

by Richard Goldstein, BANTAM BOOKS, \$1.00

The Poetry of Rock

by Howard Gladstone

I can recall reading a review by Patrick Scott of all people of Bob Dylan's album, John Wesley Harding, written when it was first released. As far as he was concerned the record was utter tripe, and he could not understand what anyone could see in Dylan's lyrics. As an example, he quoted lines from The Wicked Messenger:

And he was told but these few words that opened up his heart.

If you cannot bring good news then don't bring any and compared them to lines from a song by (I believe) Louis Armstrong:

If you have nothing nice to say
Then keep your big mouth shut.

Richard Goldstein's *The Poetry of Rock* was surely written for people with the sensitivity of Scott. If Patrick is a square in the worst sense of the word, then Richard is just as hip. How about this: "Jim Morrison looks every inch the street punk gone to heaven and reincarnated as a choir boy." Or this, about Leonard Cohen's "Dress Rehearsal Rag": "Here is Cohen's 'beautiful loser', in verse. You love this hung-up saint with his three day beard and running nose of the soul. You want to take him home, feed him chicken soup, and worship his suffering." Oh come on now, Richard; you are supposed to be writing a book, you say?

Along with a few others, Robert Shelton, Ellen Sander, Jon Landau included, Goldstein is considered one of the top pop critics in the U.S. today. On the basis of this book it is really hard to understand why. Maybe the solution as to his popularity can be found in his preface. He says that rock cultivates cliches. "Pop lyricists cherish their involvement with the mundane. This embrace of the pedestrian makes it difficult for the 'adult' within us to accept rock as an artform-without-portfolio. We like our culture classy. But it is my opinion — and one on which I base all my writing and this book — that mass culture can be as vital as high art." *Eye Magazine* and *Mad* are as significant as commentary in a cultural sense. Therefore writing on the glib level of *Eye* is just as profound. Hence this book and its cliches which Richard would call "vital." Since when you write about superficial things, you should be superficial.

So, once we have accepted the premise on which

he offers his book we are prepared to read the crap he writes about as well as his own non-sensical comments. On the basis of his great "cultural discovery" we are presented with the lyrics of such rock classics as "Long Tall Sally," "Be Bop A Lu," "Yakety Yak," "Who Put the Bomp" and so on under the guise of poetry. If this book might spark a poetry renaissance, as a note inside the cover claims, then roll over Shakespeare.

Maybe, like Pat Scott, I am missing the whole point. Andy Warhol celebrates the superficial and is celebrated in turn by the critics who love what they term his "put-ons." Maybe Goldstein has turned the tables, and for once the critic is putting us on? In that case, Goldstein has certainly succeeded for I tried to take him seriously. Until I sat down to read, that is.

What Goldstein knows is that rock songs are a combination of words and music. He says that a good deal of their power is removed by putting the lyrics on paper, but that doesn't stop him. Maybe he did it for the royalties? The best way to appreciate the "poetry" of rock is still to listen to the music, not to Goldstein.

Just for fun let's see what he has to say about a Dylan song. On *Desolation Row*: "Interpreting Dylan is a dangerous occupation; I liken it to running a U.S.O. in Hanoi. The chances of being hit by flak are staggering." A typical start. What follows gets better. I try to be fair: "Any attempt to ground Dylan's open-ended imagery seems to shed more light on the interpreter's concept of reality than on the song itself. The best way to understand Dylan and his lyric poetry is to follow the scenes he sets, and the roles his characters pretend to play." Very good, considering Goldstein's conception of reality. But then his finisher clinches the verdict: "And bear in mind, when pressed for particulars, that William Burroughs writing a *Divine Comedy* in drag might well set it on a thoroughfare like *Desolation Row*." What could you say about that?

We could still use a good book on rock, not necessarily just on its lyrics. For too long we have been sold on the cultural aspect only. In spite of his pretensions, Goldstein never does approach it in a serious or analytic manner. Even though it might defeat the whole spirit of rebellion and youthful energy that rock is said to typify, it possibly will take an academic mind to write intelligently on the rock era.

SERVANT'S A GAS

David Schatzky

It's tough to be a critic sometimes. Especially if you read the other critics. Last Friday I laughed through every minute of *The Servant of Two Masters* but, when I read the *Globe* and the *Star*, I was told that the cast and director were trying too hard to be funny. I'm sorry I laughed. If I'd known that this Italian *Commedia del'Arte* farce was supposed to be more serious, I would never have demonstrated my ignorance by giggling, chortling, chuckling, and howling at the creatively comic and often hilarious antics of the very talented participants.

What the other reviewers objected to was the bastardized style of playing this fast-moving comedy. They wanted grace, wit, and a European sophisticated veneer. They forgot that this is Toronto, 1969, and that Rowan and Martin, not Plautus, are the arbiters of comic taste these days. But luckily, Richard Digby-Day, the brilliant Theatre Toronto director, knew for whom he was producing the play, and that a good gut laugh at some unpretentious, purely entertaining and colourful, mistaken identity mixup is worth all the purists' "style".

The plot is like many others of this genre; for instance, Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. There are lovers pledged to the wrong people, a doddering old man who can't remember anyone's name, a sweaty, revolting innkeeperess whose every invitation to eat is a double entendre. The important thing is that each actor takes his funniness seriously, and that the action moves. *The Servant of Two Masters* fills the bill. Heath Lambert, in the title role, with inventiveness and humanity creates a character whose only wish is to get double wages, but whose main achievement is causing himself double trouble.

His sight gags are executed masterfully.

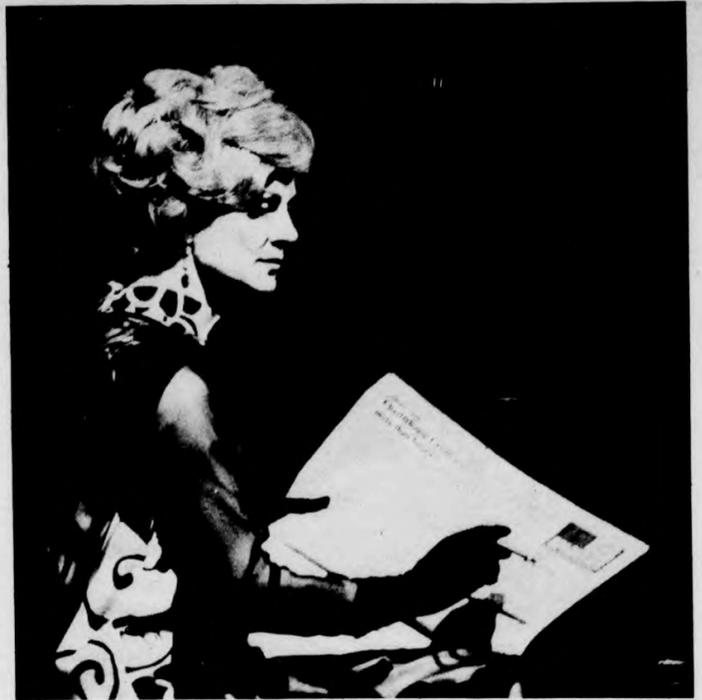
Dawn Greenhalgh, most competent in "In Good King Charles' Golden Days", is outstanding in this. As the lover of her brother's slayer, and in disguise as her brother (to thwart the marriage of the Doctor's son to the pretty daughter to whom her late brother was betrothed . . . etc), she brings an air of authority and sympathy to a part, which, not-so-well handled, might have been mere bluster.

Brian Petchey was the most hilarious. As a decrepit, senile, gawling fool, his smallest gesture and even stammered speech were beautifully calculated to produce sincere guffaws. His foil, the pompous doctor, played by Joseph Shaw whose rivalry over Petchey's lovely girl is more outraged and outrageous than his son's, who wants to marry her, is black-coated villainy itself, with a trim of righteous indignation. Rita Howell chugs through with a dynamic, energetic Italian Aunt Jemima, and her timing is exquisite.

Richard Monette does the best work of his career as a petulant lover who is constantly swearing revenge on his foes like a little boy cursing a lost baseball game. Barbara Bryne, the servant's coquettish girlfriend, is pert and impish in a delicious scene in which the two illiterates try to read somebody else's mail by sounding out the letters they recognize.

The costumes, sets, lighting and sound are most apt, being unobtrusive, yet providing bright and workable background for the important, and hard-driving action of Carlo Goldoni's relic of mirth.

Don't go and see this unless you are prepared to roll in the aisles a little, and come out grinning from ear to ear. This is one of these plays that even the actors enjoy. It's at the Royal Alexandra now.



Davena Turvey

A review of MEESON MAKES

Mr. Smith is a York graduate and the founder of Y.U.P. He has produced and acted in plays in various Toronto theatres and has written for *Excalibur* under the title *October Revolutionary*.

by John M. Smith

Dürrenmatt's primary dramatic technique, that of mystico-realism, is peculiarly German in the vein of Thomas Mann or Franz Kafka. Perhaps the most jarring note in the generally unimpressive performance of "The Visit" which recently ran at Burton Auditorium, is that director Brian Meeson has changed the locale to Saskatchewan. The setting is completely alien to all other aspects of the play. Not only is the locale disturbing, but Mr. Meeson, as exemplified by some minor points in the play, is uncertain as to whether the action takes place in 1870, 1930 or 2001. He may very well have been trying to impress upon us the temporal and spacial universality of this work but he failed, and this writer is not about to make rationalizations for him.

Maybe Mr. Meeson has failed throughout this production because he is so blatantly condescending. For instance, accompanying the programme is a short missive outlining the plot, or, if you read between the lines, "what you should get out of this play if you want your friend to praise your intellect". The ridiculous thing is that Dürrenmatt, despite his mysticism, is philosophically quite straightforward. Another condescension is the chant at the end of the play. Not only did the Broadway production of this piece delete it as being unnecessary and superfluous (which it is), but also, if you examine the original text, it is written as a dialogue of interchange, not a self-conscious psychological tidbit thrown out to the audience.

On the credit side, Mr. Meeson's sets and properties were excellent, most especially in his employment of slides. Unfortunately, this excellence, amid such mediocrity, is self-damnation by creating an environment for faint praise.

LOST INTEREST

It's as if the director lost all interest at the third rehearsal. The only people who benefitted by his guidance (and the term is used loosely) were his female and male leads respectively. It's as if he told the rest of the cast to "do their own thing" as long as they

didn't get in his way. They got in each others way. Never in the history of YUP has there been such atrocious blocking. Numerous people collided numerous times as they crossed the stage. And this wasn't the only friction amongst the cast. Every second person was cut off before finishing his lines. This wasn't an attempt at realism because it happened too frequently. There was a total lack of guidance. Other examples of Mr. Meeson's self-imposed non-involvement spring to mind. Did you know they had television in 1930? Did you know that all television commentators in 1930 bore a startling resemblance to Jimi Hendrix? Did you know that it is mandatory for all Saskatchewan policemen to have long hair and mutton-chop sideburns? Did you know that it is not uncommon for high school principals to be, look and act like 17 year olds? I could probably go on for ever.

But let us turn to the principal actors. Davena Turvey is obviously a professional. She has an ability and presence unfound in amateurs. She handles her role skillfully amid chaos, and creates a very real character. Perhaps a trifle too real for it lacks the mysticism and immortality of Dürrenmatt's Clara Zachanassian. But this fault is minor considering that she was probably the only reason I writer remained to endure all three acts.

Anton Schill was played by Tom Alway, who was the title character of last year's production of *Dylan*. One could not help but notice Dylan's mannerisms, Dylan's speech patterns, Dylan's intensity. These, however were jarringly out of place in the earthy, vulgar, strong-yet-weak Anton. Yet one would think from close observation, that Mr. Alway once had firm control over his character. Unfortunately, at some time between first reading and last dress rehearsal it must have sneaked up and overpowered him.

Amongst the minor characters, creditable performances were given by Jim Wright as the Mayor (a most demanding Role), Ruth Gallant and Jan Hamilton as Kobby and Lobby, and Frank Liebeck as a visually superb Bobby The Butler, despite his jarringly unmysterious voice.

Conspicuous miscasts were Terry Bruce as Pedro, Shimmie Plenner as the Principal, and of course, the above-mentioned commentator, Alain Goldfarb.

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