

# Return of the Bakkhai

Lloyd Wasser

After a fifteen year absence from the Toronto stage Euripides epic tragedy the *Bakkhai* returns this weekend in a dramatic new production by the York Graduate Theatre Company. This latest version extols the theme of a struggle between the forces of reason and passion and places the action in Afghanistan, rather than the Greece of the original version. All of which makes for some interesting settings, beautiful costumes and two hours of pure drama.

"The play itself is about two very strong, extremely independent forces, neither of which can exist separately," explains Alec Stockwell, the play's director. Stockwell was the motivating force behind this new *Bakkhai*, fresh from theatrical successes across Canada, including work with Stratford, the Tarragon Theatre and playwright Sam Shepard.

The *Bakkhai* tells the tale of the god Dionysus, who returns to Thebes, the city of his birth, to teach the people there a lesson. "Their ruler is a blasphemer," explains lead actor Sandy Crawley. "The ruler doesn't believe in Dionysus, so my character takes on a human disguise as a priest of Bacchus in order to confront the people and their ruler."

Despite the fact that Euripides wrote his tragedy in 483 B.C., its messages still ring true today. The basic philosophy present in the play, the search for and loss of God in a world of atheism, is as important today as it ever was.

Despite its subject matter the *Bakkhai* has rarely been performed in recent years due to its large cast size. Almost a dozen performers and a complete chorus of singers and dancers. This new production is

especially lavish—almost 80% of the operating budget was used for sets and costumes.

"Basically the *Bakkhai* is a costume play," says Janine Kroon, the show's costume and set designer. "This visual element is quite costly. We've transferred the Greek play to Afghanistan and the costumes are Afghani."

Besides the costumes, Janine has created the entire set in a thin layer of Afghani style carpeting to give the set a simple yet useful appearance. "It took a lot of research," says Kroon. "I went through a lot of National Geographic and other related materials to find the proper look. And from there I stylized the costumes to my own particular taste."

Janine Kroon, like almost all the cast, has an extensive background in theatre work. She's a graduate of Concordia's theatre design program, and is well-suited to this extravagant production. The play itself, according to many cast members, is an emotionally draining experience and will prove quite a challenge for the York graduate students involved.

The *Bakkhai* will be playing in Mac Hall from Thursday, December 3 until Tuesday, December 8. At that time it will move down to the Maggie Bassett Studio, in the Tarragon Theatre, from December 10-13. For more information call the graduate office, 667-3449.



Doris Anderson, former *Chatelaine* editor at York

## Doris Anderson fights "Lou Grant types"

Ian Bailey

In a sense Doris Anderson, former editor of *Chatelaine*, ex-president of the advisory Council on the Status of Women, and presently an author with a new novel recently published, represents her personal perception of the modern grandmother. Ms. Anderson sees the modern Grandmother as being more likely to be sanding her rocking chair than sitting in it.

Anderson, who opened Founders' Woman's Lecture Series yesterday with a discussion of "Woman and the Media", entered the newspaper field in 1945 after graduating from the University of Alberta. She had been a stringer in university and when she graduated was offered a job on, what was then a tradition for women, the *Society Page*. Later, she decided to come to Toronto to find something better. In 1959 she began 18 years of editing *Chatelaine*, leaving finally in 1977. Her sex, the years in the media and her involvement in various government establishments concerning women give her a solid vantage point from which to comment on the media, and its relationship to women in this country.

Speaking confidently and with a dry humour on her topic, Anderson described her first years in journalism when women were imprisoned in the society pages of the newspapers. Until the 60's women on magazines and newspapers did research for stories men wrote and though things have improved today with more female writers, editors and executives, she still points out that there is a "long way to go", suggesting that women could slide back fairly quickly due to economic recession.

In pinpointing the areas in the media that should trouble women Anderson begins with suggesting a practice of the *Toronto Sun* and the *Windsor Star*, namely featuring near naked women up near the front pages or in the paper at all. She describes this in terms of a combined "cheesecake-weather-vane" with near naked girls hailing the various seasons; a girl in a bikini for the beginning of summer, spring, fall and even winter.

Anderson commented that just as the 60's were the era of Youth, the 70's was the decade of the women's movement. Although she feels it was saddled by a media which unfortunately misreported it. Newspapers made token efforts such as changing the ladies page from society to lifestyle but, she notes, women are still represented in traditional roles as home-

makers, actresses or politicians' wives.

In trying to explain why this has occurred Anderson points to the "Lou Grant types", namely conservative-minded men with power who control the media. "What's said about women is usually played down," she suggests. She also highlights an increase in pornography and violence against women as being one of the problems facing the modern woman. She also points to Canada's non-activist, staid Supreme Court as being a liability for women's rights. "Because there are no women in the Supreme Court it makes conservative decisions that have never helped women," she says.

In suggesting solutions for media type-facings Anderson proposes affirmative action programmes leading women to fill a void in executive positions in the media and other fields. Neutral, non-sexist language and coverage of women would help. Anderson also suggests changes in the viewpoint of advertising for women which she sees as stereotypical. When someone mentions this with regard to her former magazine, *Chatelaine*, she confesses a lack of control.

Recently Anderson made headlines for her resignation from the Advisory Council because of interference from the federal government over a proposed constitutional conference held by the council. In reference to Lloyd Axworthy, with whom she wrangled on the issue, she calls him an asset to women's rights. "Everytime he opened his mouth he turned thousands of women into feminists."

On the topic of the recently hammered out Constitution she refers to it as a compromise. "It is not a great celebration for Canadians. It is neither eloquent nor a good charter of rights." She concedes, however, that it is the "best we could get". Referring to women and the Constitution she calls it a lesson, pointing out that it was an exercise conducted as though women did not exist. She sees the premiers' exclusion of women's and Indian rights as a powerplay.

In reference to her career as a novelist and her recent work *Rough Layout*, about a woman working on a large magazine, Anderson says that it's harder to promote than to write.

Anderson says her next novel concerns the interfacing of the bureaucrats and politicians against the backdrop of Ottawa.

When asked about a recent *Toronto Star* story which pegged her as one of the "in" people in Ottawa society, Anderson threw her head back and laughed. "Ridiculous," she said, simply.



Two characters from the new YGTC production, the *Bakkhai*.

## Revolutionary writers speak out

Elliott Lefko

*After I'm dead and time continues on without me much as it did before I was born a child will pick up a piece of dog shit and eat it and someone will say, Look! McFadden was a man who would have noticed that.*  
—David McFadden

David McFadden stopped in Toronto last week long enough for a couple of reunions, a book signing and a reading last Saturday in a downtown performing space.

Hamilton-born McFadden is the author of 17 books of poetry, the latest being *My Body Was Eaten By Dogs*, and is currently teaching at Simon Fraser University.

McFadden was asked why, after describing Hamilton "as the centre of the universe", he would up and leave it two years ago to move to B.C. "There's been a lot of really radical changes in my life in the past few years. The changes have been fairly traumatic. I woke up one day and just changed by life."

McFadden lived on Hamilton Mountain and from there he wrote poems that were insightful as well as highly entertaining. Canadian identity was a favourite target. "Canada is the only country in the world that is more American than the United States. We should be proud of it," he says.

Pride was something that McFadden felt for Hamilton, but the feeling has since passed. "It's my birthplace. It had a very special appeal. I always felt that the further I got from Hamilton the less interesting things became. However, a lot of changes have taken place that

have left me quite depressed. In visits recently I felt that a lot of the magnetism is gone and I'm sad it's gone."

McFadden plans to take his acute descriptive skills and focus on short story writing. He feels that the medium will enhance his work. "I want my writing to be more interesting than my life. That's what I'd like to feel about my books."

Northrup Frye was also delivering some warm words last weekend, as he spoke at the Ontario College of Art about William Blake and the revolutionary imagination.

Blake, an 18th century romantic poet who toiled in obscurity during his lifetime is now well renowned. Frye points out that the poet believed his time would come. "He knew that

someday he would be one of the great prophetic voices of mankind. He says it in his letters," says Frye.

Blake engraved his poems and corresponding illustrations on plates, some of which were in colour. While many people of his day enjoyed his artistic talents, many couldn't understand him. Blake worked during the day, plying his trade commercially. Frye claims Blake suffered somewhat from the isolation. "He was just as anxious to communicate as a hot gossip on a street corner."

Frye's latest book *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, ten-years in the making, was held up recently by problems in the computer system of his publisher U. of T. Press. However, he says the book will be published next spring.



Northrup Frye eyes *Excalibur* photographer Evan Adelman.

Anderson Looking

Elliott Lefko

Evan Adelman