

Help save all-Canadian Anansi



"ANANSI PRESS-LOVE IN BURNING BUILDINGS"

By JOHN OUGHTON

On March 1 I went down to the House of Anansi Press, a few small rooms of light in a big house on dingy Jarvis St. I was to talk to Shirley Gibson, the managing editor and wife of novelist Graeme Gibson. It turned out that my appointment was actually for the 2nd of March, but Shirley is a friendly and patient person and talked with me for half an hour about the progress and aims of Anansi.

Shirley stated that public and media interest in Canadian books is greater than ever before. Anansi's sales have increased 300% in the last year alone. Despite this, Anansi needed, according to Shirley, between \$75-100,000 to continue publishing for three more years. Their chief problem, on March 1, lay in selling some of their large warehouse stock of books already published.

And now Anansi is really in trouble. On March 3, a two-hour fire ravaged their warehouse on St. Joseph St. The firemen tentatively estimated damage to Anansi stocks at \$120,000. Dennis Lee stated (in the March 4 Globe and Mail) that his staff had not yet made a thorough investigation of the extent of their loss. He was sure, however, that the press's insurance would not cover "an adequate portion" of the damage. Referring to Anansi Lee stated that the fire "faces us with some very major decisions."

Canada cannot afford to lose a publishing house of the stature of Anansi. Despite the fact that only three staff members are paid full-time, in the last four years Anansi has produced 43 books. The best new writers in Canada appear in Anansi editions: Roch Carrier, Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel, Michael Ondaatje, Graeme Gibson, Dave Godfrey, George Jonas. Internationally known theoreticians Northrop Frye and George Grant are represented, respectively, by *The Bush Garden* and *Technology and Empire*. Anansi has also produced some popular community books such as *Law Law Law*, *Manual for Draft-age Immigrants to Canada*, and *The Bad Trip*. Its focus is, however, primarily literary; and its aim, according to Shirley Gibson, is "to get books out as cheaply as possible."

Despite the recent Americanizations of Ryerson and W.J. Gage and the uncertain status of McLelland & Stewart's, Canadian publishers are seeing the great upswing in public interest in Canadian content reflected in their sales. There is a good chance that a new organization of indigenous Canadian publishing firms will come into existence soon. The firms involved in the plans hope to work co-operatively on things like setting up major exhibits and having a travelling salesman (no joke) represent all the firms to educational and commercial institutions throughout Canada. CBC's *Take Thirty* recently featured the House of Anansi on a half-hour program. Although the media traditionally regards publishing as a dull industry, they are beginning to catch onto the fact that small presses such as Anansi, New Press and Coach House are making



cultural contributions on a scale that the National Film Board, for instance, has not yet attained.

The Canada Council subsidizes Anansi to some extent; it pays 1/3 of the cost of each book printed. This is not much, and now Anansi needs a tremendous amount of support in order to survive. According to Shirley, they are presently committed to publishing 28 new books. As of March 1, they had so many good manuscripts lined up that they could not afford to even look at new manuscripts; and in any event these could not possibly be printed until 1973. *Flora Lee, Where Are You?*, the last part of Roch Carrier's trilogy set in Quebec, was fortunately undamaged in the fire and will be on sale shortly.

Anansi has thus far had some success with getting its books accepted by academic circles for inclusion as course material. The

Bad Trip, and the *Spiderline* editions of new novelists have been placed on reading lists for several courses at York. Beth Appledorn of the York Bookstore stated that it stocks "100%" of Anansi's titles and showed me a letter written her last year by Dennis Lee in which he said that "the York Bookstore has done more to help Anansi than any other bookstore."

As Coach House press's pet beaver claims, "books are weapons in the war of ideas." Anansi is providing an outlet for writers who are a large part of the literary conscience of this nation. Writers like Al Purdy, who refuses to be printed by American-owned firms, and Roch Carrier, who deals with specifically Canadian scenes, are served by Anansi. Shirley Gibson pointed out an interesting reversal of the old "Canada's creative drain to USA" myth: a young Canadian novelist had a book

published by an American firm yet found that it was almost totally ignored by Canadian reviewers.

Anansi is accepted as a "serious publishing house by most of the established critics in Canada. This reputation takes time to achieve, and if Anansi flounders financially, there is no other literary press which can replace it for some time. For all of these reasons, Anansi's survival is important. In addition, it shares the communal ethic to a great degree. It has cooperated with New Press and Coach House in producing, respectively, *The Bad Trip* and Ondaatje's masterpiece *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. Anansi exists to provide a service to creative writers and the public, not to make money.

The public is once again beginning to accept books as a relevant and stimulating medium.



Lights, Camera, Action!

It's a mindless movie

By DAN MERKUR

The western is clearly the oldest of the film genres, dating back to 1903, and it is no small wonder that the western is therefore the most hackneyed, the most cliched, and the most parodied of the genres.

It is a constant lesson, however, that all art forms are inherently celebrative of their subject, and that the satire is an impossible form. Parody can be done, because a parody gently pokes fun, but with reverence for the whole. The satire simply levels its barrels and begins blasting, which makes for unhappy viewing, seeing as neither the satire nor the subject satirized is considered by the filmmaker as worth watching.

Zachariah, billed at the *New Yorker* as "The First Electric Western" is one of those pieces that couldn't make up its mind as to whether it wanted to be a parody or a satire, and so it falls apart rather dismally since it lacks the unity even an out and out satire would have had. Some of it is very clever, some merely very funny, some entirely tasteless, and most is, unfortunately, just cliched boring and dull.

Country Joe and the Fish and *The James Gang* get to play a fair number of songs, Doug Kershaw fiddles around some, but mostly the film absolutely falls apart for lack of direction. Which is particularly unfortunate since the script was co-written by Joe Massot (a big question mark) and Firesign Theatre (who didn't have an answer this time.) Firesign Theatre has established quite some reputation as a very funny comedy group; they should stick to their recordings. They haven't the faintest notion of what film scripts require in order to be entertaining, let alone good, and their sight gags are very few and far too far between.

I must say the film bears more resemblance to Fellini *Satyricon* (as a story) than anything else, and exhibits about the same logic. The star, John Rubinstein, looks about right for a Fellini part, and truly, there are only two even half-decent performances, both of them by bit parts — William Challee as the Old Man, a part he must be quite familiar with by now; and Elvin Jones as Job Cain, the second fastest gun in the west (*Zachariah* is faster.)

So anyhow it's a pretty stupid movie, but if you go really stoned, you might just be able to ignore the film and get into the music, which is quite alright. The photography is really something nice. Unfortunately the direction of the camera and the story line are purely conventional and entirely commonplace. Which means that if you're so wiped that you can't even follow the continuity, you're in business. But it's a mindless movie.

Cinemalumiere, 290 College Street at Spadina, is continually showing first-rate revivals of recent films, and if you do not know the theatre and are not on their mailing list, you ought to do something about it!

Showing tonight is Jean-Luc Godard's *Made in U.S.A.* which has never, I believe, had a proper showing in Toronto, perhaps for five nights all told at various revivals. According to some, it's Godard's absolute worst. According to others, it is well worth seeing. I figure on catching it tonight.

Beginning tomorrow and running for several days is Claude Chabrol's *La Femme Infidele*, which is a delightful movie about domesticity, cuckoldry, and murder. Very, very nice, with absolutely first rate

photography and direction, tremendous colour values, some truly fine performances by the leads and competent work by the supporting players — all in all, not a film to miss.

Chabrol has been called the French Hitchcock, which is an odd concept — Chabrol specializes in suspense-thrillers, but where Hitchcock is heavy-handed with blood and gore jarring off-screen noises and ridiculous, frightening closeups; Chabrol manages to seep his films with an undercurrent of disquiet that every now and then shows its head and worries the hell out of you. Very effective, with a Gallic lightness unlike Hitchcock's English bludgeon.

The Ontario Film Theatre, screening Tuesday's at 7:30 at the Ontario Science Centre, is currently showing a series of double bills of films directed by Rene Clair. Clair was a Comedie Francaise director of the twenties who went very seriously into film in the post-sound era. (His silent efforts were few, although one, *Entr'Acte*, is one of the outstanding surrealist experiments in the cinema, with collaboration by Pablo Picasso, Eric Satie and others.) Clair is mostly famed for his light-hearted, light-spirited romantic comedies.

I've seen three of his French films (of which ten are being shown at the OFT) and I find them delightful, a little lightweight (comparable to the Broadway stage comedy) and fascinating, due to the cultural barrier. Clair also worked in England and America during the Vichy regime, and of those films I have seen several. Clair is not an artist to be missed.