

The Gateway fine arts

ricci wows'em with eso

The Edmonton Symphony's Big Deal this week was Italian violinist Ruggiero Ricci, a personage whom the ESO publicity billed as "the greatest violinist in the world," or words to that effect. Playing Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto last Sunday, Ricci showed that he is an exciting and tremendously skilled performer, but he also proved one other thing: he is not the world's greatest violinist.

The Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto is a very nice violin concerto, and one of the better of the ones frequently played, but it is by no means a work of unrelieved inspiration. The second theme of the last movement, for instance, is unfortunate to say the least. But the piece does have some nice tunes, and is even exciting in parts.

As a violinist, Ricci is definitely in the tradition of Paganini; or, if you like, he is a rich man's gypsy violinist.

He took the first and last movements of the Concerto at a pretty harrowing clip, and at times he resembled a speeding car out of control; all rhythm and melody occasionally being lost in a fantastic flurry of notes.

He threw off the Tchaikovsky quite cavalierly, handling his bow as if it were a pocket-handkerchief; and his technical skill in the last movement left most of the audience open-mouthed and awed. Still, one had the impression that he didn't really have much feeling for the music, and was simply using it as a means of showing off his brilliant technique. At times he seemed to be saying to the orchestra, "C'mon, I'll show you how fast I can go, and I dare you to keep up!"

Unfortunately, the orchestral accompaniment was somewhat lumpy, and tended to come off second-best in its duels with the soloist, but in the passages for orchestra alone it was very effective.

In his encores, though, Ricci showed his real stature. He ended his performance with the Paganini Fifth Caprice, and his playing of it really was breathtaking.

As a somewhat over-benevolent compensation for his labors, the audience gave him the longest and loudest session of applause I have ever witnessed in Edmonton.

Now on to less important matters, such as the fact that the Edmonton Symphony played its best concert ever last Sunday.

For once, they started out with a bang. Glinka's Overture to Ruslan and Ludmilla is a good lively piece of music with lots of work for the timpani and brass, and especially requiring a virtuoso string section.

The orchestra's performance of it was relatively magnificent. I say that advisedly, because although it would not have been regarded as a particularly exciting performance if done by the Berlin Philharmonic, for example, it was greatly above average for the ESO. The audience even partially relented in its incorrig-

ible habit of refusing to become enthusiastic about the first work on the program, no matter what it is.

This was followed by an impeccable reading of Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun," (the Symphony Society has at last discovered the Impressionists!), although the performance was somewhat spoiled for me by the inane chattering of two little mongoloids sitting directly behind me. (While I'm on the subject of audiences, why do Edmonton concert-goers so obstinately refuse to quieten down after the National Anthem? I have not been to a Symphony concert yet where the audience has not grossly violated the standards of good taste and politeness.)

The last half of the program was taken up by the Sibelius Second Symphony. Sibelius is the favorite composer of all Romanticists too hep to like Tchaikovsky. Indeed, the Second is a work of unabashed Romanticism: Tchaikovsky's influence sticks out all over. It is a monumental work of dark texture and sweeping melody, and unless one tires of the innumerable crashing climaxes, it is very satisfying music.

The Sibelius was played with warmth and gusto, and, more surprising, with good dynamic balance and accuracy. The disturbing signs shown at the last concert have been confirmed: the ESO has finally arrived.

Note to music-lovers: if you miss the Wednesday concert of the Little Symphony, you will be in God's black-books forever. It's in the MacDonald Hotel at 8:30 p.m. Further Yuletide Joy presents itself in the form of the sacred annual performance of Handel's "Messiah" this Thursday, and Eileen Farrell's appearance with the ESO January 15 and 16.

And a Merry Humbug to you all!

—Bill Beard

new novel valuable but flawed

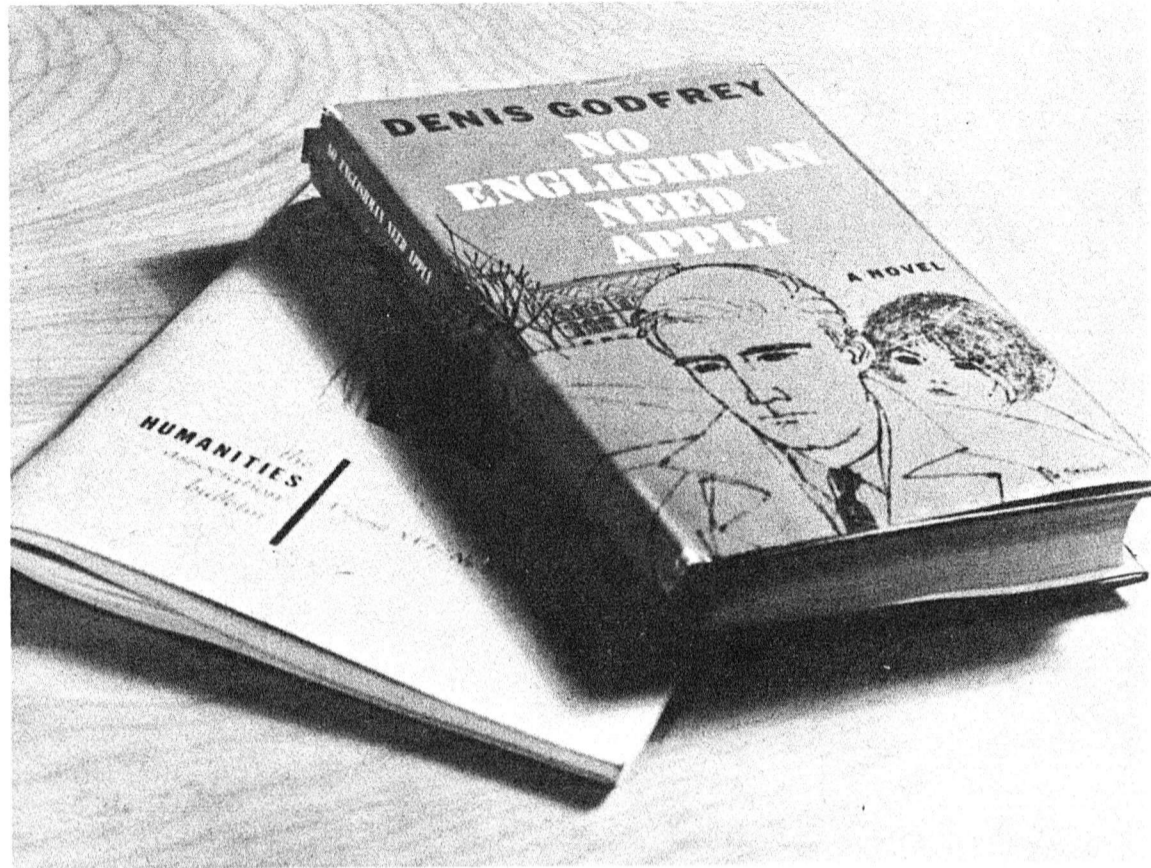
I feel uneasy about reviewing Dr. Godfrey's new novel, "No Englishmen Need Apply" (Macmillan of Canada) because, though Professor McCaughey's notorious unfavorable review was as silly as the angry letters to the Journal pointed out, his general estimate of the book wasn't far off.

That is, I feel that as a whole the novel is a failure. But it is an interesting failure, with considerable merits.

To take the merits first: Lucy Brent, the wife of Philip Brent (the English lecturer who is the novel's anti-hero) is an exceptionally well-drawn heroine; if it were possible to consider her the central character of the novel, I think it would be much better than in fact it is.

The novel would then become an examination of two anti-hero vs. heroine combinations: Philip vs. Lucy and Steve vs. Debbie. (Steve is a caddish student, and Debbie the girl who adores him. Steve is interested in Lucy but has a change of heart.)

Lucy, as I have said, is mag-



—Jim MacLaren photo

FOR THE BOOK-SIZE STOCKING—Two members of the U of A English department have recently published new imaginative works, here displayed. The novel is, of course, Denis Godfrey's "No Englishmen Need Apply"; less obvious is the presence of Wilfred Watson's verse-play "Wail for Two Pedestals" in the current number of the Humanities Association Bulletin. Both are available at the university bookstore.

nificent; and Philip is very convincing as the arrogant, unsure, priggish, appealing Englishman. About Debbie and Steve I'm not so sure.

Dr. Godfrey hasn't quite got the Average Student's tone of voice right; but neither, to my knowledge, has any other Canadian writer.

More serious is the sentimentality that Dr. Godfrey allows to inundate the novel's final sequence, in which Debbie, having pulled an All's Well That Ends Well on Steve, and then been awfully decent about not making him marry her, has the baby and gets him anyway.

Yet it almost comes off, again because Dr. Godfrey manages to make Debbie really likeable.

To this novel of personal relationships, however, Dr. Godfrey has chosen to add a surprisingly crude philippic against the American influence in the teaching of English.

This influence is incarnated in villainous Professor Floyd, the Iago of the English Department. So melodramatic a scoundrel I have not encountered in a long time. I can't see any signs of humor or irony; Dr. Godfrey really means it.

This would not matter so much if the polemical sections of the novel were fun in their own right. But a persistent vagueness clouds what precisely Dr. Godfrey is getting at. Surely it cannot be simply that there is an intentional American conspiracy to debase the English language, or that only English men are capable of feeling the language's beauty.

The dangers of Americanization are much more subtle than Dr. Godfrey represents them to be.

The result of the introduction of this slightly cranky note is that Philip in the end rings much less true than he otherwise would have done.

His coming-to-terms-with-Canada is so delicately represented by Dr. Godfrey that it seems a shame to use a meat-axe to sculpt the university through which he moves.

Still, the novel is good for long stretches, and the bad stretches, while fatally damaging it as a work of art, make entertaining reading.

—J. O. Thompson

a progress report from ol' dogpatch

The Students' Union's largest-scale project involving the arts is the annual Varsity Varieties production, which is put on in conjunction with Varsity Guest Weekend.

This year the Jubilaires (which is what those involved in this project are called) are putting on "Li'l Abner," which you will recall was a highly successful Broadway hit and Hollywood movie.

The following is a report on the progress of this undertaking by one deeply involved with it. It may be compared with the epic lists of warriors in Homer and Virgil, or with their equivalents in "Paradise Lost." (The editor was tempted, in fact, to put it into Miltonic blank verse but thought better of it.)

"In one short week our beloved leader, Phillip Silver, returns to the campus from the National Theater School in Montreal. He will be undoubtedly pleased with the progress made thus far.

"Russ Brown, the stage manager, and Cec Pretty, the musical director of the show have been putting the cast through its paces during the past two months."

"David Twigge, the set and costume designer, has his merry band of helpers busy at their vital task."

"The production managers, John Cormie and Trudee Clark, are keeping busy collecting facts and figures and working on their implementation."

"The promotion of the show is showing some definite signs of activity under the guidance of Stu Morton and John Hague."

"Jim McLaughlin, the technical manager, is getting the operation into high gear, but still needs a few more willing hands."

"The main concern of the cast

in the past couple of months has been the enjoyable chore of memorizing the many toe-tapping songs in the show. Also weekly practices in the modern dance studio have been initiated to limber the members up before Jeremy Leslie-Spinks, the choreographer, gets his hands on them.

"The chorus and the leads (Dave Ford . . . Li'l Abner, Janey Craig . . . Daisy Mae, and Glen Reid . . . Marryin' Sam), are showing excellent performances at rehearsals, and it appears that they could put on the show next week if it were required."

"So Phillip, We're ready for ya . . ."

beware of angel droppings

Downtown Edmonton is a veritable fairyland.

What? You haven't noticed? Look up, look up!

But beware of angel droppings.

The parks department (I think it's the parks department; who else could inject such a spirit of fun-fun-fun into their efforts?) have outdone themselves with a Jasper-Avenue-long panoply of light, texture and tinsel, entitled "Hark, the Herald Angels Frug." Imagine! All of the lively center of lively Edmonton now looks like the Army and Navy bargain basement!

We find in this stirring display an answer to all our earnest strivings after what we have labelled loosely "significant form": ANGELS THAT LIGHT UP!

Here is the syncretism of past, present and future; Hogarth's S-curve, the line of beauty, wedded to General Electric; Paradise Regained at the flick of a switch at the Fifth Street Powerhouse.

Where else but in Edmonton? And to think we've been searching all these years . . .

—Jackie Foord