

entertainment

Montero explores immigrant lives

By Norm Faria

After two years of heated and continuing debate, Canada's new immigration law, Bill C-24, will come into force this April. The Bill updates older legislation to increase the scope of restrictions on potential immigrants and closely monitors the activities of those already here.

Gloria Montero's recently published *The Immigrants* explores this aspect of immigration to Canada, but it also delves into the day-to-day lives of the immigrants themselves.

In fact, Montero lets the immigrants speak for themselves. Months of recorded interviews and discussions have been split up into seven sections, each accompanied by a short introduction by Montero. The first three are comprised of personal histories; the other four, in turn, are thematic chapters on work, adjusting to a new culture, social life, and a broad overview of what it means to be a Canadian.

In this way, Montero avoids two pitfalls commonly associated with "ethnic" studies: firstly, the immigrants, their poverty and struggle, are not glamorized and treated in a sentimental manner. Privations are seen as situations to emerge from, even though for many the accomplishments will be far from what is desired. In the section on work, for example, there is the description by one of the Portuguese office cleaners at Queen's Park of the successful attempt to form a union. Secondly, Montero brings all immigrants together to share their



In *The Immigrants*, Gloria Montero avoids the commonest pitfalls of "ethnic" studies, according to reviewer Norm Faria. But the book is lacking in layout and skimpy in introductions.

experiences. There is no excessive division on the basis of separate ethnic groupings. In this vein, participants are identified by their occupation rather than by ethnic origin.

Indeed, she seems to pose the question: Are recent immigrants all that different from the longer established residents? Is not work basically the same all over the world? In the book, a chartered accountant from a country bordering the Mediterranean found no trouble with Canadian accountancy methods. Victor, a miner from Chile, says the working conditions and machinery are generally the same in Chile and Canada.

Montero, who is involved with the Centre for Spanish-speaking peoples in Toronto, has brought out

a worthwhile addition to the tradition of recording and learning from the experiences of recently arrived immigrants, working men and women soon to rub shoulders with everyone.

The book, however, suffers from layout problems. Although it steers away from the excessive abstractness that mars *The Seventh Man*, John Berger and Jean Mohr's otherwise useful work on migrant workers in Europe, it could have borrowed some of the superb arrangement of print and photographs in that book. In addition to being useful in themselves, photographs of job sites and housing conditions would have broken up the more than 200 pages of solid print contained in *The Immigrants*.

In addition, Montero's introductions to the various sections seem a bit too skimpy. Perhaps some more historical detail about the particular events and experiences.

It was not so long ago that a Swiss government — sponsored xenophobic referendum to deport all the immigrant labourers working in the lowest-paid service and industrial jobs was narrowly defeated by the voters. In Canada, the recent revelations that the RCMP employed an individual as an agent provocateur among Caribbean immigrant organizations must surely reinforce the long held belief that immigrants are among the first to be used as scapegoats in times of economic and social crises.

In fact, many argue that the new Bill C-24 possesses wide powers which infringe on the already limited rights immigrants possess. For example, landed immigrants can be picked up by the RCMP and deported without recourse to a hearing. In educational institutions, it was not so long ago that the administration of the University of Toronto Medical School expressed concern over the high percentage of Chinese Canadian medical students.

The Immigrants is therefore a relevant book for all of us. Although it focuses on the experiences of recent immigrants, it should be read by a broader segment of society, made up, after all, of...immigrants.

'Bye Girl

Recommended is Herbert Ross' *The Goodbye Girl*, written by Neil Simon. It sails on energetic performances from Richard Dreyfuss, Marsha Mason and Quinn Cummings. Simon's screenplay (full of sentiment without being sentimental) is clear-eyed and lacks the condescension and stridency that marred *The Sunshine Boys*. Ross directs with affection and tidiness. Altogether a quietly special type of comedy.

C.S.



This photograph of a woman of the Padlimiut Inuit was taken by the Rt. Rev. Donald Marsh in the 1930's. The photograph and the parka of caribou-skin with beaded decoration are part of an exhibit, *A Missionary and his Wife Among the Inuit*. Now at the Royal Ontario Museum until May.

Truffaut's shocker

By Colin Smith

Coming after his lively and charming *Small Change* (1976), Francois Truffaut's new film, *The Man Who Loved Women*, is a shock. Notably one of the more sweet-tempered of directors, his latest is an overlong, melancholic look at men-women relationships that is as thoroughly depressing as it is engaging.

Truffaut tosses us into the lap of Bertrand Morane (Charles Denner), an engineer who only jerks to life when in pursuit of *l'amour*. An inveterate ladies man, he savours women as a grape connoisseur would savour an excellent wine. He pursues women, as many as he can manage, with a suave desperation that is both comical and touching. He chases, as one of his love objects puts it, "as if your life depends on it." He nurtures a dream of escaping to an island inhabited solely by women. He writes a book about his exploits. Appropriately, his pursuits inadvertently cause his death.

There is much here that makes the film work. The script (by Truffaut, Michel Fermaud and Suzanne Schiffman) is nicely wrought, often full of painful sadness shot through with a dose of drollness. There is a steady, and not overpresent, reliance on symbols expressed

through dialogue and material objects. The bright colour photography of Nestor Almendros provides an ironic counterpoint to the prevailing grey tones of the film (and an appropriate accompaniment to Bertrand's vivid, if childlike, life.) Maurice Jaubert's score is extremely functional.

Performances are of prime consideration. Denner's Bertrand is an earnest lost soul, as unfathomable as the reasons for his obsession with women, and he works hard to preserve the character's ambiguities while still making him interesting. The women have important roles, and standouts are Brigitte Fossey as Genevieve the book editor, Nelly Borgeaud as the dangerous Delphine (who has a passion for making love in public) and Genevieve Fontanel as Helen, the woman who only goes for younger men. Leslie Caron has a telling bit part as an important ex-mistress.

The over-riding factor in the film's favour is Truffaut's direction. He is keenly sensitive to his material and, although he allows his movie to run on for too long, is able to provide moviegoers with the immediate sensation of feeling (as the credits roll), "What a sad little movie...."

Mays' Spiral Stairs

The Spiral Stair, John Bentley Mays' first novel, is a story twice-framed. First, by the narration of the wife of an author residing in an asylum; secondly, by the documentation of his fascination with a renowned astronomer's son who has committed ritual suicide in a university library.

We are never sure if the frigid details of this man's life are the insane author's fiction. Its account in diary fragments, lists, and commentaries invoke the social, religious and intellectual dimensions of a culture absorbed with desire and emptiness. It is a police state, infatuated with Byzantine ritual and sexual ceremony; mass genocide and madness.

The intellectuality of *The Spiral Stair* is both fascinating and irritating. Mays sketches plot and characterization in their basic and severe contours, involving the reader in imagery as a platform for understanding the book. If imagery were the concluding element, then *The Spiral Stair* could be categorized and dismissed as the familiar genre of contemporary

morosity. But the bleakness and dispassion of the son's life, which fills the first two parts of the novel, is placed in perspective through the mad author's perceptions in the third and final part.

His accounts of his own life, and his insights regarding the dead son, restore events from their baroque and decorative place in a macabre pattern, and return them to a simple occurrence without symbolic meaning.

The Spiral Stair is an ambitious book, the coherency of which ultimately rests on structure. Its precision creates a strikingly accurate illustration of the two-fold process of recording and understanding.

The book does not attempt to produce an illusion of life, but rather involves the reader in each stage of the mental processes of its four authors: the boy in his journals, the confined author, his wife, and Mays himself; an experience which is demanding, stimulating, and powerfully rewarding.

Judith Doyle

National Ballet's Dream can't bridge the centuries

There were many things wrong with *The Dream*, the National Ballet's rendition of Shakespeare's classic play performed last week at O'Keefe Centre.

It's a new ballet for the National and uses music Mendelssohn composed around the theme of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

That fact is the ballet's major flaw, for the music leaves out much of the drama and some important portions of the stage play.

There is little detail in Frederick Ashton's choreography, choreography which seemed much

too plain for such a rich and suggestive topic for a ballet.

Some of the details seemed isolated and awkward, and some seemed to be overdone. Only one or two fairies in Titania's retinue seemed to notice their queen's inexplicable passion for a mule, the rest took it in their stride. By contrast, the artisan turned ass was much more graceful in his animal than in his human incarnation and pranced around monotonously at great length on pointe, presumably imitating motion on animal hoofs.

Both lead dancers, Veronica Tennant as Titania and James

Kudelka as Oberon were very cautious, and some of their pas de deux were quite rough. Kudelka had to step into the role at the last moment and the lack of rehearsal time was painfully evident.

Don Juan, in the second half of the evening, has been resuscitated for the current season. It's the psychological profile, of the legendary figure who, we are baldly told over the loudspeaker, is a "narcissist" who is "forever alone."

The role of Don Juan was danced by two dancers. Don Juan was danced by Sergiu Stefanschi

and his alter-ego was danced by Clinton Rothwell. It is the alter-ego who plunges into the swirl of life around him it is he who woos the women and dallies with the men. Don Juan himself only moves out of his self-absorption when someone his alter seduces tickles his jaded appetite. But one woman, danced by Mary Jago, dressed in heavily symbolic incorruptible white, resists him and escapes from him unscathed.

Two years ago, when I last saw this ballet, Sergiu Stefanschi's dancing was competent, but uninspired and the entire ballet

was wooden and tedious. This time around, however, Stefanschi seemed to have broken out of a rut and quite surpassed himself, bringing the audience to its feet. In an intense pas de deux with Mary Jago, his Don Juan's resistance seemed to visibly melt under her relentless exploration.

Clinton Rothwell provided an earthy, vibrant contrast to Stefanschi's cool contemplation of himself.

This week, the National Ballet performs *Romeo and Juliet*.

A.K.