

Book review...

...Shakespeare again

# Spiffy Bill for beginners

*The Red Fox*

Bill Howell

McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1971

\$4.95 hardback

Bill Howell is primarily a storyteller, and his first novel, *Twins*, is to be published shortly. This, and the fact that he supports himself by writing scripts, short fiction and so forth may explain the number of longer "story-poems" to be found in this collection. He has a fondness for long lines which become more and more loaded down with detail as they go on: consider the following, from "A Year Ago Today".

*Country Joe Carver black as night,*

*and John-Angus, who can't swim, and Willie R. Fraser, his father*

*who only deals in war surplus or stolen goods, put in*

*a tender to salvage the Carson Chalmers after she sank*

*with a full load of something-or-other off Hansport.*

That first verse tells the reader all he has to know about the main characters involved in a very funny and well-written poem about trust, betrayal and the drinking of Navy rum in a small Nova Scotia port. But perhaps "poem" is the wrong word to use for some of these longer works, they are minor sagas, and Howell handles them well.

The book contains some fine shorter poems as well. "Sailmaker", reflecting Howell's maritime youth, is one of these, full of the sort of love/hate that comes to exist for a father who passes down so doubtful a heritage to his sons as a fishing boat. The love theme is another which Howell write with insight. "First Poem for Another Woman" will probably hit too close to home for any number of male readers, and in "Our Time of Night" the Canadian archetype "travelling poem" takes on a freshness and originality which sets this poem apart from others of the same pattern, many of which are becoming cliches.

### SUBSTANDARD

Despite the obvious good points about this collection, and there are many of them, Howell seems to have included a few poems which do not come up to the standard of the rest of the poems in the book. These are most often short, epigrammatic poems, and perhaps his facility for storytelling foils him here, since he just never seems to get his point across in many of them. They often strike the reader as great "first lines" to be expanded upon-perhaps this is Howell's intention?but left as they are they tend to distract from the general high quality of

much of the book's contents. One shouldn't quibble, I suppose, if a collection of seventy-five poems contains a few clinkers, but one can't help but wonder if careful editing would not have resulted in a collection of, say, fifty-five really fine poems.

Another point that might be mentioned is the format of the book itself. McClelland & Stewart have done a beautiful job, as usual, but hardback publishing is an expensive game and at \$4.95 a hand, there will be few people who will be willing to bet on a "new" poet. Perhaps a paperback first, to be followed by a more expensive hardback, would have made more sense.

In his "Introduction to the Works of William Shakespeare", the General Editor of the Koles Series says that his purpose is "to get the kids to read good books and stuff, and to assimilate the essential facts from these good plays and things without having to go to all the work of figuring them out for themselves." So successful has he been that it is quite possible to go through an entire play without coming upon a single word containing more than two or three syllables, and many have only one! Also, by eliminating the unnecessary "rhyme scheme" from many parts of the play, it is possible to get the "meat" out, right down to the famous "pound of flesh" scene in *Richard IV*.

In conclusion, Koles has come through again in the cliché. One word of caution, however: check with your Prof before laying out the definitely non-condensed price for this little bundle of ancient knowledge! There are still some reactionary old critters around who think students have the time-or the inclination-to actually read Bill's stuff all the way through. Now Willy may be a great writer, but he ain't no Ted Mark, so if you have got one of these guys who is "down" on Koles notes, why not switch to another class. For information on how to do this, see Koles Press' new book, *How to Get an Education without Learning Anything*.

reviews by

Sid Stephen

*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*

ed by the entire english department staff, juniper junction junior college, junior, Ontario

pub. by Coles Notes Press, Toronto, 1971

This condensed but containing all the essential facts necessary to get you through even the most crafty crafted examination in Eng Lit or Adv Shakespeare is certain to be a big hit among a generation who has probably only heard of Mr. Shakespeare second hand, or possibly not even.

Bill Shakespeare is the author of such well-known plays as "Hamlet", (which is outlined in this fine collection in an easy-to-read three paragraphs) and Romeo and Juliet (the right to which he probably sold to Hollywood for an undisclosed but no doubt vast sum--catch the movie, rather than reading this condensation, which is a bit long at 500 words.)

Writing out of scenic Stratford-on-Avon, in jolly old England, Bill has captured the hearts and minds of lots of students with his witty "Othello", which some critics have "put down" for being too black, while others like the moor more. The Crazy Kollege Collection of *Great Plays and Stickhandlers* published by Koles last year included a line or two from this play, so if you already have that collection, don't bother with reading this one.

# COFFEE SPOONS

by David Schleich

One day a middle-aged Caucasian in tweed and tie stood, fatigued on a bridge, beside his stalled car, not intending especially to notice the log floating very near the south bank of the river below. Other cars stopped unhappily behind his vehicle. They leaped in inches at the opposite lane, compulsively, angrily. The men and women in these delayed cars glared at the standing, nervous, uncomfortable man in tweed and tie. He must wait and be uncomfortable. And, sheer chance, he saw the log, black, flat and floating in dark, grey-blue, moving, consistently toward the bank, he knew. He expected it to be lodged against a rock or rocks or sand or other bank debris. He expected it to stop. He then heard the horns and gestured apologetically. The discomfort eased when the tow truck appeared in the southbound lane. The driver went about his business officiously, ignoring impolitely the again uncomfortable driver of the stalled car on the bridge.

He moved back to the railing of the bridge, watching all the while as the tow truck man went about his job. Then he glanced away from the scene and saw again the river below. The black, flat line in dark-grey blue was there but stopped now. He looked around the line and on the bank side saw a rippled, softly bumpy surface. He looked further along the bank. Trees and bushes. Coloured trees and bushes. Gold, midas-gold, brown, light red, even green. Variegated. Bubbles of colour along, along and far away. Where the colour stopped the bank began again, grey now. And then, the river. Not so dark grey-blue. More grey. And there. There, another black, flat line. A log. Well, indeed, the same log! Gone while I watched the colours. The river freed it and took it up there. He smiled, thinking that the log had moved silently and invisibly all that way without his knowing. He was still smiling and at ease when the truck horn and a voice slapped his face. "Come on!" yelled the tow-truck man. The car, front end up in the air, ready to fly away. He saw the unhappy cars behind. Again the horn. This time the sound cut into his ears. He motioned angrily at the tow truck man. "What? the man yelled. "Go ahead! I'll walk!" said the other man standing on the bridge. The truck with the annoying orange flashing light moved off quickly and impatiently. The lines of the bridge, he saw, descended, plumb lines into the moving metal. He watched as his car went away toward the vanishing point far along the bridge and down the road he would walk along that day.

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