



BOOKS:
PAGES D6 & D7

We talk to
WordFest
author
Lynn Coady
about her
latest book

D6 Sunday, September 11, 2011

mix | books



Author Lynn Coady's new book, *The Antagonist*, is about a former hockey goon, Rank, whose life has been ripped-off and turned into a novel by a former college friend.

Jason Franson for Postmedia News

Coady keeps the faith

New book
looks at life's
hard truths

JAMIE HALL
POSTMEDIA NEWS
EDMONTON

The distance between Edmonton and Cape Breton Island, N.S. is about 4,000 kilometres, but to bestselling author Lynn Coady, it represents a lifetime. Raised a Catholic on an island of Catholics, she grew up steeped in a dogma so claustrophobic that at times it left her breathless with panic.

"I was completely opposed to a lot of it," says Coady, 41. "And I remember thinking: 'This doesn't seem like a free view of the way the world works.' It's a scary thing to come to terms with, especially when you're a creative person and you feel like you're in the middle of that, and surrounded by it on all sides."

Now living in landlocked Edmonton, with its endless blue skies and wide open prairies, she is no longer hemmed in — geographically or otherwise — and freely practises the faith to which she has devoted herself for several years now, that of fiction writer.

"Writing fiction fulfils that role in my life now," says Coady. "That's what I'm dedicated to, and the altar at which I worship."

Her latest novel, *The Antagonist* (House of Anansi Press), hit bookstore shelves last Saturday.

Coady says she tried hard not to live in Edmonton, but to no avail. The first time, she was wooed here by love. When that relationship didn't work out, she moved to Toronto for 18 months but returned when



SPOTLIGHT

The Antagonist (House of Anansi, 352 pages, \$32.95) is in stores now. Lynn Coady takes part in this year's WordFest. Visit wordfest.com for more information.

the University of Alberta wooed her with a different kind of offer — as a writer-in-residence.

Not only had she kept in touch with the "great people" she met her first time here, she had also recently struck up a long-distance relationship with a university English professor. That man, Rob Appleford, would eventually become her husband.

"The offer from the U of A was just a great opportunity," says Coady, "plus it gave me a chance to test-drive this new relationship."

Coady has become one of the country's most loved authors. Born and raised in Port Hawkesbury, she left there to attend journalism school at Carleton University but graduated with a BA in English and philosophy.

From there she moved to Vancouver, where she earned a master of fine arts from the University of British Columbia. All along the way, she was writing, writing, writing — short stories,

plays, novels and articles for publications such as *Saturday Night*, *Chatelaine*, *Elle Canada* and *Canadian Geographic*.

The Antagonist is the latest in a body of work that includes *Mean Boy*, *The Saints of Big Harbour*, and her first novel, *Strange Heaven*, which was a finalist for a Governor General's Award in 1998.

The Antagonist has been earmarked by the National Post as one of the most anticipated books of the year. Coady has already received advance praise from *Quill & Quire* for her "hearty wit" and "piercing understanding of human nature." And, of course, earlier this week the book was longlisted for the Giller Prize.

The central character in the book is Gordon Rankin, or "Rank," a muscle-bound young man who is cast in the role of a thug by his classmates, his hockey coach and especially his father, a small man with a big mouth and even bigger opinions. Much of the book features a series of monologues by Rank, which come in the form of e-mail messages sent to a former friend named Adam, who has used a mirror-version of Rank as a character in his recently published book. The light in which he is cast is far from flattering. Outraged and betrayed, Rank is forced to confront the truths in his life.

Coady says writers are always forced to confront this issue, when friends and family recognize bits and pieces of their biographies in fictional stories. She says her own family has censored itself more than once during special gatherings, believing she possesses an internal tape recorder that's transcribing their every word and story for future use as literary fodder.

"These are Rank's assumptions, too, but that isn't how it works," says Coady. "Ultimately, the act of creating fiction is an amoral act. It's art. Your highest obligation is always going to be to the truth of the story you're trying to tell."

"When people only see what they recognize, they think what you're writing isn't fiction and it can be frustrating. And I think this book was born out of that frustration."

When she sat down to write *The Antagonist*, a book that had been living in her head for months, she knew two things — that Rank was angry at his friend Adam for writing the book, and that Rank's mother had died, and that it was somehow his fault.

The rest of the story was revealed to her over time in the bedroom-cum-office of her Alberta Avenue home as her fingers moved steadily, unbidden, across the keyboard.

"Writing is really an intuitive process for me. I follow my gut. It's almost like a dog trying to find a scent."

More than a bestselling author, she also has what she calls a "freelancer's mishmash" of jobs she has accumulated through the years. She is a regular contributor to the *Globe and Mail* as an advice columnist, and in 2009 launched a magazine with friend and fellow journalist Curtis Gillespie called *Eighteen Bridges*, its mandate to champion long-form narrative journalism.

She already has an idea for her next novel, but for now it's still forming in her mind.

"I'm just in the thinking stage at this point," she says. "It's kind of brewing on a sub-conscious level, but it's there."