

**Ana Olos. *'Twas Nice to Meet Findley Angry*. Baia Mare: Editura Universităţii de Nord, 2004, 227 pages. ISBN 973-8133-74-2.**

When Timothy Findley died in 2002, the world of Canadian letters lost one of its most original voices. Though a text by Findley can be identified almost immediately by a host of stylistic markers – the chopped up yet highly cadenced prose, the haunting, recurrent visual metaphors, the decidedly oral quality of the prose – the content always surprises, for Findley was unusual (in particular for a Canadian writer) in the risks he took. With each of his works it is as though Findley is starting afresh: historical novel, detective fiction, postmodernist science fiction, magic realist fantasy – the list could go on. These texts are both densely allusive – to place, to history, to other texts – and highly personal. It is this peculiar mixture that is captured with remarkable success in this book by Ana Olos, a professor at the University of the North in Baia Mare, Romania.

In fact, this book by Prof. Olos is, in its way, as innovative and unusual as a text by Findley. The first half is a series of personal reminiscences and ruminations – on her first encounter with Findley at a seminar on cultural studies in Stuttgart in 1995, on his lectures on that occasion, on the people and places experienced on her first visit to Canada on a Canadian government grant, on her deepening understanding of Canada and the role of Findley in this, on her growing personal friendship with Findley and his partner, William Whitehead (who contributes a moving Introduction to the book). The second half is a series of analyses of four of Findley's novels – *Headhunter*, *Famous Last Words*, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and *Pilgrim* – as well as of his last, and undoubtedly most successful, play, *Elizabeth Rex*. The book is a revised edition of an earlier publication on Findley, itself an expanded version of yet an earlier book, and so the product of long thought. It was written after Findley's death: the comments on the particular works reveal both a familiarity with Findley's other works as individual texts and an awareness of their place in his oeuvre as a whole.

The great strength of the first half of the book is Prof. Olos's openness to new experiences, both of people and of places, her sensitivity in reacting to them, and her honesty in reporting her own personal feelings and impressions. She titles this part of the work "Narrative Approach"; it is both a narrative of her unfolding familiarity with Canada, Findley and his works, as well as an expertly sustained variant on the personal essay. In the second half, "Analytical Approaches", she draws on her long experience in the field of comparative literature to reveal the richness of Findley's imagination and the cultural density of his works. In addition, and equally important, she reveals the profound moral sense that underlies his texts, the anger and the pity that make them so moving. In both parts of the book, she maintains a delicate balancing act between committed participant and questioning, analytic observer.

In her foreword, Prof. Olos refers to her ongoing "dialogue" with Findley the writer. This single and simple word captures very well the strength of the book: as in any good dialogue, there is no wish to impose a preconceived view, but rather the continuous attempt to understand what the other is saying, and what its relevance might be. This makes for a very unusual academic work and one that

makes it clear – as so many current academic texts fail to do – why literature matters.

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