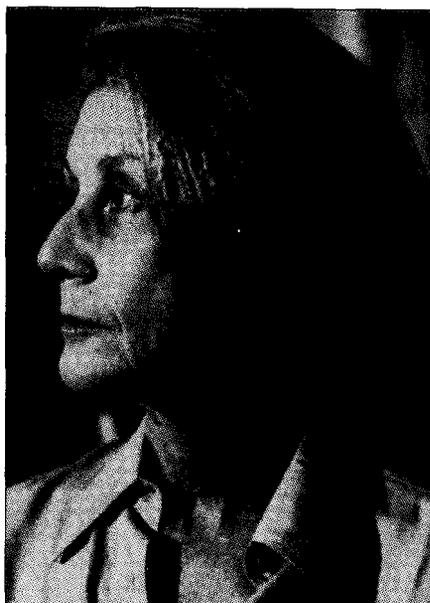


the bright beauty of the first. Yet we are still beguiled by the charm of the heroine and fascinated by the atmosphere of a new country coming to birth. The storyteller becomes the historical novelist; and then she takes to herself the mantle of prophecy in the unexpected end.

This is a most ambitious book, not content to simply describe the characters and political climate, but with a Shakespearean depth and breadth. One theme is that there are no individual solutions in the complexity of the South African situation and Hillela personifies a detachment resulting from this perspective. None of the other characters really knows her, nor are we allowed to as readers. At times it seems that Gordimer is giving her a very powerful role as a woman who can use her femininity and her unusual gifts to make major change in a blatantly discriminatory society. But the detachment and independence of this central character lose our involvement and ultimately become the



weakness of the book: we don't care as much as we want to or as Gordimer wants us to. Hillela is too much of an "abnormal variation" for us to identify with her on either feminist or political terms.

The style of writing also makes it a difficult book to read — sentences need to be re-read to make sense, it is frequently necessary to return and trace through passages to understand situations. Unlike her short stories or *Burgher's Daughter*, we are not caught up immediately with the flow. Nevertheless, all of Gordimer's writing has a strong sense of metaphor, of a deeper portentous meaning. A half-sentence, the giving of a name, the brilliant small happening are clues to what is to come, seeds to bear their fruit later — symbols. And in the end, the strongest symbol of all is the handclasp of love and trust: of man with woman; of black with white.

This review became a joint and trans-Atlantic project of Elspeth Heyworth and her eighty-four year-old mother Marjorie Moulton.

FLIGHT AGAINST TIME

Emily Nasrallah (Issa J. Boullata, trans.).
Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1987.

Rebecca Leaman

Emily Nasrallah, one of the international guest authors present at the Calgary Olympics in February 1988, draws on devastating personal experience and a real understanding of human nature in *Flight Against Time*, the first of her thirteen books to appear in English translation. A native of the small village of Kfeir in South Lebanon, she was educated in Beirut, where she raised a family and established a reputation as one of her country's finest writers of fiction. Her home was completely destroyed by the war in 1982. According to *Ragweed*: "When asked why she stayed in such a strife-torn country, she replied that, as a writer, she felt compelled to document the ... effects of constant war, particularly on women and children."

Flight Against Time is eloquent testimony. It is not a novel of war; rather, it is the intensely moving story of family ties strained by the absence of peace physical, political, and deeply personal. Nasrallah's prose, in this sensitive translation, retains the flavour and

rhythms of its origins. Despite the often emphatic symbolism ("he saw the dove abandon gentleness and turn into a hawk which ... killed residents rooted in the earth like the olive trees"), there is a certain delicacy, an honesty in the evocation of strong emotion which effectively defuses sentimentality.

The novel follows Radwan, an old man who is persuaded to leave his village in Lebanon to visit, with his wife, their children and unknown grandchildren in Canada. Little educated and less travelled, Radwan is at first slightly comic, childlike in his confusion in the city, the airport. Through his struggle to reach an understanding of North America and the new life-style of his children, the immigrant experience is described with humour and compassion. Radwan emerges as a homespun philosopher, human and intuitive, with whom the reader is eager to sympathize. "For the first time he began to see an aspect of the truth he feared and escaped from every time someone discussed the future.... An alien land will always remain alien."

Appropriate to their culture, Radwan is more vocal than his wife, Raya; his thoughts are more fully articulated. Yet Raya, in her near silence, is somehow as believable and as complex a character. She is drawn with finer lines. The reader senses that she has a core of strength

which sustains her, a faith in her grown children and their happiness, their safety and prosperity. Her perception of tradition is of a home made the stable centre of an inevitably and terribly, incomprehensibly, changing world. No faceless mother figure, she is an individual torn between loyalty to Radwan and her unspoken longing for peace wherever it is found.

The long-ago courtship and marriage of the old couple, relived in memory, seems — as indeed it is — of a different life. The contrast is almost, but never quite, overstated; it runs constantly beneath the surface of the more immediate conflicts and through Radwan's thoughts: "There, in his warm village, he felt he could stretch out his hand and hold the vineyard, the garden and the wheat fields in his palm. He could grasp the vast distances between one footstep and the next. In Canada who knew where these plains stretched? Who took care of them?"

His essential need is for the homeland that exists in those memories. The acceptance of reality is reluctant, painful, slow. "Why, man," he berates himself, "are you trying to avoid the facts? You saw them before you left, at the airport, at the airline office — long lines of young men forced to flee, to escape. You also saw them standing at the road blocks, with weapons in their hands and fire in their

eyes." Radwan sees, too, that the best efforts of his family to retain their culture are failing: the grandchildren speak only English; the close-knit immigrant community cannot duplicate the warmth of the village. He understands, against his will, that the losses — of peace, of the young, of his own youth — are irrevocable. The restlessness grows, speaking a

need to return to his home, to the vestiges of the past, "before it is too late." In the words of his son, Nabeel, "he judges things emotionally and his emotion is tied up with that little spot of the world."

Flight Against Time illuminates the Lebanon of the present in the light of a gentler time, and reflects the joys and passions, the fears, and the ideals of its people

caught in unwilling transition. A novel of considerable strength, well conceived and beautifully executed, this is a book to read and to read again: "a handful of soil ... a gift to the young ones, as though it were the last call for help from a land on fire."

WOMEN AND PEACE: RESOURCE BOOK

Edited by Wilma Needham. Halifax:
Voice of Women, 1987.

Sharon Froese Nielsen

"Women and Peace" was originally an exhibition at the Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery in 1985. As Heather Dawkins and Mary Sparling, Exhibitions Office and Director of the Gallery, point out

The exhibition provided a point from which women, peace activists and artists could work, forging new relationships between grassroots movements and art, and (in a predominantly formalist artistic environment), art-making and 'the social/political.'

This book is a result of that exhibition and takes the work to a much larger audience.

The book begins with an introduction by the editor who discusses women's role in peace and the role of feminist art. She points out that, "it is necessary to speak of peace not only in terms of an absence of war in our backyard but also in terms of justice." The issues of "art and politics and women and peace" are also discussed. Tradition has it that artists must separate art and political activity: "if you want to grub around in the unseemly muck of political and social issues, you must leave your studio." One response to what to do when an artist cares about both art and politics is the notion that the personal is political. For artists, this translates into "a conscious personal visualization of the social and political forces that inform our lives." It has also meant that we learn to speak about art with our own voices, not leaving interpretation to the 'experts,' not giving power to others. Feminist art has thus "provided a validation of women's lives and values; it made women visible more emphatically to ourselves."

Needham further notes that, "Among the many recent contributions of feminist art was the re-validation of women's craft-work, in particular, textiles." Her introduction concludes with a discussion of various themes in the work portrayed in the exhibit.

Barbara Roberts contributed the next section on "Canadian Women and the Peace Movement: An Introductory History" which is an excellent summary of women's peace activities since the turn of the century. She points out that women have always been instrumental in peace-related issues, that they tend to be the core of the movement and that women have given the peace movement new inspiration. It is often difficult to find historical material on the peace movement and women's role therein. Roberts' discussion provides a good overview not only of events, organizations, and activists but also of various theoretical conceptions that have concerned the peace movement over time. She concludes by noting that "a few women peace workers pointed out a



Illustration by Suzanne Barnes [TDN]

century and a half ago that peace is indeed a women's issue."

Following this is a presentation of poetry by Donna E. Smyth and Maxine N. Tynes. The poetry complements the artwork beautifully by portraying in words the concerns evident in the photographs of the exhibit pieces.

Prior to presenting photographs of the exhibit, Heather Dawkins and Mary Sparling discuss the exhibit, noting that, "For peace activists and supporters, the exhibition was a cultural affirmation."

The following 20-page section contains photographs of "Women and Peace: An Exhibition of Visual Art of Resistance by Women from Across Canada." Each photograph is accompanied by a brief explanation of the artist's particular vision of peace. The work presented is wonderful — although one wishes the photographs were in colour. However, as they are, the photos present a variety of ideas concerning feminist orientations to peace, from the personal to the global. The book concludes with a resource list of activist groups across the country.

Overall, this book is an excellent piece of work. It has the advantage of presenting articles in both French and English. It provides a great deal of information, educating us in terms of the historical context of the peace movement as well as showing vividly some of the various ways women are currently working for peace. Certainly one concludes the book wishing it had been possible to attend the actual exhibition. Moreover, the work is inspirational while at the same time providing information to enable readers to become active in peace issues. It is good to see evidence that

Women's groups are developing new ways to make decisions, work cooperatively, and integrate our emotional, analytical, creative, and spiritual abilities as we work to reclaim the world and shape a future safe for everyone.