

# BRUSHES

*with  
Greatness*

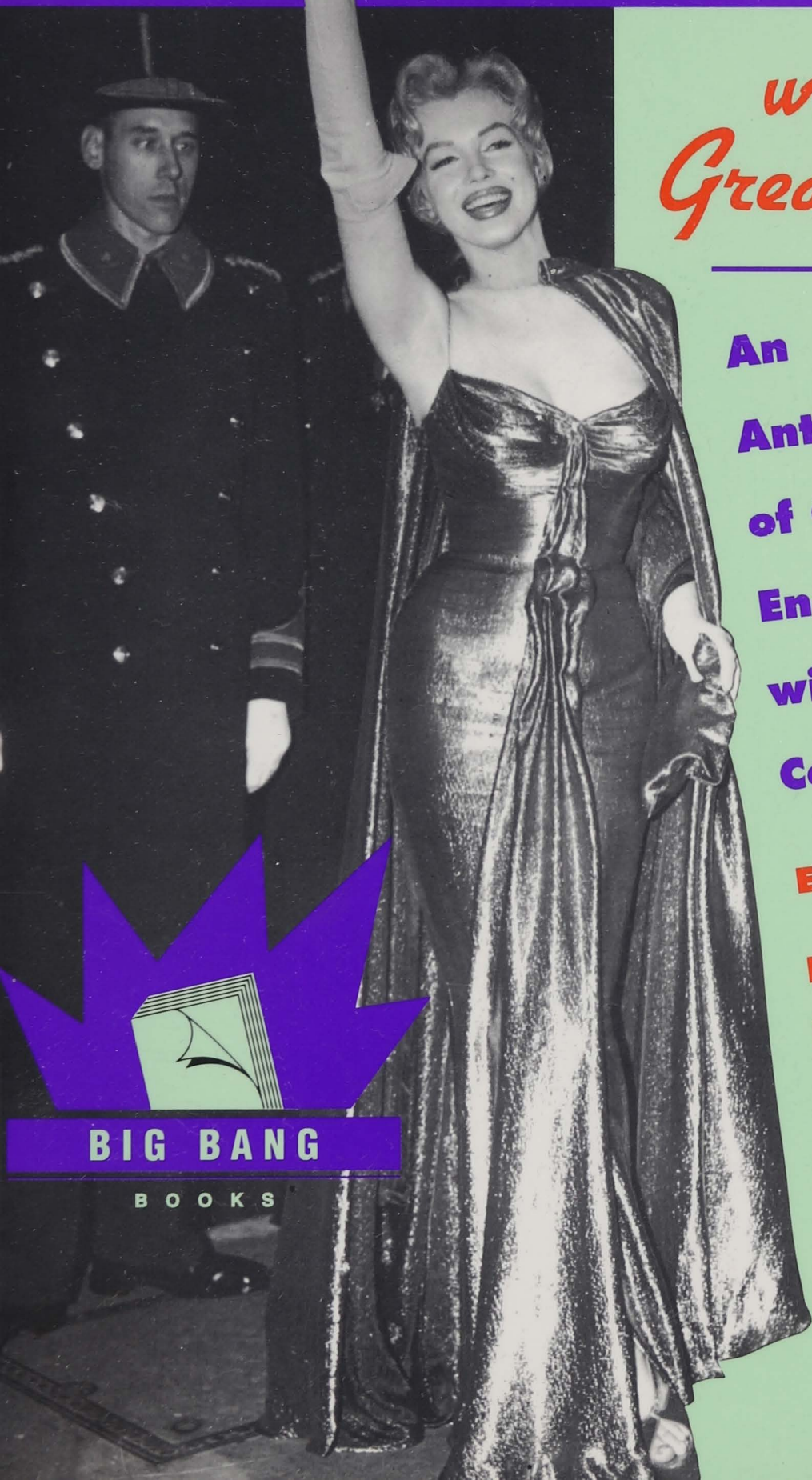
**An  
Anthology  
of Chance  
Encounters  
with  
Celebrities**

**Edited by:**

**Russell  
Banks,**

**Michael  
Ondaatje,**

**& David  
Young**



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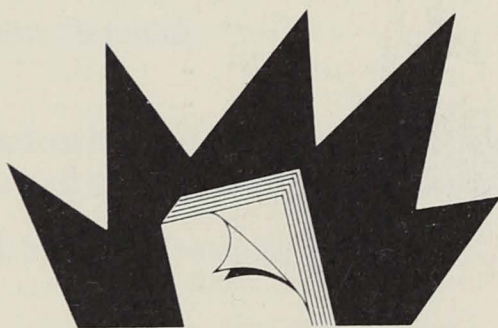
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An anthology of chance encounters  
with celebrities

edited by  
Russell Banks, Michael Ondaatje  
and David Young

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**BIG BANG**

**B O O K S**

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*Of the Great and Famous Ever-to-be-honored Knight,  
Sir Francis Drake, and of My Little-Little Self*

The Dragon that our seas did raise his crest  
And brought back heaps of gold unto his nest,  
Unto his foes more terrible than thunder,  
Glory of his age, after-ages' wonder,  
Excelling all those that excelled before –  
It's feared we shall have none such any more –  
Effecting all, he sole did undertake,  
Valiant, just, wise, mild, honest, godly Drake.  
This man when I was little I did meet  
As he was walking up Totnes' long street.  
He asked me whose I was. I answered him.  
He asked me if his good friend were within.  
A fair red orange in his hand he had;  
He gave it me, whereof I was right glad,  
Takes and kissed me, and prays, 'God bless my boy,'  
Which I record with comfort to this day.  
Could he on me have breathéd with his breath  
His gifts, Elias-like, after his death,  
Then had I been enabled for to do  
Many brave things I have a heart unto.  
I have as great desire as e'er had he  
To joy, annoy, friends, foes; but 'twill not be.

– Robert Hayman

Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

– W.B. Yeats, *Leda and the Swan*

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## Frenchy D'Amour

*Fred Wah, South Slokan, British Columbia*

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I grew up in Trail, British Columbia, home of the Smoke Eaters. These world-famous ice hockey champions gave the people from Trail an inside track on fame. As did Frenchy D'Amour who was the second legendary person I met. (The first was Larry Kwan, the China Clipper, who played with the Smokies, later with Calgary and then down east somewhere.)

My dad was a very gregarious restaurateur who, with my granddad, ran the Elite (pronounced ee-light) Café downtown. As a Chinaman he had learned early to kowtow to the rich and powerful. He'd often sit the health inspector down to a free lunch in the kitchen of the café, or spike the mayor's coffee with rum at Christmas time. The local constabulary could frequently be found rifling down sugar doughnuts and coffee by the back door. My dad knew everyone who was anyone in this smelter town.

This particular Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1948 the whole town was buzzing about Frenchy D'Amour's triumphant return. There was even a parade down Cedar Avenue. But what most impressed me was that my father had invited Frenchy over to our house for a drink, and now here they were, sitting at the dining-room table, talking about the victory. I watched them drink. Or, rather, I watched Frenchy drink; my father had that Oriental disposition that prevented him from drinking very much. He'd pour, with a great deal of challenge and bravado, huge straight shots for his guests, yet rarely touch it himself. For a long time I thought he did it just to make asses of the high muk-a-muks. But when I saw him pouring drinks and chumming it up with Frenchy, I was really proud to see my dad joking around with the most famous person in Canada that day, in our house.

You have to understand that 1948 was the greatest year in the history of human civilization. Besides the huge floods along the Columbia and the Kootenay that spring, Frenchy D'Amour's rink lifted the Brier Tankard and brought the Dominion Curling Championship not only home to Trail but, for the first time in history, to British Columbia.



'I was in my twenties when Buckminster Fuller sat on me.'

This book is an anthology of brief anecdotes about chance encounters with celebrities. Submissions were solicited by direct mail and through the media in Canada, the United States and Britain. Hundreds of writers, artists and ordinary people responded, and the resulting pieces are by turns enormously funny, poignant and strangely thought-provoking.

'"Norval Morrisseau," I said in an awed whisper. "I am so happy to see you at last..." "I am not Norval Morrisseau," said Norval Morrisseau."

You'll brush up against celebrities such as T.S. Eliot, Dizzy Gillespie, Fidel Castro, Ernest Hemingway, Glenn Gould, Elvis Presley, Errol Flynn, Leonard Cohen, Jawaharlal Nehru, Grey Owl, Henry Miller, The Dalai Lama, King George VI, John Lennon, Marilyn Monroe, Pierre Trudeau, Margaret Atwood, Rudolph Nureyev, Colonel Sanders, and many others.

'My fingers were still frozen together. "Now, would you mind if I gave you a kiss?" Tom Jones asked rather eloquently, staring me warmly in the eye.'

Among the contributors are Joyce Carol Oates, Timothy Findley, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Annie Dillard, P.K. Page, George Bowering, Fred Wah, Ram Das, Edmund White, David McFadden and Michael Snow.

'The Cisco Kid stopped in front of me. His face was flushed. He grabbed me by the collar of my jacket.'

You'll also eavesdrop on the private lives of scores of ordinary people who have some truly extraordinary tales to tell.

'I then realized it was Leonard Cohen, and I told him that I liked his song, "Like a Bird on the Water" ... and he corrected me by saying, "Like a Bird on a Wire."