

# Robertson Davies at his acid and astute best

**The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks  
Robertson Davies  
Irwin**

review by Susan Sutton

Amidst the general praise and hoopla surrounding the publication of Robertson Davies' *What's Bred in the Bone*, the brilliant sequel to *The Rebel Angels*, his new anthology of the best of Samuel Marchbanks has been largely - and unjustly - ignored.

*The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks* gathers together the writing Davies published in the incarnation of his alter ego, during his newspaper days. Originally published in three separate volumes, *The Diary* (1947); *The Table Talk* (1949); and *The Samuel Marchbanks Almanack*, the work is introduced and edited by Davies as himself, a "gentle head-waiter to Marchbanks splendid banquet." He is in fact much more than that, guiding us with his own wry wit, correcting Marchbanks occasionally, and exposing his frequent exaggerations.

Marchbanks is acid and astute on a wide range of subjects, from the common cold and salted nuts to furnaces and Canadians. His observations regarding the latter are uncanny - one completely forgets the pieces were written some forty years ago and finds that we were equally rabid about hockey and politics back then.

But Marchbanks does not deal strictly with such matters of national urgency. We come to know intimately the author's anthropomorphic furnace, to which he orates at length upon the subject of its rights and duties, and which rarely responds. In *The Garland*, the final section of correspondences, we become acquainted with some odd characters: Minerva Hawser, a substitute teacher of Marchbanks when he was a tender eight, who has, decades later, renewed their friendship in order that he might transport her sewing machine from Canada to Aberdeen; Amyas Pilgarlic, a distasteful pseudonym of Mr. Davies; and Mordecai Mouseman of Mouseman, Mouseman and Force meat, who vainly retereas a legal battle between S.M. and his neighbour

Dick Dandiprat whose skunk, Chanel, has made a home in the rear of the former's car.

This is not the sort of book one immediately reads from cover to cover - it is read leisurely, whenever the need for a bit of wisdom or a good belly laugh hits. It is the sort of book that becomes a friend over time, that is never discarded. It is also difficult to describe, so I leave you with a few bits of Marchbanks magic to mull over:

Conversation today with a young man of

eleven who confides to me that a girl at his school loves him. Ask how he can be sure. "She gobbed on me yesterday," he replies. I ask for an explanation and he tells me that in the young unmarried set in which he moves, it is a sure sign of affection if the male or female party hawks up a substantial quantity of spit and ejects it upon - or 'gobs' - the loved one while lining up to enter school, where the presence of a teacher makes reprisal difficult.

Astonished at this new gambit in the sex-life of the nation and as I walk home espying a girl of considerable charm in front of me. Shall I gob on her? For a few enchanted moments I toy with this notion, but reject it as she might be old-fashioned in her ideas and fail to understand." Oh what fun!! It will get you through finals if not life itself!

## Moody and sinister world at the *Crossroads*

**Crossroads  
Paramount  
West Mall 6**

review by Tim Hellum

*Crossroads* is an "interesting pieces" film; that is to say, pieces of it are interesting. The strongest part of the film is the soundtrack. If you have heard Ry Cooder's music or if you're a fan of twangy, lamenting chords, this movie is for you. But even if you're not, this movie is still probably something you will like.

I found myself, as I have rarely been able to do in the last while, saying "yeah, I can see the character saying that, doing that." The characters are believable; they're alternately petulant, greedy, satanic, human. When was the last time you saw a show with all these ingredients and found yourself enjoying them comfortably?

*Crossroads* is at once a moody and sinister film. These two elements blend to create the aura and mystique typical of American Deep South Folklore. The film begins (and ends) with a sepia-toned effect (black and white film processing that produces the historical "brown" effect in old pictures). This introduction to the hot and dusty fields of Mississippi sets the audience back in its collective chair - ready for a nostalgic and sentimental journey into retrospection. What saves the film, however, from complacency, are the characters.

Willy Brown, alias Blind-Boy Fulton, is played by Joe Seneca - last seen on the

screen as the serial testifier in *The Verdict*. As a crotchety old "blues man" and one-time famed companion to blues legend Robert Johnson, Seneca is entirely realistic (if somewhat overly crotchety). He leads a young and eager companion (Ralph Macchio - *The Karate Kid*) and an itinerant young hitchhiker (Jami Gertz) back into Mississippi, the land of his youth. The journey, for the two young travellers is pointless and meandering. However, throughout the course of the film it becomes clear that for the old man, there is something spiritual at stake in the journey. For him it is a necessary communion with the land and the music that it produces.

Joe Morton (*The Brother from Another*

*Planet*) also makes an appearance in the film. However, Morton is far from harmless and silent in this film. As an agent of the forces of the underworld (the "real" underworld) he is merciless in his quest for "signatures in blood". One of the finest characters in *Crossroads* is Old Scratch himself. His resemblance to a goat is uncanny. Granted he wears a goatee of sorts, but his smile is positively hircine. I swear he laughs baa-baa.

In any case, *Crossroads* is a film that mildly surprised me with its human realism (in spite of its mysticism) and thrilled me with its true and soulful blues guitar. Confused about how this film hangs together? Go see it and enjoy it yourself.

### CALENDAR

**galleriesgalleriesgalleriesgalleriesgalleriesgalleriesgalleriesgalleries**

**Ideas B.F.A./ Industrial Design Students to March 15**

**Rituals/Systems Ring House to March 16**

**musicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusicmusic**

**The U of A Mixed Chorus Sub 8:15 March 6, 7, and 8**

**Folle Avoine Orange Hall 8:30 March 8**

**The Langham Wheel The Limit March 6-8**

**film**

**Mishima Princess Theatre March 8**

**When Father Was Away on Business Princess Theatre March 7**

## Students' Union • General Election • Poll Locations Thursday & Friday, March 13 & 14

**ELECTION RALLY:** Wednesday 12 March, 12 noon, SUB Theatre

**ADVANCE POLL:** Wednesday 12 March 1000 - 1900 hr.  
SUB, Main Floor (East)

### POLL LOCATIONS

| BUILDING                     | AREA                           | HOURS                 |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Agriculture/Forestry         | Student Lounge - Main Floor    | 11:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Biological Sciences          | Near Passageway to Physics     | 10:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Business                     | Near AIESEC Offices 2nd Floor  | 10:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| C A B North East             | North-East Corner              | 09:00 - 17:00 hr      |
| C A B South                  | Pedway to Engineering          | 10:00 - 15:00 hr      |
| Chemical-Mineral Engineering | Main Entrance                  | 10:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Civil-Electrical Engineering | by First Floor Elevators       | 10:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Education                    | North Lounge near EAS Offices  | 09:00 - 17:00 hr      |
| Faculte St. Jean             | Salon des Etudiants            | 11:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Fine Arts                    | Second Floor by HUB walkway    | 11:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| H U B                        | Near Pedway to Humanities      | 09:00 - 20:00 hr (Th) |
| Law                          | North-East Entrance            | 09:00 - 17:00 hr (F)  |
| Lister Hall                  | Near Cafeteria stairs          | 11:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Medical Sciences             | Second Floor Near Vending Area | 11:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Physical Education           | by Campus Rec Offices          | 11:00 - 14:00 hr      |
| Rutherford Library           | Upper Concourse near HUB       | 0900 - 16:00 hr       |
| S U B                        | Main Floor (East)              | 0900 - 17:00 hr       |
| V-Wing                       | Vending Area                   | 0900 - 1600 hr        |
| Tory-Business Atrium         | Near Phone Banks               | 0900 - 16:00 hr       |

**PUT THE STUDENTS' UNION IN ITS PLACE & VOTE!!**

(Please bring your student I.D. with you)