

Of gadflies, court jesters and would-be kings

by Ken Burke

Like his best editorial cartoons, Aislin (Terry Mosher) doesn't waste any time beating around the bush when it comes to making a point.

"We're gadflies...court jesters," he says proudly of himself and Cana-

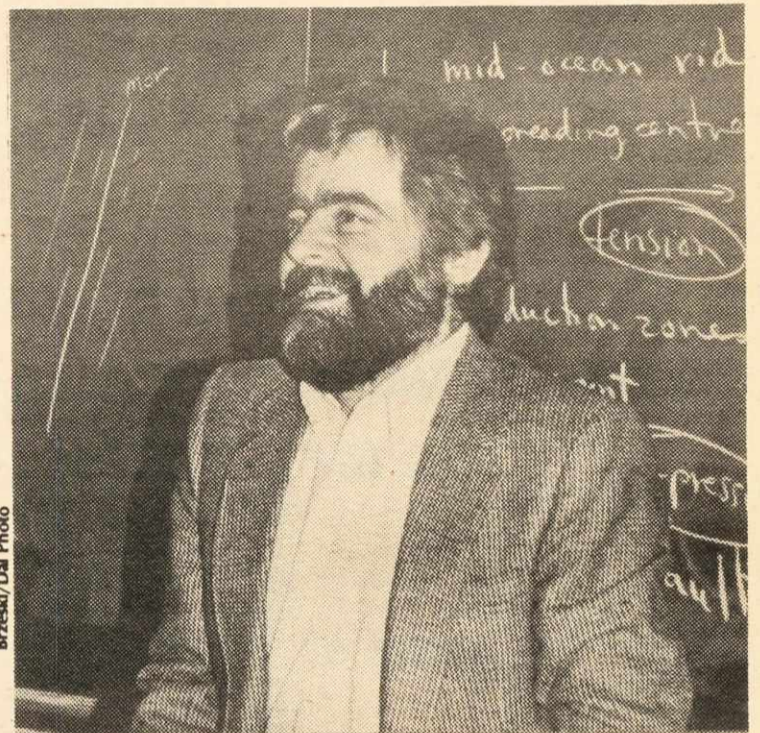
da's other 40 salaried editorial cartoonists. "We're as frustrated as the normal person in the street."

If Terry Mosher seems to betray a little condescension in his frequent talk about championing "the little guy" and "the average Joe in

the street", then he's to be excused. Working under the pen-name Aislin, Mosher is one of the country's most famous and recognizable editorial cartoonists. He's had several books of collected works from his 15-year career published, including his latest, "Stretchmarks", as well as winning a passle of awards for his cartoons of everyone from Trudeau, Levesque, Drapeau, and Clark to the archetypal Expo fan, scared Quebec Anglo, or frustrated housewife.

Pacing about the bottom of a sharply-inclined Dunn building lecture hall, Mosher recently spoke to an enthusiastic Dalhousie audience on editorial cartooning - its roots and reasons - and his own work and anecdotes. Despite a one-hour delay for the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students (D.A.G.S.)-sponsored event, Aislin/Mosher waded through several weird and unconnected anecdotes and soon the audience became his for the evening.

Utilizing a slide show for his presentation, Mosher spoke of recurring themes in Canadian political cartooning through the years. That is, he did when not going off on tangents to plug favourite cartoonists or tell anecdotes about his own work. Despite his obvious



Brzeski/Dal Photo

Terry Mosher (a.k.a. Aislin) spoke at Dal on cartoonists of all ages and types. Mostly he talked about himself, really, but what's the matter with that?

pride in the scholarly lecture he was scheduled to give - "I practised this goddam thing in front of a mirror," he stated mock-heroically at one point - it was his anecdotes and off-the-cuff remarks the crowd enjoyed best.

"Satire," he said professorially, "should be critical of the society that causes it." Mosher feels strongly about the responsibilities entrusted with editorial cartoonists. "When I draw a cartoon, I don't feel like I'm lighting a fuse and hitting the deck," he said. Cartoonists in Canada have a special duty, said Mosher, because many other countries - even the United States - don't allow the same kind of freedom to their cartoonists that Canada does. Aside from freedom from publishers, Canadian cartoonists don't have to contend with government/censorship repression. "Political cartooning is not big in San Salvador these days," he said ruefully.

Mosher's favourite topic seemed to be the chemistry of the perfect editorial cartoonist. "They have to be like everybody else," he stated, stressing the everyperson aspect of a cartoonist. "Our sympathies lie with the average Joe in the street," he said. "Most cartoonists pass up the Beef Wellington and go for the pizza and sloe gin."

Aside from earthiness, Mosher said cartoonists should monitor themselves for various evils, first among them self-importance. "I don't think any cartoon has changed the world," he stated. "They only serve to remind us we're human."

Part of that average-citizen approach is not toeing any political party line, said Mosher. "We have to be apolitical," he remarked, telling of one of Quebec's premier cartoonists' decision to resign after friends of his took political office. In his own experience, Mosher found "all kinds of political people want to embrace you."

The difference between now and a hundred years ago according to Mosher is that, then, a cartoonist had little political freedom. "They had to be true to a political party," he stated, giving examples of liberal cartoons attacking Sir John A., incredibly, on the event of his death, and another glorifying Laurier to a level reached only by Jesus or Elvis in man's history. The reason was simple - political parties not only controlled the various newspapers, but had a stranglehold on content.

Other cartoonist's tricks haven't changed much since the 1800's, though. "Things don't change - we keep drawing the same things over and over again," said Mosher, referring to the similarity of themes in good editorial cartoons from different eras. A healthy cynicism towards all things political pervades the cartoons shown by Aislin, proving that the 70s and 80s had nothing over any other period in sophistication.

Of Mosher's favourite co-conspirators in cartooning, he singled out Duncan McPherson from the Toronto *Star* as "one of the people who put Canadian cartooning on the map." Another English cartoonist Mosher considered in the same category was Len Norris, from the Vancouver *Sun*, possessing a "focus set on you and I," according to Mosher. He also pointed to Roy Peterson, also from the *Sun*, as well as *MacLean's*, as being "technically one of the very best in the world."

Ahhh, but what of the subjects of Aislin's carnage? Montreal Mayor-for-life Jean Drapeau came out on top as Mosher's favourite subject, with Renée Levesque in the runner-up position. "Drapeau's one of the slyest politicians in the universe," mused Mosher, adding "Quebec's the best place in the world to be a political cartoonist."



Film Co-Op Debuts Tour

by Glenn Walton

When does craftsmanship become art? One answer: when the whole is more than the sum of its parts. A group of Atlantic filmmakers have been providing answers of their own, and last week a show of their work was presented to an audience at the NFB. It was introduced by James MacSwain, who this month is taking the films on national tour.

Any collection from various sources will be eclectic; this one gave a strong reminder of the possibilities of film. Its selections ranged from documentary realism to stream-of-consciousness, unscripted abstraction to scripted comedy. Some of them were experimental in nature, a few attempted a broader synthesis of elements.

Mainly experimental in nature, as exercises in technique, were *Pressure Rising/Humidity Falling* by Gary Spearin, and *Transitions*, by Barbara Sterberg. The first presents a riot of images (television, art books) being manipulated (dials being turned, pages flipped) to an African beat to create in Spearin's words a "closed, measured world of hypnotic rhythm". Minimalism can evoke the terrifying from banalities; in Spearin's film the juxtaposition of primeval rhythm with media imagery creates its own form of angst.

Sterberg's film, having something to do with "the spaces between awake and asleep, here and there" is less successful, though technically sophisticated; the repeated movements of a woman getting into and out of bed, double-exposed with flitting landscapes and over-dubbed with snatches of dialogue seems like something out of a bad acid trip and quickly becomes boring after a few minutes; as a technique serving a more coherent vision, however, it could

be quite effective.

Fly My Spirits by Elaine Pain is an animated whimsical look at figures of native art that take magical wing.

MacSwain's contribution, *Monuments* focuses an irreverent eye at Halifax's granite remnants of glories past. His androgynous voice floating over the solidity of Churchills and Burns, and his camera work, (a series of double exposures, jarring angles, fixes that go out of focus) effectively debunk the intended impression of our monuments. His film shares with some of the others a certain formlessness that reveals an impatience with exposition.

The three best films of the evening came from two filmmakers, *Island Memories* by John Brett starts with a solid premise (history cannot be recorded objectively) a particular case (Acadian settled islands in SW Nova Scotia, and collects a wide variety of data, interpreted by various film techniques. Old film footage shot on the island is shown in black and white and in color, some of its subjects rediscovered by the contemporary camera. Old houses survive only in yellowed Archive photographs; the filmmaker looks up former inhabitants and visits the overgrown site.

Banal existence (one bored housewife stroking a pet explains her daily fare of soap opera and photo memories of her children) exists alongside breathtaking natural tableaux. Brett even exposes the natural indifference of the present-day inhabitants to the one conventionally interesting historical fact of the island: the gravestone of one Marie Babin, ostensibly the last of the originally expelled Acadians to die in Nova Scotia. Brett has examined past and present from various angles, translating historical lan-

guage into screen language. Ironically, *Island Memories*, (despite its thesis) through its profusion of shifting perspectives achieves a genuine sense of reality, and, yes, history.

First and last of all on the program were films by Lulu Keating, Halifax's own underground Pollyanna. *Funny Things People Can Do To Themselves* is a collection of physical loony bits performed by friends and relatives of Lulu's against a plain background. Most of the turns are fairly commonplace, but everyone is so obviously enjoying themselves that you don't mind.

Most substantial is *City Survival*, a comic look at one Cape Breton girl/woman's move to the proverbial Big City. It's a natural comic subject, and Keating has the humor to treat it; what's more she has in Mary-Colin Chisholm a natural actress with the type of Meryl Streepish face ("poised between beauty and ugliness") that registers emotion with radiant ease. Her acting, and Keating's sense of humor carry the film through its set pieces: the first confrontation with urban anonymity, apartment security regulations, bus systems.

The script, on the other hand, comes up short: weighted toward parody, its attempts at pathos are left mere empty lyricism, and the film stops rather than concludes. Nevertheless, *City Survival* succeeds in being consistently entertaining. Special praise must go to the musicians (Sandy Moore, Colin Cameron, John Galloway, John MacMullin and above all composer/vocalist Giggi Taylor) who have produced a gutsy folk/pop soundtrack, and Keating's elegant camera work, which captures landscapes, urban and rural, in strong, vivid frames. She is a filmmaker to watch.

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