

Nadine: modern martyr

by Richard Howard

Nadine, by Matt Cohen, is a perfect example of an author who, having created a character, is unable to allow this character to lead a normal and plausible life. Such is Nadine, a brilliant astrophysicist and walking chronology of sordid experiences.

Nadine is a story which recounts the various experiences of a woman growing up: from a refugee in Paris during the Second World War to a Professor of Astrophysics at the University of Toronto. The book is divided into four sections, each roughly a decade apart, which take the reader up to the present day.

However, what might have turned out to be an interesting story stumbles in several crucial areas. The biggest problem is the simultaneous occurrence of incredible and mundane experience. Cohen tries the patience of the reader by recounting various nocturnal romantic flings with just about everybody from Nadine's high school teacher to her mentor and former uncle. One can't help feeling that some of these events have been included

solely to spice up what would otherwise have become little more than an extended diary of self-mortification. (Remember, this woman is an astrophysicist. If Joan Collins gets a scholarship to grad school, one can imagine her performing similar such trivial acts.)

Nadine's life is just not sufficiently exciting to keep the reader interested, whether she marries the professor, her uncle, or her childhood sweetheart. Nadine journeys through life in the guise of a modern-day martyr. (Corey Hart in a Gothic novel is an appropriate comparison.)

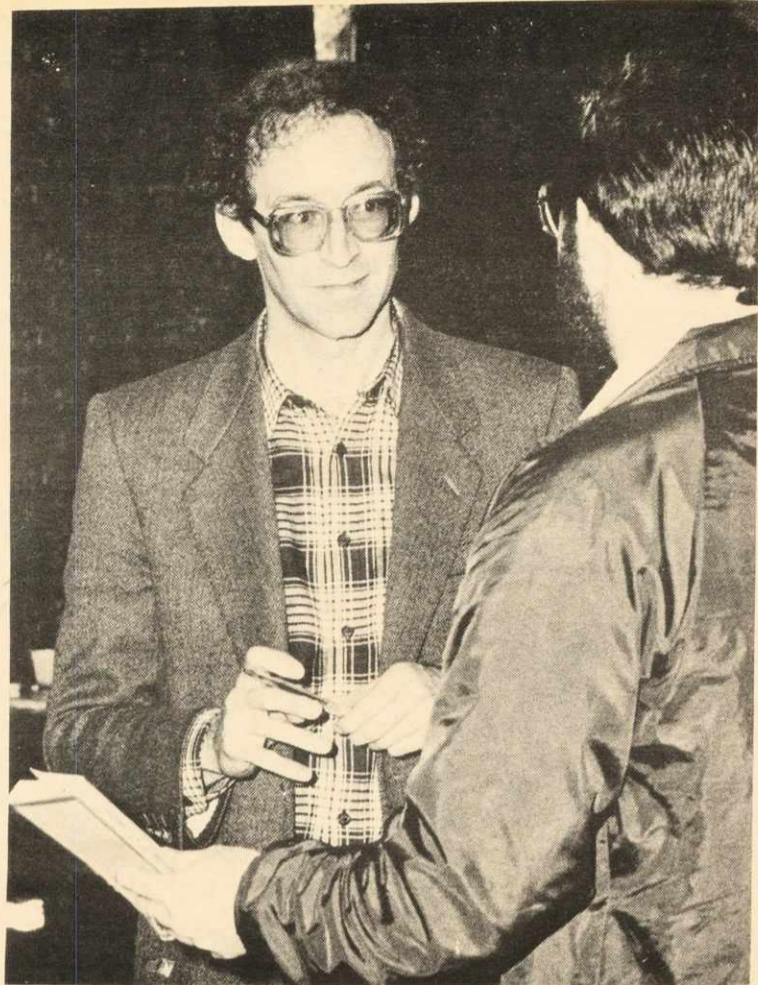
Another problem is the lack of continuity. Characters appear and fade away, conveniently killed by the war or perhaps dying of boredom. Many others reappear just as mysteriously. This is to be expected in a novel that spans forty years, but the lives of some of the characters are so disjointed Tolstoy must be rolling over in his grave. One almost expects the entire cast to gather together in the final chapter for one big happy reunion. Compounding this problem is the fact that most of the supporting cast

are unbelievable themselves. This includes a supposedly brilliant professor who takes his choice students out to lunch and then asks, "So which one of you is the smartest?" I ask, does this truly demonstrate the depth and breadth of character then this man is supposed to possess?

Another problem is the writing style. In short, there isn't any. Cliches and metaphors rain from the sky. This serves to give the book a slightly grade-school quality, though of course the redeeming feature is the ease with which one can read it.

This is not to say that *Nadine* is hopeless drivel. In all fairness, some sections are mildly amusing, if only for prurient interest. But one cannot feel empathy for this woman who, having crawled her way to the top, prefers to wallow in self-pity and self-flagellation. Such is not the stuff that dreams are made of. As the product of four years of work for Cohen, the result is less than inspiring.

NADINE
Matt Cohen
Viking



Author Matt Cohen was in the green room Sept. 26 to sign books, press the flesh and mingle with us student types.

Grenfell Esso truckstop

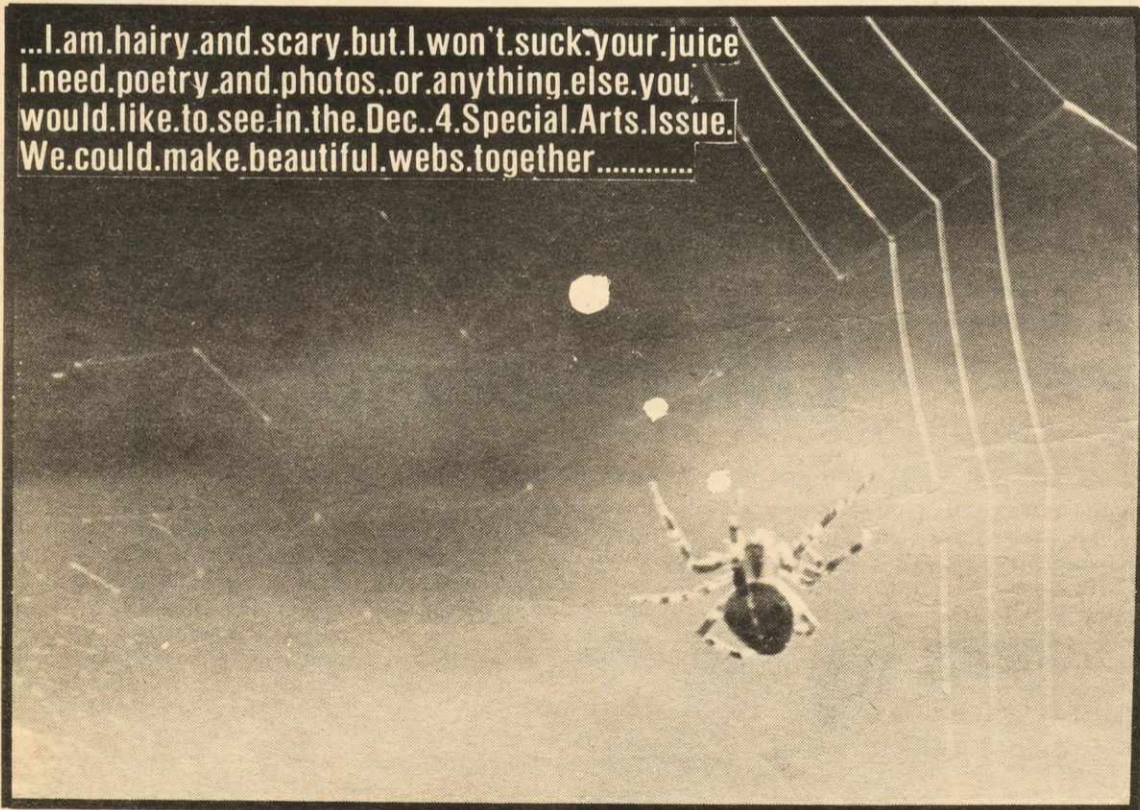
eternal night refilling
my cup with black coffee
cardboard sign on the table
stating a destination east
(not where I'm going
but somewhere reasonable
to go
when stuck in Saskatchewan)
I fight sleep
but there are no offers
I'd be an insurance risk
I'm not female

breakfast cooks & waitresses come
on duty charge me 50 cents
for the endless cup of coffee

twilight on Trans-Canada's shoulder
fist sized sun rising
above too flat horizon
I breakfast on cheese
raisins & Rainier beer
waiting for my first ride

Joe Blades

...I am hairy and scary but I won't suck your juice
I need poetry and photos, or anything else you
would like to see in the Dec. 4 Special Arts Issue.
We could make beautiful webs together.....



family reunion

hitching out of Edinburgh
wearing my "Je suis un inglése canadien" shirt
& get a ride because of it

a girl from Calgary
living in Australia for 3 years now
& visiting Britain
with her boyfriend

talking about Banff, Alberta & Calgary
I say home is Dartmouth, Nova Scotia
& she says, "I lived there . . .
with a McCurdy uncle
from Middle Musquodobit."

my father's mother a McCurdy
we are third cousins
thousands of miles from home
& we've never met before

she's the first relative I've seen
in 2 years since going to Alberta
& I'm her first since moving down under

she drops me off
outside Perth

Joe Blades