

entertainment

W. O. Mitchell gives Nellie's boost

By Richard Beales

March 7 was W.O. Mitchell night at Burton Auditorium, and the fans were delighted with the author's one-man benefit show for Nellie's Hostel. Nellie's representative Arlene Swinton estimates that the show raised over \$1,000 in the campaign to save Metro's only emergency hostel for women.

Mitchell, a visiting professor in York's Creative Writing department, told anecdotes and read from his book *Who Has Seen The Wind*. His manner was charmingly folksy, reminding one of Stephen Leacock and Hal Halbrook's reincarnated Mark Twain. The material, however, was distinctly Mitchell's.

He opened his performance by reading a satirical letter in which some of the governmental powers of Alberta are attacked for their condemnation of J.D. Salinger's *Catcher In The Rye* as, "filth,

garbage, junk and literary trash".

"It is unfair", complained Mitchell. "Why should it come first to our own Canadian trash?"

It is interesting that Mitchell should have mentioned Salinger's work, for at one point its hero says, "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it."

Something very like this once happened to Mitchell, and he chose to share that moment with us in closing his performance. He read the "nice letter" he received from a Grade 10 girl whose class had finished *Who Has Seen The Wind*. The letter, and Mitchell's reply were poignant, making the audience feel that here indeed was a "terrific friend".

The resulting ovation brought an

encore anecdote, this concerning Mitchell's fear at age 10 that he had contracted syphilis from an unpapered toilet seat. Like an earlier tale, "The Day I Sold Lingerie in A Prairie Whorehouse at The Age Of Ten And Didn't Even Know It", the syphilis story entertained the crowd with its amusing portrayal of childhood innocence.

Mitchell's grand yarn - spinning style was the key ingredient. His sense of timing was superior to that of many stand-up comics. Witness another tale of youth: "In those days I was tudyding to be an e-lo-cution-ist!.....(then, in a low, apologetic pout)..... it was my mother's".

At the program's end, Ms. Swinton thanked Mitchell and Don Harron - who has previously aided Nellie's - presenting each with a T-shirt reading "You Can't Beat Nellie's".



Windows exhausting but poetic

By Michelina Trigliani

It is extremely difficult for a local theatre ensemble to make it both financially and emotionally in this country. Such is the opinion of Tom O'Hanley, artistic director of Toronto's Cyclos Theatre Company, now officially entering its second year of existence.

O'Hanley feels that "a strong enough approval of the arts does not exist" in Canada and as a result, the conditions for the encouragement of local theatre "are just terrible".

He also feels that theatre has been stigmatised as elitist and wrongly so. "It's for everyone and what the individual must do is open himself up to the artistic experience."

I agree 100 per cent with Tom O'Hanley. An appetite for the arts is cultivated.

On that note, I direct my readers to an easily overlooked but not - to-be - missed play, currently finishing its run at the Unlimited Space Theatre downtown.

Suddenly Open Windows is a difficult play; difficult to understand and difficult to forget in spite of an easily forgotten plot.

The action takes place on the platform of an old railway station on the outskirts of an anonymous city late at night. Melrn, an aged businessman, has gathered his family together there in order to turn over control of his company to his son. Involved in the immediate drama are the son's wife, Melrn's whorish daughter, a traveller whom fate has thrown into the act and a

rather philosophical cleaning lady.

O'Hanley, who both wrote and directs the play, calls it a different type of drama for Toronto because "it's moving in the area of poetic prose". The language he uses takes feelings and thoughts to an extreme.

The result is a heavy, sometimes tiresome, often pressing presentation. O'Hanley's every word of dialogue packs the kind of punch the intelligent audience feeds on. You cannot lazily observe *Suddenly Open Windows*. It throws your mind into a feverish state of exercise resulting in a disturbing sort of mental exhaustion.

In this way, the Cyclos ensemble has fulfilled one of its primary goals which is "to stimulate the imagination of the audience so that it can participate creatively in the play."

"Ah, philosophy," says Melrn at the end, "I'm not afraid, don't you be."

Suddenly Open Windows marks the Cyclos' first stab at original adult drama. It was written by a member of the company to be performed by the company. This fact is conveyed to the spectators through the vigorous efforts of a very talented cast.

The Unlimited Space Theatre is housed in an old building just at Broadview and Danforth. The heater makes outrageous noises during the performance while the floor creaks unabashedly as actors prance across the stage but then tiny imperfections always give live theatre that special charm.

The play runs through to March 19. All shows start at 8:30 p.m. Hot apple cider is served.

WWI hit still fresh

By Rick Beales

Scarborough Theatre Guild delighted its audience last week with a thoughtful adaptation of Joan Littlewood's *Oh, What a Lovely War*. The play, a *pot-pourri* of sketches based on World War One, runs until March 25 at Playhouse 66.

Littlewood's biting satire is well handled by producer - director - designer Harry Francis. This is especially evident in the set design. A collage of Union Jacks, it is

painted not in the red and blue of Britain, but in an ugly red-brown combination to represent blood and mud.

World War One is treated as a grotesque circus. The ringmaster (competently played by John Caldwell) introduces "the ever-popular War Games". A series of girls in tight, and clowns - again, in red and brown - then foolishly prance about the stage. The clowns, wearing an assortment of military hats and helmets, divide into four camps representing Britain, France, Russia and Germany.

The players never discard the circus garb, which adds a not - so-subtle irony to the songs and vignettes. The pompous rationalization of war by governmental and military bigwigs comes under particular attack. Recruiting methods and trench warfare are also examined.

The performance of Frank Knight is praiseworthy. A giant of a man, Knight is reminiscent of the late Zero Mostel. In one scene, he plays a British sergeant addressing a confused group of recruits in a quickly delivered, highly unintelligible patter. His only understood words are, "..... bash 'em in the balls". Knight later teams with Nola Morgan-Wale to give a witty rendering of the song "Roses of Picardy".

One strange note: at the play's conclusion, the performers did not take bows despite the insistent applause of the audience.

For reservations, contact the Scarborough Theatre Guild box office at 751-6509.

Dracula a woman?

By Michael Christ

The liberated vampire. Is the world ready for one? In Toronto Free Theatre's new production of William Lane's *The Brides of Dracula* actress Chappelle Jaffe enacts the role of Count Dracula.

When dealing with mythical figures, gender is important. Ponder the likelihood of a 'Mother Christmas'; try to conceive of Superman as a petite brunette; imagine if you will, a female Count Dracula. These cast-against-character hybrids betray a faulty understanding of the function of the mythic figure.

Myths are very often used to support social and religious edicts. The threat of the lurking vampire is a very good reason for all virginal maidens to remain chaste, pious, and safely protected within the clean, white sheets of parental protection. Vampire lore prescribes that the vampire cannot enter a house uninvited, a girl is safe until marriage as long as she stays under her father's roof.

The vampire's association with bloodletting is symbolic of the tearing of the hymen. It is no surprise that the victims of the vampire's act sleep during the day, come out only at night, look characteristically anaemic, and often bear puncture marks or hickies about the neck.

The vampire is quintessentially a male principle: a terror to hymens. A female vampire is no such threat. Such an idea is merely a trendier-than-thou caprice, a distortion of someone's ersatz artistic vision; it is a substitution of confusion in the place of dramatic conflict. A female vampire is bad taste disguised as camp.

Chappelle Jaffe goes a long way in the role of Dracula. At performance's end, the couple seated behind me were still debating whether or not Dracula was-or-was-not played by a man. This is quite a compliment for any actress playing a male role. My feeling is that too much of Chappelle's energy was bound-up with playing a convincing male, she had a long way still to go in becoming the compleat vampire. I'll not mention the rest of the cast out of deference for the future of their careers but I will mention that there was a lot of hyper-kinetic mugging and some very indistinct diction - surprising in professional actors.

Most of my dissatisfaction comes to rest on William Lane's playwright. Not funny enough for a

farce, much to narrative to be an effective drama, the play is just another Dracula comicstrip. Chastity versus Debauchery, Good versus Evil, and the clash of the clean young man and the devil may-care vampire for the soul of the young lovely - all of these are potent sources for conflict in the Dracula story and all remain stillborn in Lane's attempt. Every individual has a different susceptibility to temptation, every character should display a differing degree of immunity to the vampire - Lane's victims fall for the vampire like so many dominoes, no colour, no variation, and no real conflict.

A very vapid vampire story indeed, recommended only for those who believe perseverance builds character.

Editor's Note on Female Vampirism: I wish to respectfully disagree with Michael Christ's interpretation of the vampire myth. Christ has elected to take a Freudian analysis of vampirism: the vampire as hunter of hymens. Hence, he reasons, the idea of a female vampire simply does not work.

The vampire story is a very ancient one. It did not originate with Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, as some people think, but according to various sources (*Vampires and Vampirism*, for one) the myth goes back as far as ancient Greece and possibly even before. It seems that the vampire myth is an extremely flexible one; different versions of the story appear in Germany, the Slavic countries, Greece, among the Celts and so on.

The value of the hymen and of virginity is a patriarchal phenomenon. Among the patriarchal Malaysian people, for example, vampires are female: ".....amongst the Malays a vampire is a living witch, who can be killed if she can be caught in the act of witchery. She is especially feared in houses where a birth has taken place, and it is the custom to hang up a bunch of thistle in order to catch her." (*Vampires and Vampirism*)

"Imagine, if you will, a female Count Dracula," says Michael Christ. I can! -C.W.



Photo by Robert Ryan

Cabaret's classy Brecht

ere's a rehearsal short from last week's Cabaret, Brecht's *Class*. Actually, we meant to run a show picture and a review, but the photographer didn't have much luck and the reviewer realised she didn't know enough about Brecht to do the show justice. However, this caption-writer thought it was tremendous.