

NEWS & NOTES

Congratulations to longtime Alcuin member **Gene Horvath** on receiving a very positive review for his two-volume *Canadian Collection of Hungarica* in the journal *Solanus: International Journal for Russian & East European Bibliographic, Library & Publishing Studies (New Series, Vol. 16, 2002)*. The review concludes that the two volumes “constitute a valuable contribution to the study of Hungarian cultural history.”

Apparently there are at least two points of interest about recent Booker Prize winner Canadian **Yan Martel's** *The Life of Pi*. The first point is that a South American writer charged Martel with theft of intellectual property because he used the author's idea as the inspiration for his own book. The press subsequently reported that the two had amicably reconciled their differences. The irony is that the South American writer was wrong in the first place. Ideas cannot be protected by copyright, only the physical expression of those ideas. The second point of interest is that there are purportedly two distinct versions of *The Life of Pi*. If I have my facts straight the Canadian edition differs from the British edition, in that Martel apparently rewrote the novel for purposes of the Booker competition and that is the edition the British published. This type of thing drives book collectors batty.

You have heard of the Giller Prize, the Booker Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature. You perhaps though are not familiar with with the Literary Review “Bad Sex in Fiction” Awards. It would seem that authors are given the award for

ineptness in describing sex in works of fiction. Past winners include **John Updike** for *Gertrude and Claudia*, **Candida Clark** for *The Constant Eye*, **Brian O'Doherty** for *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*, **Edward St. Aubyn** for *A Clue to the Exit*, **Wendy Holden** for *Bad Heir [sic] Day*, **Wendy Perria** for *Lying*, and **Sean Thomas** for *Kissing Engla*. If you are going to pester your local public library for these works, please do not tell them I sent you!

These quotes are from *A Passion for Books*, a collection of essays edited by **Dale Salwak**. London: Macmillan Press, 1999.

“... there are in the U.K. no real signs that readership is on the decrease. Bookshops are very busy and lively places. Reading groups are on the increase. The country is poised for a huge campaign to promote literacy. This campaign has come about from the combined concerns of the educational, business and governmental communities and it is regarded as equally important as teaching children and adults to be conversant and effective with new technologies. That in itself is quite interesting. It signals not just that it is imperative that people are able to do basic reading and writing but that both are the key to enhancing many aspects of one's life. Perhaps that is what we should be concentrating on — reading and writing as a critical means for everyone — instead of the hopeless battle over the relative merits of the book versus digital technology. There is a place for both as long as we can remember what each is best at doing for us. Even e-mail has revived a letter writing of sorts!” **Gill**

Davies, “The Future of the Academic Book.”

“The notion that, *mirabile dictu*, I am going to die someday, now all too realistic, makes me more cautious in what I choose to read. I am handed an eight-hundred-page biography and am now forced to consider that reading such a book entails at least two weeks out of my reading life. Do I wish to make the investment? Suddenly this has become a fairly serious question.

Gertrude Stein said that the happiest moment of her life was that moment in which she realized she wouldn’t be able to read all the books in the world. I suppose what made it happy for her was that it took off a fair amount of pressure. I have finally come to the realization that I shan’t be able to read even all the good books in the world, and, far from making me happy, it leaves me, a naturally acquisitive fellow, a little sad. It does make rather more pressing, once one grants a world of limited possibilities, the question of which books one ought to read and which exclude.

The late Alexander Gershenkron, an economic historian at Harvard, once took up the matter of how much one can read in a lifetime, and with rather depressing statistical consequences. Gershenkron was then near seventy, and he estimated that, in his adult life, which he felt began at the age of twenty, he read roughly two books (outside of professional reading) a week. This meant that, over fifty years of reading, one will have read only five thousand or so books. A piddling sum, when one realizes that something like fifty-five thousand books are published annually in the United

States alone.

Given this daunting logistical problem, Gershenkron, in an essay in *The American Scholar*, remarked that it is a shame to have read too many of the wrong books, and so set out to discover criteria for establishing which are the right – or best – books. He arrived at three criteria, and these are: 1. a book should be intrinsically interesting; 2. a book should be re-readable; and 3. a book should be memorable. These criteria are thoughtful, impeccable, and, as by now you may have noticed, utterly useless. How, after all, can one know if a book is interesting until one has read well into it, or re-readable until one has read it through a second time, or memorable until long after one has finished reading it? One can’t.” **Joseph Epstein**, “The Pleasures of Reading.”

The following excerpts are from another collection also entitled *A Passion for Books; A Book Lover’s Treasury of Stories, Essays, Humor, Lore and Lists on Collecting, Reading, Borrowing, Lending, Caring for, and Appreciating Books*. Edited by **Harold Rabinowitz and Rob Kaplan**. New York: Times Books, 1999.

I give hearty and humble thanks for the safe return of this book which having endured the perils of my friend’s bookcase and the bookcases of my friend’s friends, now returns to me in reasonably good condition. I give hearty and humble thanks that my friend did not see fit to give this book to his infant for a plaything, nor use it as an ashtray for his burning cigar, nor as a teething ring for his mastiff. When I loaned this

book, I deemed it as lost; I was resigned to the business of the long parting; I never thought to look upon its pages again. But now that my book has come back to me, I rejoice and am exceedingly glad! Bring hither the fatted morocco and let us rebind the volume and set it on a shelf of honor, for this my book was lent and returned again. Presently, therefore, I may return some of the books I myself have borrowed.

For All Aspiring Writers: Ten Best-Selling Books Rejected by Publishers Twenty or More Times:

1. *Dubliners*
by James Joyce
2. *M*A*S*H*
by Richard Hooker
3. *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*
by Charles Shaw
4. *Kon-Tiki*
by Thor Heyerdahl
5. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*
by Richard Bach
6. *The Postman Always Rings Twice*
by James Cain
7. *Lorna Doone*
by Richard Doddridge Blackmore
8. *Auntie Mame*
by Patrick Dennis
9. *The Peter Principle*
by Laurence Peter
10. *Dune*
by Frank Herbert

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BIBLIOLEXICON

- Bibliobibule** One who reads too much
Biblioclast One who tears pages from or destroys books
Bibliodemon A book fiend or demon
Bibliognoste One who is knowledgeable about editions, colophons, printers, and all the minutiae of books
Bibliographe One who describes books
Biblioklept One who steals books
Bibliolater One who worships books
Bibliolestes A book robber or plunderer
Bibliomancer One who practices divination by books
Bibliomane One who accumulates books indiscriminately
Bibliomaniac A book lover gone mad
Bibliophage One who eats or devours books
Bibliophile One who loves books
Bibliophobe One who fears books
Bibliopole One who sells books
Biblioriptos One who throws books around
Bibliosopher One who gains wisdom from books
Bibliotaphe One who buries or hides books

West Coast photographers **Pat and Rosemarie Keough** spent much of 2002 launching their new book, the continent-sized *Antarctica*. This latest publication from their Nahanni Productions Inc. marks a distinct change from the six books that preceded it. With *Antarctica* the Keoughs have entered the realm of limited edition art books, with strong emphasis on materials and craftsmanship to match the content.

Antarctica presents 345 photographs taken by the Keoughs of the southernmost continent, in a large, landscape-format volume weighing over 27 pounds in its accompanying presentation box. The book's size and format dictated that the couple invest considerable thought toward ensuring the finished book would stand the test of time.

The Keoughs decided to invest in a good binding. "We do not know of any other comparable edition that presents a portfolio of photographs in such a luxurious and structurally sound manner as *Antarctica*."

This focus on structural integrity reflects the Keoughs' interest in the form of the book. "Our three passions are books, stone, and wood. There is something elemental and comforting about each. A portfolio of loose prints doesn't appeal to us — perhaps because the imagery can get scattered and are individually not as protected as when bound into a book. Further, we take a lot of care in designing the presentation of our images, so that they are complimentary to one another. Images properly paired can explain a point without the need of text."

Antarctica, printed in Vancouver, is the first commercial application of a new

high-resolution offset technology. The Keoughs are justifiably proud of the brilliance and clarity with which their images have been reproduced. It's too bad most readers won't have the opportunity to look at the book with the couple by their side: their enthusiasm for the project, and background details about each of the images, make the scope of the project even more impressive.

Binding is being undertaken by Keith Felton's workshop in Ontario. While copies of *Antarctica* were unveiled at the start of 2002, binding will continue through 2003. Each of the 1000 books is signed by Queen Noor of Jordan and the Keoughs. Five books will also be autographed by about 20 Antarctic explorers, scientists, and adventurers including Alaska's Norman Vaughan (dog-driver for Admiral Byrd's Antarctic expeditions 1928-29 and 1930), Norway's Liv Arnesen (first woman to solo to the South Pole unsupported), Britain's Ron Lewis-Smith (38 years researching Antarctic plants) and New Zealand's Sir Edmund Hillary (co-leader 1957 Commonwealth Transantarctic Expedition). All net proceeds are pledged to international albatross conservation programs. Further details about this US \$2,900 tome can be found at the Keoughs' web site, www.keough-art.com.

Catalogues of the winning books in the 2001 Alcuin Competition for Excellence in Book Design in Canada are available free, postage paid from Anne Yandle, Chair, Book Design Competition, 3450 West 20th Ave, Vancouver, BC, V6S 1E4 or phone 604-733-6484 or email yandle@interchange.ubc.ca.