A feeding of the multitude in this parched  
land on the way to Dorrance, Kansas.*

But as Ondaatje read "Bessie Smith at Roy Thompson Hall", such was the effect of his poetic prose that the scene described seemed more like my own memory than Ondaatje's image:

*She wore wings, They raised themselves with  
her arms each time she coaxed a phrase. Her  
wings would float up and fall slow like a hand  
held out of a car coming down against the  
wind, the feathers black as the Steinway. You  
should have been there.*

However, it is disappointing that Ondaatje didn't read from my favorite section, "Tin Roof", of *Secular Love*. It is a quiet, more

introspective part of the book, seeming to come directly from Ondaatje's youth: (*I grew up knowing I could never fly*)

*That's me. You. Educated  
at the Bijou. And don't ask me  
about my interpretation of "Madame  
George".*

*That's a nine minute song  
a two hour story.*

*So how do we discuss  
the education of our children?  
Teach them to be romantics  
to veer towards the sentimental?*

*Toss them into the air like Tony Curtis  
and make 'em do the triple somersault  
through all these complexities  
and commandments?*

If you didn't hear Micheal Ondaatje on Monday, you might buy or borrow a copy of *Secular Love*. (I might lend mine out — for a fee: it's been autographed. Some bookstores have already sold out copies, so I've heard.) Or you might at least ask Mr., Ondaatje to please speak a little louder at his next reading. *Secular Love* is published by The Coach House Press in Toronto and costs about \$8.95.)

## GATEWAY staff meetings

**Today 4 p.m.** — election of delegates to the Spring WRCUP conference; interested volunteers are asked to elect or run as delegates.

**Tuesday 12:30 p.m.** — ratification of Gateway constitution; election of editor-in-chief selection committee; selection of date for general staff elections.

