

Artists, critics ruled by PR

By REBECCA CANN

"Look at art as a clothesline—it doesn't work unless it's held up at both ends." The supports at either end are the artist and the critic according to Mavor Moore. Here to give a lecture at the university Wednesday, January 15th entitled "The Critical Condition: Arts Criticism Today," Moore discussed the situation and relationship of artists and critics in today's glut of mass media and public relations.

Moore, a weekly columnist in *The Globe and Mail*, is a major figure in Canadian theatre. Joyce Zemans, the Dean of Fine Arts, introduced Moore at the lecture, describing his "impact on the Canadian theatre scene as virtually pervasive." Playwright, critic, actor, producer and director, Moore was the first chairman on the Canada Arts Council to have a background in the arts. Deeply involved in the development of Canadian television, Moore's work has scanned the country and in 1973 he was awarded the Order of Canada for his contributions. Two years ago he left his 13-year professorship in the theatre department here at York to move to Vancouver.

In his lecture Moore described today's criticism of the arts as polarized; "On the one hand you have the academic critic, while on the other hand you have the critic who is more interested in heat than light—half guru, half gossip-monger." The result, said Moore, is an "approaching state of perpetual discord" as the general public (and to a greater extent professors and students) find themselves "caught between the higher brows of intellectuals and the wider mouths of the media."

Moore pointed to a long list of contradictions in the history of art theory in leading up to the over-intellectualization of academic critics today. His long list of examples included "Art must imitate nature," "Art must improve nature" and "Beauty is in the eye of the



One-time Prof Mavor Moore visited York last week to criticize critics

beholder," "Beauty is in the composition of a work of art." Moore pointed out that "it serves both the artist and the critic to talk more and more about theories which hold no water" but that ultimately "beauty belongs, not to the subject or the object, but to the experience one is having of the other."

The rapid development of mixed media in our century, according to Moore, has led to a loss of objectivity in criticism and a belief in 'instant experts.' In the past, "the virtue of ignorance" was espoused by newspapers who sent sportswriters out to cover arts events, believing that "the less you know the more objective you can be," said Moore. He went on to point out that today

"most papers and other forms of media have wider arts coverage and more specialized writers in an attempt to help sort out the glut of information and art. But it only adds to the glut."

Moore described the frequent occurrence of a "critic giving his own response as if it was an attribute to the work of art, and assuming his feelings are common to all comers. Readers expect a critic to be opinionated—they are interested in the hot, emotional response—but critics are passing off subjective prescription as objective description. They are in danger of deliberately obscuring what they pretend to clarify."

The reaction to this glut of media and intellect has been twofold. "Artists," said Moore, "have begun to use art instead of life in their work. There are musicals about dancers, plays about actors, books about writers..." And it seems the hype which rules the media is beginning to

rule artists and critics. "Almost every art is a collective art," said Moore, "The artist and critic are both in league with public relations. The image of the art is intended to be taken for the product. While the critic becomes part of the build-up to the opening, the artist gets together with the critic so he will produce what he knows critics will like. Artists and critics have become prisoners of the immense machinery of publicity."

"Criticism is an art. The critics do shape the future of art, as jurors, consultants to boards and prize-givers. But the critic must be judged by the same criteria applied to artists."

Ultimately, Moore states, "it is the direct experience of art that is most important. The wordless response for whom it may concern. And unless you experience it you will not know whether it concerns you or not."

Media misses story

Sandinista, By Marie Jakober, New Star Books, Vancouver, 237 pp., \$8.95, paperback

By MATTHEW BEHRENS

As the United States broadens its war against Nicaragua through a trade embargo and the use of CIA-trained, -directed and -financed mercenaries, Canadians are in a unique position to evaluate the widening conflict. Though we are the US's "other backyard," we are not subject to the daily barrage of

charges frequently laid against the Sandinistas.

The ability to rise above the exchange of charges and present an objective view of an issue which draws passionate opinions from all ends of the political spectrum is indeed a rare find, and Marie Jakober's new novel, *Sandinista*, certainly achieves that end. Jakober, whose most significant previous credit was finalist in the 1974 New Alberta Novel Competition, has written an informative and coherent account of Nicaragua under the Somoza regime, detailing the horrid conditions which forced the people to take up arms and depose the dictator on July 19, 1979.

Sandinista manages to cover a fairly broad social landscape in the space of a few hundred pages, and Jakober's feel for characters under intense pressure is almost letter-perfect. She examines the lives of aristocratic families which break into warring factions and of barrio dwellers who manage to survive by selling their blood and escaping the wrath of the National Guard, which raped, tortured, and murdered thousands of suspected "subversives" during the 50-year reign of the Somoza family.

Though clearly a political novel, *Sandinista* is not weighed down with the sermonizing and rhetoric one normally finds in such a piece. Rather, Jakober allows her reader to draw his or her own conclusions about a cruel, earthquake-ravaged world where international aid is gobbled up by a small minority and the city of Managua lies in filthy ruins.

The novel comes at a particularly opportune time for a generation of readers who were not old enough to be aware of the Nicaraguan revolution nor of the conditions which precipitated the final "triumph of the people." Thus, *Sandinista* allows one to visualize the human impact of life in a country which has never known freedom from oppression and foreign domination. As a piece of fact-based fiction, the novel also gives a human face to what are otherwise almost meaningless facts, figures and tables one finds in non-fiction accounts.

For example, over 50,000 people died in the final years of the struggle to overthrow Somoza. Such numbers are almost incomprehensible. Jakober, though, is a crafty novelist who shows us in real terms the effects of one person's death on a community organization, rebel group, province, and even a country whose population totals no more than that of Metropolitan Toronto.

Also in *Sandinista* is a subtle

Excalibur's weekly guide to arts events on Campus.

If you are planning an arts event, drop by Excalibur at 111 Central Square or call 667-3201 and ask for Elliott or Dave.

Film Film Film Film Film Film Film Film Film Film Series: Focus

York Student Christian Movement Film Series: Focus on Peace Issues Jan. 28 & 29—Notes on Nuclear War, \$160 Ross, 5 p.m. Admission free

Department of Humanities Film Series: The Cinema of Ideas

Jan. 24: Padre Padrone, speakers Randy Scott and Joan Gibson
Jan. 31: The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, speakers George Hopton and Anne Shteir

Ron Shuebrook, Recent Reliefs and Drawings Art Gallery of York University, until Jan. 31

Lectures Lectures Lectures Lectures Lectures Lectures

Don Kane, Warden, Warkworth Institution, speaking on "Exactly What Do Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby have to do with Incarceration Anyway?"
Fellows' Lounge, Atkinson College, Jan. 29, 7 p.m.

D4, the fourth year Visual Arts design area show Samuel J. Zacks Gallery, until Jan. 24

Simplicissimus and the Weimar Republic, original satirical drawings from pre-Nazi Germany Samuel J. Zacks Gallery, Jan. 29-Feb. 20

Installation by Joan Frick Glendon Gallery, until Feb. 16

Apocalypse at the Downtown Drive Inn, Photomontage by Richard Slye Winters College Gallery, until Jan. 31

Galleries Galleries Galleries Galleries Galleries

Knotton, Ross, Hassall, Sculpture Installation IDA Gallery, until Jan. 24

Design Area Show IDA Gallery, Jan. 27-31

Life Fossils, Shawn Hill Founders Gallery, until Jan. 26
Through Our Window, works by Gail Esau and Mario Scattoloni Founders Gallery, Jan. 27-Feb. 3

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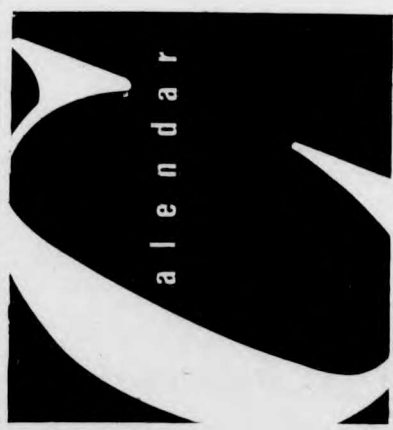
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