

She is one of Canada's brightest literary stars, having won critics' and readers' hearts with her remarkable debut novel, *Fall on Your Knees*, which became an international bestseller (and a coveted Oprah Book Club selection). Contacted just hours before her departure for a well-earned holiday on the East Coast,

ANN-MARIE MACDONALD

Q: It has been seven years since *Fall on Your Knees* was published. Now that your newest novel, *The Way the Crow Flies*, is out in bookstores everywhere, will your writing continue to be a priority?

A: It's not a question of "Would I be able to find time to write?" After I've finished every big project, the way I comfort and soothe myself is by telling myself I never have to write anything again. But this is very different. It's "Will I be able to convince myself to stop writing now?" Because you know what happens when you start: you have to finish. At least I do. And for me, it's like smoking. If you don't start, you won't have to finish. So don't start writing a book. Kids, don't start!

Q: What was the inspiration for *The Way the Crow Flies*?

A: I can't say that in one word or one line. I

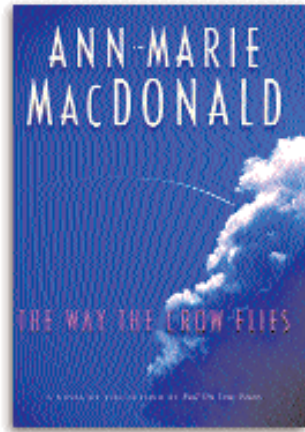
gladly agreed to an interview with **READ Magazine** to discuss her new book, *The Way the Crow Flies*.

our worlds are connected

AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANN-MARIE MACDONALD
BY RANDY CHAN

PHOTO: EDWARD POND





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can say that in 720 pages . . . which I did! But I always begin with images, and in this case I really began with the image of that cornfield and the image of a kid on those PMQs [the housing quarters] on that air force station. It's like a Kodak photo. There was a terrible melancholy and tremendous promise about that picture and I needed to make up a story to explain it. And I was also very driven to make connections between the grown-up and patriarchal world of the early 1960s and the domestic world — of children especially. How those things are supposed to be kept separate and how the adult world supposedly functions for the sake of the chil-

describe in the novel is not dissimilar to what we've just gone through with Iraq. And it's not dissimilar to what we've just gone through with the Challenger exploding, killing the astronauts, and the in-fighting at NASA and the prioritization of a fantasy missile shield in the sky. The continuing militarization of space.

And where is Canada in all of this? Canada is always caught between Britain and the U.S. Most recently we've seen Britain and the U.S. holding hands again, and continuing to hold hands, and though Canada this time opted out of that triad in a way, it's a dynamic that has been going on ever since Canada became a nation. We're the youngest child but we're always caught in between. And that comes with a price—but it also comes with some privileges. We have a privileged perspective. Once I dug into Canada's experience, our political stance in the Cuban missile crisis, it became very interesting because that time in our history really does paint a very articulate picture of where Canada often finds itself: caught between the old Empire, i.e., Britain, and the new, i.e., the U.S. And Canada has this nice, innocent look but in fact our hands are not really clean. How can they be? You can never have completely pure hands. I don't believe in purity anyway, but let's at least be honest about what we've been into.

Q: There are some complex little girls in this novel. Why did you decide to write the story from Madeleine's perspective?

A: That evolved, like everything else does in a book. The points of view that are going to be primary rise up because they are the healthiest stalks in the garden. Certainly Madeleine and Jack are the pair in this story. That's the dual perspective and each of them represent the world I've just sketched: the domestic sphere that was held separate from the political sphere; the grown-up sphere versus the child's sphere; the very masculine sphere from the feminine sphere, and how we keep these worlds

dren's. Anytime anyone ever says they're doing something for the sake of the children, I smell a rat.

And I also don't believe in keeping our worlds apart. I believe our worlds are connected—even across seemingly unbridgeable gulfs. What do the Nazi slave labour camps in WWII have to do with an idyllic post-war neighbourhood? Well, possibly everything. Our everyday lives thread back into the past—they've been paid for somehow.

Q: International controversies like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the harbouring of war criminals and NASA's quest for the moon play an integral part in the story. Were you consciously giving Canada, a country that has a quiet international reputation, an active role in these world events?

A: I'm basically describing what did happen. Canada did have a role. And it was a pretty classic role — the role that we continue to play. That nexus of events that I

apart at our peril. They actually need to communicate and they need to mix it up. Jack and Madeleine just seemed like a really good duo.

There's of course a lot of archetypal power in the father-daughter story too. We tend never to tire of either writing it or reading it. And there's a price to pay for certain kinds of fathers and daughters. There's a great deal of love in the family in this story obviously, and Jack can be seen as a very progressive father, especially when he treats his daughter as though she were a son for example, not pigeon-holing her by making her be a traditional girl (and I'm talking again period-wise—the early 60s)—he's very concerned that his daughter have all the opportunities that his son will have. He's progressive, he's beloved, and in a couple of critical ways, he's terribly wrong.

Everyone grows up and then separates from their parents. In this case a prized daughter has to separate from a cherished father for dire reasons. It's not simple. It's very easy to reject the villains when they have come from the outside. It's a much more complex affair when there's love involved and genuine value.

I read a book about Albert Speer [Hitler's minister of armaments], called *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, and one of the most interesting aspects of that book was how his daughter struggled to continue to understand her love and respect for her father while also despising his crimes.

Q: What do you like most about touring?

A: Usually I get asked about what I like least about touring! What do I like most about touring? I like meeting my readers. I like reading to readers.

Q: Your books are published all over the world. Is there a distinctly Canadian response to your work?

A: I don't know. I'm very interested in the answer to that question. And I don't think I have enough anecdotal evidence. I think clearly Canadians have that extra edge of

identification. They really get some things in my writing. I think there's also something about us as Canadian readers where we feel vindicated to see our point of view front and centre because it's so often marginalized, or it's on page 7 in the bottom left hand corner, if it's there at all.

I think people around the world can identify with our particular Canadian perspective because we live in the shadow of a superpower. On the one hand, the U.S. is our ally. But the whole Iraq thing has again led a lot of people to question their relationship with power, and we have to do that every day all the time—both because we get so much out of our relationship and we're such close friends and neighbours with the U.S. and because it can also be so chilling, depending on who's in charge.

Q: Are there any books that you wish you had written?

A: No, because I'm just so terribly relieved that I didn't have to write them, and that I didn't have to go through the pain and agony of creating them. I just had to enjoy them!

Q: What are your favourite books?

A: Books like *Jane Eyre* and *Huckleberry Finn* are formative books for me. And *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan had a big impact on me many years ago.

What do I like most about touring?
I like meeting my readers. I like reading to readers.

Q: Are there authors writing today whose books you can't wait to read?

A: There are tons! I always hate having to name names because I always leave out everybody. I want to catch up on my Canadian reading. There's a lot of great fiction coming out lately and while I'm writing fiction I'm very hard-pressed to enjoy reading it. I read it too analytically and I'd rather read as a reader.

Ann-Marie signs books at the launch for *The Way the Crow Flies*, September 2003.

PHOTO: JASON CHOW





Ann-Marie meeting fans.
PHOTO: JASON CHOW

I want to read Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. I also want to read Gail Anderson-Dargatz—she’s had two books since her first novel and I’d like to catch up on what she’s been doing. And I’ve always wanted to read *The Wives of Bath* by Susan Swan.

Q: Have you ever considered writing books for children?

A: It has crossed my mind. I wonder what would happen, and where it would go.

Q: What’s next for you?

A: Family. The thing is there’s either too much touring to do or there’s a screenplay in the works for *Fall on Your Knees* or there are other projects of mine that I might return to, projects for theatre. There’s plenty for me to do, but starting a big new work is something that I would like to not do for the next couple of years. I think life will be full enough without starting to follow that string into the labyrinth. I don’t want to miss out on my child. ■

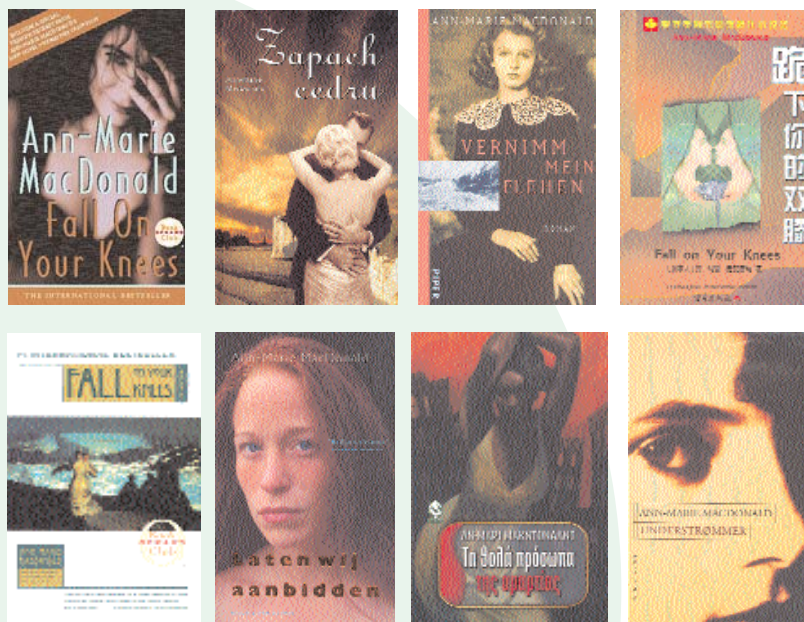
Read an excerpt from *The Way the Crow Flies* at www.bookclubs.ca

COUNTRIES AND THEIR COVERS

Clockwise, starting near right: Canada; Poland; Germany; China; Norway; Greece; The Netherlands; United States.

Ann-Marie Around the World

by Jennifer Shepherd



ANN-MARIE MACDONALD’S *Fall on Your Knees* has had tremendous international success, with rights being licensed to 22 publishers around the world, and it has been translated into 18 languages—from Chinese and Hebrew to Czech and Swedish. Over one million copies have sold in the United States alone. Canadian sales (English language only) are now well over 365,000 copies. The next-biggest market to date is the Dutch language; they are now in their 15th printing and sales in excess of 150,000 copies.

When Knopf Canada first published *Fall on Your Knees* in 1996, there were some major hurdles to overcome in selling

foreign rights. The author was a first-time novelist with absolutely no international writing credentials. Putting these issues aside, the biggest concern for many foreign publishers was that the book was over 550 pages, which means it is very expensive to translate. For those publishers that took a chance on this “unknown” writer, the risk has paid off.

Featured here are only a few foreign covers of *Fall on Your Knees*. These covers illustrate the various ways in which publishers around the world have perceived the book, and have determined the right look for their respective markets.