

Multi-talented York prof has students and readers eating out of her hands

By NICHOLAS POWER

"Latin is a language as dead as it can be first it killed the Romans and now its killing me!"

Students used to sing this song when they had to study Latin, but it's definitely not being sung in classes taught by York professor Margaret Visser.

Her work is a very lively example of what can be done with the classics. Since her introductory course is currently taught as a part-time job, she has diversified into free-lance work on radio. Visser is heard frequently on CBC's Morningside, thereby educating not only students but the general public.

"I have no contempt for popularization if it is based on a genuine knowledge of the subject. To convey complex ideas broadly and elegantly one must be able to encompass the whole field. You also have to be able to shake your listeners up for it not to be boring," Visser said.

She feels that the classics are an integrated part of general education and definitely not a dead end. Employers are realizing that they need people who can adapt to changes.

Visser explained that with the classics the student makes a comparative study that includes language, history, art, philosophy and literature. "In order to study in depth, you have to begin with a body of

knowledge. Too many people make the mistake of specialization," she notes.

Though her course begins with a two-hour lecture on one line from *The Iliad* by Homer, it's not simply a matter of learning the rules of the craft. "If you can think yourself into the brain of an ancient Greek, you'll never be the same again—it's exciting . . . and weird!"

Her work researching how the roots of our culture relates to our everyday lives has found expression beyond her radio comments. Her recently released book *Much Depends on Dinner* is a fascinating exploration of an ordinary meal and is already in a second printing. (For review, refer to the December 4th issue of *Excalibur*.)

At a recent signing session at the York Bookstore, she was asked by a former student for help with a current project for another course involving dragons. Her answer was immediate and detailed with close attention to the roots of the word "dragon" itself. The student later said that it was criminal that Visser isn't teaching upper level courses.

Margaret Visser, who has worked as a journalist in London, said she enjoys working with Canadian students. "When they don't know something, they ask; in England they'll pretend they know and therefore miss a chance to learn. You can't teach well if you have contempt for your students."



THREE WOMEN IN SEARCH OF OSCAR: Jessica Lange, Sissy Spacek and Diane Keaton go through old scrapbooks as they prepare to duke it out for an Academy Award.

A great play matures into an okay movie

By KEN KEOBKE

1986 saw a number of award-winning plays adapted for the silver screen. Among them were *Children of a Lesser God* starring William Hurt falling in love with one of his deaf pupils, and *Little Shop of Horrors*, starring Rick Moranis falling in love with his plant. And more recently, is Beth Henley's play *Crimes of the Heart*.

Crimes of the Heart is a little more complicated. It investigates the passions and failures of three sisters and, as a play, is set in their grandfather's house. The women are

gathered because the youngest, Babe (played by Sissy Spacek), has shot her husband. Meg (Jessica Lange) comes home from Hollywood where she has been working in a dog food factory, instead of pursuing her career as a singer. The third sister, Lenny (Diane Keaton) is the frump who has denied herself love and stayed home to look after the now hospitalized Grandpa.

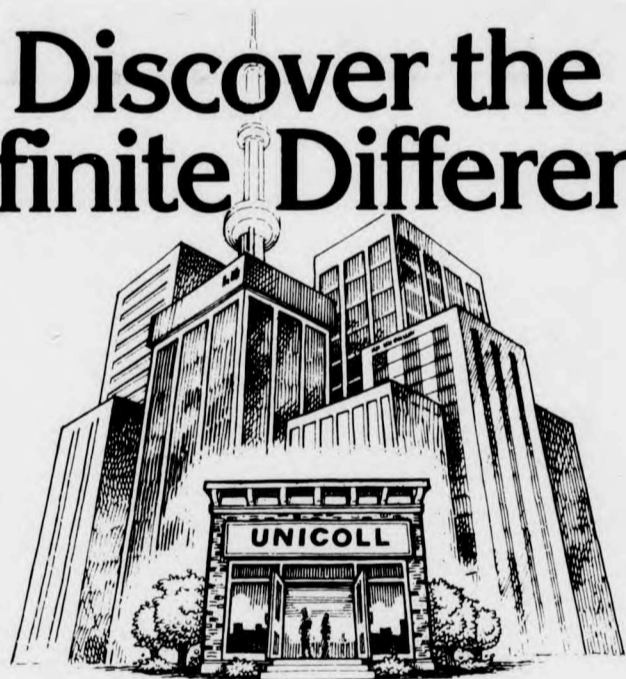
Possibly because the playwright Beth Henley was so closely involved in the production, relatively little dialogue changed in the transition from stage to screen. What *did* change was the settings.

Theoretically, if not financially, in film it is possible to flit minute by minute back and forth from opposite ends of the globe. Opposite ends of the globe can be represented on stage, but it takes time to physically move assemblages of cardboard and wood, and to adjust lights. In the stage version of *Crimes of the Heart*, Henley set all the action in the kitchen. Yet many things take place outside of the kitchen, such as when Meg goes for an all night ride with her former beau. We learn this when she comes back the next morning and joyously declares that nothing happened.

Playgoers wonder if anything actually did happen. With the film, however, we're deprived of using our imagination. We're shown Meg and Doc (played by real life sweetheart Sam Shepard) dishevelled on top of a blanket. Similarly, we are shown flashback scenes of the three sisters when they were children. At other times, such as when Meg and Babe look at photos while seated in the branches of an old tree, the setting only distracts from the dialogue. And often, so does the music.

The performances by all the actors are excellent but, one wonders, how will they affect future stage productions? Will theatre goers be expecting clones of Spacek, Lange, Keaton and Shepard? They probably make up as fine a cast for the play that anyone could want, and a movie makes them accessible to wider audience; if the concern of the playwright is to get a message to the people, probably more people saw the movie *Crimes of the Heart* on its first week than ever saw the play. *Crimes of the Heart* is a good movie but it's a great play. You may want to see both.

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Research Paper

Experimental Radio Programming

Objective:

To research and submit a written report by October 30, 1987 on the development of new and innovative approaches to radio programming in terms of both content and presentation. The final report must offer viable suggestions from which we can produce experimental programs on radio. We do not wish to produce programming which by and large, presents types of music not offered by other broadcasters.

Qualifications:

The ideal candidate will have an M.A. in a Social Sciences discipline as well as proven research and report writing skills.

Remuneration:

The successful candidate will receive a grant of \$5,000 (including expenses).

Applications:

Send a written proposal not exceeding ten pages outlining your plans to satisfy the project objectives along with a resume detailing your qualifications and experience by January 9, 1987

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