

Entertainment

"My sleepers will flee towards another America."
-Jean Genet-

Writer sees red

Tom Walmsley speaks his mind and we hear strange things...

Stuart Ross

Since his first book of poetry, *Rabies*, was published in 1975, Tom Walmsley has remained a controversial figure among Canadian critics and audiences. His second collection, *Lexington Hero*, earned him a wider audience, and *Doctor Tin*, published in 1979, was the winning entry of Pulp Press's 2nd International 3-Day Novel-Writing Contest. But Walmsley is best known for his play-writing abilities. His most recent *Something Red* (just published in book form by Virgo Press) followed in the staggering footsteps of the earlier *Jones Boy* and *The Workingman*. Playing at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre last year, it literally stunned full houses. His work deals with junkies, prostitutes, little criminals. His people. I spoke recently with Walmsley the writer, the sado-masochist, the former heroin addict, the anarchist. He was amicable, excitable, and slurred a few words.

In *Something Red*, Bobby, the main character, reads a poem and then says he doesn't know what makes him write...the birds, the trees maybe. Is that what makes you write?

Not at all. I'm more interested in things that fuck you up than those things. I mean, you're going to die and that's it. You're going underground and the worms are going to eat you. And wouldn't it be nice to see a nice show about—about what? What's nice compared to death. Everything has got to be measured against the fact that you know that someday the worms are going to eat you.

But amidst all this cheerful nihilism, you still talk about social change.

Well, O.K. What I say is that the individual has got to fight against the state and everything else. And that's when a better state will

be formed. I'm always looking for the answer. I don't want it to end up that somebody always dies at the end of my plays, it just happens that way. I would rather things worked out. But what's the solution to anything? Buy a car? Get a job? Get a fucking hanging plant? Would that help Bobby? Him and the rest of God's children. Who wants to leave behind a piece of vapid entertainment. I just try to get to what bugs me. And what bugs me is stuff like working for a living and...everything. Just how the hell do you make it? I don't know.

The *Star's* Gina Mallett said that one of the problems with *Something Red* is that it doesn't show much development since the last plays...

I'll tell you something. I would like to piss in Gina Mallett's mouth. And that's all I have to say about any of her criticism.

Your three-day novel is a lot different from your plays. A lot funnier. And you don't seem out to change things with it.

I don't have a political stance, right? I'm not a Marxist, or a Leninist, or a Trotskyite, or any of those fucking Russian names. I don't have a perfect idea of the world. I'm more interested in writing of the world as I know it. I mean, I am for anarchy, basically. In *Dr. Tin* I just wanted to say what the fuck I felt like. I had a lot of fun doing it. You wrote a three-day novel yourself. Now, where do you get that stuff from? It's not something you lived and died by.

Dr. Tin becomes a rock star and tries to literally destroy his audience. Is he your ideal artist?

Oh, absolutely. An artist who just discovers that art doesn't change anything. I'm disgusted with the so-called artists who aren't trying to change a thing, and for some reason think that their inconsequential works are having a major effect on society. Writing, or any art, becomes such a closed

circle, you end up writing for writers. I write for you, you write for me, dooka dooka, dikka dee.

You don't think you can change anything with your writing?

I hope to make people look at things a little differently than they do. I mean, look at the fucking people who came to *Something Red*. The subscriber series. All these terminal cases showing up to watch the play. They have obviously never lived like any of those people on the stage. These people who go to live theatre will finally look at this guy and start to question things. You know, you can't start from an answer. So, if they start from the question maybe their lives will be different in some way. Maybe not. Basically, I don't care. I write just so I can get it out there and get on to the next thing.

Do you read much James Cain and detective stuff? Dr. Tin seems to have a lot of that sort of influence.

I love James Cain. I like Hammett, Chandler. I've always liked that. That was my earliest reading when I was a kid. The thing I like about James Cain's work is that everything is so totally founded on lust. The sexuality of the people is so important...you know: man meets woman, decides to murder husband. I find that much more real than anything else. A guy's got the hots, and will commit any amount of violence to fulfill that. That I understand.

How about rock? Hendrix and Lou Reed pop up in your plays and poetry.

I totally believe in rock and roll. I



Walmsley in the pose that Chatelaine refused to print.

think if you don't like rock and roll, you're too old to live. It's the only thing that keeps me going. Bobby says that in *Something Red*. The thing he can't really believe is that Jimi Hendrix ever existed. In a world that sells Bic Disposable Razors, I can't believe that Jimi Hendrix ever existed either. I mean, all I can think about is 'Robert Young is God'. It's all *Father Knows Best*. What they're always saying to you out there is: "Grow up, work hard, do this, do that." And basically, you live your life in a three-piece suit. You're just going to trudge along and *nothing* means a thing. Everything is sensible, calm, very nice. It's like drinking tea, you know? Well, in that world you've still got Hendrix on guitar, and you've still got sex, *flesh* and *rock and roll*. I'll go for that every time. I mean, fuck the TTC.

What did you think of the punk movement?

I was absolutely for it. When the punk thing came along—Johnny Rotten, the Clash—all that great stuff, I thought, 'Now, that's what I do.' Because that's where you've got an outlet for your own violence. You're not feeling violently about life, and you're not feeling passionately either. I equate passion and violence.

And violence doesn't have to necessarily be a negative thing. If you go to bed with somebody you can make love violently. And that's positive. And you have to believe violently about your work, too. Just so you feel violently enough to say, "Look man, if you do that to me, I don't sue anybody, I'm gonna fucking kill you." That's feeling violently and that's positive. Revolutions are violent. And that's positive violence. You know, everybody ignores the positive aspects of violence. Like heroin, it's got bad press. A couple of guys throwing an East Indian on the subway tracks isn't such an attractive proposition. But that's one side of it. I mean, no doubt those guys felt passionately and violently, and I totally disagree with them. The way I feel about it is I'd like to shoot *them*. I have a violent reaction. I mean, I'm not Mahatma Gandhi. Which I know shocks you.

You write a lot about heroin and sado-masochism, and you feel strongly about gay rights, but you don't deal with that in your plays.

It's like Marlon Brando with the Indians. I'd rather hear it from an Indian. I think to really deal with

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A relaxed Walmsley awaits gun-toting Gina Mallett.

Art spaces sparkle

If you commit yourself to a search, York's art galleries will reward you with more than a few cultural pearls.

The Art Gallery of York University, N145 Ross, open 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, is the flagship of York's galleries. This gallery once mounted its own small, but highly respected shows, sometimes doing work with international importance. Now, being a victim of major cutbacks, curator Michael Greenwood says the gallery relies upon ready-made exhibits imported from outside galleries or museums. The exhibit now on display, "Edward Curtis, Seventy Photographs of Canadian West Coast Indian Life Before the First World War", comes from the Edmonton Art Gallery, and will be here until October 10.

The Samuel J. Zacks Art Gallery, Room 109 Stong, hours TBA, will be opening October 14 with a show of "Caribbean Art, Paintings and Sculptures". Artists will be in constant attendance until the end of the show, October 22. Curator Dixie Worcester wants the Zacks Gallery to promote multiculturalism with more than one art form at a time. "Instead of an



Ronald Ramage at the Galleries

ordinary gallery, we would want to be a participation gallery."

Founder's Art Gallery, tucked behind its reading and listening room, just opened its first show of the year, "Paul Salmon, Recent Photographs", running until October 10. Herman Yamagisi is Founder's Art Director.

McLaughlin College, in lieu of a gallery, sometimes mounts shows in Mac Hall, or in conjunction with other events. One such upcoming event will be the first Chamber Concert, October 31, 7:30 p.m., in the Music Room, 016 McLaughlin. Ms. H. Sandburg's work in progress, scene by scene paintings of the entire bible, will be on display at the same time. Persons wanting to display their own work should approach McLaughlin Student Council.

Winters' Art Gallery, Rm. 123, hours TBA, is a bit hard to find but one of the larger and more comfortable of York's art spaces. The first show of the year, "Drawings by Alex DeCosson"

will be opening October 14. The opening has been delayed by renovations in the gallery. Besides visual art shows, the gallery will be presenting music, dance and performance art pieces. Kathy Lipsett, of Winters' Art Gallery, says she also wants to bring in outside non-student art from Canadian Industries Limited, and The Royal Ontario Art Museum Extension Branch.

Students wishing to show their work should call Kathy at 663-9320, for there is still unbooked time in December 1980, and January 1981.

It's quite different at IDA, the gallery in the Fine Arts Building. This gallery displays the work of the master and upper year visual art students at York. Curators Laura Cosgrave and Robert Youds state the gallery is booked until April 1981, but the situation is confused at present, and more information will be forthcoming.

The most exciting gallery times are openings. Wine and cheese are de rigueur; the artist, critics, and important personages are there; there's nearly always somebody pretty enough to make your day; conversation sparkles; and the art work, (yes the art work) looks best in this light.