

arts

York actors in Devilish plot

By PAULETTE PEIROL

In the twentieth century, a potent dose of lust, passion, plotting, and murder all packed into one artistic package is a rare commodity. Even Harlequin Romances succumb to the "happy-ever-after" syndrome. Equally rare is a semi-professional theatre company willing to undertake a classic melodrama that employs the aforementioned devices, and achieve commendable success in their rendition of it.

John Webster's *The White Devil*, a Jacobean play set in the year 1585, is such a play, and the York Graduate Theatre Company, who are presenting it at Adelaide Court Theatre, is such a company.

The intricate plot involves passionate affairs, devious ploys, poison, sword-fighting, and royal scandals. It does not end happily, although for the audience there is a perverse and rich satisfaction in seeing the characters murder one another in cold blood.

The White Devil challenges even the most accomplished actor, for there's a fine line between melodrama and absurdity. David Smulker's directing is not without flaws, and the performance as a whole has many weak points. The Jacobean spirit of *The White Devil* challenges not only its actors and producers, but its audience as well. Thick English accents and eloquent yet difficult speeches make the dialogue hard to follow at times. The script is far from colloquial and even has long phrases of Latin in it. A brief plot summary would have been a useful addition to the program.

The Company utilizes the play's rich dramatic potential well. Of exceptional finesse is Glenda Romano in her portrayal of Vittoria, the cool romantic who is nonetheless capable



Robb Hutter, Dolly Reisman, Susan Bracher, and Asheleigh Moorhouse Jr. in the York Graduate Theatre Company's production of *The White Devil*.

of violent murder. Asheleigh Moorhouse Jr., playing Vittoria's passionate lover (albeit with ulterior motives), is also captivating in performance. The role of Cardinal Monticelso, played by Carl Armstrong, is written with much sublime irony, an integral part of this play. Unfortunately, Armstrong does not capture the Cardinal's spirit. This diminishes the play's impact considerably.

The sets, costumes, and sound effects are all well conceived and executed, bringing the Jacobean setting alive. The luxurious costumes are enhanced by a simple, yet tasteful and ingenious set depicting a courtly palace. Music

and sound effects add yet another dimension to help set the time period, ranging from Baroque to a cathedral gong and the slamming of ominous iron gates.

The White Devil is rich with humor, satire, cunningness, brazen egos, and corruption; not an easy mélange of emotions to brew in one play. The York Graduate Theatre Company stirs the pot and conjures a wonderful alchemy of passion nonetheless. For those with a taste for lustful adventure, drink *The White Devil's* potion. It's available at Adelaide Court Theatre tonight and tomorrow night at 8:30 p.m.

International writers at Harbourfront

The written page comes alive at Authors' Festival

By SHEILA HIRD
LAURA LUSH
and KATHE SESTO

Harbourfront held its fourth annual International Festival of Authors last week. The Festival attracted exceptionally talented writers from Canada and around the world, such as Morley Callaghan, Ted Hughes, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Salman Rushdie, Mavis Gallant, and Anne Beattie. The following offers an overview of the Festival in a series of reviews of some of the more notable and interesting authors.

• Stanislaw Baranczak

Stanislaw Baranczak's political interests in the Polish underground press got him blacklisted in Poland in 1976. Bearded, hands clasped formally in front of him, he stood back as a translator read his poems in English. Then, in a low even voice, he read them in Polish. He spoke of the hypocrisies of political leaders: "Those men so powerful who we are all so afraid/they are the ones who are afraid the most." In a style that was simple, strong and careful to detail, he spoke with humility and detachment. You felt that Baranczak creates this distance as the defense that has allowed him to endure in his life. He tried to warn us about our own battles: "Didn't anyone tell you, you wouldn't fit in, here?" Baranczak approached the injustices of life in a clever, striking manner, that aroused our general agreement—allowing us to share his thoughts.

—LAURA LUSH

• Ann Beattie

Whether she is writing about a woman whose husband has left her for another man, a marriage that is splitting up at the seams, or a group of friends grieving over the early death of a friend who used to bring them together, Ann Beattie records the emotions of men and women of the '60s generation with alarming, often painful accuracy.

The unpretentious Beattie, author of *Chilly Scenes of Winter*, and *Falling in Place*, read from her most recent book, her third collection of stories, *The Burning House*.

Beattie's characters are middle-class men and women disillusioned by the lost hopes of the 1960s. They are self-absorbed in their personal lives, jumping from relationship to relationship, constantly in limbo.

The depiction of her characters and their situations is pitiless in "Greenwich Time," the one story Beattie had time to read. Beattie provides no answers to their situation and makes no judgements on them.

She presents us with Tom, a middle class man dreaming up a serious approach to marketing frog soap for his Madison Avenue ad agency.

"The Cinderella Waltz" is another typical Beattie modern-day tale. Milo, an ambitious architect, has left his wife for a man named Bradley.

Beattie doesn't tell us the how or why of this very common predicament—she doesn't care to discuss what Milo's daughter might think of her father having a relationship with another man, or how his wife might feel, except for her saying, "I got it through my head Milo was crazy. I was expecting Bradley to be a horrible parody—Craig Russell doing Marilyn Monroe." The dialogue and visual detail concern her more than character development.

Look to Beattie for disarming glimpses of this generation, glimpses of yourself and your peers—it hurts, but it's definitely good therapy.

—KATHE SESTO

• Josef Brodsky

Exiled Russian poet Josef Brodsky had an interpreter read in English while he looked away nervously waiting to read in Russian. It was well worth the wait—exhausting the audience with a continuous rapid reading. His abrupt endings were as unexpected as a needle being lifted off a record in mid-song.

Clearly, Josef Brodsky perceives the world in existentialist terms. He imparted a sense of non-being, a sense of void and a sense of redundancy: "After Wednesday, comes Thursday and so on, and so on." He spoke of prison walls: "Only fish in the sea seem to know freedom's price," and "Even the wicker chairs are bound down by bolts."

—LAURA LUSH

• Morley Callaghan

Morley Callaghan briefly joked with the audience before giving a 20-minute reading from his novel, *A Time for Judas*.

Callaghan recreates first century Judea in this story of Judas Iscariot as seen through the eyes of Philo of Crete, Pontius Pilate's scribe. Philo describes Christ's betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Callaghan explains in his contrived prologue that the novel was written by a deceased friend, Owen Spenses Davies, who had managed to read Philo's authentic manuscripts, although they were suppressed by the Vatican.

A Time for Judas is only the latest work of a prolific career that began 60 years ago. Morley Callaghan has published 15 novels, three short story collections, a memoir, and a play. Callaghan established his career in his undergraduate years at U of T, when he realized that the everyday language he spoke also had to be the language that he wrote in.

Callaghan believes the novel should reflect reality by offering a coherent vision of life. The novel should not be "an entertaining, loosely knit variety show," but should encourage the reader to be more understanding and tolerant towards mankind.

Callaghan once said that his own country does not appreciate him. After the success of *A Time for Judas*, after the bestowal of the title Author of the Year, and after the hearty applause concluding Wednesday night's reading at Harbourfront, it is obvious that Canadians finally appreciate Morley Callaghan.

—SHEILA HIRD

• Derek Walcott

Poet and playwright Derek Walcott, a classically-educated teacher in his native Trinidad, spends half of his time in the United States at Boston University.

Walcott derives his themes from the myths of the post-colonial West Indies, which he wants to celebrate. He reads in a serious tone, holding back the audience's applause.

In "The Schooner Flight" he told us about a different kind of exile; the flight of a sailor from his mistress. In simple, vivid verse, he spoke of the loneliness and estrangement caused by this separation. Using haunting metaphors, he drenched his poems in brilliant Caribbean images.

The Caribbean has been his source of inspiration to his poems that convey a new consciousness in the post-colonial world.

—LAURA LUSH

• Ian Wedde

New Zealand poet Ian Wedde's preoccupation with the 1960s is reflected in his choice of clothing (casual), and in his poems, nostalgic reminders of a more care-free and "natural" generation.

"Beautiful Golden Girl of the '60s" is simply a long catalogue of places where he had slept with the beautiful golden girl. Wedde's modern version of Versil's "Georgics" shows that his subject matter sometimes dates further back than the '60s.

Wedde made his more contemporary interests blatantly known when he threatened those who did not plan to attend the Anti-Cruise demonstrations held on October 22.

—SHEILA HIRD

Ex-Fairports Thompson exuberant

Richard Thompson
Larry's Hideaway
Friday 21 October

By ADRIAN IWACHIW

Richard Thompson belongs to that shadowy middle-earth of rock—he isn't quite at the level of mass acceptability, but his name and reputation is well-established among aficionados and the rock press. Guitarist/singer/songwriter Thompson has been playing his particularly stark brand of English folk-rock for over fifteen years now, first with the seminal Fairport Convention, which he co-founded in 1967 with guitarist Simon Nicol (and which was once dubbed "England's equivalent to Jefferson Airplane"), and since 1971, on his own and with his wife Linda.

In the past couple of years, Thompson has toured North America a number of times (both solo and with band), including three appearances in Toronto, the latest of which was a sold-out show at Larry's Hideaway last Friday night. Together with his six-piece band (which included long-time friend Nicol, bassist Pat Donaldson, and accordionist Alan Dunn), Thompson played a well-rounded set at Larry's consisting mainly of material from last year's highly-acclaimed *Shoot Out the Lights* and the new *Hand of Kindness* albums, as well as some older and less conventional material—a 17th century court dance, the old Fairport song "Sloth," and a fanciful rendition of Glenn Miller's "Pennsylvania 65-000."

The band provided a hot, spunky, and dynamic rock & roll edge, at times calling to mind the Lou Reed of *Take No Prisoners*, at other times attaining an almost-hymnlike stature (as on the gradually-intensifying "How I Wanted To," from the new album).

Elsewhere, the saxes frequently came close to imitating the sound of traditional horns and pipes, and the accordion provided an unmistakable folk underpinning. And Thompson's elusive and spidery Stratocaster managed to break away for a couple of high-flying virtuoso excursions.

Where the live situation succeeded admirably *The Hand of Kindness* comes across a touch less convincingly. A few tracks stand out—"Devon Side," the title track, and "How I Wanted To," are delivered with a subtle, graceful power, while "A Poisoned Heart and a Twisted Memory" is positively and painfully exuberant.

The album as a whole is joyous and energetic, though it sometimes tends towards an overall flatness—Linda's dramatic vocal clarity is sorely absent here. (The themes of broken love undoubtedly relate to last year's break-up of the Thompsons. Linda is, incidentally, working on her own solo album.) And Richard's guitar work is unfortunately confined within the tight structures of the eight songs.

Thompson's ability to reflect on complex and sombre themes within a simple balladic framework has frequently been showered with critical acclaim (especially his and Linda's *Shoot Out the Lights* and their earlier *I Wanna See the Bright Lights Tonight*). However Thompson, now a devoted Moslem, seems happy with his consistent and studious avoidance of commercial success. This is something *The Hand of Kindness* probably won't alter, but considering the enthusiastic response at Larry's last Friday, one never knows.



Richard Thompson