

# entertainment

## Dramatic language and the art of obscenity

By Michael Christ

Two apparently very different plays: Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide — When The Rainbow is Enuf* and David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. Shange's work is a presentation of dramatic poetry; she explores what it is to be black and a woman, in America. Mamet's is a glib comedy; he explores what it is to be white, single - and horny - in America. Two different plays; and yet, very similar in their language of expression.

*Colored Girls* opens with an uncomfortable verbal attack on a typically comfortable Royal Alexandra audience. With a poetic mixture of whine and obscenity Shange's dramatic monologues create little shock waves in the carefully coiffured audience: the audience is asked to do penance for being white and happy about it. After crowding the audience into a defensive corner she wastes little time in seducing them out with her passion, insight, and depth of poetic expression. Linked together by songs and dance reflecting her fierce racial pride, her poetry is most

effective when it stresses the shared humanity of man rather than his superficial differences.

David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity*, in contrastingly modest quarters at the Bathurst Street Theatre, is a series of comic sketches and one-liners joined together by blackouts and snatches of jazz. The pungency of his language discomfited the middle-aged couple in the front row but immediately won over the play's predominantly younger audience.

The play's 'shock' title is belied by its single - bars wit and a tasteful use of the parochial. Please be advised: the players remain clothed throughout. Readers who have been weaned on the asexual nudity of some of Toronto's other alternate theatres will be surprised to hear how seductive verbal suggestion can be.

Both plays are well - acted and produced with economy and restraint. Mamet's intent is humorous, the result is slick. Shange reaches out for emotionalism and nobody will doubt the integrity of her purpose. However, both suffer from the same disability of not having a formal dramatic backbone:

the plays are a collection of parts without internal interdependence, they are joined only by theme. Mamet's play progresses like a passing train: the 'Diopler' effect. Shange's is the 'Roman Candle' effect: a series of dramatic flashes climaxed by a finale of emotional fireworks. Both works lack the driving force which comes of structure and sureness of intent.

Obscene, frank, and colloquial - the language of the street is the language of the present. George Orwell knew that without a language to express discontent, the nature or source of that discontent may never be articulated. Likewise discontent cannot be channeled into change unless it is phrased in a manner suggesting a solution.

The obscene language in both these plays expresses a frustration with a solution unphrased. Shange's characters are separated by sexual and racial barriers; her language expresses the frustrations of a black



A scene from Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* with Dean Smith and Monica George. Presented March 14 and 15 at McLaughlin Hall.

feminist. Mamet's characters are separated by barriers of sex and identity. His characters are *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan* philosophies in conflict; either sex cannot com-

prehend the other. Each sex is seen as the sum of its anatomical and cosmetic accomplishments - the language reflects this crude appreciation of human worth.

## Coma commercial

By Colin Smith

If one looked, one could probably find a point buried in a film like *Coma*. One could nod one's sagely head and reflect that, yes, there probably are such diabolical goings-on in modern medicine and yes, it raises some interesting and valid moral questions. But watching the film is another story. With *Coma*, one can easily nod one's sagely head and come up with this lone thought: yes, this is bullshit.

Written and directed by Michael Crichton (who did much better with *Westworld* in 1973), *Coma* is a good example of "bourgeois" film-making at its worst. First of all, it's a bit too long (114 minutes) than the usual thriller, but this is minor quibbling (*Marathon Man* was 121 and deliciously got away with it). The point is that in 114 minutes the movie doesn't accomplish a great deal. There are not enough gross medical jokes to make it a good black comedy. There isn't enough tension to make it a good thriller. There aren't enough inventive elements in the script - predictability rules the day. Watching this film one can put the mystery pieces together in 25 minutes before the heroine (Genevieve Bujold) gets her act in shape, and one can (unfortunately) spot the ending 15 minutes before it happens. One also begins to feel put-upon by the gratuitous gore and nudity trotted in rather obviously

(presumably to spice up the PG rating a little).

The film *does* have some good moments. There's an eerie chase scene through a pathology dept., an eerie tour through a sinister clinic, and efficient performances from Bujold, Richard Widmark and Elizabeth Ashley. There is a nicely weird electrocution scene, and some of the humour's not bad. But on the whole *Coma* reeks so much of commercial tailoring and wooden contrivance that the touchy issues raised by the script are rendered inconclusive and unworthy of attention.

## Fury lacks DePalma's punch

By Alan Fox

Those who are tuned into the bizarre, paranoid world of director Brian DePalma will welcome his latest film, *The Fury*. It's an occult thriller about a man looking for his psychic son who has been whisked away by a government agency.

Peter (Kirk Douglas) is the man, and Robin (Andrew Stevens) is the son who is gifted with an overdose of ESP. Kirsch (John Casavetes) is the head of the secretive agency (of which Peter used to be a member), which has taken Robin to develop ways to use his ESP for the good of Mankind; i.e., the US of A.

DePalma has proven himself a master storyteller with this kind

of film. Occult powers, pernicious government officials and general vengeance are familiar elements in all his films. Although his special effects are always obvious, hokey even, they prove effective in spite of their lack of believability.

This results in a film that is a combination of Godard and Hitchcock; one is sucked in while one is aware of being sucked in.

DePalma tries some interesting narrative experiments in *The Fury*, and they work quite well. We see almost all of Robin's story through the psychic eyes of Gillian, an intriguing departure from the run-of-the-mill Hollywood story.

By Linda Bandy

*Arts at Noon* is a series of noon concerts, performances and screenings, taking place this week.

Monday's program, held in a foyer in the Administrative Studies Building, began with Tomasi's *Variations on a Corcisan Theme* for woodwinds. Performed by Shelagh Aitken, Paul Gillingham, Paul Hodge, John Hurlhey and Francis Lougheed, the piece got off to a rather tentative start, but increased its authority by the final variation as the musicians grew less aware of their wandering audience.

Following the quintet, Terrill Maguire, an active choreographer-performer and faculty member of York's Dance Department,

presented a solo work, *Run Ragged*. First created and performed by Ms. Maguire in 1976 to rag music by James Tenney, *Run Ragged* is a tight piece of loose, smooth movement in which the dancer becomes literally worn-out from body parts that won't go in desired directions. The knitted eyebrow perplexity expressed by the dancer was amusing and endearing and lent an intimacy to the piece, making it especially appropriate for this performing space.

*Coping*, choreographed by Wendy Laakso was danced by Elizabeth Kewey, Cathie Finlay and Ms. Laakso; all three women are M.F.A. candidates in dance history at York. Francis Lougheed, having

gotten back his wind from performing with the quintet, improvised the accompaniment on his oboe.

The dancers, dressed in conflicting colors and haphazardly held together with rope, leaped, pulled, rolled and banged heads and feet to the ground while moving through periods of slow, sustained and quick abrupt movement. Underlying all was the use of tension and the dependence of each dancer on the others to make it through the piece. A mature dance work, *Coping* used the high technical abilities of the dancers to the fullest.

*Full Moon* concluded the dance segment of Monday's concert. Choreographed by Isabelle Depelteau, an undergraduate in the dance department, to music by John Kuiper; *Full Moon* was peopled with black-clad figures undulating through all sorts of experiences of the night, frantically running, playing, showing fear. Though some of the movement was original, I have seen far too many dancers tritely clutching their heads in despair to appreciate seeing the emotion again (and again). The piece was performed by Pierre Bergeron, Jean Hamilton, Martha Randall, Catherine Stewart, and Isabelle Depelteau.

On Wednesday, *Arts at Noon* moved to Osgoode for a jazz quintet featuring Chris Connors, Del Dako, Ben Heywook, Larry Krames, and Paul Meggs.

The series finishes today at Admin. Studios with a sax quartet, mime and a flute-guitar duet.

## Ballet season ends on high note with Romeo & Juliet

The role of Mercutio, in the National Ballet's production of *Romeo and Juliet* is a lively and demanding one; kudos are due any dancer who can carry off a death scene lasting over ten minutes. Such is the case of Clinton Rothwell, the dancer who seems to have specialized in roles as alter ego to the male lead this season. (He danced Don Juan's, as well as Romeo's, close friend.) Rothwell provided a measure of excitement in the production of *Romeo and Juliet* that was only matched and countered by Hazaros Surmeyan, in the role of Tybalt. The two stars, Romeo and Juliet placed in the background in the particular production witnessed by this reviewer.

While Peter Schaufuss, the National's new acquisition from Denmark, danced the role of Romeo in a manner that in sheer athletic virtuosity surpassed practically anything that has been seen on the stage of the National since Mikhail Baryshnikov, nearly three years ago, this dancer's ability to portray passion and emotion differs from the general company's by a factor of three. It is probably just a matter of time before Schaufuss is tuned to the National's lyrical style, but to this reviewer it seemed he has a long way to go to equal Mercutio's vivacity or Tybalt's passion.

The particular production seen by this reviewer has surpassed previous ones in sheer animosity and malice in

scenes between Mercutio and Tybalt. Hazaros Surmeyan, who danced Tybalt, seemed to stalk Mercutio relentlessly in order to get at Romeo; his characterization of Tybalt as an intelligent, evil force is a change from the usual portrayal of that character as a brainless dandy and 'passion's plaything' who mindlessly kills off the ballet's most lovable character.

The central focus of the entire ballet seemed not the star-crossed lovers, not the feud between the two families, but how long it was going to be before Tybalt managed to kill Mercutio.

The choreography of the ballet is far from new; yet even if the role of Paris had been danced with more than passing interest, one would still have to object to the peremptory fashion in which the final death scene is dealt with. If one contrasts the death of the three central characters (Romeo, Juliet and Paris, who incidentally is also killed off during the final massacre) with the death of Mercutio, the effect is devastating. While Romeo is off in a corner brooding about some lover or other, Mercutio dominates the dramatic and comic action. The speed with which all three - Romeo, Juliet and especially poor forgotten Paris - are dispatched is quite mind-boggling. Don't blink, or you'll miss the grand finale.

The choreographer and director make no bones about

which side are the good guys, in the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. There is not a snippet of a doubt when all of the approaches that Romeo's kinsmen repeatedly make to the Capulets are rejected; there is not a shadow when the Capulets indulge in extensive power rituals during their party in heavily status-conscious gold and black velvet costumes.

The matinee crowd stayed in its place to give Veronica Tennant what can only be described as a passionate and loving welcome-home applause. And indeed her pregnancy, but mostly her knee-injuries had made it seem doubtful that she would ever dance at her former calibre.

The fact that she still has some ways to go to regain her stamina was nowhere more painfully evident than in her performance as Titania in the new ballet, *The Dream*. Titania lacked verve, charm and feistiness. Tennant was still too careful; moreover, the choreographer, Frederick Ashton, has not given much detail to the fairy queen. The music of *The Dream*, for no fault of anyone now connected with the ballet, does not reflect the full story of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* to which Mendelssohn has composed the music as incidental accompaniment. But by the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, itself at the end of the ballet season, she regained much of her former class.