

When I finished my first Workout Book, I swore I'd never do it again. I'm not a writer.
—Jane Fonda

Rooke book don't cook

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

Vancouver native Leon Rooke is one of Canada's best known short story writers, a Governor General's Award winner, and the 1981 recipient of the prestigious Canada-Australia Literary Award.

With these credentials, and with three novels and seven collections of short stories under his belt, it would seem reasonable to expect great things from Rooke's latest release, a collection of short stories entitled *A Bolt of White Cloth*. What we actually encounter is a rather disappointing, uneven assortment of stories, none of which measures up to his reputation.

To be sure, Rooke's prose is very clean, his images carefully chosen, his blend of the mundane and the fantastic occasionally arresting, but with the exception of a story called "Why the Heathens are No More," the offerings here are, at best, only partially successful.

The title piece is a good example: a suburban fairy tale that gets bogged down in its own structure. The story tells of an encounter between a suburban couple and a passing cloth salesman. The salesman gives the couple a large quantity of a particularly beautiful white fabric, asking for nothing in return except for the promise that they remain "loving people." In the early going the story works because of the tension created between the episode at hand and the understandable skepticism of the couple. Yet, as they are persuaded to take the cloth, which is rolled from a seemingly endless bolt

the man carries over his shoulder, the reader loses interest. From this point on, the story, which had been exploring the issues of mutual goodwill and emotional responsibility, descends into rather maudlin fantasy, with the cloth taking on magical qualities and seemingly transforming the young couples' lives. Like "Dream Lady" and "The Woman's Guide to Home Companionship" (two later stories in the book), the premise is weak, the imagery contrived, and the moral almost trite.

This becomes a little confusing when one realizes that Rooke's strongest stories use the same fantastic elements. His strengths lie in his strong, visual use of language, and his ability to infuse the seemingly mundane with a touch of the surreal, the grotesque, and the absurd.

Rooke is most successful when he maintains the illusion of naturalism as long as possible. Stories like "Saks Fifth Avenue" and "Why the Heathens are No More" are successful because they make the real seem other-worldly, while saving the fantastic twist until the end.

At his worst, Rooke tends to be too intrusive; his poorer stories alienating the reader because they are too busy with their imagery, and too moralistic. "Dream Lady" and "Saloam Frigid with Time's Legacy . . ." both fit into this category.

One story, "The Only Daughter," is particularly poor, partly because it is naturalistic in the midst of fantasy, but most because the narrative structure is just shy of being downright clumsy.

Rooke borrows much from Faulkner in this story—the rapid shifts in space and time, the changing narrative voice, and the italicized mental asides—but none of these devices seem to serve any constructive purpose. When the extraneous stylistic gymnastics are combined with stiff dialogue and inconsistent characterization, all we are left with is annoying third-rate melodrama.

While none of the other stories are as poor as this one, only in rare moments do they rise above their general mediocrity to provide a flash of insight. "Dirty Heels of the Fine Young Children" takes the old theme of family breakup and illuminates it with an overt discussion of adult and childhood fantasy.

"Why the Heathens are No More" goes one step further, taking the reader into the somnambulant world of an isolated teenager, then gradually lapsing into fantasy. The line between reality and illusion is blurred, and unlike many of the other stories, Rooke sustains the balance until the end. The shift is subtle, ambiguous and restrained—everything the others should be.

Taken on its own, this story reveals the control and ingenuity this author is capable of; but taken as a whole, *A Bolt of White Cloth* is more a testimony to Rooke's weaknesses.



Von Trotta gotta lotta problems

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Margaréthe von Trotta's *Sheer Madness* has been praised for its bold yet intimate portrayal of female relationships, and chastised for its shallow male stereotyping. Its strong emotional content forces a response from the viewer. For example, *Tip-Magazin* in Berlin wrote, "It is apparently still an added bonus in the German Film World to be born without a cook." Interpretations of this statement are varied when applied to *Sheer Madness*.

Since 1975, with the successful *Lost Honor of Katherina Blum*, von Trotta's reputation as a feminist filmmaker has solidified. She earned earlier fame as an actress in films by Fassbinder and Schlöndorff who is now her husband.

There are few who dispute the fresh and illuminating insights about women that von Trotta has exposed in *Sisters, Marianne and Julianne*, and *Sheer Madness*. In all of these films, von Trotta contrasts an apparently shy, insecure woman with a stronger mentor—yet she makes clear in all instances that there is an imbalance within each character which can be partially rectified or harmonized by the influence of the other. Her militant women ultimately have weaknesses and often frailer, sometimes psychotic women turn out to be stronger and more resourceful.

Unfortunately the same depth is missing in von Trotta's male characters, which are most often complete stereotypes. Von Trotta claims that "the point" of *Sheer Madness* is "to show how men react to women, how they show their anxieties when women venture too far ahead . . ." Unfortunately, von Trotta has been unable to find a male character who can cope with

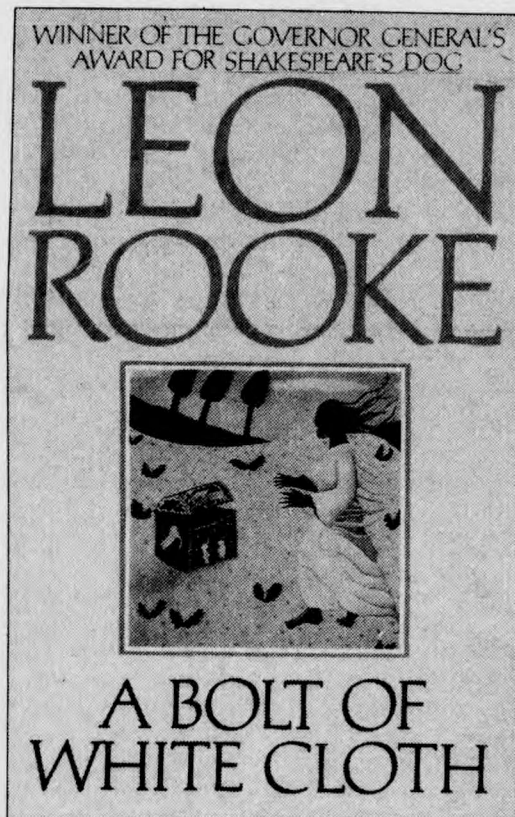
these "anxieties." As she admits in an interview with Gerald Perry, "I feel that I'm describing men from the outside because I can't feel their soul. I can't say that I'm really hating men, but things come out unconsciously."

The centre of *Sheer Madness* is the relationship between Olga, a divorced mother and feminist professor, and the depressive, severely introverted Ruth. Performances by both Hanna Schygulla (Olga) and Angela Winkler (Ruth) are distinguished by their subtlety and consistency. The character of Ruth is especially intriguing; on the surface, a neurotic would-be painter whose dreams and flashbacks are frightening in their *film noir* transposition. The friendship of the two women is based on trust, a trust which Ruth's domineering husband Franz (Peter Striebeck) repeatedly attempts to destroy. Olga's ex-husband also tries to interfere because of selfish motivations.

The two men are shown as needy, self-centred creatures. They are both successful professionals, but dependent on their women and dominated by jealousy. Franz eventually becomes violent and Ruth dreams of murdering him.

It is disconcerting that von Trotta doesn't allow even a minor male character's compassion. There is no evidence of their own needs for friendship or trust. Olga's concern for Ruth is at times all too similar to Franz's—a case of self-gratifying sympathy.

Von Trotta's films contain moments of greatness, but they fall short of excellence because of their incompleteness. *Sheer Madness* has a thesis and antithesis, but no synthesis. The fine acting and photography are not enough to compensate for the script's inconsistencies.



Toronto's Glenn Gould not fooled by Beethoven and Mozart

By STEVEN KENDA

The Glenn Gould Reader

Edited with an introduction by Tim Page
Lester and Orpen Dennys
473 pp., \$24.95

In October, 1982, Toronto's newspapers featured daily, eulogistic editorials, special articles, and entire pages devoted to the career of Glenn Gould, whose death left music lovers around the world in a state of profound shock and infinite regret. In the two years since then, CBS, Gould's record label, has, with the kind of shameless dispatch that is all too typical of a record company on the demise of one of its "stars," re-issued Gould albums long out of print, repackaged discs already in the current catalogue, and issued for the first time recordings whose release Gould would probably not have approved—specifically, one "live-in-concert" performance recorded in Leningrad in 1957. Three Gould books have also been published (two of them in the last two months), the most recent of which, *The Glenn Gould Reader*, is the most engaging.

Wilder Penfield, writing in the *Sun* the day after Gould's death, observed, "Canadian letters now has no task more important than the collection and publication of his wide-ranging essays, scripts, liner notes, lectures, and interviews." *The Glenn Gould Reader* is that collection, collated by New York musicologist Tim Page. (Page can be heard in conversation with Gould on the interview disc which accompanied the pianist's 1982 recording of the Goldberg Variations.) He has catalogued the material into four parts: I Music, II Performance, III Media, and IV Miscellany. Only one piece in the collection, however, "N'Aimez-Vous Pas Brahms?" has not previously appeared.

Like that other cerebral pianist, Charles Rosen, Glenn Gould was a musical thinker whose energies and ideas were usually realized at the piano, but whose activities were by no means

limited to that medium. *The Glenn Gould Reader* is difficult to absorb, to say the least, particularly Part One, which makes up the book's first half. Page calls the articles "lucid," but for the reader lacking in anything but the most thorough knowledge of music and its language, such essays as "The Piano Music of Berg, Schoenberg, and Krenek," "The Dodecaphonist's Dilemma," or Gould's discussion of his own String Quartet, Op. 1, will prove well nigh incomprehensible. An astonishing verbalist, both in person and on paper, Gould wrote as he played, in an extremely intense style. Listening to his radio and television programs, one sometimes suspected that he had shifted himself into lower gear for the occasion; here, he most assuredly does not "talk down" to his audience. Abstruse and highly technical in nature, these compositions demonstrate the awesome depth of Gould's understanding of musical structure. His regard for a work was always measured by his assessment of its architectural strengths and weaknesses. The "linear" and "vertical" aspects of music were what fascinated Gould.

In plumbing the depths of a score, be it for orchestra, chamber ensemble, or solo piano, he often formed an opinion well at odds with that held by the great majority of his colleagues. For instance, Mozart's Symphony No. 40, commonly regarded as a masterpiece, was for Gould "eight remarkable measures surrounded by a half hour of banality"; and again, the "Appassionata" Sonata was not great Beethoven, not even good Beethoven, but, as Gould put it, a product of Beethoven's preoccupation with being Beethoven. Gould freely made the admission (in the book's last piece, an interview with Page) that "Mr. Beethoven and I do not see eye to eye on what constitutes good music." The one "dud" Gould picks out of Beethoven's early piano sonatas is No. 11 (Op. 22), the very sonata the master himself believed was his best to date at that time (1801).

It is somewhat disillusioning, incidentally, to have listened to and enjoyed Gould's interpretation of Mozart's Sonata in B-flat, K. 5780, only to learn that he went about recording it "with

no conviction whatsoever," but merely to complete the cycle for CBS. Gould had his favorites—Richard Strauss, Ernst Krenek, Schoenberg, Orlando Gibbons—whose music he quietly championed throughout his career (though, except in the case of Schoenberg, he recorded very little of it) as well as his aversions. About these latter—Stravinsky, Bartok, Stockhausen—he preferred to say little, or nothing at all, except when they dared to deprecate or patronize his heroes.

Humor is a prime component in Gould's prose style. It occasionally gets in the way of a point being made, but in his own quirky fashion, Gould could be devastatingly amusing. There is one full-blown example of this side of Gould: "Memories of Maude Harbour, or Variations on a Theme of Arthur Rubinstein." While ostensibly reviewing Rubinstein's second volume of autobiography, *My Many Years* (1980), Gould completely satirizes the book, forewarning, however, that "the reader may detect a certain biliousness in my approach." Hilarious as "Memories of Maude Harbour" is, it has the effect of taking much of the warmth away from the Rubinstein-Gould interview which immediately precedes it. (It may be significant that these two pieces were written 20 years apart.) Page aptly describes the Gouldian humor as "puckish." There is often a kind of "what fools these concert-goers be" tone in Gould's voice, particularly when public taste in music is being discussed.

Not surprisingly, in all the interviews, the subject most talked about is Gould himself, his evaluations and analyses of particular work, his ideas on recording and performances. There are two Gould self-interviews: in one we find g.g. the doctor psychoanalyzing G.G. the pianist to help him come to terms with the fact that he has "doubts about Beethoven."

Not every Glenn Gould listener will necessarily wish to become a Glenn Gould reader, but most of this fans will not be able to pass up this superb compilation of views, reviews, and interviews, by one of this century's most significant artists.