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In a Zombie Birdhouse with Iggy Pop

by Michael Brennan

I could say this record is the best ever but really everything Iggy Pop has done is the best ever. I mean, Iggy Pop is the best ever. The best, most, least, worst-everything.

Iggy Stogee has given his whole energy, passion and love to rock & roll and, for me, made rock & roll more than it ever was before. Just listen to "Now I Wanna Be Your Dog" and I dare you to say it isn't the greatest. There is as strong and as pure a passion to that number as there is to anything Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker or Miles Davis ever played. It's with American artists like that, where Iggy should be placed - crazy poets, happy hookers, eager virgins and lonely adventurers. Iggy Pop may be rock and roll's first artist and a happy artist he is too. I know he'll live forever.

I say a "happy" artist because

Iggy's recent release, **Zombie Birdhouse**, has a great force of life to it and an enthralling, moving spirit. There is a subtlety and maturity here that marks all meaningful art. Listening to this album straight through is like reading powerful words - Russian, American, whatever. And yet I don't think of anyone else when listening to it except Iggy Pop and the wonderful depths of human experience he expresses. This Iggy Pop will cure all your ills. There's no one else like him, a soaring zombie in a birdhouse, flying all the way back to black Africa, guru India and New York City women and love.

Since his full-time return to recording and performing in 1977, Iggy Pop has made a lot of very good, solid, and mature music. I really loved a few albums, like **Lust for Life**, **New Values** and parts of

last year's **Party**. They weren't the all-out punk rock sex attacks of the Stooges, but quieter, simple rock and roll records for well-fucked-up adults, not just romantic, sex craving adolescent lovers (though still for them too, of course). Iggy Pop didn't need to retrace his past punk image, he was the first and probably truest punk anyway.

Zombie Birdhouse follows in a similar vein as **Party**, yet it has an intensity and flow of emotion that make it a much greater record. I think it's the best album I've heard this year. It's not only Iggy's effortless, spontaneous singing and warmth that makes it, but the clear and beautiful flow of the music.

With Rob duPrez on guitar and Clem Burke on drums and African percussion, the band has created a rugged and simple rock and roll that moves like a perfect melody of

jazzy notes. Iggy is quite influenced by all the great black music coming out of America and it shows. Every song has that beautifully simple rock and roll - African beat. Iggy always wanted to be an African anyway. He even looks like one on the album cover, where he's seated with these rugged-looking New York blacks.

There are no particular songs on this album to pin-point. I think they're all perfect, from the hard-edged rockers and quiet love songs like "Run Like a Villian" and "Platonic" to the "jungle music" of "Strut Crazy's". Iggy Pop has a rock and roll heart just like Lou Reed and the well of thoughts and experience that come from him on the album make it a classic piece of rock and roll. Iggy Pop shoots straight from the heart. He deserves the biggest kiss ever.

Return of the unknowing soldier

by Steven Gregoris

Toronto publishers Lester and Orpen Denys are currently promoting a series of re-publications: "Enduring Works by Women Novelists". The line is labelled "Virago Modern Classics" (modern classics?). This series of fiction by women ranges from the late nineteenth century onwards. This week I'll review a young Cicily Isabel Fairfield, alias Rebecca West, and her initial novel: **The Return of the Soldier**.

Christopher Baldry, gentleman-businessman, is drafted into the "squalor" of the Second World War, where he is shell-shocked into amnesia. Fifteen years of memory are eradicated and he is psychologically shoved back to the period of a pre-marital romance. This is the novel's preliminary business, not part of its action. The **Return of the Soldier** examines the Baldry homecoming and Chris' subsequent retrieval of memory, otherwise called his "cure".

The soldier returns to a beautiful but basically insensitive wife of whom he has no remembrance (Kitty), to the newly uncovered love of an old girlfriend now married (Margaret), and to his spinster cousin (Jenny).

Through and with the character of the narrator, Jenny, the action is played out and concerns of the novel are explored. Jenny also shows the broader context of evolution of her perception toward a certain realisation.

The plot Rebecca West has chosen is basically static, skeletal and actionless, and the action of the characters is corresponding.

Jenny, in the beginning, exists in the world of manorhouse artifice, of soft, chintz fabrics, oak panelling and nature shaped into trim beauty. It is characterised by the one-dimensional Kitty, glossy as "the girl on a magazine cover" and as soulless. On the other hand, Margaret, who Chris remembers with youthful desire, is a mundane

and practically sexless woman - she lives in a tacky bungalow in a suburb stained by industry. One world is full of Anglo-Catholic righteousness, beauty without spirit; the other is a simple, compassionate realm of understanding where Chris lives during the blissful ignorance of his amnesia.

The brief interlude of Chris' bout with amnesia is, in a sense, a Joycean epiphany that ends when Chris regains memory (the status quo re-established). It is Margaret who effects the change back to normalcy, but only Jenny has profited - only she has come to a realisation of truth. The book ends and life begins anew, but once again the same.

Fairfield/West's women verge on the allegorical; they are opposites and represent two levels of existence, each with her own spiritual and particular social standing. Both, though, take meaning and define their being in terms of Chris:

"It had lain on us (Jenny and Kitty) as the responsibility that gave us dignity, to compensate him for his lack of free adventure by arranging him a gracious life."

Margaret, too, performs an act "ennobling" womankind:

"The woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time. I know these are the things at least as great for those women whose independent spirits can ride fearlessly and with interest outside the home park of their relationships, but independence is not the occupation of most of us. What we desire is the greatness such as this which had given sleep to the beloved."

The Return of the Soldier telescopes the women in it. They are narrowly defined and dependent on the male in their relationships.

Though Margaret is a spiritually "good" person, she is painted as one-dimensional, almost a cliché or set-piece, very much like Kitty. Though they define opposite poles of existence in the book, the axis on which they revolve is Chris.

Rebecca West (see: Cicily Isabel Fairfield) guides Jenny along this axis through a process of realisa-

tion which is complete only when she realizes Margaret's inherent spiritual goodness. It is a simple progression, and neatly done, dipping into psychology, but it constantly risks exposing its characters. There is a distinct feeling the characters are flat and the story a bit thin. The novel seems as if it could use some fleshing-out.

...Shadow Box

(cont'd from p. 17)

Peter Perina and his crew created a marvelous set. When backlit it swept us into the depths of a wonderful woodland of arborous towers interlaced with the warm rays of a glorious, golden sun. Closer scrutiny (and brighter light) revealed dried and wrinkled browns. Like death, this had a sensitizing effect on the images of life. Although the play was set in early May, the forest floor was smothered by fallen leaves. This incongruous presence of autumn in spring paralleled the seemingly unjust and unexpected appearance of death in the lives of the protagonists.

Overall the acting was very good. The way the actors accompanied the dialogue with movement was impressive and a credit to the director, Patrick Young. Each movement was smooth, expressive, and most importantly natural - showing great confidence and power.

Michael Howell (Joe) managed to win our hearts and our sympathies even though his putative New Jersey accent would have been more at home in Bangor, Maine. As Joe's wife Maggie, Paulina Gillis gave the most consistent performance. Her Betty Boop voice provided much of the comedy at her introduction yet later provided a suitable instrument to express her near hysterical fear and frustration with a situation she was not yet ready to handle.

Glenn White was convincing as the intellectual Brian, managing to hide the emotional portion of his being behind a cerebral facade. He

allowed us glimpses of his frail, terrified inner-self without losing his credibility when switching modes. Ken Roy (Brian's lover Mark) and Lisa Housden (Brian's former wife, Beverly) had perhaps the most interesting parts to play.

However, in the first act something was wrong I just could not put my finger on. Things did not quite gel in their scenes together. I could not feel the tension I knew should be there. By the second act the problem had attenuated but I never felt that they actualized their obvious talents. They were good but they could have been better.

Sherry Thomson was also delightful as Felicity. Her impressively meticulous characterization allowed her to actually become the old woman she portrayed. Her attention to detail was superb and its replication flawless right down to the expression in her eyes. Agnes (Suzanne Jacob) was not overshadowed. Her crescendo from cold resignation with fate to boiling fury with the waste of her life was explosive and masterfully executed.

Bill MacRae provided a haunting presence as the disinterested interviewer/god/fate. His contribution to the mood of the piece was substantial and his performance as tidy as his appearance.

Dalhousie Theatre Productions will be performing **The Rivals** by Richard Sheridan November 24 to 28. I think the quality of their performance of **The Shadow Box** makes this company a safe bet for future entertainment. Try it... You'll probably like it.