

Travelling salesman, again

by ROD CURRIE
Canadian Press

Aritha van Herk's new novel is a sort of literary retread of all those raunchy old jokes about travelling salesmen, but with an important twist.

Her salesman is a woman. And what a woman Arachne Manteia is — amoral, irreverent, daring and a seducer of men, often in the same way that the fast-talking salesman of those locker-room jokes was a threat to the farmer's daughter.

One of Arachne's idiosyncracies is that although she sells ladies' underwear, plying up and down the towns and villages of the Prairies with her titillating merchandise, she doesn't wear underwear herself.

For a start, she isn't a "lady." And, anyway, she doesn't like anything that confines or clings, interfering with her freedom of movement or spirit.

No Fixed Address, subtitled An Amorous Journey, is full of such symbolism and irony. One of the great ironies is that the only real man-woman relationship of Arachne's life is with Thomas, an elegant, cultured man of good background — everything Arachne isn't — who holds on to her by giving

(Watch out, she's a terror!)

her her freedom, no strings attached.

What a man Thomas is. Aware of her indiscretions and infidelities, he nevertheless lets her fly, waiting on the sidelines while she plays out her act. In another reversal of roles, he does the cooking, shopping and housekeeping, sort of tending the home fires for the times when, occasionally, she returns.

He's a Calgary cartographer, a maker of beautiful maps, and the novel has a lot of symbolism about being lost, taking the wrong road, seeking a destination.

Van Herk, an associate professor of English and creative writing at the University of Calgary, is widely published in Canada and abroad. She's a feminist, married to an exploration geologist, who won the \$50,000 Seal First Novel Award in 1978 with Judith, the story of a young woman pig-farmer. The Tent Peg, her second novel, was about the harrowing experiences of another free-spirited woman who disguises herself as a man and gets a job as cook on a geological expedition.

In No Fixed Address, Arachne meets Thomas — actually he's sort of a pickup — when he's the only midnight passenger on a city bus she's driving in Vancouver.

There's a funny scene when Thomas takes her home to meet Mom and the family. He'd waited until Arachne got a new job before telling his mother that he was having a "relationship."

As van Herk puts it: "Those are the kinds of words his family understands: relationship, lifestyle, recreation, career, situation. Arachne would say: shackled up, life, fun, job, mess."

Under Thomas' influence, Arachne acquires a slightly calmer personality that fits her for a sales job with Ladies' Comfort, flogging underwear as she criss-crosses the Prairies in her magnificent antique Mercedes.

But she feels like an imposter in the new middle-class mould. Underneath she remains bold, larcenous, selfish and tough, a woman who is foolishly daring but who can handle herself in just about any dangerous situation.

She's probably also a murderer. The reader is never quite sure, because Arachne simply steps over the bodies of the men she fells at various points in the story, not knowing herself whether she has left them dead or alive.

Much of the story is told through Arachne's conversations with Thomas, the only woman in Arachne's life and the kind of friend who can call her names and get away with it.

Arachne's the sort of woman who stalks men and attracts them only so she can use their bodies, then goes belting off in her Mercedes to the next town. The reader may need a roadmap to follow this story, hopscotching across the Prairies, to British Columbia, then north to what seems the end of the world.

One grows road-weary at times, with all the description of road conditions and weather as the place names go zipping past. And van Herk occasionally gets carried away by excessive literary devices and metaphors that blur the story. But the tale itself is never boring.

No Fixed Address, by Aritha van Herk. Published by McClelland and Stewart; 320 pages; \$19.95.

RANDOM NOTES from Rolling Stone

NOTABLE NEWS — Among those who auditioned for the new Monkees TV show were the sons of Donovan, Frankie Avalon, Bobby Darin, Kenny Rogers and Mike Nesmith. Sting and Kathleen Turner are filming Giulia and Giulia, a new movie for Italian television. Rhino Records has reissued John Cougar hard-to-find first two albums, Chestnut Street Incident and The Kid Inside. Two members of Bad Company, Mick Ralphs and Simon Kirke are reuniting. Foreigner's Mick Jones is producing their album. The tentative title for the upcoming Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' studio LP is Let Me Up — I've Had Enough. Rickie Lee Jones has recorded Love Is the Light Inside your Heart for the animated film The New Adventures of Pinocchio. Heart's Nancy Wilson has married film producer and former Rolling Stones writer Cameron Crowe. Former MTV VJ Nina Blackwood will resurface on Solid Gold this fall — as a reporter, not one of the dancers. On July 28th, Keith Richards and Patti Hansen became the parents of a 9 lb. 12-oz. daughter, Alexandra Nicole.

MAGIC SHOW — Elvis Costello has a hare-raising cameo as a magician in a bleak but funny British film, No Surrender. Costello took the role at the behest of screenwriter Alan Bleasdale. "He noticed my innate clumsiness," says Elvis. "I had to

learn to do tricks in a very inept way." Elvis still has some musical tricks up his sleeve. This fall he'll tour the States with a show called Costello Sings Again. The concerts will vary from night to night with Elvis backed sometimes by the King of America and sometimes by the Attractions (who've reunited with Elvis on the upcoming Blood and Chocolate LP). And some shows will feature the Spectacular Spinning Songbook, a 40-song roulette wheel that audience members will spin during a request segment. With Costello's repertoire, every bet should be a winner.

NO OLD FOGERTY — "It's one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life, says John Fogerty of Eye of the Zombie, his second comeback LP. "I wrote literally hundreds of different ideas before I came up with the stuff for this record. I'm at that stage now where I'm ready to flop across the finish line." But the fans waiting there may be surprised. "This record's definitely not Centerfield," he says. "It's more reflective of music since Creedence. Let me tell you, in the last four months I became quite a whiz-bang, conquering keyboards, then Macintosh and all that stuff." As reported last month, John will tour with the "world-class band" he assembled for "Zombie."

'Meathead' behind the camera

by GARY STERN

NEW YORK (Reuter) — When no director would hire Rob Reiner as an actor, because as far as they were concerned he was just television's Meathead, he decided to become a director himself.

Reiner realized he would be known eternally as Mike (Meathead) Stivic, the liberal-minded son-in-law who tangled with near-dertal Archie Bunker on All in the Family.

"I can't act on television or film," said Reiner. "Who's going to hire me? Hiring me would destroy the reality of the films you're going to create."

"If I ever win the Nobel Prize, the headline will read 'Meathead Wins Nobel Prize.'"

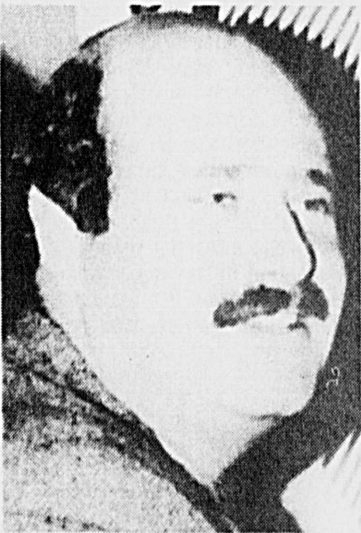
Reiner's third film directorial effort, Stand By Me, opened to excellent reviews in August.

His first film, This Is Spinal Tap, a parody of a rock group, garnered positive reviews and turned a profit. His second, The Sure Thing, was a coming-of-age romance between two college students that also received good reviews.

Reiner says directing was a natural outgrowth of his character.

"When I'm on stage, I'm aware of what's going on with everybody, not just myself. That's not good for an actor; it's better to be involved with what you're doing."

But directing enables him to tap all of his talents as a writer, his



ROB REINER

acting background and musical expertise.

He sees Stand By Me, a film based on a Stephen King short story entitled The Body, as his most personal film to date.

The story revolves around four 12-year-old boys, all played by unknown actors, who embark on a journey to find a boy who has been lost in the woods and who the boys learn has died from being hit by a train. The boys' motives are inno-

cent enough, hoping to present the body to the police and be interviewed by the local paper.

The journey, Reiner says, leads to self-discovery by all four boys, especially Gordie, whom the film zeroes in on.

Reiner infused his personality and life on to Gordie's character.

Gordie says he was never understood by his father and therefore felt worthless. But through the support and encouragement of his three friends, he began to accept himself and feel good about himself.

For Rob Reiner, growing up the son of successful actor-director-writer Carl Reiner wasn't easy. His father, Reiner once noted, possessed everything that society deemed important — success, recognition, a good home, a happy marriage and was well-liked by everyone.

Following in his father's footsteps was no easy task. In Stand By Me, it's peer approval and friends' support that validate and enhance Gordie's life, not his relationship with his father who disapproves of him.

"I felt all those things growing up as a child," Reiner reveals.

"I always felt that my father

couldn't quite see me. He loves me — there's no question about that — but I don't think he quite understood what it is I'm about."

He says his father's lack of approval and understanding undermined his confidence, and it is only now, at age 39, that he is beginning to accept himself and feel like a valuable person unto himself and separate from his father.

While Reiner no longer plays Meathead, he still retains the character's heartfelt liberalism. For example, it does not take much to get Reiner to rant about such profitable Hollywood films as Rambo and Police Academy.

He says he wants to make films that "touch people, move them, make them laugh, cry or think, and those things that can't be measured in terms of dollars because they are life-affirming."

Reiner is currently working on his next film, The Princess Bride, based on William Goldman's novel and screenplay, a movie he describes as a "swashbuckling adventure-mystery" about love conquering all. Set to star are Billy Crystal, Mandy Patinkin and Christopher Guest.

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Opera star receives Mexican award

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Opera star Placido Domingo has been awarded Mexico's highest honor, the Order of the Aztec Eagle, for his work in helping victims of last year's earthquake.

Domingo was presented the award at a ceremony attended by President Miguel de la Madrid and Foreign Minister Bernardo Sepulveda.

"Placido Domingo has demonstrated to be an extraordinary friend of Mexico," Sepulveda said.

Domingo is a Spanish citizen but grew up in Mexico. Within hours of the quake, he was in Mexico City at the site of an apartment building collapse where four of his relatives died.

Domingo has been performing in benefits for earthquake victims and said he has raised \$2 million US. He said he plans a new tour of benefit concerts he hopes will raise another \$5 million.

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