

# Looking back on Yesteryear

By LORRAYNE C. ANTHONY

*Yesteryear*  
Written by Joanna McClelland Glass  
Bluma Appel Theatre

If the winter blues have you thinking that reading week is the only event you can look forward to, think again. The Canadian Stage Company is staging the cheerful comedy *Yesteryear*.

*Yesteryear* is a nostalgic look at small-town Canada in the post-war years.

Playwright Joanna McClelland Glass was born in Saskatchewan. After spending time writing in Canada, she made her way to New York. The warmth of her stories as well as unique Saskatchewan settings have given rise to several off-Broadway hits.

Glass recently moved to Toronto, where Bill Glassco, general manager of the Canadian Stage Company, showed an interest in her writing and eventually persuaded her to write *Yesteryear*.

## Theatre Review

Glass's heartwarming characters come to life through an impressive cast, which includes R.H. Thomson, Fiona Reid, and Kate Trotter. Each of the 10 characters play off each other harmoniously, from the right-wing mayor to the socialist proprietor of the local brothel.

R.H. Thomson gives a brilliant performance as David McTavish, a complacent, middle-aged bachelor who wins the Irish Sweepstakes. Thomson's last performance was in *Glory Enough For All*, which aired on

CBC. Last season, Thomson wowed Torontonians in *Emerald City* at the Toronto Free Theatre.

Beth MacMillan, a discontented wife, is played by Fiona Reid. Her character is hilarious yet pathetic. Better known as Cathy on *King of Kensington*, she more recently performed in the Canadian Stage production of *The Bourgeois Gentleman*.

For fans of the big band sound, this production has an added attraction. The soundtrack — including Sammy Kaye, Tommy Dorsey, Judy Garland, and Frank Sinatra — transports you back to yesteryear.

*Yesteryear* is definitely worthwhile. It may cost more than a movie, but the experience of this performance will stay with you longer.

*Yesteryear* plays until February 4 at The Bluma Appel Theatre. For more information, call 362-7041.

# Holy biases probed by prof

By JACOB KATSMAN

*The First Historians*  
by Baruch Halpern

"The Hebrew Bible is the one place where you can leave your critical faculties at rest, go away, and the Bible will remain solid as a rock," said Baruch Halpern, Humanities professor at York and author of *The First Historians*.

As an undergrad at Harvard, Halpern studied Near Eastern Languages. He later followed in the steps of Frank Moore Cross, a prominent Harvard professor, who satisfied his thirst for knowledge and passion for history.

In 1976, Halpern came to York where he continued his research while teaching courses such as Hebrew Bible.

"Teaching the Hebrew Bible to university students is like teaching right-hand boxing to a group of dominant southpaws," said Halpern. Everybody has some previous preconceptions about the Bible, he added, but students today are less conservative and can better evaluate literature from a critical perspective.



York prof Baruch Halpern.

*The First Historians* takes an in-depth look into the origins of the Israelite culture. Halpern points out literary contradictions, doublets, and inconsistencies in the text, and uncovers hidden biases of biblical authors.

Through a systematic analysis, Halpern shows that some parts of the Bible were constructed from two or more sources. *The First Historians* is a detailed and difficult book designed primarily for graduate level study. But with enough passion and imagination, anyone can indulge

him/her self in a never-ending mystery story which opens up a new dimension in time.

Reading *The First Historians* with a religious bias may be a disturbing experience. Nevertheless, the book tries to stay away from portraying God in any specific manner. Halpern puts the emphasis on the people shaping events and culture, not the other way around.

"Culture changes with time and context and adopts to ecological circumstances," said Halpern.

"Faith played a big part of the Israelite culture, and it still plays a great role in our western culture of today. When Yri Gagarin came back from his revolutionary space flight and said that he did not see God, we in the West laughed. Of course, we said, you can't see God — God is invisible," he continued.

"Faith is something beautiful," added Halpern. "We don't have to worry, it is not like the ozone layer, it will always be there."

When Halpern was asked how God comes into his course, he quickly responded, "God enrolled in the second year I was teaching at York, but later dropped out."

# The reality of an author's Brutality

By HOWARD KAMAN

*A Casual Brutality*  
Neil Bissoondath  
MacMillan

The melting pot does not exist.

This is the attitude of Neil Bissoondath, a native of Trinidad who, at 28, immigrated to Canada in 1973.

His novel, *A Casual Brutality*, tells the story of a Toronto West Indian who travels to his homeland, the fictional Casaquehada, and finds that living there is unbearable. Raj Ram-singh, who has lived in Toronto for many years, is a foreigner in his own homeland.

Bissoondath graduated from York with a BA in French and feels strongly that multi-culturalism does not exist. As he told Michael Todd of the *Alumni News*, "It's something promoted by bureaucrats, quite often for their own political ends."

Bissoondath rejects being labeled a Trinidadian-Canadian.

"I think of myself solely as a Canadian writer," he said.

His story reflects this idea in meticulous detail.

"There are times when the word hope is but a synonym for illusion," he writes in the novel's opening paragraph, expressing the ambivalent feelings that his character (and perhaps Bissoondath) feels for his home country.

The book is his second work, following *Digging Up The Mountains*, a 1985 collection of short stories. Like the short stories, *A Casual Brutality* looks at life in a sheltered culture, as on an island, in comparison to life in a "civilized society," like a major city.

It is interesting to note that, while taking French at York, Bissoondath didn't go to Glendon as he felt it was an island, isolated from the rest of the city in language and atmosphere. In short, it reminded him of Trinidad. Still, he claimed to have liked the main campus for its "separateness from the city then. I liked the feeling of space."

Contradictory as it may seem, this attitude permeates Bissoondath's book. Raj Ram-singh is caught between a feeling of native pride and a long-forged Canadian identity. Bissoondath was caught between taking French either at the main campus or at Glendon. He felt that both campuses were isolated — one culturally and one physically.

In a similar fashion, both Toronto and Casaquehada are restricting to Raj. One allows him to pursue his dreams, but removes him from his culture, while the other is his home, but is physically dangerous.

Bissoondath's fine portrayal of this struggle, and his eye for detail, make this book an enjoyable read.

## Atwood

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are not supposed to do that kind of thing. They are not supposed to get up in public and say what their own personal opinion is."

Atwood's personal opinion, however, was welcomed by her audience. At the end of her lecture, she was applauded with a standing ovation. Rosalie Abella took the microphone briefly to thank Atwood, explaining to the crowd that Atwood had asked that her honorarium be donated to a charitable women's organization.

Although Margaret Atwood has

stellar wit, she is not a legal celebrity. After a cloudy lecture about Utopia in an unlikely forum, Atwood left her audience more star-struck than inspired.

Barbara Betcherman, whom the occasion commemorated, was a lawyer trained at Osgoode. She committed her life's work to law and social change with particular interest in the role of women. Tragically, she was killed in an automobile accident at the age of 35. The Barbara Betcherman Memorial Fund was established to promote ideas about women and law, and does so each year by choosing a significant speaker for the annual lecture.

## Club Funding Update

### • Fall Term Funding Recipients

Your second installment cheques will be available February 1st

### • Winter Term Funding Recipients

Your cheques are now available.

CYSF is now accepting bids for the publication of:

## 89-90 Manus

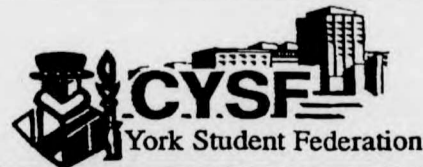
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Deadline for applications is 3 February 1989

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