

## Better-late-than-never honour roll: Grub Street

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# Better-late-than-never honour roll



Grub Street

Stephen Smith

BEFORE the old year's too far gone, a few late-blooming laurels for a preferred few from the year gone by.

The Point-and-Shoot Award in Sharply Straightforward Reviewing goes to Anderson Lane who wrote in *The New Yorker*: "As for *365 Ways to Cook Hamburger and Other Ground Meats*, by Rick Rogers (HarperCollins), what can I say? Welcome to the most disgusting book on Earth." Best Tribute to a Fellow Writer was a tie between Margaret Atwood and children's author Janet Lunn, both of whom were on hand at October's International Festival of Authors to salute Al Purdy. Atwood spoke of Purdy's granite-hard character and permanence. "They ought to name an escarpment after him," she offered. "He has a personality so strong," Lunn added, "that you have to wring him out of your clothes."

To Gail Anderson-Dargatz and her debut novel, *The Cure for Death by Lightning* (Knopf Canada), an award for Best Opening to a Novel: "The cure for death by lightning was handwritten in thick, messy blue ink in my mother's scrapbook, under the recipe for my father's favourite oatcakes: Dunk the dead by lightning in a cold-water bath for two hours and if still dead, add vinegar and soak for an hour more." Best Title for a Volume of Poetry: Mary Elizabeth Grace's *Bootlegging Apples on the Road to Redemption* (Insomniac

Press). Best Title for a Book We Don't Think We Need to Investigate Further: photographer Sherman Hines's *The Outhouse Revisited* (Firefly). The Best Literary Ad of the Year comes from the classified-advertisement pages of Quill & Quire's December issue: "Wanted: Agent with guts enough to take on 79-year-old writer who is still filing about 1,500 words a week to global readership and is currently midway through his third non-fiction book on a newsworthy subject for a general audience. No vanity agents, pay-up-front publishers, nor geriatric arm-twisters please. I want a legitimate and proved operator who can get this book published and cash me out before I cash in."

Finally, a dishonourable mention for Supreme Foolishness in Reviewing to Montreal's weekly Hour Magazine which, all agush over Dr Susan Love's *Breast Book* (Addison-Wesley), advised readers: "Get it. Your breasts will thank you."

## Criminous Canada

Peter Robinson, John Brady, Eric

Wright, Gail Bowen, Howard Engel, Medora Sale: When it comes to popular Canadian writers dealing in murders and mysteries, there's no shortage of prominent suspects. What's not so well advertised — and what a voluminous new work of annotated bibliography called *Canadian Crime Fiction* makes clear — is that the genre has a long and distinguished history in Canada dating back to 1817.

Behind the book's 470 pages is Toronto writer and editor David Skene-Melvin, widely recognized as the presiding expert in Canada's "criminous" literature. What started as a hobby 12 years ago turned into a cataloguing mission. Skene-Melvin resolved to track down not just every book of crime fiction ever written by a Canadian — whether or not it's set in Canada — but also any crime book anywhere that made reference to Canada or Canadians.

"I'm a cultural nationalist and a completionist," Skene-Melvin says. "I just got carried away."

The book is priced at \$125; it's available from its publisher, the Battered Silicon Dispatch Box, either by fax (519-925-3482) or E-mail (gav@gbd.com).

For Skene-Melvin, meantime, new games are afoot. He has also just published an anthology of Toronto crime fiction, *Bloody York*, and is at work on a supplement to *Canadian Crime Fiction* as well as a volume of murderous tales set in the Arctic.

## The Last Time I Saw Joni

"A swami told me that in my last life I was a bird," Alberta-born singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell told an interviewer last year. "In the life before that I was an English gentleman, and before that an Arab rug merchant." In this life, Mitchell is enjoying a return to commercial and critical grace, the latest chapter of which is a three-book deal recently signed with the U.S. publishing house Crown.

Along with an 18th studio album, Mitchell is now at work on her memoirs, which are to be published simultaneously by Crown, Random House in Britain and Knopf Canada. No publication date has been set. Crown, apparently, is shy of pressuring Mitchell with anything like a deadline. The other two-thirds of the deal will be a volume of Mitchell's poetry and a book sized for the coffee-table, featuring her paintings.

## Pay Check

Brace yourself if you're ambitious to be a writer in this country. Statistics Canada reports that the average income for Canadian writers in 1994 (the most recent data year) was an unprintable \$15,300.

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