

DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS: "HE MUST BE A SOCIAL REALIST REGIONALIST"

SCL/ÉLC interview by Kathleen Scherf

KS By the time this interview appears, you'll be packing to leave for Edmonton, where you'll be U of A's writer in residence.

DAR Yes, September 1990. I hope to have time to write. I'll be reading manuscripts, I'll be going into the classes and talking about my work.

KS But you won't actually teach a creative writing class.

DAR Well, I wouldn't be very good at that. My whole idea of writing, and what is good and what is bad, is so instinctive anyway, that I wouldn't know how to get across how to go about making work better. I think that's a type of editorial perspective which I don't have.

KS Did you take any creative writing courses when you were a student?

DAR No.

KS Can writing be taught in creative writing classes?

DAR No, no.

KS What's their function?

DAR I think you can give support.

KS You can teach students how to write a sonnet, you can teach them forms . . .

DAR But you can't teach them how to write a good sonnet! You see that's the whole thing, you can teach them how to write a novel too; you can write a novel with twenty-one chapters or seven parts, but I think form and function are a long way from creative instinct.

KS Who helped you out when you were a fledgling writer?

DAR Oh, a lot of people, almost everyone at UNB, from Fred Cogswell on down, you know, almost everyone and all in different ways . . .

KS The Tuesday night group . . .

DAR The Tuesday night group, all of that, but perhaps in a different way than some of them think. I don't know if I would have written differently without Tuesday night, it might have taken longer to find what I was doing.

KS Do you now find yourself in the role of advisor?

DAR Sometimes.

KS And what advice do you give?

DAR Well, I mean, it depends on the day I'm talking . . .

KS Aside from "give it up."

DAR Yes, aside from "don't write" or "give it up" or "get the hell out of Canada," it's very basic sort of stuff: write what you know and how you feel and not what you think you're supposed to.

KS Why "get out of Canada?"

DAR I'm being facetious about that, you know, I've lived here all my writing life and I'll probably continue to. Sometimes it gets rather frustrating.

KS In terms of sales?

DAR In terms of sales, in terms of promotion of work, in terms of overseas markets and the marketability of a Canadian book; all of that is frustrating because there are writers in Canada who are probably as fine as writers in most places in the world.

KS Who? Which Canadian writers do you read?

DAR I think Alastair MacLeod is probably as fine a short story writer as you're going to find, certainly. He hasn't written all that much, but certainly his stories can be compared to Flannery O'Connor's, and when you compare the reputation she has with

the reputation he has, you see what happens to Canadian writers.

KS What are you currently reading?

DAR *The Decisive Battles of the Western World*, and the life of Alexander the Great.

KS Is this historical research?

DAR I just love to read history, I always have. I've read as much history as anything else, and especially when I'm writing a novel, history is what I like.

KS How about historical novels?

DAR I'm not a great fan of them, I'm not a great fan of Thomas Raddall, and I'm not questioning his talent at all, it's just not my cup of tea.

KS Which authors have most influenced you?

DAR I'm not sure; the obvious and standard reply is D.H. Lawrence and Faulkner.

KS Hardy?

DAR And Thomas Hardy. I suppose in a way they all have, except that I remember John Metcalf, in the *Ottawa Citizen*, did a review of *Blood Ties*, an extremely favourable review. At the end of it he said "it's too bad that Richards is so influenced by D.H. Lawrence," and at the time I hadn't read D.H. Lawrence at all. I can understand what they're saying about William Faulkner, the influence of William Faulkner, but I certainly write very differently from Faulkner—extremely differently; however, I think that I've been influenced as much by writers' philosophies as by how they write. I've been influenced by Dante, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekov, certainly as much as I have been by Hardy and Faulkner, and so if I'm thinking about which writers influenced me I'd have to think of the writers' philosophies.

KS What is a writer's philosophy?

DAR Perhaps his humanity, and how his humanity comes through, or his ideas of what humanity could be in art. It's difficult to categorize influences.

KS Can you categorize your body of work?

DAR Well, I don't know; I might categorize myself the same as other people do, that I'm a depressing nihilist. I really have no idea how to categorize myself. I know that in a lot of ways I'm rather traditional—I'm not sure how well that would go over anymore. I don't think I follow trends in writing or get on band wagons. When I did *Road to the Stilt House*, someone wrote to me and said "this is one of the finest examples of minimalism that I've ever seen," which was a nice compliment except I didn't know what in the hell she was talking about, I didn't know what minimalism was.

KS Are you aware of literary theory at all, literary theory trends?

DAR Not very much, no, it doesn't interest me and I think I'm safe to stay away from it.

KS It's difficult to teach literature without referring to theory. What's the best way to teach a piece of literature? What's worthwhile at all in sitting through an English course?

DAR I think the best thing is to let the kids read the books.

KS But you can't sit there for fifty minutes and let them read, you have to talk about it. What do you talk about?

DAR Well, you can talk about characters, that's always been my major line anyway, to talk about the characters and what the characters are doing, and what they're really doing as opposed to what the narrator sometimes implies they're doing—that's extremely important in a novel. It's the most important thing of all and it's what makes for the greatest conflict in the discrepancy between what critics think and what the author is actually doing.

KS Let's stick with academic institutions for the moment—we'll get back to the critics.

DAR Oh, we always do.

KS Let's say someone had to design a Canadian literature survey course, or a Maritime fiction course, and she wants a representative Richards novel: which should she choose?

DAR Oh, well they're all so different, yet they're all sort of the same, so if you wanted a short one you could have *Road to the Stilt House*, or if you wanted a bigger one you could have *Lives of Short Duration*.

KS But a definitive one, one that sums up . . .

DAR Well I don't know if there is a definitive one: maybe *Nights Below Station Street* or *Blood Ties*.

KS We've almost gone through your entire canon now.

DAR Yah, well, exactly! I'm not sure what a definitive work of mine would be. I'd probably have to fall back on *Blood Ties*, I probably would, and say that's a good place to start.

KS The *Globe and Mail* recently quoted you as being fairly hostile to English departments or academia, and I want to know why. Doesn't a Canadian writer depend on academic departments for book sales, for dissemination of information regarding novels?

DAR Yes, but you must realize the context of what was said. The fellow who interviewed me was talking about violence in my work, which is fine, but ninety percent of my novels show that people, *most* people, treat others with humanity and dignity no matter what the situation—that is what I'm getting at—and I said "Look, you know, I've seen as much boot-licking malice in the common room of the English department as I ever saw on the streets of Newcastle," and the only thing I'm sorry about is that I mentioned Newcastle: I should have said "in a tavern." It's absolutely true, I mean, you can't depict my novels as being something other than humanity itself, and this was what he was trying to do, or make me a guru for some type of violence, which I am not, and I'm not going to stand for that, so that's why I said what I did.

KS Let me rephrase the question: many writers of my acquaintance seem to demonstrate some hostility toward the scholarly side of the literary process. Would you like to comment?

DAR You can't generalize what people are doing. Some analyses are good, but then again some of them aren't. Some of

the things that have been said about my books have been deplorable.

KS What would be a deplorable way to approach one of your novels?

DAR The most deplorable way of all is that there are demarcation lines of good and evil in my work, and that the men are generally bad and the women are generally good, and that what Dave Richards is trying to show is how evil a red-neck society like the Miramichi is, and how sensitive and caring only one or two male characters are, and the rest of course are sort of, you know, tobacco chewing deer-slayers, and you know, if you approach my work like this, then, I'm going to give it to you both barrels, because I feel I have to defend the integrity of my novels. But at times there've been some extremely positive things, and my novels have been taught at times well, so you can't generalize, you have to take it where it comes.

KS One predominant motif in Richards reviews is the sense of regionalism in your work: have you ever considered setting work outside the Miramichi?

DAR Oh, of course I have, but in a sense all my work is outside the Miramichi.

KS In that it's universal?

DAR Not only that, but also it's my own rivers, my own places, and in so many instances it doesn't have that much to do with the real Miramichi. So, in a sense, they're arguing about something that doesn't even exist.

KS But the setting itself, the physical setting . . .

DAR O.K. there is a physical setting, and it's my own physical setting; however, that's not what they're really arguing about. A lot of times they don't know what to put their finger on in my work, and so they say "he must be a regionalist." Another thing they say is "he must be a social realist because he's saying stuff that doesn't happen to us but only happens in the Maritimes, so he must be a social realist regionalist because this is what happens down there," that's really not true because, and I say this without batting an eye, what happens to Arnold, in *Road to the Stilt House*, happens to everyone, and that's why I wrote

about Arnold. I didn't write about Arnold because it only happened in this little house in the center of nowhere, but because it also happens to people on Bloor Street in Toronto.

KS Why don't you set a novel on Bloor Street in Toronto?

DAR Because I know my region better, but I do plan to. Right now I'm in the middle of a trilogy.

KS A trilogy started with *Nights Below Station Street*?

DAR Yes. A second book will be out in September and I'm on the third. When that is done I plan to write a novel that uses the Miramichi only on the periphery and deals with other provinces and states.

KS I wonder what the critics will have to say about that.

DAR Oh, they'll probably say "look—he tried and failed, you see he's not really a writer at all." No, but you see there is a real problem with critics because they're not saying what really annoys them. They're saying things that annoy them but they're not telling the truth. I'm talking about reviewers. What bothers them is that I firmly believe that the only way a person can be free is thorough self-sacrifice. The only way a person can get something is to give something. But that's not the sort of standard progressive social milieu that we're all in, and if they read carefully enough they see this, and I think it bothers them and they say "this guy must be a Maritime regionalist, because his people think so differently." The whole idea is that the underlying humanity of a human being continually frees him, and that spontaneous action always frees you and that determined action never does. Therefore I tend to be against social workers where I'm for a person like Rita. You know, I tend to be for Rita while I tend to disagree with Juliet. That is a problem which has not been addressed by the critics very much. And when they try to address it, like Bill French in the *Globe and Mail*, they miss the point.

KS What's most interesting in what you're saying right now is the fact that you think critics have a responsibility to answer questions posed by your work.

DAR Well, critics always do. But what I'm saying is that some of the more famous ones think they have a role to shape

Canadian literature, and if this is the case, they should at least see what the hell a person is doing in his work.

KS Speaking of shaping Canadian literature, what about the debate over government funding of the arts: does it encourage mediocrity, or provide for excellence? Is it possible to be a writer in Canada and to make a living without government funding?

DAR No. If no one got funding, then there might be two writers in Canada: Margaret Atwood and Pierre Berton. And as respected as these people are, I'd still like to see some others write, so government funding is necessary. And sure there's going to be grants given at the wrong times perhaps for the wrong reasons to the wrong people, but there are going to be grants given to other people who certainly can use them and who will write fine work.

KS Some people make money by writing for film and television.

DAR Yah, well, I wrote a film script, but when it was finally produced it wasn't very much like the film script I wrote, so I won't even talk about it, but I did a CBC script for *Nights Below Station Street*.

KS Is there an art to writing television?

DAR Well, it's the art of getting along with people because it's so communal, and I've never been able to do that.

KS Some of your characters can't get along with other people, either. We hear over and over, in many of the early reviews especially, that your novels are peopled with misfits and losers who could not be loved by anyone. But you say that the possibility of love between those characters, the fact that it exists in all its gritty glory, is precisely what's so optimistic in your work. Now, how do you view your characters? Do your novels start with the characters?

DAR Generally yes.

KS Are they real people? Do these people exist somewhere?

DAR Well, sort of, in a composite way, I suppose. In a lot of ways they're all me too, I mean, I don't think you can write about a John or a Packet without feeling part of them. So, in a way they

exist. I've known people like them, and not all from the Miramichi either, you know. I've always been interested in how people move and talk, so that's why I always start with character.

KS Do you know these characters by the first draft? Or do you get to know them better during the writing process?

DAR Well, generally I only write one draft, so if I don't know them by then, I'm in trouble. The book that was edited the most of all was *Nights Below Station Street*, and the reason that was edited, I'll say very frankly, was because I had two books in one. But that was the only one that was edited.

KS Why do you write novels in which characters reappear?

DAR Because I can work with them in different phases of their lives. And a lot of this is done subconsciously, you don't know when you start that you're going to do it, you see, and you end up doing it.

KS In February 1986, you said "It's not that I dislike Pamela, it's just that, well, anyone who tries to take control of my novels in those ways I'm not fond of." That struck me: I thought "But Dave, she's just a character, get a grip!"

DAR I know; well, you say a lot things in an interview that you shouldn't say. I don't think I said that right. And I *do* like Pamela, but I think the problem with her in *The Coming of Winter* is the problem of justification. Young people are often vindictive, but there are so many young people who read the novel and who absolutely hate John, hate him with a passion, and say he's hardly human because he's so mean and vulgar. But to me Pamela is every bit as violent, every bit, *every bit* as manipulative and controlling as John—she just does it in a different way. And as H.L. Connors said in his remarks on *The Coming of Winter*, she just does it in socially acceptable ways. So, in that sense, I'm always pitted against her when I come to defend John, and I don't mean to be, because I think in a lot of what she says is absolutely right.

KS In what have you most improved in the sixteen years since *The Coming of Winter*?

DAR I think my work has gotten different and quite a bit different. I think I've become, over the last six or seven years, more analytical, and I think that's more to my advantage for the books that I hope to do. In *The Coming of Winter* and *Blood Ties* and *Lives of Short Duration*—especially *Lives of Short Duration*—I was striving for a type of narrative analysis which I could never get. And then with *Road to the Stilt House* I cut it down to bare bones because I said “analysis isn't going to work.” With *Nights Below Station Street* I sort of broke through, because I could analyze at times and still be subjective.

KS With what kind of specific point of view are you most comfortable? In some books you switch around—in *Road to the Stilt House* for example, we have first person narrators, we have limited third, and then we also have an omniscient voice. What are you most comfortable with?

DAR Again, that's a difficult question for me to answer because I'm not really sure until I'm writing what's going to best suit the novel I'm writing. I had no idea there was going to be a first person narrative voice in *Road to the Stilt House*.

KS There's not just one.

DAR No, I know, but until I got into it I did not know that's how the novel was going to proceed, or that that was how I was going to proceed with the novel, until I found it was the best way to get into Arnold's mind, and to show what was going on. I'm very comfortable with third person, writing third person with sort of an overseeing narration, which allows the characters to move about as freely as I can get them to move. So often the narrative voice has nothing to do with character. It has to do with the character in a certain place, or the characters within their environment, or the characters within their setting, which gives you a sort of broader perspective than most readers would have. John and Kevin, for example, are seen from within their environments, and I think I followed that pretty well right through. Now I think that at times I've also included a moral tone, for example within the narration in *Lives of Short Duration*. However, basically my narration is to show characters within their environment and to let the reader see them more completely than he would otherwise. I think that one of the problems some critics have had with my work in calling it

depressing is they never got the fact that I'm dealing not with abnormal or subnormal or poor or poverty stricken human beings, but that I'm dealing with human beings at the moments of emotional or physical crisis. That has most interested me in the human dilemma. I don't think I'm unique in this.

KS What's the necessary condition for you to start a work? How much information or material do you need before you acknowledge to yourself that you have a project?

DAR Well, I have a basic idea of what I want to say about certain things, and how my characters would probably feel about certain things, and this is an ongoing sort of dialogue within myself. And in a way it's one ongoing work.

KS Do you usually have the idea for your next novel before you've ever finished the previous one?

DAR Oh yes, I have ideas for two or three more novels. Whether I'll ever do them or whether they'll be done in that way, I'm not sure. Because once you get into a novel, if the characters are any good, they're going to tell you what to do. I start out a novel about a boy shooting a cow and going to court, which is going to be fifty pages long, and it ends up with Kevin and John, and Kevin getting married to Pamela, and this other guy who drowns. That's how *Blood Ties* worked also; and for *Lives of Short Duration* I was only going to have a long monologue about this old guy coming home from the woods, that's all there was going to be to it, and some people are probably saying "why the fuck didn't he stay with that," but I didn't, I had to get into the whole milieu of what made these characters. Once the characters take over, that's where the novel comes from.

KS And how can you tell whether that novel's any good?

DAR If I could quote Mortimer Adler, art is the purgation of emotion. I think that, at moments, in novels there should be that, there should be purgation of emotion, there should be a total forgiveness within the self, within the character, and if and when that happens, then I'm satisfied.

KS And that's what you appreciate as a reader?

DAR Absolutely that's what I appreciate as a reader. Novelists are there to touch a sort of universal pulse. It's like when Emily

Brontë has Catherine say "I am Heathcliff"; nothing could be greater than that line. So that's where novels work.

KS Do you write to access that pulse? You told *Maclean's* that to give up writing would be like giving up breathing; do you take it that seriously? Isn't it just a job, a profession? At most a vocation?

DAR I don't think I've been exaggerating one bit. I can't envision my giving up writing. I mean, what would I do? I wouldn't be me if I didn't write, and I don't know what else I would do. Certainly my options are running out; when you get to your late thirties you can't become a steeplejack or a competent plumber, although I'd earn more money at both. I would have loved to have gone to sea, I would have loved to have done a lot of things that I didn't manage to do in my life, but if there were a choice, it would always come back to writing.

KS If it is a vocation, then what special gifts do you possess?

DAR If you're talking about gifts of the novelist, then characterization might be one and dialogue might be another.

KS How do male writers create female characters?

DAR By being human. I think that there are far more similarities between men and women than there are differences. The way you think and proceed and want to give and want to hope and want to love, all that's pretty well the same. It's not whether you agree with all the daily things that go on in the world between men and women today, but whether you create a character that everyone's going to "know." And I think many writers can do that, and it's good that they can. I don't find it hard writing about women because I've never thought women to be anything but human, just like men are.

KS How do feminists respond to your books?

DAR Well, it depends on the feminist of course.

KS Okay, let's have a range of responses.

DAR I think that there are certain women who tend to believe that men shouldn't write about women. However, I think that if I were a woman writing the same stuff, I'd be much applauded by the feminists. For instance, if I were a woman writing about Cecil

coming home and throwing his kid around, and Leah having to leave the house, I'd be much applauded by feminists as showing the degradation that women go through. But since it's the man writing with at least equal sensitivity for the man and the woman, then certain feminists might not think this "politically correct."

KS You "assert the dignity in downtrodden lives," right? That's a quote from *Maclean's*.

DAR Not my quote though.

KS No. But you do say "I am not going to allow these people whom I knew and grew up with to be dismissed." Now, is there an element of *noblesse oblige* here? We're sitting in a rather nice house. At what point do you decide to write about the working class instead of working in it?

DAR I don't think I ever wrote about the working class in my life.

KS You know you're tagged with that all the time.

DAR Well of course, but you see, that's their problem. Of all the quotes they could have used in that article, that's the quote they decide to remain with, that and one about alcoholism. Shit, I know more alcoholics who are members of the legislature than I ever knew who didn't have a job. It's so bloody silly to assume that I'm writing about the working class as a class of oppressed people. Half the characters in my novels earn more than the critics that are criticizing them for being poor. It doesn't matter how much you earn but it's what you do. I mean, Clinton Dulse drove a school bus and owned his own store, Kevin worked at the mill, which is one of the higher paying jobs. The problem is the *physical* aspect of their work. Certain critics are disgusted with the physical aspects of labour, they always have been, it has nothing to do with the working class or downtrodden people. I've hardly ever written about downtrodden people. The only novel that I can think of that I've written about downtrodden people is *Road to the Stilt House*. There are four millionaires in *Lives of Short Duration*, for example. No one wants to mention Lester Murphy being a millionaire or Cyril Brown being a millionaire; they mention George Terri being poor! George Terri's not poor—he just chooses not to work. He just won the

fifty thousand, he owns three acres of land, he's got enough money for another few drunks and a couple of delirium tremens, as Pap says in *Huck Finn*, and what's wrong with that? If I were writing comedy they wouldn't call these people working class at all. I came from a middle class background. I grew up on the streets of Newcastle where there was as much middle class as there was working class. We all fought, played baseball and went home. The whole idea that I am setting out to write this great working class tract, the sort of thing that Trotsky would approve of, is absolutely trash. And it only comes from a middle class mentality. It never comes from anywhere else, and in fact it only comes *not* from a middle class mentality, because that's not where the demarcation line is, but rather it always comes from an *academic* middle class mentality, and it's just not true, it's just absolutely not true.

KS Were you the person just telling me that writers are not really hostile toward academics?

DAR One would wonder though if academics are hostile toward Kevin Dulse. It is, however, what people wish to perceive. If they do not wish to perceive that I'm writing about them, that's their business. If they wish to perceive that I'm writing about something in the Maritimes, something that's not where they are, then that is up to them.

KS I'm sure that many people who've read all your books feel like they do have an accurate picture of Maritime life. What about you? What do you see when you review your body of work? Does it break into clear periods?

DAR Well it does now.

KS What are they?

DAR Well I'm not really sure if I can define them but I think it does. I think that after the second novel I had gone about as far as I could go doing that type of novel. I don't think I could have written another *Blood Ties*, for instance.

KS What do you mean by "that type of novel"?

DAR Well, a very subjective novel that was internal. A very internal novel where the writer internalizes each character, and their thought processes went on totally inside. I'd done that as

well as I could do it and I wasn't going to do it again. For better or for worse I had to find some other approach, and I think both in *Lives* and in *Road to the Stilt House* I was trying to find a way in which to go about that. In these last couple of novels, I'm fairly comfortable doing what I'm doing.

KS So in that middle period . . .

DAR I think it was a transition period.

KS And the transition is trying to move toward a more analytical voice?

DAR Yah, and God knows how long that will last but right now I feel comfortable. The voice is now more removed, not as heavy as it was in the first two novels, or for that matter in *Lives*. It's more removed, but I think it's true as it was in *Blood Ties*.

KS I think there's lots of compassion in *Nights*, especially with Adele.

DAR Yah, well, Joe too. And they're all in this, I mean the whole Jesus crew of them are in my next two novels.

KS Let's pretend—and you've really got to stretch your imagination here—that I have the money to go to Europe and I go and I say "there's this great young novelist in Canada, you've got to read some of his work." And they say, "well what's it like?" What could I say?

DAR Well I think I'm continually striving to show the underlying intentions behind surface action, and I think that's been implicit in all my work, which shows finally Cecil to be a noble character, and shows that socialized altruism is not as good as the everyday common concern that Rita and Joe have, and I think that this has been my major concern throughout all my works. And I think that started with *The Coming of Winter* and it continues on. This is probably why I set up conditions where my characters on the surface seem unlikeable, but it's all done more gently than it seems at first reading.

KS Some critics have said, in fact many critics have said, that your characters are inarticulate. I don't believe that, but I believe there exists what I call a language of silence in your work. How

and why do you decide to narrate a passage rather than to allow the character to have a dramatic scene in which he or she speaks?

DAR Because most of the characters I know would feel embarrassed to expostulate. They expostulate like Georgie expostulates all the time, but when Adele expostulates or Anthony in my new novel expostulates, they don't expostulate about their *sense of self*. They expostulate about others around them or how they feel about others, but they don't really expostulate about their sense of self. And I think it's the narrator's job to do that.

KS So they need you to do that.

DAR Well, in the type of novel I write, I guess so.

KS The type of novel you write hardly ever proceeds perfectly chronologically. Why not? What does playing with plot and structure add to the telling of the story? What effect are you trying to achieve? Why not proceed chronologically? It must appear as an option at times at least.

DAR I think Alden Nowlan has come closest to the truth, when he said that I was blind drunk from the age of two and time sequence always was mixed up for me. I mean Alden said that to a reviewer one day who was in the house, and of course Alden was just joking but I don't know if the reviewer knew that or not, but I think that chronological order just never felt right to me, it always felt like there was something missing, that something wasn't being said, and in order to explain things correctly, or in order for the novel to move correctly it had to have time lapses, because that's how people thought and that's in essence how they acted in their lives.

KS Well surely we don't, in our minds, ever think chronologically. We tend to think emotionally, and you maintain that you deal with things of the heart rather than those of the head. What does that mean?

DAR Well, I try at any rate. I think it's the idea of sympathy rather than reaction, and I think that's probably what I meant. I mean, this young man who was interviewing me last week said that he could never forgive people like Cecil because he pushed his little boy out of the way . . .

KS Cecil didn't just push him out of the way, Dave, he smashed the kid against the bloody stove.

DAR At any rate Cecil through three quarters of the novel acts with dignity and some humanity toward other people. Where does forgiveness come, hasn't he forgiven himself and her? He certainly doesn't need my forgiveness or, I might add, yours.

KS How do you feel about the Ontario literary establishment?

DAR I think that Toronto has some real problems, I mean, I think that its focus on the nation has some really blind spots. I'm not talking about the writers there, I'm just talking about it as the "center of Canada." I can understand why the critics from there would say that I'm a regional novelist, because you see, I say things about Canada that no Torontonians want New York to know. And so since I do I must be a regionalist, because Toronto wants New York to think of Canada as being urbane and upwardly mobile and progressive, a lover of baseball and concerned about violence in hockey. And God, here I am talking about people killing moose out of season and all this, and Toronto doesn't want New York to know about that! The last thing Toronto wants to be is the true voice of its nation.

KS What do you say to critics—most of whom can't believe that you beat out Atwood—who suggest that in 1988 a Governor General's Award was due to a Maritime writer?

DAR Well, it probably was. Hell, they should have given it to Alastair MacLeod years ago. So it probably was due. They could have given it to any one of us down here. We deserve one.

In September 1990, McClelland and Stewart will publish David Adams Richards's new novel.