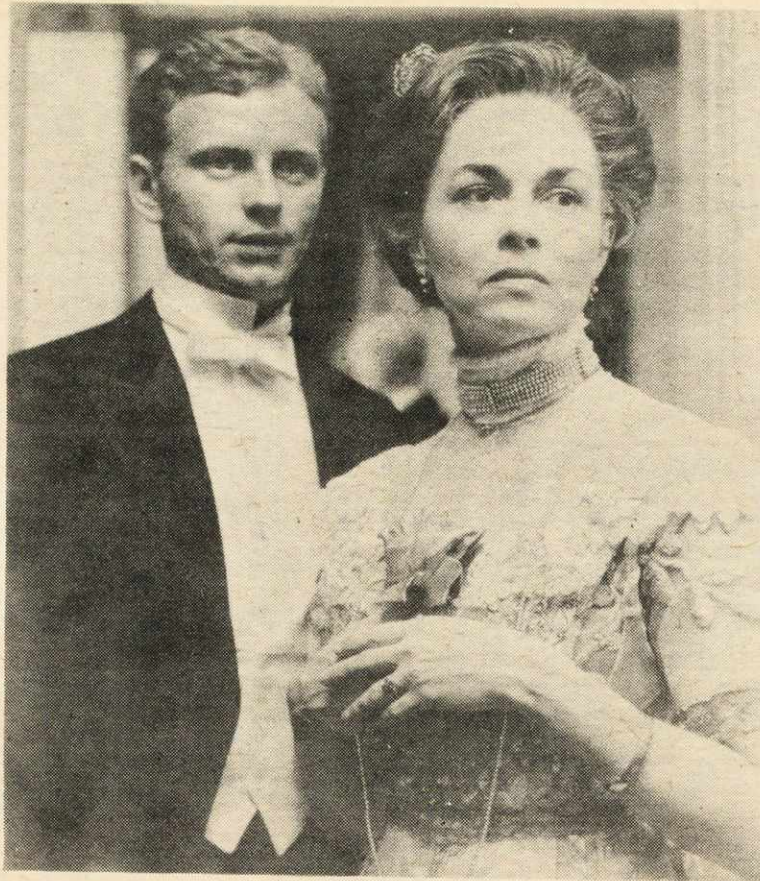


## THE WARS

By P.J. WILSON



Brent Carver and Martha Henry in *The Wars*.

**T**he *Wars* is a significant contribution to the genre of films depicting the horrifying realities of war—in this case, the horror of trench warfare in France during the First World War. But more importantly, it is a film about the interior states of mind of the people who go to war and those who remain behind.

Director Robin Phillips (here directing his first film) and Timothy Findley (who adapted his novel of the same title for the film's screenplay) have handled the characters' interior states in an interesting, if all too sparse, style.

Evident from the beginning, this style conveys psychological turmoil through still cinematic shots of physical details—coals smouldering in a grate, sepia-toned photographs on the mantle, smooth table-tops reflecting people's faces, close-ups of hands touching jewelry or bits of clothing, subtle facial gestures, and so on. We are shown these things while a young woman, who we discover later is the nurse attending the main character's death, asks about his past and reveals the circumstances leading up to his death. The film then flashes back to the serene, sheltered world of the Ross family just prior to its upheaval.

Most noteworthy in this segment of the film is the performance of Martha Henry, who does a superb job playing the hardened, well-bred, stiff-upper-lip Mrs. Ross, very much the lady of the house—and incidentally mother to the main character. She plays the part with frosty reserve, her face stiff and mask-like. Unfortunately, she has to push this characterization a little too far during one long-winded, prosaic reminiscence to her son, Robert (Brent Carver), while he soaks his bruised body in the bath. This is one scene that should have been pared down to the bone and wasn't: The undertone of incestuous longing from Henry is of singular importance to understanding, if only partly, the main character's complex motivations. Much of this undertone is lost, however, in the length of Henry's monologue.

The audience will find themselves mentally taxed in attempting to understand the complex—and indeed obscure—motivations behind the close-knit and emotionally closed family. We may be pleased that Phillips and Findley assume we are an intelligent audience (particularly with the plethora of movies which assume an average intelligence of, say, an ant eater). Nevertheless, they may be hoping for a little too much, as though each viewer were capable of filling in the bevy of Bergmanesque

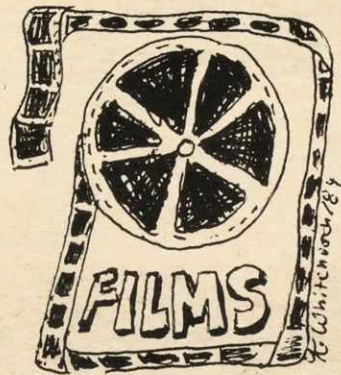
silences with lines of insightful prose like those presented in the novel. Part of the reason for this may be that Findley, a novelist, is uneasy writing for the screen, particularly in the delicate area of deciding what parts of his novel to cut out and what parts to leave in.

In the lead role, Carver puts in a solid performance as the naive, wholesome, all-Canadian boy who has a lot of growing up to do. On the face of things, he seems totally ill-equipped for the responsibility of leadership with which he is suddenly burdened when he joins the Canadian army as a lieutenant. Once in the trenches, though, he finds poise and strength under pressure. A chilling example of this comes as a cloud of dreaded mustard gas slowly creeps down the sides of a bomb-crater where he and several men are setting up mortars. With only a single gas-mask between them, Ross coolly orders the men to tear off bits of their clothing and urinate on them, then hold these urine-soaked rags over their mouths and noses while lying face-down in the mud. Something in their urine, he remembers from high school, will react with something in the mustard gas to form unbreathable crystals—and thereby save their panic-stricken skins. From this arises the film's only moment of humour: One of the men remarks, "I guess we should be glad you went to high school," to which Ross replies, "No, just be glad we drank a lot of tea for breakfast."

The cinematography enhances the film's treatment of psychological states. At its most brilliant—shots of room interiors with sunlight pouring through windows and washing out the screen's colour—the cinematography is profoundly striking. At its least brilliant, it is always more than adequate, shot from unusual angles, through doorways and around corners, creating a striking visual density that parallels the film's psychological depth.

Also worthy of praise is the musical score by Glen Gould. Like

the script, the direction and the cinematography, Gould's score underlines the film's psychological themes. At times reminiscent of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*



and at other times more like the melancholy tonal colours of Eric Satie, the score helps to create an overall low-key atmosphere.

Alas, by the time this review goes to press, *The Wars* will have moved on from Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema, and readers will have to content themselves by catching it when it airs on CBC this fall. While it is unlikely to translate well onto the small screen (much of the power of the cinematography will be lost), *The Wars* will still sparkle by contrast to most of the fare on CBC's Wednesday night Canadian film series. That is to say that this is a film which stands apart from the majority of the projects that have been produced in this country, and one which announces that world-class films can indeed be made in Canada. Flawed though it undoubtedly is, particularly due to an uneven script, *The Wars* makes inroads into the battle-scarred Canadian film industry.

To say that it is anything less than a brilliant film is surely to judge it by high standards. But with internationally-known names such as Timothy Findley, Robin Phillips and Glenn Gould involved, these are the kinds of standards *The Wars* demands—even as it fails by them. □

## Ape man speaks

By DAVID OLIE

**O**ne of the few good things to come out of South Africa in the last half-century is the eminent anthropologist Dr. Philip Tobias of Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg.

Dr. Tobias enlightened and amused an audience of 200 with his illustrated lecture on human evolution last Monday at the Tupper Medical Building. His talk traced the general course of anthropological discoveries in Africa since 1924, and also publicized the remarkable *australopithecus* finds his team has made in the last few years.

*Australopithecus*, a hominid or proto-human, is now nearly universally regarded as the common stem from which modern human and several other human-like creatures evolved. Various species date back to between 1.5 and 4 million years ago.

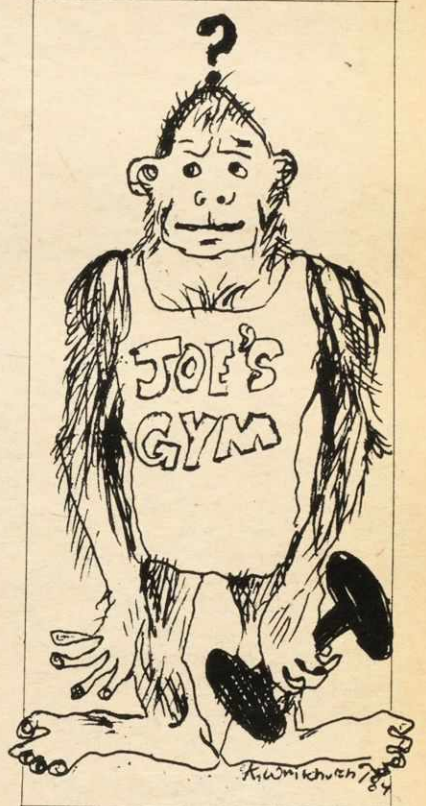
Tobias was enthusiastic about the results of his work at the Sterkfontein site over the last years. He said that in the six years before August, 1983, 149 specimens of *australopithecus* had been found. Then from August '83 to August '84 they had a "miracle year," cataloguing 175 specimens of *australopithecus* and the more recent *Homo habilis*, "the richest haul of fossil hominids from any one cave in any part of the world for any one year." The vast bulk of these finds were bits of skull and teeth, but there were also seven precious post-cranial fragments.

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A former student of the discoverer of *australopithecus*, Raymond Dart, Tobias first came to world attention in 1936 as co-discoverer of Makapansgat, last of the five South African hominid sites. In the past years he worked closely with Mary, Richard and the late Louis Leakey in their work at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. He is currently Head of the Department of Anatomy at Witwatersrand and former Dean of Medicine. He has received numerous awards and distinctions in his field and has written or contributed to over 600 scholarly works.

Though Dr. Tobias steered clear of any mention of social and political affairs in his home country, he is known to be active in the struggle against the apartheid system in the educational institutions of South Africa, and has worked for the expansion of human rights throughout the world.

### Election 3 Student reps on Gazette's Publishing Board

Any Dalhousie student who has a special interest in the workings of the Gazette is encouraged to run for a position on the Publishing Board. The elections are taking place at the Gazette's Annual General Meeting, Monday, Sept. 24th.

Room 314, 3rd Floor, Dalhousie Student Union Building, 12:00 p.m.