

Davies' latest is rich adventure in reading

What's Bred in the Bone
Robertson Davies
MacMillan

review by Susan Sutton

What's Bred in the Bone is Robertson Davies' eleventh novel and the second in the projected trilogy which began with *The Rebel Angels*. It is a wonderfully humorous book full of warmth and a great deal of wisdom.

At its most basic level, *What's Bred in the Bone* is a fictional account of the life of Francis Cornish who was born in small-town Ontario and rose to become an eminent art expert and a rather enigmatic character all around.

But the book goes far beyond standard biography, dealing with art, the supernatural, and the mystifying patterns which occur in our lives and which we call 'coincidence'.

Davies deals at length with art and the essence of greatness. When Francis is instructed by master restorer, Tanered Saraceni, to render a painting in the manner of the old masters and the result is lauded by the experts who mistake it for the real thing, Francis is in a quandary. There is a sense of dishonesty here for, while he has not forged the work, neither has he enlightened the experts. They call it a masterpiece which adds to his dilemma — he knows that if he were to claim responsibility, his painting would be dismissed as unimportant.

The issue, then, is what makes a work of art great? Is the author of the work so very important or is its value intrinsic to itself? Davies clearly argues that worth is in the work itself and that it does not greatly matter who is responsible. A rose by any other name, after all...

Crucial to Francis' development is a dai-

mon called Maimas whose influence Davies weaves throughout the story with an air of complete realism. This is not surprising since Davies has stated repeatedly that the supernatural is, on the contrary, quite natural. So, as fantastic coincidences occur in Francis' life, we detect the sleight-of-hand of this spiritual watchdog who gently directs our hero's progress. Maimas does not shelter Francis; he appears to see himself as existing, rather, in a character-building capacity, as he explains to the Reconciling Angel:

"Still no pity for Francis, brother? said the Lesser Zadkiel..."

"—I have told you repeatedly, said the Daimon Maimas, that pity is not one of the instruments with which such agencies as I do our work. Pity at this stage of his life would not make Francis better; it would dull his perceptions and rob him of the advantages I have managed for him.

— Rough on the bystanders, would you not say?

—The bystanders are no concern of mine. I am Francis' daimon, not theirs. He has already met his Dark Brother. Everybody has one, but most people go through their lives without ever recognizing him or feeling any love or compassion for him. They see the Dark Brother in the distance, and they hate him."

The supernatural element is pervasive, but not oppressive and it is the direct result of this matter-of-fact treatment that it works. The reader has no trouble believing in daimons or Recording Angels because they are quite simply there.

Enough! *What's Bred in the Bone* is a book far too rich to read about — it must be read for its humour, wisdom, and gently honest insight into human nature which jolts, but does not insult. A rare, fine book for those who like to laugh while they're learning.

WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE



ROBERTSON DAVIES

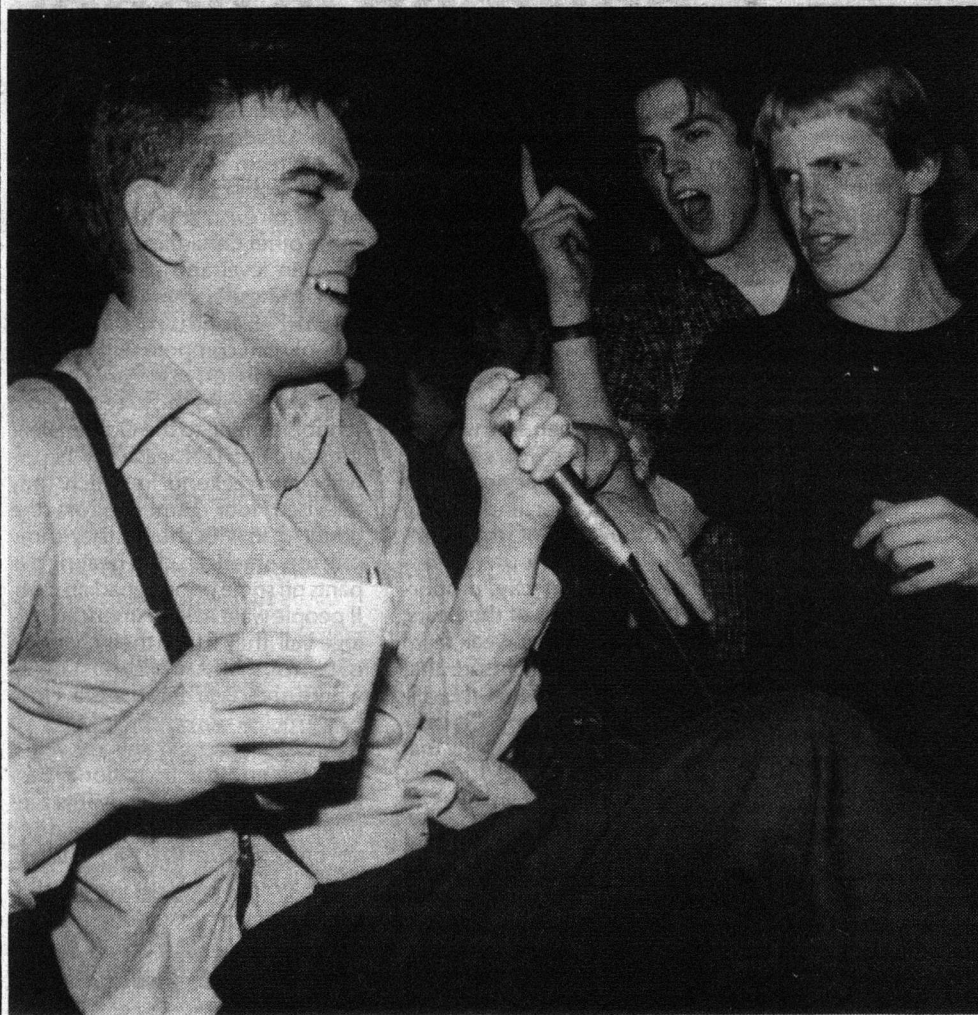


Photo: Bill St. John

Jerry Jerry is good good

Jerry Jerry and the Sons of Rhythm Orchestra
Dinwoodie Lounge
Friday, November 29

review by Suzette Chan

Jerry Jerry and the Sons of Rhythm Orchestra are like fresh fruit. Preserved on vinyl or videotape for mass consumption, they're dry and spiritless. But cast them on stage amidst a pack of Jerry followers and they're as juicy as they should be.

They were even able to meet all expectations on Friday night, their last gig together (the members are splitting in various directions; Jerry will be back as Jerry Jerry and the United States).

During their (disappointingly) short set, they managed to pack all the JJ classics, from

"Bad Idea" to an emergency "God Bless America" as Dinwoodie closing time was nigh.

Rhythm devotees mouthed along to the indispensable between-tunes preacher patter and flailed away to anything remotely musical: by the time JJ hit the stage, there wasn't an occupied chair in Dinwoodie.

It was quite the opposite for opening act Down Syndrome, whose thrash with power pop predilections was drowned/droned out by their sound system and the hi-fidelity Dinwoodie acoustics.

Calgary's RipChords are, like Jerry Jerry, a band that needs an audience, as their last EP suggested. Usually near-rapturous on stage, the funk-ish band was in trouble when it was apparent that the audience was more interested in drinking, carousing and Jerry Jerry.

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