



A FEW REMARKS MADE ON THE OCCASION OF RECEIVING AN AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE "HONOUREE" IS PROJECTED ONTO AN ENORMOUS SCREEN BEHIND THE PODIUM.

NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARDS, JUNE 2004.

Thank you all very much. You will have noticed already that there is someone else in the picture. Her name is Mary Schendlinger, and this honour belongs to her as much it does to anyone. Mary is my life partner and my publishing partner; she is also the brilliant senior editor of *Geist* and my personal brilliant senior editor. She has also been known to refer to herself as an ethnic American. A story of mine won a prize in the recent CBC Literary Awards: that story was not only closely and expertly edited by Mary Schendlinger, but it was about her own early life, so you can see that she is also my subject matter. And she's sitting right over there: you can go over to her and give her a hug. Also in the picture should be Barbara Zatyko, who many of you know as the ebullient and highly effective Managing Editor of *Geist* and who is also sitting over there beside Mary and you can go over and give her a hug too.

For many years my life was haunted by the spectre of the 3-Day Novel Writing Contest, which had begun as a barroom challenge in 1977 and has ever since been the occasion of the writing of hundreds of novels every year, in fact, in one year, 1986, nearly a thousand novels came in. This is wearying work for editors, to put it mildly, and it often makes you want to run away. I was greatly relieved, after fifteen years of trying to run away, when Anvil Press, a younger and equally foolhardy publisher, took over the 3-Day Novel and it thrived at a comfortable distance from me for another twelve years; and then a few months ago I went into the Geist office to discover that Barbara Zatyko and Melissa Edwards, who is one of our brilliant associate editors, had just taken

over proprietorship of the 3 Day Novel and were gleefully planning its next incarnation, and I saw then that I would never escape the long shadow of what William French in the *Globe and Mail* once called Canada's only formal contribution to World Literature. Mr French was mistaken as you know, for he had overlooked the Jackpine Sonnet, the peculiarly Canadian sonnet form invented by Milton Acorn, a form that we hope to breath new life into in future pages of *Geist*.

I want to acknowledge the support that I have received from my colleagues in the Literary Press Group and the ACP and BCAMP and particularly the CMPA whose professional development programs and great goodwill have enabled us to keep *Geist* growing and improving, even to the extent of achieving a first intimate scrutiny by the Circulation Audit Bureau, a harrowing experience for a literary magazine. The Canada Council and Heritage Canada have proven themselves again and again to be prepared to support a thriving literary culture, and I would like to acknowledge the very early support of James Lorimer, publisher of *Canadian Forum*, a magazine sadly no longer with us.

Canada is a big strange country, with its Jackpine Sonnets, its 3-day Novels, its Victoria Day holiday (the only one in the world, as you know), and its many different ways of ordering six beers: a six pack, a half-sack, six in a sack, a few in a bag. This is a country that spells the word *toque* at least six different ways. *Geist* has rarely appeared in the National Magazine Award nominations and for a moment it seemed strange that I had been selected for this award, and then not so at all when I reminded myself that this country is after all a place of strangeness and asymmetry.

Recently the editor of a respected literary house pointed out that *Geist* has never reviewed any of their books, although they had been sending us books for years and I was embarrassed to learn that our system of reviewing caused us to overlook this publisher entirely. Last week I looked into the *Geist* database and discovered that our subscriber list is as big in BC as it is in Ontario, but our list of contributors from BC is

three times as long as our list of contributors from Ontario, which is another asymmetry of which I had not been aware. Asymmetry is what this country is made of, which means that one has to make an effort to see not only what there is to see but also what *else* there is to see. That's what Canadian magazines are doing all the time. And this award, coming to me, and let me say to *us*, at this time, confirms that indeed we have been seen, and that we are seen, and in that seeing we have been touched.