

Mavor Moore

by NANCY PHILLIPS and MARK MOSS

Mavor Moore is best known as a drama critic and playwright. His contributions to Canadian theatre and cultural matters are both vast and influential. Son of Dora Mavor Moore, he was born in 1919 in Toronto and graduated from U of T in 1941.

After serving in army intelligence during World War II, he founded an influential theatre company, and served as a writer, director and producer for UN radio in New York, among other projects. He was involved in the foundation of the Stratford Festival and in 1969 he became the first general director of the new St. Lawrence Centre.

In 1970, Moore began to teach Fine Arts and graduate English at York (where he also received an honorary D.Litt). There is now an award in his name given to the most promising playwright. In 1983 he was awarded the Order of Canada.

Moore wrote an influential column on the arts and culture for *The Globe and Mail* from 1984 to 1989. His theatrical work includes more than 100 plays for radio and over 50 for television, as well as adaptations and librettos. Six of his plays are being published by Talonbooks in the fall.

He is currently writing his memoirs, which should also be completed by the fall.

Deeply involved in the development of Canadian television, an active participant in radio and long time critic, Mavor Moore spoke to *Excalibur's* Nancy Phillips and Mark Moss about his latest project — a book which he is so aptly qualified to write — about the polarization the mass media has forced on literary and arts criticism.

Criticism now is either very high or very low and there's not much in the middle. It is becoming either so pedantic that nobody reads it except other academics, or a sort of vulgar shouting match to see who likes or hates something the loudest.

You've got Siskel and what's-his-face at one end, which is what I call the shouting match — just opinion, opinion, opinion, and the hotter and louder the better — that's the one kind of criticism. Although you get a reflection of that too in news coverage of an artistic event like a theatre opening or a new piece of music — critics are always turning to ask that guy on the street, his wife and his girlfriend what they think. Informed criticism they don't want. They catch people coming out of movies for instance — "how did you like that?" and they say "oh, it really was great." It's all instant opinionizing.

I think on the other hand that academic criticism has gone way too far in the other direction. The proper word for it is *hermeneutics*. It was a word invented for literary elaboration in the Middle Ages. You just elaborated something until you wound its tail around itself. It suggests something that's in code. It's so involved that only the people who can break the code can properly understand it.

In the meantime, of course, is the whole middle area of criticism, such as what most of the experienced journalists are trying to do, which is increasingly difficult. They are being urged by their editors to scream louder.

The public, however, is on the whole very informed — they know what's going on, at least — not necessarily understanding, though. You've got to combine with that — and here is the complicating factor — the whole hype machine of which television's a part. Which means that people like what they get. They're told what they like. While the advertisers are busy trying to ascertain what the public wants, they are at exactly the same time, of course, using advertising for all it's worth to tell people

what they want. There is a really vicious circle going on here.

As long as people know what is available they are perhaps less able to avoid this trap that the mass media had laid for them. Every trick in the book is being used on them to like "x" because everybody else does. So we're not in the state of freedom that we'd like to think. We can only choose from what's on the shelf, from what the mass media elect to give us.

I see this in every form of criticism in every form of the mass media.

Moore is concerned about the involvement and interaction of the business community in the arts.

Advertising and corporate sponsorship in particular are singled out for comment.

You can see it most easily in what's happened to *The Globe and Mail* recently. It's becoming more and more of a business type of machine. It's more business elite and it goes back to the patronage that used to be. Just as our universities are when you raise the fees, you encourage the rich to come and you discourage the poor from attending. In the arts the same thing goes. When you try to do the whole thing out on a market place basis, it becomes, as it used to be, the plaything of the rich and the well-to-do. They are the only ones who can afford the tickets. So you find the artists and the arts organizations pandering more and more to the people who've got money, including advertisers.

We're in the condition today where advertisers are paying increasingly for everything that society wants to do for itself — even politics and the church.

Corporate sponsorship in this country has never risen to the responsibility of doing things that it should. There are a number of corporations in Canada which give charitable money, but it is considerably less than half of what Americans, in most cases, give. What they are doing is making it part of their marketing budget. They're doing it for advertising purposes. That is to say, they'll do it when it reflects credit on the corporate image, and they will not do it if it does not, which is very dangerous.

On the controversial subject of free trade, Moore does not voice any concern for Canadian culture and Canadian artists. In a novel explanation for one so involved in Canadian culture, he explains that free trade will not alter the existing situation.

I don't think there's anything wrong with free trade at all, in my view. The point is we have had it always in the arts in Canada, and most particularly in the theatre. It's never been anything but free trade.

The problem is not whether you should have more or less free trade, but how one keeps the already minimal control of that which Canadians have over their own artistic household.

In the theatre and in film there's never been anything else. The present free trade agreement will change nothing whatsoever for Canadian culture in the United States.

Free trade has run the other way too, very little is preventing most Canadians from going down to the States and doing what they like. Making a film and selling it or getting a book published in the United States is apple pie.

There always has been this interplay and to talk about free trade therefore is really a red herring when the real problem is, how do we preserve for ourselves let's say, 10 per cent of our own market?



Canadians continue to go down there and will continue to go down there, to the extent that there isn't anything sufficiently challenging here. The problem again is how do we maintain our own plant? How do we provide an opportunity in this country for our own artists to stay here? It's easy for them to go abroad and it's easy for the Americans to come in here; free trade is a shibboleth of the business community, as I've said, we've always had it in the arts.

If only the business people had listened to the artists a little bit more, for the arts have had a long experience with free trade — the pros and cons — and if they'd have listened a bit more instead of shutting their ears, which is what they did — there wasn't a single person familiar with cultural affairs on the negotiating committee — they'd have come up with a better agreement than we've got.

Moore's advice to fine arts students is the standard "keep plugging," yet with much more optimism than is normally the case. He believes that the opportunities for those who sacrifice and work at in Canada are better than ever.

There are now infinitely greater opportunities than when I started out. When I started writing plays, which was even before I went to college, there were no theatre companies. So I had to go back to square one and start theatre companies. Now there are lots of theatre companies — they may not be easy to crack, to get into with your work — but they're here and they're functioning which they weren't 30 or 40 years ago.

The opportunities are greater than they've ever been but so, I think, are the temptations to just say "the hell with it" and go to America, Britain or France. I've met an extraordinary number of Canadians in Europe who are doing some very exciting work.

There will always be a tendency in a smaller country for people to go where there is even more excitement, to go where the audiences are. We're a relatively small country, population wise, and if you're looking for a big audience, you've got to go where that audience is, especially for the performing arts. Of course this is not so for the solitary arts like painting, musical composition and literature. You can do those by yourself and then send them off. You can even get a world reputation. Those solitary artists can continue to live here. But performing artists and film makers can't.

Mavor Moore will return to York in August to continue researching and writing his memoirs.

RENEGADES saves itself from cinematic hell

by BOB SHAIRULLA

Take one maverick cop, one Lakota Indian, several really mean bad guys and combine with car chases, diamond robberies, explosions, stampeding horses, medicine men, forest fires, lots of blood and plenty of guns a-blasting. Now add the right amount of humour and what have you got?

Nothing less than *Renegades*, the recently released action-adventure film starring Kiefer Sutherland and Lou Diamond Phillips. Judging from the audience response at an advance screening, it could be one of the major hits of the summer.

The film begins quietly enough on an Indian reservation but quickly moves to downtown Philadelphia where Buster (Sutherland), an undercover cop, gets involved with some nasty crimi-

nals in order to track down their corrupt police accomplices.

Hank (Phillips), a Lakota Indian, enters the picture when the bad guys kill his brother and then take his tribe's sacred lance. The two men grudgingly decide to work together in their pursuit of revenge.

Hank wants his lance back and Buster is after some crooked cops who allowed his father to go to jail for their crimes. The revenge part is somewhat diluted since the criminals pretty much engineer their own demise.

Director Jack Sholder, sensitive to a potential moral backlash, never places Buster and Hank in a position where they have to do any cold blooded killing. Nevertheless, there is enough fist fighting, gun shooting and blood spurring to satisfy the average moviegoer. Considering the plot, *Renegades* could have been a stinker. Fortunately, it has strengths in other areas that save it from going straight to cinematic hell. First among these is its unflinching humour. The jokes are part and parcel of the action, so that the hunt for the bad guys never becomes tiresome.

Most of the one-liners occur between Buster and Hank. They start to trust each other about halfway through the plot. Their relationship is not a deep one, but it works just fine for the purpose of the film. The fact that they don't take themselves too seriously is what saves the movie from being just another shoot-out. Despite its violence, the film never dips into the cynicism of the Charles Bronson/*Dirty Harry* genre of retributive justice. In the end, the bad guys, having no redeeming qualities whatsoever,

do get what they deserve, and the audience can cheer as it happens. No complex portrayals of man's dual nature here.

The stunts in the film are another strong point; and the cinematography takes full advantage of the daring deeds of our heroes. There is an excellent car chase near the beginning that's actually exciting to watch.

The acting talent of Sutherland and Phillips is instrumental in raising the quality of the film. Rob Knepper, who plays the leader of the bad guys, also does a very nice job.

If you'd like to see some good old-fashioned violence mixed with the right helping of humour to keep things from getting too serious, then *Renegades* is not a bad way of spending an evening.

Watch for the scenes shot in Toronto.



"No complex portrayals of man's dual nature here"

this book exploits animals

by TANJA OSWALD

Naughty, naughty author for writing such a preachy, neo-fascist, reactionary little book as the *Naughty Kittens*.

What begins as a promising, subversive romp through the prepubescent lives of two cheeky pussycats is manipulated into a pitiful display of almighty authoritarianism that could ambush the minds of today's impressionable youth.

In the book's first sequence, a curious kitten takes the initiative and experiences his surrounding environment, only to have it violently and harmfully ricochet in his face.

For example, the orange feline approaches a ball of wool, grin on

its face, paws outstretched to "hug" the ball. AND THEN, this omnipotent voice shouts "don't" and our kitty is gagged and bound in a sexually prone position by the wool and is scolded as being "naughty." Please.

Each sequence follows this pattern with the kittens experiencing physical confinement and embarrassment because of their curiosity and drive to learn.

What will this poor excuse for a children's book teach our young? Well, the message is quite clear. Be timid, cowardly, faint o' heart, and, above all, hesitant to try new things for fear of being challenged.

Shame on you Honey Bear Books for printing this diatribe.

be carapace with this band

by ANDY MARSHALL

Fools for Jade is a hard driving, tight band with an edge. No lush, comfortable production for these guys.

Composed of Bruce Tennant (lead vocals, guitar), Paul Marcotte (guitar), Rob Tennant (drums) and Rosie Everett (bass). Fools have been playing the Toronto clubs for the past four months. Their music is hard to categorize, although you might call it alternative pop.

They treated a good size crowd at Lee's Palace May 31 to an all-original set, featuring the baritone vocals of Bruce Tennant. Fools' influences range from Echo and the Bunnymen to Lloyd Cole and

the Commotions to the Tennants' father.

"My father played five-string banjo, and he was a hell of a lot better than I am," admits Bruce who uses what his father has taught him in his guitar licks and vocal stylings.

Fools like to try innovative rhythms and arrangements. They execute runs, shots and drum rolls in synchronicity, a testimony to hard practice and good musicianship.

Fool's songwriting is also strong. "Carapace" is Bruce's "version of a love song." As he explains, the carapace is the outer shell of a lobster and, in the song, it becomes a shell in which two people can lose themselves within

each other sheltered from the unpleasantness of the world.

Fools could work on their background vocals, as they tend to go on the flat side and are not sustained with strength for along period of time. This was most noticeable on "Real Men." Also, words are often hard to hear, partly because there's so much going on musically and partly because of Bruce's voice.

Even though their stage show was fairly static, Fools played with a lot of energy. At the end of a short, 10-minute set, one guitar string was broken, Everett was a little more buzzed and they were all drenched in sweat.

They put a lot into their show but really jammed on their last

song "The Field Behind the Church." It seemed to be the band's favourite song and, if reaching #1 on Windsor's University Station CJAM's chart is any indication, it's pretty popular with the university crowd.

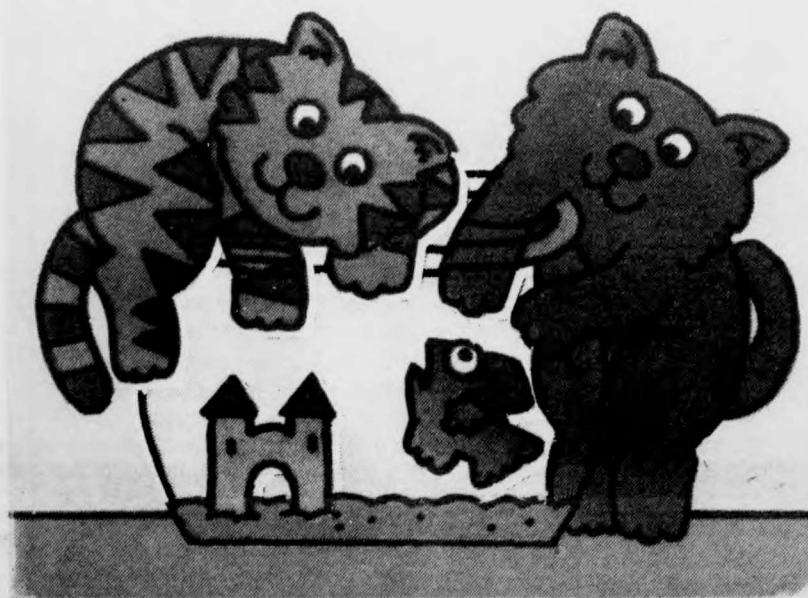
Oh, yeah. How did they get their name?

"We were reading an article on (Oriental) history, and it was talking about how jade was very sacred, spiritual and so precious that it was worth more than money. And we thought, worth more than money? Hey, that's cool. We could be fools for that kind of thing," explains Rob.

Well, they may be Fools for Jade but they sure know what they're doing.



the naughty kittens



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