

Theatre

Drama chair Carl Hare goes to *Bartholomew Fair*

Interview by Elaine Ostry

Carl Hare obviously loves a challenge. He is directing Studio Theatre's latest offering, *Bartholomew Fair*. "It's a massive play," says Hare, grinning. "There are 23 speaking roles, and 45 in the whole show, not counting the Jacobean wenchers."

"*Bartholomew Fair* by Ben Jonson was first produced in 1614, and is set at the great fair at Smithfield, which lasted for 500 years. "By Jonson's time," comments Hare, "it began to get more sleazy."

The plot is far too complicated to relate, but it involves the participation of two families at the fair. It features characters with names like "Justice Overdo," "Lantern Leatherhead," and "Win-the-Fight Littlewit."

Jonson didn't avoid raunchiness in this play. "Usually the Pig Woman's booth is the headquarters for anything you want to name," says Hare with a chuckle. "There are (also) four fights and a beating in this play.... And a scene that is the textbook for all seduction scenes."

"The play culminates in a puppet show which is as close to obscene as you can get. Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, a Puritan elder, argues vehemently with the puppets that they're obscene." The argument is closed when the puppet, "King Dionysius, Tyrant of Syracuse, opens his cloak and shows that he's neither female nor male."

Bartholomew Fair is "like a melodrama," Hare claims that Jonson was "more theatrical than Shakespeare." The performance lasts over three and a half hours, but the audience will "get exhausted but not bored."

Certainly the play has variety. It features "jugglers, a strong man, a fortune teller, a belly dancer, acrobats — and a roller skating pig."

During the first intermission, says Hare, the crowd in the play and the audience "become one in the lobby." There will be costermongers and wenchers selling food and balloon animals. The jugglers and acrobats will be performing still. "The place is festooned with banners."

Wait a second. They didn't have balloon animals in Jacobean England, or roller skates for that matter. The costumes are also a blend of the old-fashioned and the modern. These anachronisms, according to Hare, serve a purpose. "For *Bartholomew Fair* is "all fairs."

The play requires a huge cast, and there are only fifteen BFA students. "We've been able to use a lot of BA students and people from outside (the university)," explains Hare.

A large portion of the cast is the crowd at the fair itself. Hare and his assistant director, Jim Eadie, spent two weeks working with the crowd. "You need that dimension to a fair," says Hare.

Hare and his cast referred to the work of

the nineteenth century caricaturist, Dourier, for inspiration. In Dourier's art, "there are characters with more life the more you look at them." Hare comments that "there's a certain degree of change in the characters" of *Bartholomew Fair*, due to this attention to vivid detail.

The language of the seventeenth century "is not easy," Hare says. "It's very colloquial — he (Jonson) caught the slang of his time." But the actors "speak it with meaning, and the situations are so strong...the audience gets most of it."

This is Hare's last year as the Chairman of the Drama Department, a position he has kept for five years. His next plans include taking a year's leave and going to Norway in order to do some of his own playwrighting. Projects in Victoria and Montreal are also in the future. Hare will then return to the U of A as a faculty member.

During the past five years, Hare feels that "the department has grown together more." There's greater awareness of the "need for

connections between the different programs... and understanding of the variety of experience that can take place in theatre."

This "collegiality" extends to other departments as well, "among the Fine Arts at least... and in the community." For example, the posters for *Bartholomew Fair* were designed by students in the Art and Design Department. The Music department helped the play by providing "thematic music to introduce the actors" and 70 sound cues. The Drama department also helped to found the National Screen Institute in Edmonton.

Hare is proud of the U of A Drama department. "It's one of the three top departments in North America," he says. "We have strong faculty members." Edmonton also has "a vibrant theatre community" for the students to look forward to after graduation. "Edmonton has the most theatre per capita in North America," he states.

Hare is a native of Edmonton, which he describes as "raw and alive." He received two degrees in English from the U of A: an Honours BA degree for which he received the Rutherford Medal, and an M.A. His M.A. thesis dealt with "the Shakespearean setting."

After teaching English and Philosophy at Victoria College (later to become the University of Victoria), Hare decided to study drama. He attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. He has served in the dramatic field as an actor, director and teacher. He taught at the National Theatre School, and founded the Drama department at UVic. He also founded Company 1 in Victoria.

Altogether, it's been a busy 30 years in show business, and it's evident from the challenges of *Bartholomew Fair* that Hare's energy has yet to slacken.



Carl Hare directs "massive play."

Photo: Bob O'Neil

Robert Corness a catalyst in hitchhiker role

Interview by P. J. Groeneveld

Carl and Brandon live in Detroit. Brandon has a car. Carl doesn't. Carl, however, has met a wonderful girl from Vancouver, and has fallen in love. He has known her for three days when she returns to her native province, and he decides to go for a visit. Brandon will drive, and Carl's dad will buy the gas — sounds ideal. Then while Carl is asleep, Brandon picks up a hitchhiker by the name of Frank (played by Robert Corness).

The play is *Rattle in the Dash*, by Vancouver playwright Peter Anderson. It was a big hit at the 1986 Vancouver Fringe, and the cast hopes it will do as well during its run at the Phoenix Downtown. It will most likely be available at the Edmonton Fringe this summer also. "Unless it absolutely bombs and nobody comes!" laughs Corness.

Robert Corness and Bill McDonald, also featuring in this play, form two-thirds of Matrix the theatre company responsible for last year's production of *Fortune of Men's Eyes*. Corness has also played Toad of Toad Hall in *Wind of the Willows* and a paraplegic homosexual Vietnam veteran in *Fifth of July*, so he feels he has a broad enough background to bring life to the character of Frank the hitchhiker.

"The play is about one hour long, sixty-two minutes to be exact, and Frank has no lines until the last scene," says Corness. He appears three times before this, standing at the side of the road. The first time Carl and Brandon see him they argue about whether to pick him up or not. Brandon says yes, Carl says no, and wins the argument. Still, he doesn't mention the fact when he sees the hitchhiker again further down the road, and yet again in a nightmare. You can imagine his delight when he awakens to find this man in the back seat of the car.

This car is the set, and the set is the car. There's nothing else. Brandon and his car have a special relationship, more stable than the relationship between Carl and his Vancouver girl (seeing as though he didn't even call her before he departed Detroit).

That's pretty well Robert Corness' favorite thing about the play — the fact that it is all

one-act comedy that takes place entirely inside a junked car. (The set looks like the backyard of that guy who lives down the street from you.... You know the one.)

"It's really well written," comments Corness, "it's a comedy, yet the next morning people will remember the allegories and the subtext rather than cheap belly-laughs."

The friendship between Brandon and Carl is something to remember in the morning.

They are old high-school buddies. Carl looks up to Brandon because of his worldliness and knowledge of automobiles and amateur genealogy. Brandon looks up to Carl because of his intelligence and literary skills, such as they are.

Says Corness: "Two people that much different, no matter how strong their friendship is, are going to grate on a long car trip like that.... Character Frank serves as a catalyst

Book

Shocked and Appalled in the past

Shocked and Appalled
Edited by Jack Kapica
Lester & Open Dennis

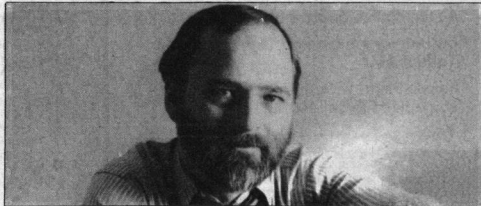
review by P. J. Groeneveld

Shocked and Appalled is an ideal coffee table book. That is, if you don't happen to have a coffee table, you can use the book as one. It's a big one, even in paperback, and not the sort of fare most people would enjoy reading all at one sitting. It is a compendium of selected letters to the editor printed in the Globe and Mail over the last hundred years.

It is fascinating to see the different topics that were of concern enough to prompt a person to write letters. In the January of the year 1900, for example, there were reams of letters asking whether it was now the twentieth century or still the nineteenth. (For your information, and to avoid another deluge of similar letters years hence, the twentieth century will begin on January 1, 2001.)

Also interesting to note are the letters of 1922 complaining about the fashion sense of young women. The specific complaint? Girls' outside with laceless overshoes. (Shades of Run-DMC!)

A series of letters spanning a few weeks of the autumn of 1939 deal with one woman's alleged sighting of a cross covering the face of the moon. Many people wrote in offering the explanation that it was caused by looking through a screen door. These letters were



Jack Kapica with a century's worth of letters.

followed by a rash of other and more peculiar claims of strange lunar effects, enough so one writer was moved to suggest that all of the sightings were due to refracted moonshine, or some other similar beverage.

There is a series of letters dating from 1972 arguing about the proper plural for the word "hippopotamus". Is it hippopotamii? or is it hippopotamuses?

One man claimed that the "es" ending is more accurate, as the name of the animal is from the Greek potamos, the word for river. He said the "ii" ending was a Latin plural and should not be used. A reply was printed two weeks later — the grammatical plural of the Greek word, properly spelled "hippopotamoi", or "hippopotamium" in Hebrew. I personally agree

with a later letter-writer who advocated the use of the term "hippos".

This is a fascinating book for all habitual readers of the letters page. It allows the reader to experience the joys of witnessing a decades-old argument about the implementation of the red maple leaf as a national symbol (some people preferred green, and one wanted a peony instead). Another interesting effect this book has is that it allows you to recognize the habitual letter writer who will jump in with his/her opinion about practically any issue.

This book is well worth the time it takes to wade through. It will probably amuse you to discover that people have changed so little over the last century.