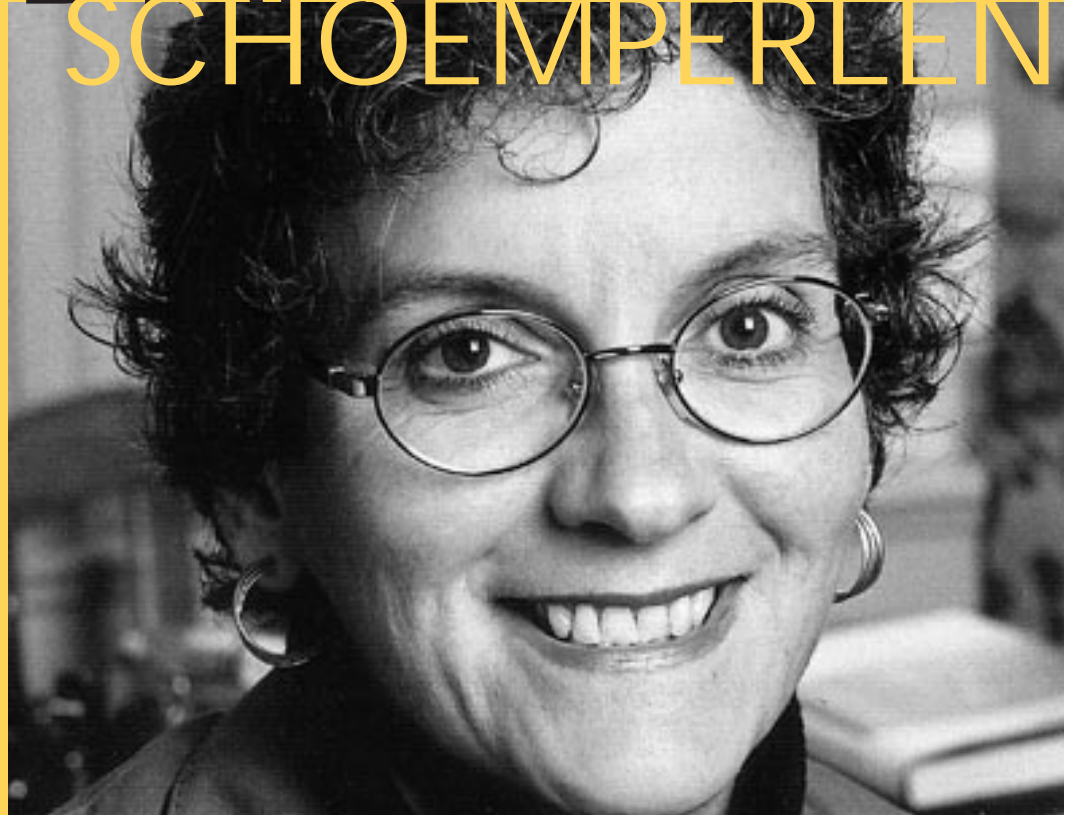


In the Language of Love

DIANE SCHOEMPERLEN



diane schoemperlen

WINNER OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARD FOR FICTION

Table Dark Music Sickness Men Deep
Soft Eating Mountain House Black
Mutton Comfort Land Short Fruit
Butterfly Smooth Command Chair Sweet
Whistle Woman Gold Slow
Wish River White Beautiful Window
Rough Citizen Fish Spider Needle Red
Sleep Anger In the Language Carpet
Girl High Worsening of Love Sour Earth
Trouble Soldier Cabbage Hard Eagle
Stomach Stern Lamp Dream Yellow
Bread Justice Boy Light Health Bible
Memory Sheep Bath A novel Cottage
Swift Blue in 100 chapters Hungry Priest
Ocean Head Grove Long Religion
Whisky Child Butter Hammer Thirsty
City Square Butler Doctor Loud Thief
Lion Joy *Serenity* *Shada* Bed Heavy
Tobacco Baby Moon Scissors Quiet



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Excerpts from “Eva Tihanyi speaks with Diane Schoemperlen” taken from an April 1999 *Books in Canada* interview.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Short Stories

Double Exposures (Coach House, 1984)

Frogs and Other Stories (Quarry, 1986)

The Man of My Dreams (Macmillan, 1990)

Hockey Night in Canada and Other Stories (Quarry, 1991)

Forms of Devotion

0-00-648155-8; \$18.00 tpb, March 1999

HarperCollins/Publishers paperback edition, A Phyllis Bruce Book

Novels

In the Language of Love: A Novel in 100 Chapters

0-00-648544-8; \$18.95 tpb, March 2000

HarperPerennia/Canada paperback edition, A Phyllis Bruce Book

Our Lady of the Lost and Found

0-00-225510-3; \$32.00 cl, March 2001

HarperFlamingo/Canada hardcover edition, A Phyllis Bruce Book

In the Language of Love has also been published in the United States, Sweden, and Germany, and has been produced as a stage play by Threshold Theatre in Kingston and Toronto.

AWARDS

Frogs and Other Stories won the Writers' Guild of Alberta Award for Short Fiction.

The Man of My Dreams was shortlisted for both the Governor General's Award and the Trillium Award.

In the Language of Love was shortlisted for the *Books in Canada*/W.H. Smith First Novel Award.

Forms of Devotion won the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1998.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Schoemperlen was born, raised, and educated in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Although not from a family of “book people,” Diane has always had a deep devotion to books. She dreamed of becoming a writer from an early age. As a child, she would write little stories based on the Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden series. As Diane matured, so did her writing; she studied creative writing from childhood throughout her university years. After graduating from Lakehead University in 1976, she spent the summer at the Banff Centre studying with such well-known writers as W.O. Mitchell, Eli Mandel, Sylvia Fraser, and Alice Munro. She then moved to Canmore, Alberta. Although she supported herself at various times by working as a bank teller, newspaper reporter, typesetter, and avalanche researcher, she was always writing. She soon began publishing poetry and stories in such literary magazines as *Descant*, *The Malahat Review*, *Event*, *Quarry*, and *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. In 1983 she was featured in *Coming Attractions* as a notable new writing talent.

In 1984, her first book, *Double Exposures*, established her trademark wit and ironic style that for all its humour is sharply perceptive and deeply moving. In 1986, her second book, *Frogs and Other Stories*, won the Writers’ Guild of Alberta Award for Excellence. In 1987 *Hockey Night in Canada* moved Schoemperlen firmly into the ranks of Canada’s best short story writers. As a highly original, innovative writer with a particular fascination for the ways we organize our lives, her reputation was further heightened in 1990 by the publication of her story collection *The Man of My Dreams*. This collection was shortlisted for the Governor General’s Award and the Trillium Award.

In 1986, Schoemperlen moved from Canmore to Kingston, Ontario, with her son, Alexander, where they still live. She has taught scores of emerging writers at St. Lawrence College, the Kingston School of Writing, and in other writing programs. Her first novel, *In the Language of Love*, was published in 1994. Shortlisted for the *Books in Canada*/W.H. Smith First Novel Award, *In the Language of Love* has also been published in the United States, Sweden, and Germany, and has been produced as a stage play by Threshold Theatre in Kingston and Toronto.

In 1998, Schoemperlen’s collection of illustrated stories, *Forms of Devotion*, won the Governor General’s Award for Fiction. Her illustrated stories are an elegant collection in which the subtle interplay of words and images creates a backdrop for her intriguing, fresh, and electric voice. Each story is a creative delight—rich in mischievous wit, irony, and multi-layered meaning.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANE SHOEMPERLEN:

From an April 1999 *Books in Canada* interview with Eva Tihanyi.

Q. Your work has been frequently hailed as innovative, experimental, unconventional. What do you personally consider to be most innovative about what you write?

A. *I suppose it would be my adventures with form and structure. I do like to push the story envelope as far as I can. I find it exciting and challenging and FUN to turn some of the conventions of fiction on their heads and see what happens. Again, I am not always conscious of doing that while I’m doing it but afterwards I can step back and see what I’ve done. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t.*

Q. Because of your experimentation with technique, much of your work seems self-consciously “contrived.” It flaunts its artifice, its “fiction-ness.” Do you consider yourself more of an intellectual than an emotional writer? And how do you react to the term “postmodern” as applied to your writing?

A. *I wouldn’t say I consider myself more an intellectual than an emotional writer. In fact, I think of myself as a very (sometimes overly) emotional person and I think that informs my writing. Perhaps I use rather “intellectual” means to express these emotions. But the emotion always comes first.*

As for the term “postmodern,” it doesn’t bother me a bit although I’m not entirely sure what it means. Doesn’t it apply to all of us who are writing at this time, at the end of the twentieth century, because we are all writing after the moderns? Well, I’m just splitting hairs there. But really, “postmodern” is fine with me, although I realize it isn’t always a compliment!

Q. The word “ironic” is probably the word used most often in connection with your work. Why are you drawn to irony?

A. *I'm afraid I have no logical or rational explanation for that. My fondness for irony is a life-long habit. I think my attraction to irony is something like my attraction to dark-eyed, dark-haired men . . . just one of those things! I am not conscious of looking for irony but it does seem that I see it everywhere.*

Q. You deal a lot with marriage, male-female relationships in general, contemporary urban life, the lot of the contemporary woman. If we agree that all writers are to at least some extent affected by their place and time, what would you say most interests you about ours?

A. *I think that what interests me the most is changing as I grow older. For a long time, my stories did deal mainly with misguided male-female relationships. I've never been married but I have had a number of relationships with men, none of which worked out very well. I certainly had ample material to work from on that topic! But I think I am more or less written-out about all that now although I'm sure it will continue to reappear in my books, but more likely now as a side issue rather than the over-riding theme. I hope that my work is moving in new directions. In *In the Language of Love*, for instance, I wrote for the first time about being a parent and all the wonders and worries that that involves. As has been pointed out, *Forms of Devotion* looks at things from a more spiritual point of view. I consider it very important that my work keeps growing and changing as I do.*

Q. The use of illustrations in a book of fiction is unusual. What was your purpose in including them in *Forms of Devotion*?

A. *My idea to include illustrations in a book of stories actually grew out of my previous book, the novel *In the Language of Love*, in which the main character is a collage artist. In researching collage so that I could write about it more knowledgeably, I found myself becoming more and more interested in the whole art form. I have always been something of a frustrated visual artist. Back in high school I was drawn to the visual arts as much as I was to writing. But I found I could not paint or draw very well and although I seemed to have infinite patience for tinkering*

with words, I could not muster the same dedication to visual art. If I couldn't make an image look the way I wanted it to, I just got frustrated and gave up. But collages are fun. I started collecting volumes of copyright-free illustrations and making collages of my own from them. I filled up my living room walls, gave some to friends, and even sold a couple . . .

Purpose? To make a beautiful book, to add a new element to my writing, to please the reader's eye, to exercise my creative impulses in a new direction. The pictures function in relation to the text in various ways. In a couple of stories they are mostly decorative, but in most cases they add a new dimension and hopefully a new level of meaning to the text. I have tried to play the contemporary stories off the historical illustrations in different ways.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE



While conducting research of a different nature at the local library, Schoemperlen happened to look into a psychology textbook and came upon a list of the 100 words of the Standard Word Association Test. In using this test, the psychiatrist would say a word and then the patient would respond immediately with whatever word came to mind. The use of this test, known as the WAT, was pioneered in 1879 by the British scientist Francis Galton, who tested only himself. It then came under the influence of the psychoanalytic movement, and in 1910 Carl Jung first used word association as a clinical test procedure to uncover complexes, neuroses, and other emotional problems in his patients. The first large-scale WAT was performed by G.H. Kent and A.J. Rosanoff in 1910. Their results were published that year as “A study of association in insanity” in *The American Journal of Insanity*. Their method differed from Jung’s in that their stimuli words were neutral rather than emotionally disturbing. Norms were established by giving the WAT to one thousand normal subjects. Then the test results of 247 psychotics were compared to these norms. The difference between the two groups was minimal.

Although the WAT has been used in various forms of testing since then, it has generally proven to be disappointing as a projective technique and diagnostic tool. But it immediately struck Schoemperlen as possessing rich and exciting possibilities for a novel. Having long been fascinated by lists and unusual literary structures, Schoemperlen chose to use the 100 words of the Kent-Rosanoff list as the titles for the 100 chapters of her novel.

Following this structure, the book tells the story of a young woman named Joanna, from her early childhood until the time she becomes a mother herself. The novel moves back and forth through time, exploring Joanna’s artistic and emotional development, particularly her relationships. Joanna examines her past with her parents, Esther and Clarence; her

first lover, Henry, a nice but (as they say in the self-help books) inappropriate man; her second lover, Lewis, an appropriate but married man; her third lover, Gordon, whom she eventually marries, and their young son, Samuel.

Each chapter proceeds from the title word using a free association technique. Some chapters cover all the stages of Joanna’s life, while others are shorter and focus on one period of time in her life. Still others are more like meditations on the various connotations and implications of the title word.

The result is a tour-de-force of wit and word play, drawing profound insights from the gritty reality of everyday life. This novel is an exceptional and remarkably honest uncovering of life’s defining passions.

PRAISE FOR *In the Language of Love*

“Schoemperlen is a smart, confident writer. Her 100 chapters are each bright and polished and as coherent as can be expected when they spring from word associations . . . she draws you in, with those words, Head, Wish, Dream, Scissors, Smooth. Very smooth, very clever, very smart.”
—*The Globe and Mail*

“ . . . a wickedly marvellous novel—wickedly funny, compassionate and, above all, wise. *In the Language of Love* surely confirms Diane Schoemperlen’s reputation as one of the most accomplished and inventive writers of contemporary fiction.”
—Barbara Gowdy, author of *Mister Sandman* and *The White Bone*

“Diane Schoemperlen’s first novel, *In the Language of Love*, is a wonderful read for lovers of language and those who take delight in inventive narrative structure . . . Her writing exhibits an intelligent but playful approach to clichés and word meanings.”
—*The Toronto Star*

“ . . . makes an excellent bedside book, the end of a chapter always reachable at a minute’s notice . . . the author maintains a mistressly detachment and control over the narrative, yet draws the reader into a rich, emotional complexity of the kind that can only be expressed with simplicity.”
— *The Canadian Forum*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1) An important theme of this novel is the selective and associative nature of memory and how we use it as a means of imposing order and meaning on our usually tumultuous lives-in-progress. How does the non-linear structure of the novel help to illuminate this?
- 2) As an adult, Joanna is a collage artist. How does this connect with the structure and the theme of memory?
- 3) The quote on the back cover of Stephen Scobie’s collection of poetry, *Ghosts: A Glossary of the Intertext*, reads:
Every word in the language is haunted. Every word has its ghosts, which it comes back to, and which come back to it. These ghosts are memories, mirrors, and shadows: the traces of allusion and connotation, the echoes of previous usage, the reflections of traditional associations.
This aspect of language as a personal mythology in which even a seemingly simple word may be loaded with layers of meaning is another important theme in this novel. How does the inclusion of dictionary definitions in several chapters serve to emphasize this theme?
- 4) Discuss the various forms of love that are explored in this novel. Which one stands out the most for you?
- 5) Lewis, the married man with whom Joanna has an affair, is an important character in the novel. Do you like or dislike him? How does this relationship change Joanna’s attitude toward romantic love?
- 6) Joanna’s relationship with her father becomes increasingly ambivalent as he grows older. Discuss how their relationship changes over time.
- 7) In this novel, as in her short stories, Schoemperlen makes extensive use of lists. What is the significance of this? Is it successful as a literary technique?
- 8) Schoemperlen is especially fond of including many descriptive details in her work. How do these details help to create atmosphere and develop character?
- 9) Six of the 100 chapters are colours: black, white, red, yellow, blue, and green. These chapters are written in a completely different style than the others. Why did Schoemperlen do this?
- 10) Schoemperlen’s favourite chapter is “45. Trouble.” What is your favourite chapter? Why?