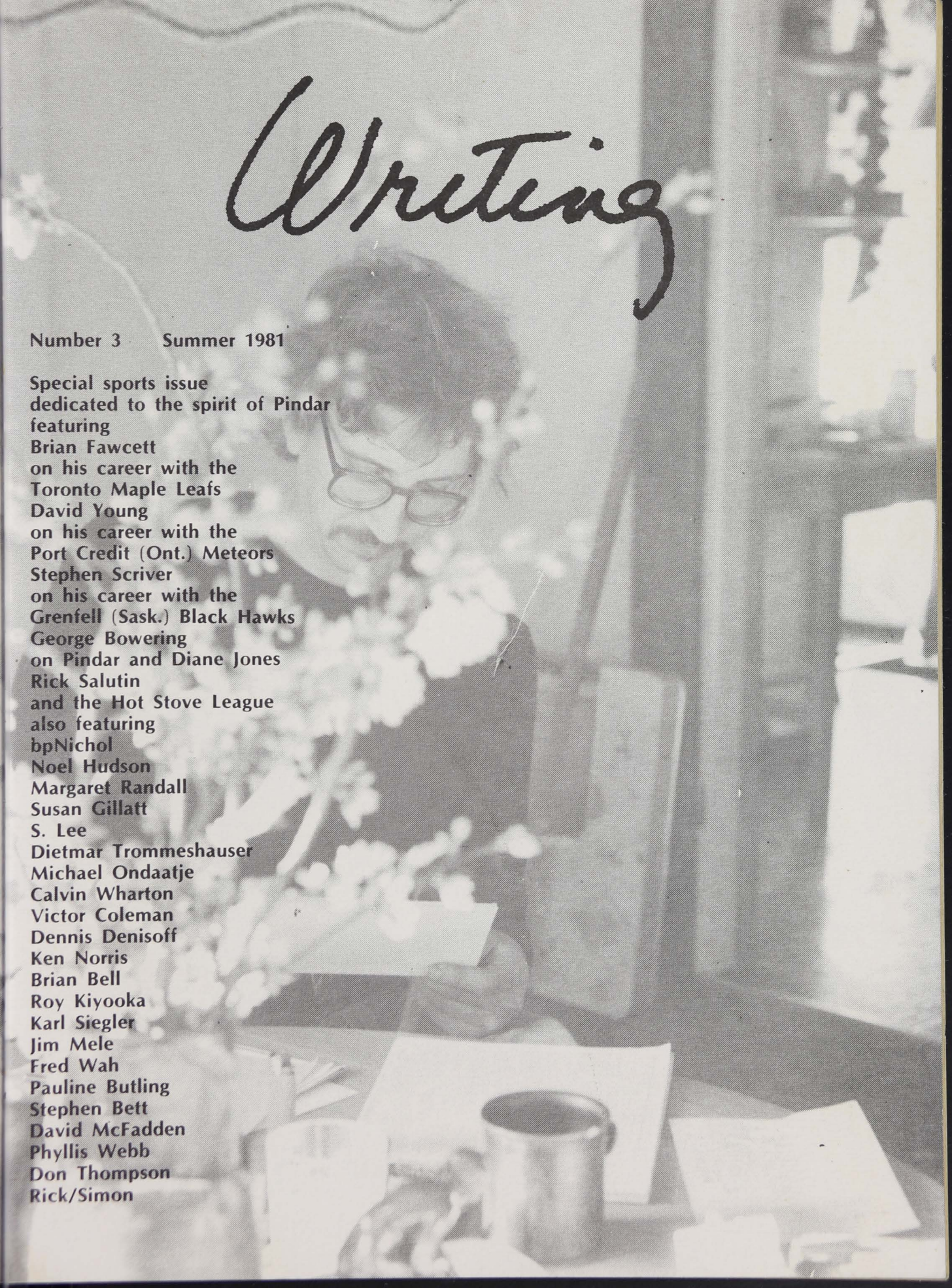


Writing



Number 3 Summer 1981

Special sports issue
dedicated to the spirit of Pindar
featuring

Brian Fawcett

on his career with the
Toronto Maple Leafs

David Young

on his career with the
Port Credit (Ont.) Meteors

Stephen Sriver

on his career with the
Grenfell (Sask.) Black Hawks

George Bowering

on Pindar and Diane Jones

Rick Salutin

and the Hot Stove League

also featuring

bpNichol

Noel Hudson

Margaret Randall

Susan Gillatt

S. Lee

Dietmar Trommeshauser

Michael Ondaatje

Calvin Wharton

Victor Coleman

Dennis Denisoff

Ken Norris

Brian Bell

Roy Kiyooka

Karl Siegler

Jim Mele

Fred Wah

Pauline Butling

Stephen Bett

David McFadden

Phyllis Webb

Don Thompson

Rick/Simon

Writing

Number 3 Summer 1981

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Number 1 features extracts from novels by George Bowering and John B. Boyle, stories by David Young, Ken Mitchell, Fielding Dawson, Sarah Sheard, Robert Fones, G.B. Sinclair, Stan Dragland, Martin Avery, Oleste Weston, and poetry by Margaret Atwood, Daphne Marlatt, Gerry Gilbert, Lionel Kearns, Endre Farkas and Ken Norris.

Number 2 features Daphne Marlatt, a chapter from Margaret Randall's **We Are All Awake**, and new work by Neurosurgery, Margaret Atwood, Audrey Thomas, Susan Musgrave, Marilyn Bowering, George Bowering, Al Purdy, Ken Norris, Carolyn Zonailo, Rosemary Allison, Sarah Sheard, Karl Jirgens, Noel Hudson, Terrance Cox, Brian Shein, Tom Whalen, Leona Gorn, Robert Kroetsch, Don Thompson, Paul Quarrington and Judith Fitzgerald.

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Interview with Rick Salutin & the Hot Stove League

(Brian Bell, Dave McFadden, Fred Wah,
Pauline Butling & Don Thompson)



This chat took place March 23/81 at the David Thompson University Centre and was transcribed and edited by D. McFadden.

Dave: Who's your favourite hockey player of all time, Rick?

Rick: I think the Rocket. There used to be a lot of debates. Ken Dryden told me that when he was growing up there were the great debates about who was the better player, Rocket Richard or Gordie Howe. And since he was living in Toronto, he always thought Gordie Howe was better. Howe had many more skills than Richard. He was a better skater, a better passer, a better back-checker. But Ken said that after awhile when he started playing for the Canadiens he realized that was beside the point, that Howe probably had more skills than Richard, but they played completely different roles. I mean, Richard was this madman, he just had to score. If you wanted to win, it was Richard---

Brian: I want to ask you first a bit about your play. After you decided to write *Les Canadiens* how were you able to set up interviews with the players? How did you get their confidence?

Rick: It was all because of Ken Dryden. He was a real collaborator on the play. And he took responsibility for figuring out who he thought would be the important people to talk to to give me a balanced view of the team. So that included not only a lot of the old players and stars but also the people around the Forum like sportswriters, hockey writers, anyone he thought of. He would set up the meetings or he would tell them I was gonna call, and then after I met with them I would usually talk to Ken and we would compare notes and it was a way of getting a balanced perspective. So that without that I wouldn't have had any way of having an inside sense of what the team was like. And he's quite a unique player. It's not I don't think the same as you might have got with other players. But then other players wouldn't have been interested in working hard on a play. He took real responsibility for his contribution.

Dave: This kind of literary sophistication, do you think it's unusual among hockey players?

Rick: Well, he's got more education than most hockey players---although that's changing. He not only has a BA but a law degree. So that's unusual. And the sort of verbal quality and the articulateness is unusual. What I don't think is unusual is the perceptiveness. I think most people are quite articulate when they talk about something they know, especially about their work. And I found that Ken was articulate but in an educated way. The way a lot of players wouldn't be. But certainly all the people I talked to were I would say eloquent when they talked about hockey and I ended up using their lines because they said it so well---and so casually. It just came out of what they knew, what their lives had been.

Brian: Did you model every player/character in your play after a player on the Canadiens?

Rick: Most of them. There are places where characters are fictionalized. There's a character in the second act named Dave Kirk, who's a lot like---I mean he is and he isn't like Ken Dryden. There are things about Dryden that are like him.

Dave: Is Dryden a reader?

Rick: Yeah, he's a reader of non-fiction. I don't think he reads much fiction.

Dave: He doesn't read poetry?

Rick: I don't think so.

Dave: Have you run across any hockey players who read poetry?

Rick: No, not that I know of. But I don't really think the situation would be all that different than among other sections of the population. I was once standing with Ken Dryden outside the hotel where the Canadiens stay when they're in Toronto. Bob Gainey walked by with a bag full of books under his arm and it said Longhouse Bookshop which is a bookstore in Toronto that sells only Canadian books. And I said what's that about? And Dryden said, "Well, Gainey's always reading and he only reads Canadian books. Whenever he's in Toronto he goes to Longhouse Bookshop and picks up a bundle of these books." And Gainey, you know, as far as his background is concerned, is sort of a typical hockey player.

Dave: In Brian Fawcett's story in this issue, Brian introduces some of the Maple Leafs to writers like Jack Spicer, and some of them actually start writing poetry. . . .

Rick: I remember when the actors in Montreal were preparing for their parts in the play. One day we went into a Canadiens practice. The actors went into the dressing room afterwards and one of them said to Steve Shutt, "I'm an actor doing a play about the Canadiens, I don't know if you've heard about it." And Shutt was a very quick guy, but I don't think he goes to much theatre. And he said, "Oh yeah, that's the thing that Kenny's involved in, isn't it?" Everybody has their role in a situation like that. Kenny is the sort of guy who would be involved in that kind of thing.

Don: Didn't you get intimidated at all talking to these heroes? You're a hockey fan.

Rick: Well, there's two sides. The first time Ken was over at my place and we talked I did consider not washing the glass that he had a Coke in. [Laughter.] But I got over that fairly quickly. On one level you're always a kid and a fan and on another level you're doing a job. I was being paid to do the job and people were counting on me to have the script ready---and Ken was counting on me. I couldn't have sort of blissed out on being in Ken Dryden's company. Because then I would have been letting him down. Because he was putting in his best effort. . . .

Brian: How did you get involved with Ken in the first place?
Rick: He'd been attending the theatre in Montreal regularly. He was interested in plays. And occasionally when they were having a fund-raising auction he'd donate his stick or something. One of the directors had written him and said would you be interested in helping with a play about the Canadiens? He said yeah, he'd like to have a look. So we met and we decided we could get along, so we worked together.

Brian: Have you been a hockey fan all your life?

Rick: Yup.

Brian: A Leaf fan?

Rick: Yup.

Fred: Seventeenth place. [Laughter.]

Rick: I didn't really think I'd live to see the day that the Leafs were fighting with Edmonton for sixteenth place. There's a scene in the play where a little kid is trying to listen to the game on the radio and his mother makes him go to bed by promising she'll keep the score for him and leave it on a piece of paper by his bed for when he wakes up. My mother used to do that. I'd wake up in the morning and there'd be a little paper by the bed that said Leafs 6 Red Wings 2 or something. And who got all the goals and assists, and the times of the goals, and the three stars.

Dave: And you grew up and met Rocket Richard. What's it like for him now?

Rick: I didn't meet him before the play. I met him after it had been on. He came to the Toronto opening. But I didn't do any research with him. Because I got such a clear sense of him from everyone else around the team that I felt I didn't need to meet him, I felt what he meant was so clear to everybody it wasn't really necessary to talk to him.

Dave: What about all this Grecian Formula stuff? Does this embarrass him?

Rick: No, I don't think so. I think he's a very straightforward person. He's taken a job with this Grecian Formula company and he does it in a very dignified way. He's working for them and he feels he should do a job for them.

Dave: If he were here right now he might start handing out his Grecian Formula cards?

Rick: No, he doesn't hand them out. If somebody says can I have your autograph he says sure. He gives them this autographed picture card with the Grecian Formula logo on it. But I find him a very dignified person. He never did really know what the fuss was about. He always said he was just a hockey player. And I think he's always retained that.

Brian: Are most of these stars you're talking about pretty humble? Or do they act like superstars?

Rick: They were all terrific to talk to and I got terrific material from all of them. Beliveau—everybody says he's a real gentleman. And he was. He was superb. I told him I wanted to go into the dressing room and it happened to be—

Fred: Do you want a beer?

Rick: Sure. It happened to be after they'd lost a close game to Boston. So when I got into the dressing room that night everyone was quite depressed. It had the atmosphere of Belsen. Cause they don't lose lightly, the Canadiens. As one of the players said, "You don't lose and laugh if you want to stay on the team."

Fred (shouting): Bar's closing. If you want a beer get it.

Rick: No one wanted to talk to me. And I said to Beliveau, "Okay, well, I'll just walk up the side of the dressing room," and he said okay, sure. And as I walked by they just didn't want to talk, even Ken didn't really want to talk. They were very down over having lost one game. And Beliveau just sauntered up the other side of the dressing room because he knew I'd get to the end and have no one to talk to. So that when I got there he was at the other end. He hadn't said anything, he just did it.

Dave: That's nice.

Rick: Yeah, and I found him a very sort of decent gentleman. Jacques Plante was terrific. And Dickie Moore was terrific. And so was Blake. And Henri. They were just terrific people. Jacques Plante told me about how he invented the mask. And Henri was especially eloquent. Henri said when he was a kid he had two dreams. The first one was to play on the Canadiens. And we were sitting in his—he's retired—sitting in this tavern that he owns. And I said what was the second dream? And he said, "I dreamed I would own a tavern. . . ."

Brian: With all this contact with the Canadiens did you find yourself becoming less of a Leaf fan?

Rick: No, but I find I can compensate when the Canadiens are winning.

Brian: You don't feel so bad?

Rick: Yeah.

Fred: Is hockey like art for you?

Rick: One of the things I'd expected about professional sports was that since these guys are being paid so much they'd have a very professional-in-the-bad-sense attitude. That they'd come in, they'd play the same every night, they'd collect their how-many-thousands per game, and it somehow wouldn't get to them. What I found actually, at least on the Canadiens, was that the attitude was much closer to kids on a rink. They get depressed when things go badly. They get very up, very excited and out of control. And it still is very much of a game. You'd think if a guy is getting five or ten thousand dollars for playing a game of hockey, why should he care that much how it goes, but. . . .

Don: [Tape inaudible.]

Rick: It wasn't just that. Sure there was an element of that, a very strong element that your performance determines how well you're paid. But there was something else, there was a thing about the team. And about—just pride. And wanting to win and play well. And getting excited like kids do.

Brian: What are the players like off the ice, are they close?

Rick: Yes and no. They hang around together when they're on the road—and sometimes when they're at home. But funny I don't think they trade that much personal stuff.

Fred: Have you had any other ideas for writing on sport?

Rick: Not in the theatre. But I did a magazine article on Bob Gainey for *Today Magazine* that I was very proud of. Because I felt in a way I'd joined the mainstream of my culture. Plays really aren't a central part of the Canadian cultural experience. But a profile of a hockey player in the weekend magazine is.

Fred: Why didn't you pick someone like Derek Sanderson who was much more controversial?

Rick: Well, I thought Gainey was very—well, one thing was he only reads Canadian books and another thing was I thought he was a really interesting player. I mean he's a sort of defensive forward, he usually scores less than twenty goals in a season and yet almost everyone said he was in a lot of ways the heart of the team. And the Russian coach—what was his name?

Brian: Tikanov?

Rick: Tikanov said he was the best player in the world. When I went up to visit Bob's family and friends in Peterborough to find out what it'd been like for him I found a very sort of working-class community where everybody worked hard. Everyone was either coming off shift or going on shift. Which is really Gainey's characteristic on the ice. And everybody had wonderful things to say about him. A couple of people actually said I'm sorry, I can't think of anything bad to say about him. So afterwards when I saw him I said does it feel as if you're being a bit of a goody-goody? He said, "No, I don't consider it unselfish that I want to play as part of the team." He said rather than playing individually, as part of the team I can score more, I can make better money for my family, I can do better. He was saying that working together with other people is the way each individual gets ahead. I thought that was a very working-class attitude rather than the middle-class attitude that you've gotta be better than everybody else and outdo everybody else to get ahead. It's basically only in solidarity, in unity, that we each get ahead.

Dave: Does that relate to writing?

Rick: In some ways it does, but I think writing is very individualistic. The reason I say it's working class is because I think it reflects the situation of people who basically have a pair of hands to sell. The way the writing world is set up, it'd be very hard. I mean I think it's important that writers work together in unions and get better conditions for everybody. But in your actual work you don't collaborate. Whereas on a hockey team or in a factory the product is a joint product. One of the reasons I like theatre is because it has that social/collaborative aspect as opposed to poetry or novels. The world we live in is one in which everything is really a social product, including each of us as individuals. And I think in some ways there's a sort of romanticism about the writer creating his own work of art. There's something unreal about that. I like working in a form where you do have to work collectively. [Aside.] So long, Pat.

Brian: What kind of a reaction did you get from the players after the play came out?

Rick: It was really varied. According to Ken, some of them liked it a lot. Riseborough or Jarvis—one of the guys from Guelph—loved the scene about Howie Morenz arriving in Montreal from the small Ontario town because it was just like that for him. Gainey said it was luke. By which he meant luke warm, you know? I said to Ken, "Does that mean he didn't like it?" And Ken said, "With anybody else it would mean he didn't like it but with Gainey it means luke." [Laughter.] Ken felt that in some degree it's hard for people to see themselves portrayed. So there was a bit of distance. I mean, they're not that keen about the press either. And in Montreal, the press is accused—

Fred: Do they mistrust language at all? Do you find that any of them were embarrassed by their language, worry about it—?

Rick: No. They were very eloquent as I say.

Dave: In his story Fawcett suggests there's a kind of mind-set in the NHL that makes the players feel they have to play dumb, they can't show any intelligence in public or the owners'll get upset.

Rick: I'd have no idea. I met a lot of guys who I thought were very . . . basically like people you'd find anywhere. You know—some more or less involved with their work, some more or less articulate.

Dave: Gee, Fawcett should be here right now.

Brian: Since you're a Leaf fan what do you think about Harold Ballard and his treatment of his players and that?

Rick: I think the problem with the Leafs is Ballard. That's become clearer and clearer to almost everyone. And they've tried everything, they've tried everybody, and it's obvious that since Ballard became the owner the thing's a wreck. People working anywhere, if they're working for a boss who's a real ass, they hate it and they work badly. In any situation. It can be in a university department or a restaurant, people always talk about the boss and the effect he has on the way they feel about work. There's Ballard, he's on every road trip, he's in the dressing room, he's there at practices, and I think it had a disastrous effect. And the press in Toronto has generally been really sucky towards Ballard. And blamed the players, blamed the workers.

Dave: That's pretty general in sports reporting, isn't it? To suck up to the brass.

Rick: Yeah, I think there are some exceptions but it's pretty general. For guys who do features it's not the same problem. But for a guy who's assigned to cover a team every day right through the season, it'd be very tough if he had bad relations with management. They could make his job very hard and in the end they could get him taken off it. And management knows how to play that.

Brian: Did you ever want to be a sports writer?

Rick: No. I like sports too much. [Laughter.] In sports writing you often get guys who are getting on—approaching middle age—and they have to do an awful lot of work cultivating very young guys and there's something that always made me uneasy about that. There's something a bit undignified about that.

Fred: Do you still want to be a sports writer, Brian?

Brian: Oh, yeah. [Laughter.]

Rick: I don't think we yet have a good book about hockey. Sports writing is much more developed elsewhere, certainly in the States. There are now a number of good books, about baseball particularly. There are some real classics, both fiction and non-fiction. And there's the odd good book about basketball, football. In Canada there are lots of books about hockey—I just don't think there's a good one, a really good one. One you can really say yeah that's good that's the way it should be.

Dave: What about Scott Young's *War on Ice*?

Rick: Yeah, that may be close. And Ken Dryden is writing a book. He's taking a year to do it. My life in hockey, that sort of thing. I think it's going to be extremely good.

Dave: Pauline Butling was saying it'd be a good idea to take *Les Canadiens* over to one of the European hockey countries.

Rick: I always thought that the East European countries—Poland, Czechoslovakia—would really like that play. Because they play hockey and they also know about being a small country trying to keep your identity in the face of a big nation. And there's some sense there of sports being one way that you affirm yourself against other countries that are overpowering you.

Fred: You're very outspoken on nationalist issues.

Rick: Yeah.

Dave: He's from Ontario. [Laughter.]

Fred: But as a writer are you at all interested in international writing?

Rick: Oh sure, I just think we should write our own stuff so that when they show us their stuff we have something to show them. In the situation we're in, this is a country that sends Canadian versions of Shakespeare to Poland. [Laughter.] The people in Poland say, "What the hell's going on? Don't you have any theatre of your own? If we want Shakespeare we'll get the British to bring it to us." And it's humiliating. Our big films, you can't recognize them as Canadian. Anybody anywhere in the world including Canada who looks at them says, "Yeah, it's another American film." It's humiliating. If we're going to hold our heads up internationally when other people give us something that we really like—like Australian films or literature from elsewhere—we should be able to have something we can point out with pride to show back.

Fred: But in terms of paying attention to international writing, how do you go about that? Are there particular foreign writers you pay at-

tention to?

Rick: I don't particularly, but that's not a function or nationalism. My interests really are not so much in the theatre. My main interests are in politics and history. I think I know a lot about what's going on in southern Africa or Central America but I don't know about theatre in those places particularly. I'm just not really interested primarily in the formal artistic questions and I find this sort of—

Fred: This is a paradox. Rather than being a politician or historian you're a dramaturge—

Rick: Yeah.

Fred: You wouldn't go to another country like South Africa and pick up what they're doing in that same field?

Rick: Well, I have, actually. I went to Mozambique in southern Africa and visited there for a couple of months as a guest of the government to learn about the culture as it was developing there. So I am in that respect—but no, I don't think it's a paradox because I think the most boring writing is writing about writing and the most boring art is art about art. I know I wrote a play about a theatre critic. [Laughter.] You do get trapped in these things. I think art should really reflect the society. And I think it's for people out there. I think a lot of the stuff we get—drama and writing—tends to be the self-absorption of the artist himself in his own sort of woeful experience. I think there are two choices: You can either write about yourself and your own agony or you can write about the world and its agony. And I guess I'm more interested in the latter. I'm writing a play now about Mozambique, set in Mozambique. I'm writing about what's happening there, what are the fights people are fighting, what do they really care about that's different from here and what are the things that people are fighting for that we can learn something from—

Fred: But if art is a reflection of the society can't you find out about that society by going to the art?

Rick: Yeah, in that way maybe I'm remiss and I could get something out of it. I think the interesting thing about the Latin-American writers is that they do really reflect their society in a grand way generally, at least the ones I'm familiar with. I don't think you can find Quebecois writers who do that. And it's a bit hard to find English-Canadian writers with that same kind of social sweep. So I guess it's writers like that I'm most interested in. In theatre by and large there isn't too much of that happening right now.

Pauline: You've undertaken a fairly unique kind of theatre—not unique but unusual I guess—incorporating a lot of historical material. Do you look to other writers for ideas about form and technique?

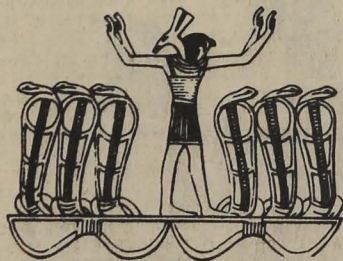
Rick: I'd like to but I don't know of any. I mean, 1837 in a lot of ways was the result of seeing a production in Paris called 1789 by Le Theatre Soleil around 1971. It was a superb production and it just broke open my ideas about theatre. The things that really touch you, you don't so much study and look for them. You encounter a piece at a certain point in your own life and it seems to just get inside of you and affect you in a strong way. But I wish I knew where to look for stuff that I could really rip off basically.

Dave: Well, thanks a lot, Rick. That was really interesting.

Fred: And Dave's gonna spend all weekend transcribing it.

Dave: No, Brian's agreed to type it all out.

Brian: You told me you were joking.



Contributors

STEPHEN BETT teaches at Columbia College in Vancouver and has studied with Robin Blaser. He is widely published in magazines and anthologies and has a book, *Flatware*, coming out this year with New Rivers Press. GEORGE BOWERING's novel *Burning Water* has been nominated for a Governor General's award. An earlier version of "The Heart of Diane Jones" was broadcast on the CBC.

VICTOR COLEMAN's *Terrific at Both Ends* is available from Coach House Press, and a record, *Vic D'Or: 33 1/3*, is available from Music Editions in Toronto.

DENNIS DENISOFF is an eighteen year old from Glade, B.C., and has been studying at David Thompson University Centre.

BRIAN FAWCETT teaches in various B.C. penitentiaries. His *Tristram's Book* is about to be published as a special issue of the *Capilano Review* and his *Aggressive Transport* will be published by Talonbooks in the fall.

SUSAN GILLATT is an actress and writer from Victoria who is about to move to Toronto after two years in the Writing Program at David Thompson University Centre.

NOEL HUDSON had a story in *Writing 2*. He's enrolled in the Writing Program at David Thompson, plays guitar in a rock band and drives a little red pick-up.

S. LEE recently moved to Vancouver from Winnipeg. She works on the delicatessen counter at Woodward's Kerrisdale branch. Drawings of hers appeared in *Writing 2* as well as in a couple of issues of *NMFG*.

JIM MELE's *An Oracle of Love* and *The Sunday Habit* are available from Cross Country Press. He lives in New York.

bpNICHOL lives in Toronto but his spirit is everywhere. His "Vagina" (from *Organ Music*) appeared in the last issue of *Periodics*. He's a member of the Four Horsemen.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE teaches at Glendon College in Toronto but spends all his spare time in Sri Lanka. "To a Sad Daughter" was published as a broadside by Coach House Press.

KEN NORRIS has been on an extended tour of the South Pacific for the past four months. At home in Montreal, he edits *Cross Country* magazine and is a founding editor of Cross Country Press which published his new book, *Autokinesis*.

After eleven years in Havana, MARGARET RANDALL early this year moved to Managua, Nicaragua. Her *We're All Awake*, a section of which appeared in *Writing 2*, is being published by New Star in Vancouver. She has translated many Cuban poets.

RICK SALUTIN lives in Toronto and is an editor of *This Magazine*. He was recently at David Thompson talking to students about theatre, sports, journalism and politics. His play, *Les Canadiens*, is available from Talonbooks.

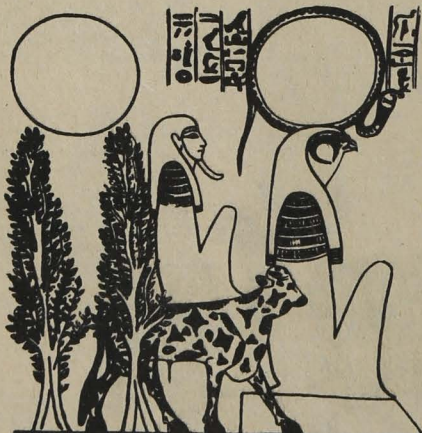
STEPHEN SCRIVER's book, *Between the Lines*, was published by Thistle-down Press and he has a new one coming out from Coteau Books. As a hockey player, he has recently been sidelined with back problems and has been teaching school in Grenfell and covering sports for the local paper.

DIETMAR TROMMESHÄUSER is a writing student at David Thompson University Centre. His book of poems, *In Love with a Poem*, is selling briskly in the West Kootenay region.

PHYLLIS WEBB is writer in residence at the University of Alberta this year. Her home is on Salt Spring Island and she recently gave a reading of her poetry at David Thompson University Centre.

CALVIN WHARTON plays guitar in the same band as Noel Hudson and is enrolled in the Writing Program at David Thompson. He drives an old white van and is working on a series of poems based on the topography of the moon.

DAVID YOUNG's story in this issue is from his new novel, *Incognito*, which will soon be published by Coach House Press, publishers of his first novel, *Agent Provocateur*. David is a well-known and much-admired figure on the Toronto literary scene.



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