

acters that really make me stretch.

"Biologically I am a woman writer but it's never the way I've thought of myself. Ever since I was old enough to know what gay men were I've considered myself to be a gay man that happens to be born in a female body and that's the perspective I'm coming from."

When Brite talks about her personal life, she declines to go off the record. "I have no off-limits subject as far as interviews go. You can print anything I say." She continues, "I live with two boyfriends. They are both

would of New Orleans, which contributes her exotic content.

For a while we discuss Louisiana voodoo, which Brite described in one story as "a slapdash recipe concocted of one part Haitian graveyard dust, one part juju from the African bush, a jigger of holy Communion wine and a dash of swamp miasma." Then we spend the rest of the time talking about the parking problems in New Orleans. They are really terrible.

'Lost Souls' is published by Penguin at \$14.95.

in American classic

lieu has opened out so that his parents' relatives figure largely in the action, and naturally the boy's consciousness is wider, so that history — the war, the upsurge of left activism at that time — and the awakening of Ira's political sense form the background of the action.

The family moves from a Jewish to an Irish neighborhood; a cousin goes to war and returns; Ira changes schools and reads and evades the caresses of child molesters. The

the slightly off-putting touch of having the computer talk back to him, commenting on his thoughts. Roth does little with this device. I'd have thought you'd want to do a great deal with it to justify it being there at all: he might as well be talking to himself.

A book like this stands or falls by its prose. While the visual things are done with attractive precision and the rhythm moves with a natural easy grace sometimes there's a kind of fusty banality in the phrases and imagery that cools and distances the reader: this is Ira at the computer:

"he . . . who was now left the realisation that the good heart was far more precious than artistic acclaim. Here in this defunctive zone, where he felt himself verging ever closer at all that had vanished, at last came this wisdom, accrued from the woman who would not be deferred from loving him — and with the wisdom won from her came its minion: humility."

And beyond the occasional pomposity something approaching *chutzpah* creeps in from time to time. This passage continues:

"Pity Joyce — Ira thought in passing — not only did the guy marry a functional illiterate, but unlike Blake, such was the man's monumental ego he made no effort to raise her to his level."

Maybe Nora liked herself as she was, you think, quite unfairly. Ira



Henry Roth: the fireworks of 'Call It

expect to be more intrigued than supplied with answers or one liners in this smartly written biography of a very complex man. Margolis is extremely thorough and he makes up for a lack of cooperation from his subject by stylish



use of material already on the record and exhaustive interviews of the rest of the cast in Cleese's life. Surprisingly, given Cleese's often public exposure of his psychiatric treatment, the biography is short on psychological insights but it is a most enjoyable exposition of a fascinating life.

Deborah Stone

FICTION

'Lunch' by Karen Moline, Picador, \$19.95.

IF YOU enjoy lushly baroque melodrama, a kind of Cyrano de Bergerac meets 'Damage' with Joan Collins stirred into the mix, here's a plump and steamy read. Nick is an American street kid turned movie superstar whose very words are dictated by his heavily scarred minder and alter ego, Major, the narrator of the novel. While in London filming 'Faust', Nick falls in love with portrait painter Olivia, a good woman who is about to be fatally led astray because Nick is, we are repeatedly told, "a beast" (apparently defined as a chap who mostly practises mildish S&M and likes to watch video replays of the same). Luckily Major too falls in love with the irresistible Ollie and helps her get over the worst of it. Heaving with overwrought sex and emotional chiaroscuro, reading 'Lunch' is a lot like going to see a Sharon Stone film.

Jane Freeman

WALKING OFF THE SHELVES

The 10 best-selling contemporary American novels from the Avenue Bookstore, Albert Park:

1. 'Short Cuts' by Raymond Carver, Collins Harvill, \$14.95.
2. 'Mr Vertigo' by Paul Auster, Faber & Faber, \$29.95.
3. 'Delusions of Grandma' by Carrie