

Cellar publishing escapes obscurity as established houses muddle on

Think of a publishing house, and what do you see in your mind's eye? A tall, gleaming office building, or a stately late-Victorian edifice tucked away in the bowels of a great city; or at very least a few respectable floors of some such building.

In Canada one can find publishing houses that fit this pattern, and one can find, too, more modest establishments such as the Coach House Press, which fills the small expanse of an old livery stable in a back alley near the University of Toronto.

At the bottom of the hierarchy of publishing houses, at least in terms of architectural setting, are the "little" houses, the transient establishments which bring out a volume or two of mediocre or avant-garde poetry, then fade quietly away. Yet every now and again one of them succeeds and goes on to shake the stately edifices to their foundations. Such a one is the House of Anansi.

DANK CELLAR

To reach the House of Anansi you must find a small side street of Toronto's Spadina Avenue, then walk up dead-end alley, through a wicker gate and across a back yard. Stooping low to avoid a concrete arch, you descend a flight of stairs and find yourself in the dankest and most medieval of cellars. This is the headquarters of one of Canada's most exciting publishing ventures.

Anansi has been in business for perhaps three years, and in that time it has brought out, in addition to several books that are best forgotten, at least half a dozen works of major importance and a dozen others that no one would be ashamed to have on his shelf. The editors seem to have an uncanny

knack for finding authors on the way up: Margaret Atwood (*The Animals in that Country*, *The Edible Woman*) had her first book, *The Circle Game*, published here, and Graeme Gibson's *Five Legs*, which I'm going to talk about in a minute, received extraordinary good reviews.

In addition there have been several important works of non-fiction published by Anansi, as well as reprints of collections by Al Purdy and Allen Ginsberg.



Anansi

What is most significant, perhaps, about Anansi's success is that it tends to receive, and put into print, manuscripts that have been turned down by the established houses such as McClelland and Stewart and Ryerson. *Five Legs*, it is said, went the rounds of Canada's major publishers before finding success in an Anansi edition.

This is not to say, of course, that the major houses are crying into their bankbooks: although *Five Legs* was praised by many as the most important novel to be

published in Canada in years, hardly anyone made the claim that it was fun to read (which it isn't), and sales do not seem to have been large. Anansi, which is not aiming to become a rich firm but only a valuable one artistically, can afford to publish such works.

I can recommend *Five Legs* to anyone who is interested in the art of the novel or in the character of Canada (though perhaps the book is only about the character of southwestern Ontario). It is a masterful application of a prose style to a subject: written in a halting, broken prose that wants to become Joycely mellifluous but it not allowed to by the psychology of the characters (who, briefly, are afflicted with the emotional tightness brought on by the tradition and WASPishness of Ontario).

ANTHOLOGIES

Another field into which Anansi has sallied is that of poetry anthologies. The first, *T.O. Now*, unfortunately was smothered by the protective attitude of Dennis Lee, an Anansi founding father who likes to take young poets under his wing. Reading the arrogant preface to this book was enough to make one forget that there were some very good things within.

The latest anthology in *Canada First: A Mare Usque ad Edmontion*. Nineteen poets are represented, a disturbing number of them ex-Americans (disturbing, that is, because of the title of the book). Not without exception, the poems herein are mature and refreshing; the anthology tells us nothing whatever about Canadian poetry between St. John's and Edmonton, but at least it is an interesting and enjoyable collection.

—Terry Donnelly

leftovers

In an effort to be pleasant—difficult though it was—and, we will admit, in order to prove that leftovers is capable of sweetness and light, we some weeks ago effused plaudits all over the folk who set up Student Cinema. You can count this as an official retraction.

Before we get nasty, we should first admit that the original program looks as good as ever: a sprinkling of really ghastly movies among some classics of modern film-making and many reruns of eminently worthwhile current films. The problem began when we decided to take our own advice and actually go to Student Cinema.

The victim was *Cleopatra*, a girl who admittedly deserved a more incisive treatment than the hatchet job she got in this rather limp production. But for twenty-five minutes after the scheduled show time we waited in breathless silence for something to happen. As it turned out, that silence was the best part of the evening.

When Cleo finally made her entrance, it appeared that she had been damaged in transit. Her blemishes took the form of maddeningly irritating green lines that appeared from time to time and wove, McLarenque, across the screen. Film breaks, changes of reels, and fuzzy projection were provided free by the management as comic relief.

Some sort of ultimate came during a particularly passionate love scene, when the film gave a jump so that words and actions went their separate ways. It was the most unco-ordinated love-making we have ever witnessed.

Film goes with more guts than we have, who regularly attend Student Cinema's offerings, tell us that this happens every week. What this will do to such tightly-structured films as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Death of a Salesman* is awful to think upon, and not to be tolerated.

* * *

On a vastly happier note, the English Department will sponsor a conference on Canadian poetry, *Poet and Critic '69*, in late November.

The conference will bring together poets and academics from French and English Canada in a three-day series of critical seminars, poetry readings, a drama presentation, art displays, literary papers and drinks. An impressive list of Those Who Count has been assembled. That means Eil Mandel, Irving Layton, Margaret Atwood, Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay, Jean-Guy Pilon, Gattien Lapointe, and just possibly Leonard Cohen.

The Quebec government is shipping us a group of grad students in literature, and more are expected from Manitoba. The evenings will be taken over by a Studio Theatre production of Wilfred Watson's verse play, *Let's Murder Clytemnestra According to the Principles of Marshall McLuhan*.

Those Who Don't Count (i.e. those who are not Great Canadian Literary Figures but rightly believe they have something to offer) have organized an anti-conference of poetry readings for students and anyone else with a song in his pocket.

Everything is free and open to students, except some Faculty Club nothings that will set you back a crippling \$7. But if that's your bog, see professors Harrison or Wiebe for registration forms.

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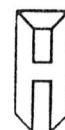
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