

'Two Weeks' is just too weak

AT FIRST GLANCE, "Two Weeks in the Forties," a novel by Grosse Pointe T.R. Peters Sr. (Xpressway Publishing, \$9.95 softbound), looks like it could be the definitive Detroit novel — indeed, the novel of the century, if the anonymous praise-bearers have their way.

The cover, bearing an evocative black and white photo of the Detroit skyline in the 1940s, also bears a seal proclaiming an "International Literary Award." The words "Stunning" and "Powerful . . . Unforgettable!" are in quotes at the top of the cover — and at the bottom: "One of the best novels ever to come out of Detroit!"

A work of enormous vitality. One of the best adolescent portraits yet, an unnamed New York publisher says.

Sheer power and intensity with characters who are uncannily realistic, the mysterious International Literary award-givers say.

"Remarkable evocations of the '40s immortals Jack Kerouac, Charles (Yardbird) Parker, Horace Dodge Jr. and Father Solanus Casey appear in this work," Editorial Review says.

The press release says this is a wonderful, original, highly entertaining work that should cause a minor sensation, especially in the Detroit and Kalamazoo areas.

And here I am feeling, well, dumb because I just don't see it.

"TWO WEEKS" is the joining of an earlier published novel and its sequel.

In Part One, it is 1943 and the protagonist, Tom Webber, is a 14-year-old student in a Catholic military academy near Kalamazoo. This section covers one week in Tom's life — the week during which his father leaves for overseas and Tom the troublemaker is nearly expelled.

Tom, the typical randy adolescent, is in lust with Theresa Miller ("Theresa Miller was a frustrating, exciting feeling"), a student at a nearby Catholic girls school, but must be content with a few stolen kisses before they're separated.

We learn that Tom, the music lover, has eclectic tastes (Debussy, Ra-



book break
Mona Grigg

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vel, Beethoven, Bartok, Gershwin, contemporary jazz).

He spends a lot of time in the office with the priest and the nuns, who spend a lot of time telling him what a great little philosopher he is — reminding him (as though he would allow himself to forget) how intellectually superior he is — but warning him that with his attitude . . .

In the second section, the sequel, Tom is now 17 and living upstairs of the St. Vincent de Paul warehouse with Solanus as his mentor.

Tom is still randy, surrounded as he is by luscious girls threatening to burst out of their buttons. He is also the local football hero. But poor Tom — he is the hero nobody understands.

"DESPITE A wonderful tender feeling he had for Oleatha (the black girl he eventually seduces), his official girlfriend was Mary David, statuesque, awesomely endowed, with beautiful black hair and bangs and fully committed to Tom as boyfriend, even though she, as middle-class and traditional as possible, really did not accept him for what he was, a brash, gifted, teenage philosopher and self-styled individualist."

And, "School was an endless bore for Tom . . . He wondered how he could have been considered so bad at Gull when he had lived the life of a

cadet studying for the priesthood the entire eight years. Oh, well, he thought, some people are just destined to be perceived as bad because they think for themselves and are independent of the stupidities of life."

Tom is a snob, a prig — he is the cadet here. Tom is not the literary counterpart to Holden Caulfield or Huck Finn or David Copperfield or Studs Lonigan, as Xpressway Publishing suggests. If there is a dimension less than one, Tom Webber is it.

He might have been more if T.R. Peters Sr., an English instructor, hadn't followed the "Tell, don't show path" of least resistance: "Tom felt queasy." "It was quite dark out."

"He sort of woke up." "It had been determined that he would not have fit that mold in any way . . ."

There is nothing to feel, because there is nobody there. The book is hampered, too, by curious inconsistencies.

The viewpoint, for example, is Tom's — though we learn of future events Tom couldn't possibly know about. "He would be placed in the trust of the Capuchin monks . . ."

In the latter chapters, the tense suddenly switches from past to present and back again, continuing at such a dizzying pace that both tenses eventually collide in a single sentence.

AND — OH, for an editor! Debussy's "Afternoon of a Faun," mentioned several times, suddenly becomes "Afternoon of a Faun," immediately conjuring up images for Tom of a forest clearing and a single fawn prancing about in the sunlight . . .

The word "monastery" is

misspelled throughout. Common words are misused ("He had a beautiful record case filled with castoff classics and some jazz that he managed to squander with his own money . . ."), and, with all the lessons we were forced to sit through — about life, about music, about intellectual superiority — we want to shout "Aha!" when we read, "He loved Black Cows especially, which were made with foaming Vernor's Ginger Ale and vanilla ice cream." Any Detroiters know that's a Boston Cooler. Seems to me the author should have spent more time developing the innards of this book, and less time culling faint or imaginary praise. Then he might have had something here.

"THE POLISH Trivia Book" (Avenue Publishing Company, softbound, \$5.95) comes from John M. Vranlak, a Farmington Hills resident and a statistical engineer at Ford.

Putting his statistical training and his ethnic background to work, Vranlak came up with a workable format for both the casual reader and trivia buffs (questions on the left page, answers on the right, with an alphabetical index).

Vranlak wanted his book to appeal to everyone, since his real purpose, he says, is to covertly educate the reader about good things Polish.

So in it you will find mention of actors, musicians, writers, scientists and sports figures, as well as historical events and Polish place names (including Hamtramck, of course — named after a Revolutionary War hero).

OK, so name Archie Bunker's son-in-law. (Michael Stivic.)

The polka is as popular in Poland as in the United States. (False.)

The Poles introduced plaited — — — — — to American women. (Toenails.)

But I don't want to give it all away. In the "Polish Trivia Book" you'll find authors of Polish descent (including Marilyn French), and correct pronunciation for favorite foods. Czarnina (CHAR-nee-nah), or blood soup, is a favorite, right?

You'll also learn what certain surnames mean, and why the tag "ski" came to be added to so many Polish names.

Available by mail order through Avenue Publishing, 11473 Solecki, Suite 1, Hamtramck 48212, \$5.95 plus \$1 shipping and handling. Or pick it up at Little Professor-on-the-Park in Plymouth. Check also at Borders in Birmingham.



O'Keeffe tribute

The J. Parker Copley Dance Co., Ann Arbor's professional, award-winning modern dance company, will present "Portrait of an Artist: O'Keeffe" at the Power Center for the Performing Arts Tuesday, July 5. Reserved seats are \$12.50, \$10.50 and \$8.50 (students and seniors) and are available at all Ticketmaster locations.



condo queries

Robert M. Meisner

Q. As a member of our board, I am wondering if this radon gas question has any effect on our condominium and, in particular, on the responsibilities of the association board.

A. To the extent that the radon gas permeates from a common element which includes the land, the association may have a responsibility with respect to this particular problem. This issue has not been considered by condominium scholars and to the best of this writer's knowledge, it has not been litigated. However, the board of directors should consult with its legal counsel as to the potential liability of the association in regard to this issue. Like the asbestos question, radon gas may be the source of substantial litigation in the 1990s.

Q. We live in a small condominium project, and the president of the association has been in office for over nine years. While the board of directors is comprised of seven individuals, the president, because of his architectural background, thinks he knows all the answers to all the questions being posed before the board and elicits assistance from members of the association gratuitously, including legal help to deal

with problems at the condo. What, if anything, can be done about this situation?

A. The mere fact that the president of the association is an architect and has been in office nine years does not necessarily make him a good or bad officer and/or director; however, it does suggest that there may be a vacuum of authority on the part of the other board members in discharging their legal responsibilities by way of assuming leadership roles.

If, in fact, the president is abusing his prerogatives the other board members had better wake up to that fact and remove him from office. Perhaps the other members of the association should be apprised of your concern, particularly with respect to utilizing people at the condominium to provide advice of whatever nature or kind.

Generally speaking, members of the association who provide advice gratuitously may have a vested interest regarding the issues involved and it is bad practice to utilize people who live or own units in the condominium to provide advice or assistance to the board of directors on legal, accounting and other consulting matters.

Artist sells paintings

Two acrylic-collage paintings by Linda Zalla, West Bloomfield were selected to be hung in Tam-O-Shanter Country Club.

Her paintings are in the permanent collections of the Livonia City Hall, Gemco Corp., the Consortium for Human Development, American Motors and Sheraton Oaks Hotel.

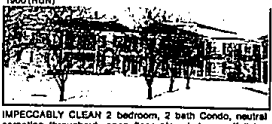
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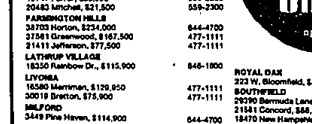
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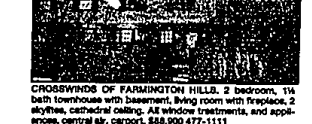
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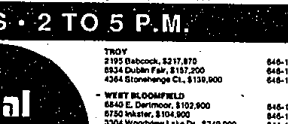
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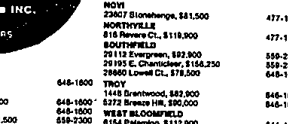
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