

British author reaffirms penchant for satire

By ROBERT MACLEAN

Stanley and the Women
by Kingsley Amis
Hutchinson Publishing, 1984, 256 pp., \$16.95

With well over a dozen novels to his credit, Kingsley Amis has a reputation in Britain for being satirical, off-beat and at times 'angry.'

Stanley and the Women, his latest effort, certainly reaffirms this. Not since *Jake's Thing* has he managed to focus so aptly on the unconscionable. In this instance, Stanley Duke, the book's anti-hero, asks, "Would you go as far as to say that the real mad people are not the ones in mental hospitals... but women, certain women?"

Happily married a second time and comfortably settling into middle age with a well paying job Stanley comes to understand what R.D. Laing, a British existentialist psychiatrist, has termed 'our own appalling state of alienation called normality.'

Stanley doesn't become mad but when his son Steven displays all the signs of a schizophrenic disorder he begins to see the illness as a yardstick to the sanity of the people around him. As Steven's condition deteriorates the insidious character of the women in Stanley's life are exposed, including that of the female doctor in charge of his son. Could it be that there are more subtle forms of madness than Steven's?

In addressing this issue Amis doesn't break any new ground, nor does he come up with any fresh comments on the nature of mental health. Instead, he says, like it or not, we are all mad. The story is even divided into four parts—Onset, Progress, Relapse and Prognosis—as if

to help us deal with this dilemma. But like a number of his earlier books, the narrative line in *Stanley and the Women* is cluttered. In this case it is cluttered with theories on schizophrenia and the resulting confusion.

Less abstruse is the manner in which Amis measures normality. It seems all his characters are neurotic; Stanley too often gets "pissed" in order to escape the unpleasantness of a deranged sibling and a previous spouse; Susan, his wife, stabs herself for attention; Nowell, his ex-wife, is utterly fallacious and her husband Bert is more of an actor than a drunkard.

If all this is strange then Stanley's encounters with a misogynous doctor and with the psychiatric staff at the mental hospital can only be called bizarre. It all leads poor Stanley into realizing that, by any professional standards everyone should be committed.

Although attacking madness, marriage and medicine, Amis's dependable acuity and wit never falter. The unbridgable psychological gap between men and women Stanley believes exists is laid out like a foreign relations course: "women were like the Russians—if you did exactly what they wanted all the time you were being realistic and constructive and promoting the cause of peace, and if you ever stood up to them you were resorting to cold war tactics," Stanley believes.

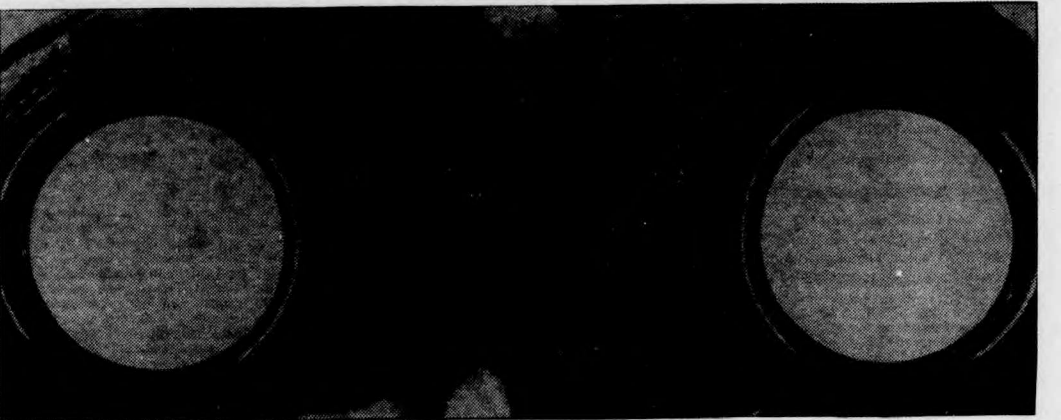
Frequently, though, the insane reality of such sexual politics is sidestepped. There are also some very funny passages on collective madness—on why people drink, where, when and what prompts men to swill themselves silly at a sea-sick dinner party. Also amusing is the use of British dialects to emphasize the differing worlds they represent.

Yet, it isn't altogether absurd that Stanley



Duke concludes that most women are mad. The fact that he decides to ignore and accept the frightening behavior of the women around him as normal supports his view that "men's minds are funny things too, you know."

While this type of English sensibility may not appeal to everybody, Amis fans will probably place *Stanley and the Women* well above many of his past outings and into the same breath as *Jake's Thing* and *Lucky Jim*.



ArtStuff

ON CAMPUS

Compiled by EDO VAN BELKOM

ON CAMPUS

Continuing

□ *20 Poses*, a black-and-white photographic exhibition by Jeff Nolte continues until Nov. 30 in the Calumet College Common Room. Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fri. 8:30 to 4 p.m. Closed weekends.

□ *Portraits*, new drawings by Patrick Murphy closes on Sat., Nov. 17 at Winters Gallery, Rm. 123 Winters College. Hours: Tues.-Sat. 12-4 p.m.

November 20-24

□ *Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado* will be performed by the Stong Titwillow Ensemble at

Samuel Beckett Theatre. Showtimes are at 8 p.m. and tickets can be obtained in advance at Rm. 313 Stong. Tickets: \$6 adults, \$4 seniors and children under 12.

November 19

□ *Homage a Picasso*, text by Herbert Schwarz, photos by Andre Villers, illustrations by Luc Archambault. Continues until Friday, Nov. 23 at Winters Gallery, Rm. 123 Winters College. Hours: Mon.-Fri. 12-4 p.m.

OFF CAMPUS

November 20

□ The world premiere of *Prague*, a play by John Krizanc, will be at the Tarragon theatre. Krizanc authored the award-winning play *Tamara*. The play opens at 7:30 p.m.

November 14

□ The Canadian premiere of Sam Shepard's highly-acclaimed mod-

ern-day western, *Fool for Love*, will open at the Toronto Free Theatre and runs through Dec. 23. Opening night performance is at 7:30 p.m., all other weekday shows are at 8:00 p.m. Weekend showings will be on Saturdays at 4:30 and 8:30 with a Sunday matinee at 2:00. 26 Berkeley St. 368-2856.

November 21-24

□ The University College Playhouse presents an evening of one-act plays will include *The Operation*, *The Stronger* and *The Twisted State*. 79A St. George St., Showtime is 8:00 p.m. Admission: Friday \$2, Saturday \$3. For reservations call 978-6307.

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