

BOOKS

Tobias Wolff stories are powerful

"The Night in Question," by Tobias Wolff (Alfred A. Knopf, \$23, 206 pp.)



VICTORIA DIAZ

I met Tobias Wolff once. A tall, graying individual with a neatly clipped moustache, he wore a brown, tweed jacket complete with leather patches at the elbows. He had what I remember as a voice that made me think of the word "mellifluous." He seemed the very picture of a competent, middle-aged actor, costumed to play the part of a lauded writer and English professor at a rather large American university. As all his readers know, Tobias Wolff ("This Boy's Life") is not an actor. He is, however, a middle-aged, critically acclaimed writer who also happens to be an English professor at Syracuse University in New York. And as this remarkable collection of short stories reveals, he can bring new importance to the phrase "imaging-making."

These 15 contemporary tales

touch on other matters too: moral timidity, paternal obligation, the power of words, free will, schemes, dreams - weighty stuff. But the flavor of the stories (some of which first appeared in such magazines as The New Yorker, Esquire and Harper's) is never ponderous. Before anything else and like fine stories everywhere and always, they are, each one, utterly engaging, much of their fascination lying within Wolff's clear, accessible and finely drawn "nightless" characters, for whom, paradoxically, image and appearance rule the day.

In the opening story, "Mortals," a rather superficial young newspaper reporter loses his job for the best of reasons: He has not checked the "facts" and consequently writes a story that only appeared to be true. Mark Twain might have titled this story, "Rumors of My Death Have Been Greatly Exaggerated."

Three of the stories - "The Other Miller," "Smorgasbord" and "Firelight" - were selected for inclusion in the Best Ameri-

can Short Stories series. "The Other Miller" opens as one bone-weary soldier is excused from "war games," to be told that his mother has died. "No problem," he says as he is led away from the mock battlefield, believing it's all a case of mistaken identity, but glad for relief from the rain, the mud, a sickening toothache and his nagging stomach ulcers.

"Smorgasbord" focuses on two rather pathetic prep school boys. It's March on campus, a free weekend, and most students are elsewhere, leaving behind "foreigners and scholarship students" and a few other untouchables. The narrator and the out-of-town Crookes, are invited out to dinner by one classmate's exotic stepmother, Linda. What ensues makes for a striking story about innocence and appetites.

In "Firelight," a boy goes home-hunting with his glamorous (but poor) mother on a chilly autumn afternoon. Seduced by a cozy domestic scene and an inviting fireplace, he discovers the place of his dreams and comes to a kind of parting-of-the-ways with his

mother. This marvelous, many-layered story reveals perhaps more vividly than any other in this collection Wolff's insight into the heart of youth, and our lifelong need for a feeling of belonging and a place we truly can feel at home.

The title story is a story within a story in which a rather self-centered, unstable man named Frank delivers to his loving sister, Frances, the sermon he had heard that morning in church. Within the sermon is a true tale about a man who has sacrificed his only son for the lives of a large number of people.

Frances is appalled by the story and its moral implications, while her brother (for whom she has willingly sacrificed much of her own life) somehow finds comfort in it. (Wolff's word-picture here of a monstrous engine room at a drawbridge station is enough to make you break out into a sweat.)

All of the insightful works in this coherent, well-balanced collection provoke thought, and this one perhaps most of all. As Wolff proves throughout, a small number of words can carry much weight.

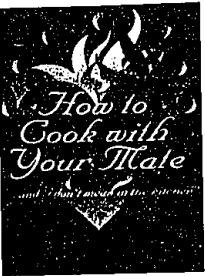
BOOK STORE HAPPENINGS

Bookstore Happenings features various events at bookstores in the suburbs and surrounding metro Detroit area. Send news leads to Kelly Wygonik, Arts & Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSELLERS (BLOOMFIELD HILLS)
Children's storytime featuring Valentine making, the celebrating of African-American History Month, and the birthdays of Susan B. Anthony and Copernicus, 11 a.m. Saturdays, 7 p.m. Wednesdays, at the store, 5875 Telegraph, Bloomfield Hills. (810) 540-4209

BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSELLERS (WEST BLOOMFIELD)
Farmington Hills-based author Ruth Langan will debut her latest Harlequin Historical romance work "Judo" 1:30-2:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 14; Professor Arthur Wiggins, head of the department of physical sciences at Oakland Community College, and co-author of "The Five Biggest Ideas in Science" will explain the basics of the five major scientific disciplines and how they relate to each other, 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 16; Rabbi Steven Weil discusses "Jewish Spouses: Best of Friends, Best of Lovers" in the second of 12 appearances by Jewish scholars sponsored by the Agency for Jewish Education, 7-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 18; Barnes and Noble hosts the third annual Muscular Dystrophy Lock-up benefiting the West Bloomfield District, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 19; Carolyn Caldwell, chairwoman of the Department of Communications Arts at St. Mary's College in Orchard Lake, discusses "Gender and the Wonderful World of Disney," 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 20; at the store, 6800 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield, (810) 636-6804. Also, Valerie Greenberg discusses "Long Term Care" during the Senior Men's Club Breakfast Club sponsored by West Bloomfield Department of Parks and Recreation, 10:30 a.m.-noon Thursday, Feb. 20, \$3.50, \$4 non-residents. For reservations, call (810) 738-2500

BORDERS BOOKS AND MUSIC (DEARBORN)
Author Michael Franck discusses and signs his book "Elmwood Endures," about Elmwood Cemetery, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 13; Cordury joins Story Circle, 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 15; Kathleen Kryza leads a mini-romance seminar, 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 15; Intermediate fiction book discussion group for



Featured author: Kathleen Kryza discusses and signs "How to Cook With Your Mate... And I Don't Mean in the Kitchen!" 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 13 at Borders Books and Music in Farmington Hills.

children ages 7-11 reads "The Phantom Tollbooth" by Norman Juster; Students from Allen Park Middle School perform "The Fairy Tale Known as Peter Pan," 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 16; Open mic poetry night featuring local poet Regina Reid, 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 17; Author Elaine Greenfield and illustrator Jan Spivey Gilchrist read from and sign copies of their book "For the Love of the Game: Michael Jordan and Me," 10 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 18; Sci-fi fantasy book discussion group reads "Paris in the 20th Century" by Jules Verne, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 18; Story Circle features "Very Hungry Caterpillar," 10 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 19; "Here's Looking at You" series features a seminar on hair care by Kevin Holmsbeck, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 20; Issues in Parenting seminar focuses on "Raising Moral Children," 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 20, at the store, 5801 Mercury Dr., Dearborn. (313) 271-4441

BORDERS BOOKS AND MUSIC (FARMINGTON HILLS)
Kathleen Kryza discusses and signs "How to Cook With Your Mate... And I Don't Mean in the Kitchen!" 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 13; A naturalist from the Independence Oaks Nature Center of Oakland County teaches kids about insects, 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 15; X-Philes Forum, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 18; **WALDENBOOKS (WATERFORD)**
Troy author Stephanie Mellen signs copies of her book "The Crystal Rabbit," 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 14, Waldenbooks in Summit Place Mall, Waterford. (810) 682-722

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Michigan writer tells about water's wonder
"The Bird in the Waterfall: A Natural History of Oceans, Rivers and Lakes," by Jerry Dennis and illustrator Glenn Wolff (Harper Collins, \$26)
BY HUGH GALLAGHER STAFF WRITER
Water is Michigan's great resource and it's defining quality. We are blessed by sharing four of the five Great Lakes and have hundreds of inland lakes, rivers and streams. Water is an essential element of life, indeed the source of life.
Jerry Dennis is a Michigan naturalist who writes in a clear, simple prose, highlighted by rich, human anecdotes. He makes the complexities of science easy to understand.
"The Bird in the Waterfall" is a detailed essay on all the different facets of water - what it is, where it comes from, what kind of life it supports directly and indirectly. The book covers everything from the mighty oceans to wildlife rich wet lands, from the cycle of water to the life of a sea turtle.
Dennis combines his story-rich narration with an impassioned belief in ecology and argues persuasively for water preservation programs on local, state, national and international levels.
In addition to being interesting and well-written, "The Bird in the Waterfall" is a strikingly attractive book. Glenn Wolff's black and white illustrations recall the fine engravings of 19th century books. They provide clear illustration for Dennis' text but also show a strong eye for design and a sense of humor.
This is a good introduction for young readers on an important subject and a good source of information and entertainment for older readers as well.

JAMES W. WILLIAMS, Attorney, 1400 N. Woodward, Ste. 100, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48305
STATE OF MICHIGAN, PROBATE COURT, COUNTY OF OAKLAND, No. 92-224-062-12
CLAIMS NOTICE
INDEPENDENT PROBATE
Estate of MICHAEL PINTO, Deceased.
TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:
Your interest in the estate may be barred or affected by the following:
The decedent, Michael Pinto whose last known address was Bloomfield Hills, MI, died October 16, 1992.
An instrument dated November 14, 1990 has been admitted as the will of the decedent.
Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to the independent personal representative, MABA DETHLEFS, 1188 Bannockburn Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304, or both the independent personal representative and the Oakland County Probate Court, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, Michigan, within four months of the date of publication of this notice.
Notice is further given that the estate will be thereafter assigned and distributed to the persons entitled to it.
Attorney: James W. Williams (P-223252), 1400 N. Woodward, Ste. 100, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48305. Telephone No. (810) 645-5000
Newspaper: Observer & Eccentric
Publication: February 9, 1997

JAMES W. WILLIAMS, Attorney, 1400 N. Woodward, Ste. 100, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48305
STATE OF MICHIGAN, PROBATE COURT, COUNTY OF OAKLAND, No. 97-477-8616
CLAIMS NOTICE
INDEPENDENT PROBATE
Estate of HADESEN C. YAKAN, a/k/a HADESEN CHADABAY, YAKAN, a/k/a HADESEN CHADABAY, YAKAN, Deceased.
TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:
Your interest in the estate may be barred or affected by the following:
The decedent, HADESEN C. YAKAN, whose last known address was 3390 Lehigh Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI, died November 28, 1996.
An instrument dated 9-23-91 has been admitted as the will of the decedent.
Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to the independent personal representative, MABA DETHLEFS, 1188 Bannockburn Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304, or both the independent personal representative and the Oakland County Probate Court, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, Michigan, within four months of the date of publication of this notice.
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