

Entertainment

Phoenix takes new twist on old favourite

Frankenstein in a modern vein

The Zen of an Intelligent Machine
Phoenix Theatre
til December 1

review by Suzanne Lundrigan

Move over Frankenstein, here comes "Friend".

William Kuhn's *The Zen of An Intelligent Machine* is at once dazzling and disturbing. . . such are the makings of a brilliant play.

Victor, a Silicon Valley magnate and his whiz kid friend, Lazlo, spend their afternoons putzing around in Victor's garage. Their latest project deals with artificial intelligence. The culmination of their high-tech tinkering is a synthetic being — Friend.

The god-role proves too much for Lazlo who explains that he was raised by a "marauding band of Hungarian nuns". Cognizant of the moral and ethical boundaries which are under seige, Lazlo abandons the research, leaving Victor to his own devices. A self styled romantic, Victor removes all controls from the project in the hopes of creating a being untainted by human limitations and impurities.

Friend grows to love Victor as any creation loves his creator. . . even more. Ultimately he asks Victor to give him a female form so that he can become all that Victor would ever want. Dismayed that the innocent and intellectually superior Friend would request the shackles of human weakness, Victor abandons the project, sending Friend into the world to fend for himself.

The "fifth wave" is crashing over the human race. *Zen* examines the moral issues which accompany that wave. How far should man go in his pursuit of artificial intelligence, and what should he do with the creatures born out of it.

Zen is an elegant vehicle for these questions. From the exchanges between Victor and Lazlo, which are littered with sufficient jargon to warm the cockles of any technocrat's heart, to the electrifying meeting between Friend and Polly, this play is effective. Tension gives way to more tension.

David McIlwraith as Victor is superb, providing an accurate portrayal of a man caught up by the temptations and thrills of high tech creationism. Tom Wood as Lazlo is his match in his role as friend and conscientious objector. Christopher Thomas as Friend has mastered mechanical-speak and shines. Lucy Peacock and Artie Feschel complete the circle of excellence.

Clever set design by Stencil Campbell creates the appropriate ambience: Computers blink and monitors flash. Stencil also effects irony as he allows the audience to see

into the garage where Friend is hidden and view the poolside action simultaneously, thereby underlining Friend's omnipresence.

The Phoenix has a winner on its hands, definitely a must see for technophiles and phobes alike.

Main Photo: David McIlwraith and Tom Wood
Inset: McIlwraith



Photo Rob Schmidt

Jane Rule: the page is her canvas

Inland Passages
by Jane Rule

Lester: Orpen Denny

review by Lisa A. Trofymow

If true beauty is that which endures, then Jane Rule's collection of short stories, *Inland Passages*, is truly beautiful. Like a painter with a palette, colors, and knife, Rule wields words, characters, and irony so that almost each story in this collection leaves an imprint on one's brain like the image of a striking portrait.

Perhaps it is Rule's particular twists of irony, or perhaps some characters' unconventional lifestyles, which might unbalance the reader and force one to put the page under better light. Rule's writing demands careful attention paid to subtle shades of characters and their viewpoints.

Without force or fault, Rule's persona transforms into male (as in "A Chair for George") into female; into young, into old ("Power Failure"); into heterosexual or homosexual ("His Nor Hers"). To write through such diverse perspectives is a feat few authors attempt, and few who attempt succeed. Rule is one of those successful few. She leaps so gracefully from world-view to world-view that ages and sexes of characters are secondary to their simple humanity.

In achieving this universality of character and yet retaining the characters' idiosyncrasies, Rule's stories keep the reader bound with fascination to the page and simultaneously touch something dark and deep, propelling one's mind beyond book and story-space. Such are the best stories' metaphorical impressions — left by certain settings or phrases — that they linger within one long after the book is closed.

There are one or two flawed stories "More Than Money", for example, seems hastily drawn and far too literal than most of Rule's work in the collection. A few sentences in (what I call) the "Anna and Harry Series" tip dangerously close to the mouth of the Short-Stories-for-Cosmopolitan chasm, but such wobbling may be forgiven.

Such powerful tales as the title story dem-

onstrate excellent writing. In "Inland Passage", a Prince Rupert ferry trip alters the ways of tomboy Fidelity and matron Troy. The setting of this story is both familiar — as ship, passengers, and reader journey similarly — and unfamiliar, as is this strange inland passage.

Although the West Coast is prominent in *Inland Passage* — landscape and atmosphere

are vivid — this should not alienate neither Albertan nor African nor astronaut; as in all good stories, character dominates. Furthermore, timid readers should not shy from some stories' lesbian characters: the writer does not exploit the supposed novelty of such relationships. As is the Rule of *Inland Passages* — humanity, first.

Book a Journey through Hell

The Postman of Nagasaki
Peter Townsend
Penguin

review by Rod Campbell

On the morning of August 9, 1945, the Japanese inner cabinet had been summoned to an emergency meeting to hear Prime Minister Suzuki announce his intention of accepting unconditional surrender. Shortly after 11 a.m. on that same day, Major Charles Sweeney aboard a B29 bomber, having been thwarted by clouds over his initial target, Kakura, was starting his bombing run on his option, Nagasaki. Seconds later the city and surrounding districts were turned into an inferno, scorched by a heat hotter than the core of the sun. Amid the carnage, more dead than alive, lay a sixteen year old boy, Sumiteru Taniguchi.

It is Taniguchi's life author Peter Townsend chronicles, as he traces the young postman's struggle for survival through a pain-saturated hell.

Taniguchi was delivering mail when the bomb went off, 1800 metres from the hypocentre. In an instant everything around him disappeared in a blinding flash, bluish-white, like a gigantic arc-lamp. The skin on his left arm and back was flayed clean off. His chest looked as though it had been clawed by a monstrous beast. For seven days he lay in agony before being seen by a doctor. It would be several more before he would receive any medication.

For two years Taniguchi was to lay face down on a hospital bed suffering excruciating pain from his burns as well as bed sores — pain so intense that often he would beg his doctors to kill him just so he could escape from his suffering.

When finally he was able to leave hospital Taniguchi soon found that physical pain was not all he had to endure. For now as an 'Hibakusha' — an A-bomb survivor — he was seen as tainted and shunned by the majority of Japanese society.

Taniguchi's fight for acceptance is sensitively told by Townsend. He poignantly shows without rhetoric the barbarity mankind is capable of. Unfortunately, Townsend tends to dwell on Taniguchi the victim, to the exclusion of the more positive aspects of man's life. Determined to see Nagasaki be the last city to endure a nuclear explosion, Taniguchi has worked as a peace activist for the last thirty years — yet this fact is hardly mentioned.

Townsend's manner of writing is semi-documentary, semi-biographical. He uses insightful interesting historical background information on the war and the city. However, he is bound to have historians scratching their collective heads as he offers no references or footnotes to validate his sources.

These quibbles aside, the book is an intimate confirmation: the reality of the unthinkable. It is rather fitting that the last sentence in the book should contain the prayer of the Nagasaki Hibakusha "May the second atom bomb be the last."

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