

Entertainment

"The eyes snap, but merrily now."
-Walker Percy-

Sward in the stone

I did not want to be old Mr. Garbage man, but uncle dog Who rode sitting beside him.

from "Uncle Dog: The Poet at 9"

Stuart Ross

Sward's on the phone again. It's six hours to deadline and he's just thought of something else he wants to include among his quotes.

When I found out that Robert Sward was living in Toronto, I quickly phoned him up. "Sure I'll do an interview," he said, "but what's the occasion?"

"I found out that you're living in Toronto."

Sward was born in Chicago in 1933, and began writing at sea when he joined the navy about 17 years later. He has since published eight books of poetry, including the notorious 1962 *Uncle Dog & Other Poems*, and a novel, *The Jurassic Shales*, published by Toronto's Coach House Press in 1976.

After living in Victoria, B.C. for about 10 years, Sward moved to the Toronto Islands about a year and a half ago. But he doesn't consider his 'cave' of much importance. "To paraphrase Doris Lessing, once you've given up your attachment to one country, you've given it up in terms of all countries. In a sense, it doesn't even matter. I simply regard myself as a North American poet. I don't feel bound to anyone particular place. I mean, there is a difference in humour, a difference in manner, a difference in language—but if it's possible to belong to both places, I do."

Sward has made himself quite at home on the Island, becoming actively involved in its fight. Along with photographer Ursula Heller, he has put together "The Islanders", a travelling exhibition of photographs, stories, poems and interviews, a la Studs Terkel, with Island residents.

Hey, Metro Chairman,
you tearer down
of your visible past,
where is your history?

And when you're home already,
Mr. Goofy-Goofy,
—squeak, squeak
you extraordinary geek—
where you going to go?

In reference to a recently published poem of his, I asked Sward about the presence of teetotalling alligators on the Island. "That's a B.C. image," he explained. "Alligator matrons in Victoria, B.C. Pre-historic English alligator tea-drinkers, lively Royalists, Tories in their glory, who seem to live forever. But I'm looking for *pterydactyls*. I know they're there because we have these marvelous lagoons. It's like Tarzan country."

Sward's publishing output has been very sparse in recent years. "I go through fits and starts with it. There are times when I've written 14 or 15 poems in a day—real rushes—and times I've written five or six. Other times it's very painstaking, hours of agonizing over punctuation marks. The process is new for each particular poem."

"I'm working now on a longer poem about the Toronto Islands and I've written several longish poems like *Horgbottom*, *Stringbottom*, *I Am Yours*, *You Are History*, which was published by Swallow Press '71. The longer poem about the Islands involves a lot of research. I'm going to the City Hall archives and doing a lot of reading and taking hundreds of pages of notes. In some sense, the Toronto Island poem is a cross between a term paper and a very long lyric poem."

And Sward's plunge into the non-prolific is also a result of his higher degree of self-criticism. "There's an awful lot of junk poetry being produced. I studied once in England with a fine poet named Charles Tomlinson, and he used the image of a tube of toothpaste and every month you squeeze it and then you've got enough stuff to fill an issue of a poetry magazine. And a lot of publications are like that. I'm tending to write less and publish

less and be a little harder on myself."

Possibly one of Sward's most exciting works is his novel, *The Jurassic Shales*, a blend of surreal poetry and prose about an amnesiac. "In the process of recovering his memory, the man goes back 160 million years, to his first incarnation, which was that a flying dinosaur."

My mother has peculiar nipples that never work. She feeds me eggs of smaller lizards and I watch and she's beautiful with her scales and feathers, her enormous bulging eyes. She's blue now and I love her. I nuzzle her where she slimes. And she sits on me and I burp. Nauseous, I begin to cry; I cry under her beauty for hours.

The work is a beautifully cohesive meld of fantasy and personal history. Much of it emerges from Sward's own experiences and belief in past lives. "I was in Cambridge, Massachusetts," he recalls, "and I got run over by a car. An M.G. came around a snowbank, knocked me over, and suddenly I was inside this car with these two people I'd never seen before in my life and they were taking me to the hospital."

"For about a day and a half or so, I had amnesia. I didn't know my own name. Apart from being a little bit scary, the experience was kind of beautiful, somewhat like a



Stuart Ross

Poet and Islander Robert Sward waits apprehensively in front of the iron gates of his mind for deputy sherriffs riding on mammoth ancient turtle-creatures who have nothing better to do than read week-old copies of *National Enquirer*. Maybe.

psychedelic experience. Like, suddenly everything's clean and you're just seeing. There's no Robert Sward, there's no past—there's just the present reality. The first image I remember is sunlight on this huge red brick wall. Beautiful..."

A lot of Sward's work and thought has been influenced for a number of years now by his involvement with Yoga and connection between Yoga, meditation and poetry as "the whole process of communication between two people, an intermingling of one consciousness with another. I guess I'm constantly trying to simplify my language and my approach. I write primarily for myself, but the next inclination is to see whether other people can connect with it. I don't think there's anybody who poetry cannot reach."

His tastes in poetry, reflecting

these influences, range from Earle Birney to Al Purdy to "14th and 15th century Indian poets like Kabir, who I think is just great—nothing short of great."

In addition to his Island writing, Sward is also freelancing for industrial and business magazines about ecology and nutrition and has a couple of volumes of selected works scouting about for publishers. In addition, he and poet Penny Kemp will be editing a special edition of the poetry rag *CVII*, the theme of which is "A Sacred Mosaic: Spiritual Poetry in Canada". And "The Islanders" begins its exhibition at the Sanderson Library, 32 Bathurst St, this week.

There. All has been said for now. I click off my battered tape machine. And Robert Sward, removing his grey trenchcoat, lifts his massive scaly wings and heads for the Islands.

Venice the film starting

Jolanta Morowicz

Beginning next Monday and running all week, you will have an opportunity to sample five masterpieces of Italian cinema as the Italian Film Festival unrolls with five cinematic ventures into the human soul and Italian mentality.

The Festival is presented by the Osgoode Hall School Italian Cultural Club. Club president Domenic Brigante hopes that the festival will provide an interesting glimpse of Italian culture, as well as show the rich complexity of the work of famous Italian film directors. The films will be shown in Italian with English sub-titles.

On Monday at 8 p.m. Bernardo Bertolucci's *Luna* will be shown. This controversial film deals with a mother-son relationship and the multi-faceted nature of love. Pier Paolo Pasolini's startling *Teorema* will be screened on Tuesday at 7 p.m. This is a must for Terence Stamp fans. In *Teorema* he portrays a visitor who affects every member of the bourgeois family he comes in contact with in a different manner. Following the screening the provocative Robin Wood of Atkinson Fine Arts will give an informal talk.

Scheduled for Wednesday, at 8 p.m., Ermanno Olmi's *Tree of the Wooden Clogs* gives the viewer an insight into village life. Federico Fellini's autobiographical *8 1/2* will be screened on Thursday, at 7 p.m. In this film, Marcello Mastroianni plays a Fellini-like director whose sense of the theatrical blends imperceptibly with reality.

Professor Anthony Vicari of the Department of Italian Studies at U of T will give an informal lecture following the film.

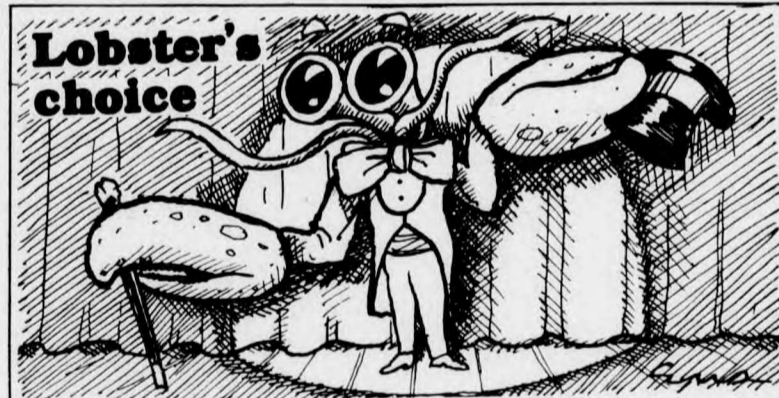
The festival ends on Friday, with Luchino Visconti's *The Innocent* starting at 8 p.m. The film is a masterful portrayal of a love-

triangle and the effects of infidelity. Laura Antonelli, Jennifer O'Neill and Giancarlo Giannini lend their considerable talents to Visconti's last work.

The Italian Film Festival offers a great variety of cinematic styles and subjects. The influence of Italian cinema on international

film-making is easily understood when one discovers the superior quality of the five movies chosen for the festival. Take time out to catch these films—your senses and emotions will be amply compensated.

Film screenings take place in Osgoode's Moot Court Rooms 101 and 102. Admission is free.



Modest Ron heads this week's highlights

It's April and that means It's That Time again. A lot of coffee, essays, exams, plus the busiest social calendar of the year. Here are a few enticing possibilities.

Modest Ronald Ramage is back again tonight with his art performance...*Hey Ma-ah He's Doin' It A-gaaain!*. Ramage invites anyone he's ever criticized to come over and seek revenge. The shootout begins at 7:30 p.m. in Room 326 Fine Arts Building. The auteur promises all will be over in time to catch *Disney On Film*.

And speaking of old Walt, tonight in Curtis "L" at 8:30 p.m., for the price of a mere smile, all are invited to *Disney On Film*, a forum on animation and fantasy filmmaking in the '80s. Speakers include Eric Larson, animator/dir-

ector, Harrison Ellenshaw, special effects expert and John Musker, director.

And J.L. Hayglass sends word that *Tracks*, a two-act play she has written and directed will open next Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the Sam Beckett Theatre. *Tracks* continues on Wednesday and Thursday at 8 p.m., and then moves over to the Atkinson East Studio for a 7 p.m. show on Friday.

And what about the mysterious Himbara who will be giving an exhibit called *Conscious Art*—political photography and sculpture next Monday and Tuesday in the Sculpture Studio in the Fine Arts Building.

Oh yes, don't forget *Rats* which will nibble their way into Central Square on Friday at noon???

Bad manners

Ronald Ramage

By most measures, the recent Sam Beckett Theatre production, "Etiquettes", conceived and directed by Robert Fabes, was an accomplishment of note—but what was it saying? If you have nothing to say, why bother?

For an interminable time, six actors silently pretend to be "crazies" in an institution of some type. They pretend very well: Herwig Gayer as a severely regressed individual, and Lesley Ewen as a girl unable to face reality without her kaleidoscope were particularly strong. There were clever ideas in abundance, such as the phallizing of J.P. Chassel's catch-toy, but they weren't

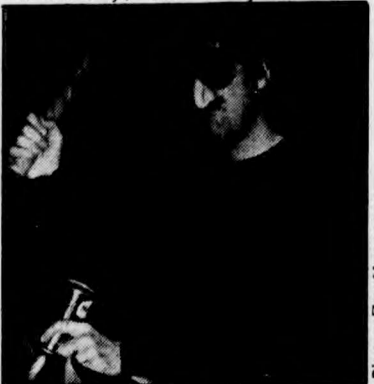


Ewen the mood for Galileo?

enough. The cast created a comfortable, living-room fantasy of an institution. The use of saccharine music added to that cloying comfortableness.

During the show, and especially during the hands-on exploration of a catatonic Gayer, the cast respected each other's public/private boundaries, but by not pushing his cast across those borders, Fabes made "Etiquettes" mushy pretending instead of hard-edged theatre.

Since the director had nothing to say, he couldn't know when he had said it, and had to resort to deceptive trickery to bring the piece to a close. Akin to running out of room at the bottom of the



Scene banned by censors.