

films

Department of Final Reminders: Next Monday is blast-off for the Edmonton Film Society's Main Series; \$4 gets you ten films, ranging from Japanese comedy through Russian Shakespeare ("Hamlet" is the first presentation of the season) to the definitive film on bull-fighting.

Tickets will no doubt be available at the door at the Jubilee if you haven't already bought yours. The films start sharp at 8:15 p.m. Be there!

Department of Second Thoughts: The more I think about it, the less I like *Alfie* (at the Westmount). If we're supposed to find Alfie loveable, the moral point against him shouldn't be labored. If we're supposed to find him guilty, he should surely, in a comedy, glory more in his guilt.

The movie never makes up its mind, and tries to bluff us by piling on the Style—winks to the audience and so forth. This doesn't really work, and all one is left with is sentimentalism sugar-coated with toughness.

A much better British comedy is *The Wrong Box* (at the Odeon).

The plot (unusually elaborate and satisfying) revolves around the 18th-19th century institution of the Tontine. A tontine is a combination of bequests and gamble. The loot goes to the last surviving heir; thus the question of who outlives whom becomes rather important.

So we are whirled through a maze of corpses, none of which turns out to be the right one from anyone's point of view, until the final sequence, a wild battle in a cemetery which out-Breughels Breughel.

A star-studded cast (Ralph Richardson, John Mills, Peter Sellers, Tony Hancock, Michael Caine—happier here than in *Alfie*—etc., etc.) romp through the intelligent screenplay with delicacy and zest.

I've never seen a movie that sends up the Victorians more lovingly. Yet death is constantly lurking—the skull beneath the skin, and all that.

A word of warning; Some comedies base their effect on a steady succession of jokes; others are effective in terms of their overall plan. *The Wrong Box* is of the latter sort. Don't expect continuous guffaws, but I think if you keep your eyes on the shape of the total structure as it unfolds you'll leave the theatre satisfied.

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (at the Garneau) is a French film directed by Jacques Demy, whose *Baie des Anges* was the final Film Society film last year. I liked the film very much, but his present offering worries me.

All the dialogue is sung. The tunes are catchy, though not to my mind particularly good. Generally, song packs a greater emotional punch than does speech. Opera is an art of extreme situations, and even in musical comedy the characters sing only when their emotions have crystallized.

But here Demy has deliberately kept the emotional level low, choosing a banal plot and having it photographed in pretty-pretty color. Song becomes a way of saying things even less intensely than usual. An interesting effect, but to what end?

Those who caught *Repulsion* at Studio 82 last week will be amused to find that the murderess-heroine of that powerful film, Catherine Deneuve, here plays the blandest of blondes. She's in love with a garage-mechanic who leaves her pregnant to serve his term in the army. How sad!

Should she marry the jewellery-salesman who loves her regardless? What will our hero do when he returns from Algeria? (Maybe the film is about the banalization of life under the Fourth Republic.)

Certainly there's a wan charm about all this, and perhaps one should demand no more. Essentially, for obscure reasons of his own, Demy has chosen to devote his talents to making an upper-middlebrow Sound of Music, and he has succeeded.

The praise the film has elicited from some quarters amazes me, and perhaps I'm being less than fair as a result. The film itself is so unpretentious that it almost seems pre-emptive about its lack of pretensions.

But if you're in the mood for an evening of the lightest possible entertainment, you might very well drop in at the Garneau. Nothing there will tax either your mind or your heart.

—John Thompson

The Great Canadian Sex Novel proves to be more than porno

In Praise of Older Women: the amorous recollections of András Vajda, by Stephen Vizinczey. Ballantine (95c), 224 pp.

Unlike most Canadian writers, Stephen Vizinczey has not chosen to write of things distinctively Canadian, such as small prairie towns or Torontonian pseudo-sophistication. In fact, the subject matter of this little novel is something distinctively un-Canadian—sex, or, more explicitly free sex.

In Praise of Older Women purports to the sexual autobiography of one András Vajda, a philosophy professor at the University of Saskatoon. With this deliberately prosaic setting ends the "Canadianity" of the book. Vajda takes us back to his boyhood in wartime Hungary and Austria, where he began his career at the tender age of twelve, acting as a pimp for the American army.

That's only the beginning. As he grows up he has experiences with young girls, matrons, virgins, and just about every other sub-species that might be imagined. He gets involved in the 1956 revolution, flees to Italy for a quick affair with a frigid woman, and finally ends up emigrating to Canada, where he continues his hobby as best he can.

So far the book sounds like just another Frank-Harris-type sexual diary. But it isn't—and this, as I see it, is where the books leaves the common run of sex-obsessed novels and emerges into uniqueness.

For the past fifty years people like D. H. Lawrence have been trying to make physical love an acceptable subject for treatment in fiction. They succeeded, but unfortunately many novelists have never realized this and are still carrying on the campaign.

As a result, the average novel in its own self-consciousness is apt to offend us either by hedging or by being crudely blunt. And it will probably never get further into its subject than mere anatomical descriptions.

Vizinczey, however, is not out to win any battles. He recognizes that he is dealing with what is now a legitimate theme in literature, and that this new theme can be handled in countless ways. He works within the theme, exploring its various aspects, and emphasizing one: that older women are infinitely better lovers than giggly young girls.

The result is that he has written a mature, tasteful book, fascinating to read and perhaps even significant as a didactic novel. One does not necessarily have to be a proponent of free sex to enjoy the treatment Vizinczey has given to this theme.

He never bores us with page-long medical lessons à la John Cleland. He doesn't euphemize about anything, nor does he offend us by using vulgar terms out of context. The language at all times is the language of András Vajda and the people he encounters.

And Vajda is quite a character. He is extremely frank, as quick to point out his failures as he is to note his successes. An element of humour pervades the whole book, and parts of it are extremely funny. Nonetheless, nothing detracts from the moral that Vajda wants to put across.

The book is "dedicated to older women and addressed to young men"—with the purpose of connecting the two. No incident fails to teach the young men something, and no type of woman escapes judgement.

Vajda seems to live in a bachelor's paradise when he is in Europe. The women—the older women, at least—are warm, mature, and responsive. But when he arrives in Canada toward the end of the narrative the whole tone of the novel changes. The sexual climate, formerly so warm and friendly, becomes cold and hostile.

This chapter is titled "On Grown Women as Teenage Girls", and begins with the quotation "sex on the moon". After a few affairs with women who are either indifferent or "mercilessly irrational", he is forced to conclude that true older women are rare indeed in this country.

He doesn't have too many kind words for Canadian bachelors either. A taxi driver warns him: "When you'd grab a girl, a Canadian grabs another drink. The place is full of fat men and unhappy women." Vajda finds out that this is perfectly true.

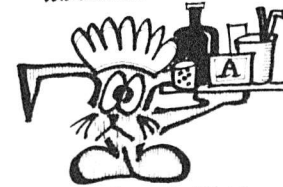
The book, as a whole, succeeds amazingly well. It is a real pleasure to see Canadian writing leap into popular fiction of an international sort. It is an even greater pleasure to see sex discussed like any other theme in literature, without blushing self-consciousness or dull cataloguing.

—Terry Donnelly

once again
Lapinette by Tomkerz



little lappy cowers consternationally under the threat of tuition tantalization.



lappy ponders plodding through piles of vigorous vitamins as a health food helper.



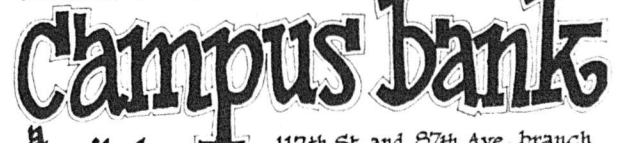
happiness is a thing called intuition, the opposite of which is out-of-tuition.



a loan lent should be wisely spent...



the bank of montreal



a capital idea.

112th St. and 87th Ave. branch
n.w. mcLennan, manager

ah hah! said a meany in the registrar's office. it is tuition time again!

great gollies! said lapinette. tuition time usually means like money. the hollow feeling that somehow accompanies an empty piggybank, and sundry circumstances of similar sorrow.

lappy was about to throw in the carrot and get a job as a waitress in a health food shop when, in a fit of rampant recollection, she thought of her friendly bank-type manager.

he explained to her all about the government-backed student loan bit.

good gosh! she gasped. then I don't have to worry about a thing!

so she romped down town and purchased a whole new fancy wardrobe.

she has another appointment with her bank manager tomorrow.

guess why.