

ARTS

Two treats for Edmonton theatre-goers



photo Peter Jarvis

Don Pedre (Michael Charron) kisses the hand of Dona Beatrix (Guylaine Payeur) as a softening-up measure prior to a lover's spat. Maid Celia (Valerie Gobeil) acts as chaperone to make sure things don't get out of hand.

La Dame Fantome
Faculte St. Jean, T.F.E.

review by Brent Jeffery

La Dame Fantome playing at Faculte St. Jean is an entertaining, at times extremely funny, two act play.

It concerns the pursuit of a mysterious lady by a bumbling knight and the pitfalls, superstition and rivalry that come between them.

The play is marred by mediocre, and at times overzealous acting, a sure sign of lack of talent or of over-compensation for a lack of conviction. At fault in this regard are Michel Charron as Pedre and occasionally Pierre Lamoureux as Lesardo. Their actions were not conclusively indicative of the characters they were attempting to portray.

The play is saved, however, by a strong performance from Michel Lalancette as Calabazas, Lesardo's valet. Lalancette is excellent as the witless servant of the bumbling knight. Whether it was with a grimace, a smile or a twist of a leg, his actions and buffoonery kept the

play alive. In tandem with his master they were strikingly similar to the comic greats Laurel and Hardy.

The humor, although inventive, was sometimes overdone, with sequences being milked for every last ounce of laughs.

In spite of this and other factors such as set design and construction, which could use improvement, the play succeeded, and French theater in Edmonton should hopefully progress further.

The Skin of Our Teeth
Studio Theatre
until Oct. 24

With the Pulitzer-Prize winning play *The Skin of Our Teeth* by Thornton Wilder, Studio Theatre continues to build a strong reputation for putting on good quality, entertaining plays. This one tells the story of the life of the Antrobus family during three major events in world history; the coming of the Ice Age, Noah's Ark and the Great Flood, and World War II.

The portrayal of the family was done with adequate, if sometimes overbountiful realism, interjecting small, humorous

anecdotes which were readily identifiable with our own real world experiences. One good dramatization of and significant comment on the expectations of the Antrobus parents was presented in one scene.

In it the son Henry observes that he must "be a good boy, a good sheep". Very good.

The breakdown of family relations was another aspect vividly portrayed. Included in this was rebellion of youth against authority, thought control and the status quo. The scene which climaxes this buildup of resentment and anger was very moving, one of the highlights of the play.

The largest contribution to the success of the play, however, was unquestionably the performance of Marianne Copithorne as Sabina. Sabina was merely supposed to lend support to the central characters of the play, Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus, yet she ends up being the catalyst from which the play derives its strength.

Sabina, as the prissy maid of the household, is very likeable, and it is her viewpoint that provokes the most intriguing thoughts. Lines like "Children are a thing that only parents can stand", or "It was girls like I who inspired the multiplica-

tion table" and "Why is it that however far away I go I always find myself in the kitchen" served to provide humor while making the most revealing of statements.

Nor was the excellent dialogue limited to Sabina. Mr. Antrobus, played very competently by Ed Lyszkiewicz, had one of the best lines of the evening. During the pre-Ice Age period, he extolls his own virtues by saying, "Little did my parents know when they told me to stand on my own two feet that I would come this far", a subtle Darwinian reference that would be easy to miss.

Despite its numerous strengths there were a few weaknesses. The slide show/narration opening of the first and second acts was stupid to say the least. Also the convention centre scene was slow and provided little significant plot or character development.

The major fault was the over-use of stopping the scene, supposedly spontaneously, to talk with the audience. More restraint should have been exercised by the scriptwriter in using this device.

All was not lost, however, and the play was still one of the better plays I have seen. Man does survive and will survive, come ice or high water.

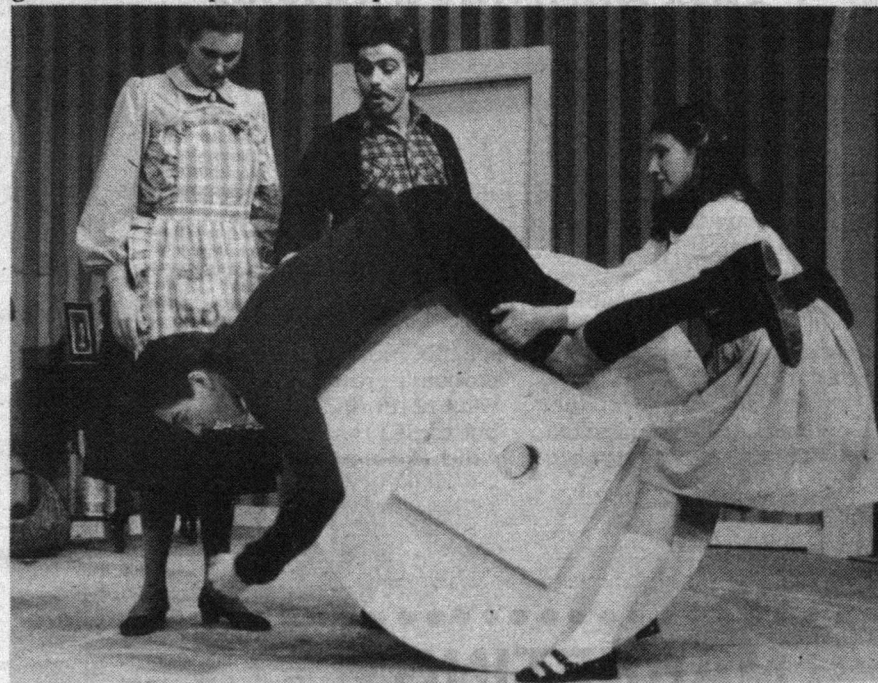


photo Ray Giguere

The Ice Age Antrobus family try out a revolutionary new invention.

Fine new novel from a Canadian institution

Bodily Harm
Margaret Atwood
McClelland & Stewart 1981

review by Geoffrey Jackson

Here is Margaret Atwood's fifth novel, released with all the pomp and circumstance of the inevitable mass media push. For some reason, however, the *Gateway* was overlooked by McClelland and Stewart, and we received no review copy of this book. So I am grateful to *New Century Books* for lending me a copy to read.

I'm glad to say it seems to be one of the best novels she has written. There has been such growth in her prose in her last two works that I believe she is only now really hitting her stride as a writer of fiction.

It is very hard to discuss Margaret Atwood in this country. Fate put her in the right place at the right time and made her the patron saint of Canadian literature, a title she certainly never asked for. Of course, deification brings its blasphemers, and thus there is no shortage of those who deride Atwood because it is so fashionable to deride success. All of which is hardly fair; she never asked to be the darling of the Canadian press. We should rather try to judge her work on its own merit, which is considerable.

Bodily Harm, like all of Atwood's novels, with the possible exception of *Life Before Man*, has an odd but captivating plot. It is the story of Rennie, a young woman who writes light fashion articles for magazines. Immediately Rennie is placed in the novel as a member of the walking wounded since she is recovering from a mastectomy for cancer. This brush with death serves as the focal point for the work. In an effort to find a way to cope with

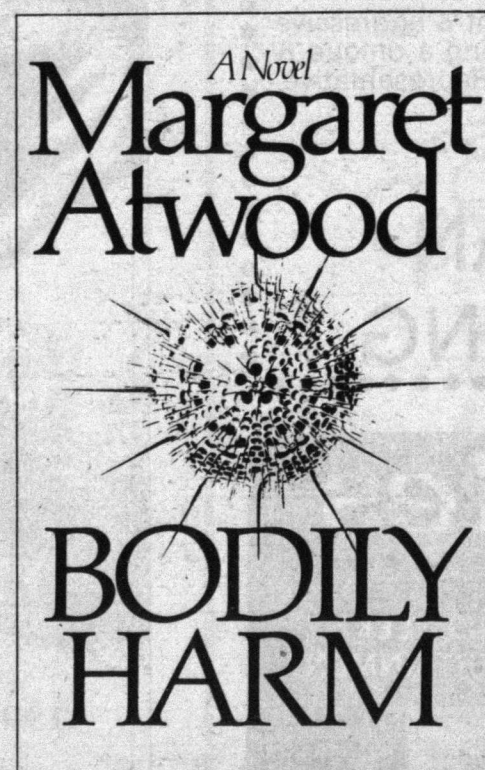
her new-found morbi sense of mortality Rennie goes on a working holiday to a ragged Caribbean island. There she eventually comes to grips with her problems as she finds herself being drawn into the chaotic local politics. Such a synopsis makes the book sound a bit like fluff. But anyone who has read the *Edible Woman* or *Lady Oracle* will know what Margaret Atwood can do with such a strange framework.

Yet the foundation for this framework is a basic one; a woman's efforts to reconcile herself to her mortality. With this Atwood has found a new theme that gives the book a strength and freshness one wouldn't expect in a fifth novel. Death is an ancient and noble theme and for Atwood it is certainly a progression from the directionless analysis of relationships seen in the rest of her work.

Bodily Harm also shows that Atwood is truly beginning to control her poetic nature. If anything marred her first three novels it was the manner in which she created a perfectly realistic atmosphere and then would throw it away in the last chapters. The wildly poetic madness of the heroine of *Surfacing* is a classic example of this disconcerting tendency. Margaret Atwood is a fine poet, indeed a far better poet than a novelist, but her poetry has often intruded into her prose to its detriment.

Fortunately no such lack of control is to be seen in *Bodily Harm*. Atwood takes her theme in hand and carries it smoothly to its conclusion with strength and vigor. The prose has her characteristic touches of wit and humour and the plot never goes out of control. This is intelligent writing that achieves what it has undertaken.

Rennie is revealed piece by piece as a classic Atwood heroine. She is introspec-



tive, moody, and filled with vague guilt and fear. Yet Rennie is more mature than Joan Forster in *Lady Oracle* and far more sympathetic than either woman in *Life Before Man*. Death has sobered Rennie and reduced to triviality many things that were of previous concern.

The men in *Bodily Harm* are also certainly an improvement on those in her previous work. It once seemed that men for Atwood fell into two categories: either they were dull and overbearing, like Peter in the

Edible Woman, or they were quite crazy, cute, and unreliable (The Royal Porcupine from *Lady Oracle* is an obvious and extreme example of this type).

Bodily Harm gives us far more three-dimensional men than these. That isn't to say they are loveable people, but at least there are no caricatures. The man that Rennie lives with, Jake, is drawn as a somewhat over-sexed and selfish person, yet there is enough good sense in his thought, and enough pain in his character to make him real. Rennie's love for him is plausible in a way that Marian McAlpin's attachment to her Peter in *The Edible Woman* never was.

Still, Margaret Atwood is a woman and I am not, so there are aspects of this book that are barred to my full understanding. Throughout the work time is taken to reflect on the conflict between the sexes. While I can only vaguely identify with the feminine fears expressed here, a great number of the ideas put forward are fascinating. Jocasta, a friend of Rennie's gives an example of this with her theory that the open sexual atmosphere of our times intimidates men, that they were far more comfortable when they were the only aggressors. Very briefly Jocasta is sketching an interesting role reversal. Such food for thought is common in this book.

This is a strong novel by a capable writer. I will not pretend that it is a 'pinnacle' of literary achievement. Nor will I say, as Germaine Greer so absurdly did, that Atwood is "one of the most important writers in English today." Such statements are for the media hype machine. Still Atwood is a writer of grace, skill, and strength. *Bodily Harm* gives us a fine work and the promise of even better writing in the future.