

If you think that we have a ridiculous amount of book reviews in the paper this week, you are correct... BUT we did that on purpose. You see, the holidays are-a-comin', maybe you celebrate Christmas, or Hanukkah and want a gift idea for that hard-to-buy-for person. Maybe you just want something for yourself to read. Here are numerous ideas...

**Daughters of the House**

(Avon)  
by Michelle Roberts

This book is the first American release by British author Michelle Roberts. It is the story of two women and their lives together during England's post-war era.

After twenty years in a convent, Therese renounces her vows and returns home, opening new wounds for herself and her childhood acquaintance Lenore.

Lenore, now the Lady of their childhood home, reluctantly welcomes Therese back. Through a flashback, we learn of the life of Therese and her rejected cousin, Lenore. One can almost feel the tension between them as they learn the horrible secrets of life and their innocence is shattered. This book takes us through the painful memory of naive adolescent first love and rejection. The end (I'd love to spoil it for you) is full of revelations which make the rest of the story make sense.

At first, I thought this book was crap; but when I paid more attention, I realized that all the sex and slander is great in an adolescent kind of way. Read with caution.  
—Maryn Nass

**Modern Canadian Plays Volume I and II**  
(Talonbooks, third edition)

Edited by Jerry Wasserman

*Modern Canadian Plays* is just that: a collection of modern Canadian plays. Talonbooks first published it in 1985, and it has been a popular reference book for thespians, students and teachers ever since. In fact, it's billed as "the primary textbook in Canadian theatre and literature courses around the world."

The development of significant homegrown Canadian theatre was relatively recent, even considering our status as one of the younger major countries in the world. *Modern Canadian Plays*, therefore, begins with English Canadian drama's first significant era in the late 1960's and extends into recent years (as late as 1989's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*).

Every selection is preceded by biographical and bibliographical notes on its author(s), making these texts handy reference guides to Canadian playwrights as well as their plays. Wasserman, the editor, provides introductions for the two volumes that span the course of Canadian theatre in its entirety: from the seventeenth century to the mean governmental thrift of the Mulroney years and the advent of mega-musicals.

In addition to an historical overview, these books provide an impressive selection of plays: *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, *Les Belles Soeurs*, *Creeps*, *Leaving Home*, *1837: The Farmer's Revolt*, *Walsh*, *The St. Nicholas Hotel*, *Jacob's Wake* and *Automatic Pilot* are all in volume I. *Zastrozzi*, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, *Balconville*, *Doc*, *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, *Toronto Mississippi*, *I Am Yours*, *Moo*, *Polygraph*, and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* can be found in volume II. Some are favourites, some are not, but they are all chosen as significant works-- and their diversity amply reflects that of Canada and its growing body of drama.

-- Sean McQuaid

**The Best of Bizarro Volume II**  
(Chronicle Books)

By Dan Piraro

The Trojan Cockroach. Dickensian rodents. The Accordion in the Stone. A mummified Mickey Mouse. You mightn't think these things have anything in common apart from being just plain weird, but there is indeed a common denominator: they all sprang from the fertile brain of cartoonist Dan Piraro, creator of the syndicated one-panel Bizarro cartoon.

One-panel weirdness is generally considered the domain of *The Far Side's* Gary Larson, but Piraro proves time and again that there's room for more than one wacko on the comics page. Subdued and subtle but seldom inaccessible, Piraro is a cartoon contender in his own right. This latest collection yields another batch of hilarity and head trips, all rendered in Piraro's distinctive drawing technique: a slick, pseudo-realistic illustrative style that far outstrips Larson (and many other cartoonists) from a technical standpoint. All of this adds up to make Piraro one of the more sophisticated (but no less amusing) of the one-panel wonders (and how many other folks have the long-dead philosopher Socrates write an introduction to their book?).

-- Sean McQuaid

**Jackers: Warstrider**  
(Avonova Science Fiction)

By William H. Keith, Jr.

If this novel was a movie, it would be fodder for Turkey Dinner. Keith's book tells the blood-and-guts story of a futuristic war between greedy Imperialist overlords and idealistic freedom-seeking rebels. I found the plot buried under a sea of futuristic pseudo-scientific technobabble-- words that Keith seems to have invented himself. Had it been written in the Queen's English, *Warstriders* would have been easier to understand and probably just as effective.

One thing that stood out positively was the naga, a slimy being whose completely different mode of thinking was well thought out and convincingly described. Keith's aliens were interesting, but his genetically engineered and technologically enhanced humans even more so.

The caste system differentiating Nihongo from Gaijin (Japanese and white guys to the uninitiated) and genies (gene engineered) from full human was to me much more interesting than whose team could shoot down more ships. I thought it especially ironic that the "full humans" of the twenty-fifth century had computer hardware cybernetically linked to their nervous systems. If that is full human, what are we?

Disturbing scene to look for: a description of a "living statue" which is 90% human, but with genetically altered DNA. The statue lives, thinks and understands, yet it cannot move or speak. Its nervous system has been tailored to continually transmit pain "roughly on the level of being burned alive".

Gratifying sense of closure: at the end of the novel, a rebel genie soldier puts the statue out of its misery.

-- Shannon Younker

**Stupid Crimes: a novel**  
(Vintage)

Dennis E. Bolen

This should have been titled *Crimes: a Stupid Novel*. One of the reviews on the back says "only a clever writer could make stupid people this interesting." Obviously, he wasn't very clever. Besides, who really wants to read about a bunch of truly pathetic criminals? I only got about a third of the way through it, so there is a vague possibility it was going to get better, but I didn't think I could make it that far. This novel was too contrived: from the "avant-garde" cover, to the little hand gun graphics between paragraphs, to the writing style within. There are people in the world who would like this novel-- my roommate did-- but I am not one of them. Try it for yourself, but don't get your hopes up.

--Aldera Chisholm

**The Wives of Bath**  
(Vintage)

by Susan Swan

I really enjoyed this book, but I cannot review it. I can't tell you the plot without giving it away, and I can't begin to describe why I liked it, I just know that from my first glimpse I was captivated. I read it all in one long night because I had to know how it ended. This is a very sexual book, which may surprise you (or it may not) when you discover that it is written from the view of girls in a boarding school in Upper Canada. The girls in the story are learning to deal with their own sexuality in some typical ways, but also in ways that involve a male worship cult and murder. Parts of this book scared me while other parts made me want to be there. If you consider yourself open-minded, give it a try. Otherwise, you might want to try safer fare.

-- Aldera Chisholm

**It's not a bad job, but I hate the hours: A Farcus Collection**

(Andrews & McMeel)

by David Waisglass and Gordon Coulthart

After only two years in syndication, *Farcus* is being read in over 250 newspapers. This cartoon series is aimed at the business world, and has managed to poke fun at almost everything from four unions to dentistry. Favourite targets include dairy farming, affirmative action, gal-slaves, and Santa Claus.

The individual cartoons range from mildly funny to outrageous. One of the best features Santa Claus at the auditor's: "You've away sixty billion toys and didn't get one receipt!" Another that struck me as poignant featured two very aged men, one of whom was sending a letter. "Hey, only three more months and my student loan will be paid off!"

In case you haven't guessed, I liked the book. My family enjoyed it as well, and I had a fight with my sister to get it away from her. If you need a good laugh, look for this Farcus collection.

—Marko Peric