

Something lost in translation?

Theater review by Mini Niller

Mistrust of racial minorities exists perpetually within all societies. The current W5 campaign is evidence of its presence among us. Canada's treatment of Japanese Canadians during WW II, another sad example of the extremes to which prejudice can grow, is documented in Walterdale Theatre's present production, *Shikata Ga Nai*.

The play deals with the experiences of several British Columbian Japanese families, from the issuing of evacuation notices in 1942, until the end of the war when they are freed from the internment camps and reunited with their families.

There are many scenes, with some sad moments, some infuriating moments, but on the whole they are vague and uninteresting. My complaint is that the structure is incoherent. The play, originally an acting exercise for the Manitoba Theatre Workshop (subsequently compiled by Kevin Burns), comes across as simply that — an acting exercise. Now, I realize that the cast of young actors was elemental in shaping the play, dubbed "a collective creation", and that in exchange for group innovation one must sacrifice

perfection. I am also sure that the production was an enriching and valuable experience for all involved — except the audience.

Because the play lacks a consistent plot, the mixture of different stories becomes tiring. The tension dissipates and all original strength in the message is wasted. The large portion of the audience, half asleep, testified to the intense gripping nature of the play.

It might also be deemed unfair to criticize the acting too harshly because of the inexperience of the amateur cast. However, their inexperience was obvious. Delivery of certain lines seemed stilted and unnatural — surprising considering the freedom actors were given in reworking the script. Jan Markley as Mrs. Mori and Linda Missouri as Sumi Mori, her daughter, are especially poor in this respect. Their movements as well as their speech seem awkward and consciously forced.

A sensible decision was made in using straight make-up rather than attempting to make the cast look Japanese. Instead, they wore symbolized wrist bands. This was effective, reminiscent of the yellow star Jews were forced to wear in Nazi Germany at that time.

Make-up, however, is needed to help convey the age of 71 year old Chijiro Mori, played by Blaine McIntyre. Although the feeling is there, his body movements and voice aren't thoroughly convincing.

Desiree Reghini deserves mention for her portrayal of Mrs. Tanaka, one of the few roles that avoids cloying sentimentality. Gary Lloyd as Akira, Rose Bene as Yuki, Darcia Parada as Hanoko, and Joan Dymianiw as Mari also outshine the rest of the cast.

The set by Alli Ross is simple and has a Japanese effect. Anything more complex wouldn't work with the infinite number of scene changes.

However, the play lacked economy everywhere else. An in-depth study of fewer characters would have held together better than the detached vignettes. The ending was also too drawn out. Burns should have cut the reunion scene and used just the powerful dramatic reading at the end.

As it is, the play's emphasis is misplaced. Instead of being a poignant commentary in protest of destructive prejudices, it resembles a soap opera. And it didn't even give me a good cry.

New book sees Lee ascending with the gods

Book review by Candy Fertile

Since the Governor-General's Award winning *Civil Elegies* of 1972, Dennis Lee has published various wonderful children's books such as *Garbage Delight* and *Aligator Pie*. His long awaited new collection of adult poetry, *The Gods*, arrived last fall and was certainly worth waiting for.

The first part of the book is a collection of short poems in wide-ranging styles. Each concerns itself with man's quest for some kind of meaning or structure in his life.

The traditional view of the gods is dealt with in the poems, "The Gods", where the main question asked is, "Who, now, can speak of gods". The sense of time, past and present, is very real and important. Man is different now so he needs new answers to old questions:

*For man no longer moves
through coiled ejaculations of*

*meaning;
we dwell within
taxonomies, equations, paradigms
which deaden the world and now in our
heads, though less in our inconsistent lives,
the tickle of cosmos is gone.*

We dwell in the "flash and vacuum of modernity." Something has been lost which is still necessary.

In other poems Lee looks at varying ways of ordering life and seeking identity. The poems about marriage are gentle, humorous and touching. The political poems show the divisions in the past and the present.

*The dream of tory origins
Is full of lies and blanks
Though what remains when it is gone,
To prove that we're not Yanks?*

In "Not Abstract Harmonies But," the speaker criticises himself for his misuse of youth, his service to

*"the one forbidden/god — denial of here and now."
Youthful attention to abstraction is left in favor of the
"chronic, abrasive, not-quite/ consonance of the/
things which are."*

The second half of the book is an elegy for Harold Ladoo, a writer who was killed in 1973. Lee was Ladoo's editor at House of Anansi. The poem is Lee's attempt to exorcise an inevitable death. "You were a fresh explosion/ of that lethal paradigm: the Tragic Artist." The tribute to Ladoo is particularly moving because Lee speaks to him directly, even apologizing for quarrels that come up in the poems. The men not only had a professional relationship, but were also friends. Lee tries to understand the differences between himself and Ladoo (who grew up in Trinidad) and ends by recognizing a basic similarity.

The Gods is a sincere, serious work. No answers are given but the question of man's relationship to various conceptions of gods is treated with insight and care. McClelland and Stewart, 1979, pp. 59.

Poetry reading

George Bowering, a writer who needs little introduction by now, will be giving a reading next Tuesday, Feb. 12 at 12:30 pm in AV L-3 of the Humanities Centre.

Prolific in both prose and poetry and winner of the Governor General's Award for 1969 in poetry, Bowering continues to explore language with love and care and a finely honed and often comic intelligence.

Bowering has, since his early days as a member of the editorial board of the poetry newsletter TICH, articulated an uncommon poetic and striven to live up to his widening vision of what writing can be. After achieving recognition as a lyric poet, Bowering kept expanding his horizons, pushing himself towards longer forms. These include serial poems like *Geneve*, "Autobiology" and the recent "Allophanes".

Bowering has also explored prose in recent short stories and in *A Short Sad Book*, a comically extravagant vision of Canada and his place in it.

George Bowering is not only a fine writer, he is an engagingly entertaining reader. All of which makes his reading something everyone should enjoy.



The Alban Berg Quartet of Vienna will be performing next week for the Edmonton Chamber Music Society.

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