

# A seamless sequence of scenes and sonnets

## Shakespeare Unplugged well worth the walk

BY PATRICK SHAUNESSY

A far walk from the Dalhousie campus, the North Street Church is a very quiet, unassuming building. In fact if you walk along North street you'll most likely pass by without noticing it.

However, you perchance have noticed it, you would have known that over the past two weeks the church has been host to a theatrical exposé entitled *Shakespeare Unplugged*. The show

was comprised of a selection of sonnets and scenes from some of Shakespeare's works.

The hour-or-so long performance made use of simple scenes and costumes to portray some of the highlights of one of the most intriguing and complicated playwrights in history. The performance was acted by Raymond O'Neill and Shelley Thompson, both very experienced and accomplished actors of stage and television, and directed by Ed Thomason.

Both Thompson and O'Neill have appeared in the *Atlantic Theatre Festival* in past years, so Shakespeare is no stranger to either of them. Besides various stage

performances in places like Stratford and the Royal National Theatre in London, O'Neill and Thompson have also enjoyed careers in television. O'Neill played a leading role in the popular soap opera *Days of Our Lives*, and while in Britain, Thompson held a leading role on the hit TV series *Rita & Angelo*.

Thomason has been the director of several of Britain's more prominent theatres, among which are the prestigious Belgrade and Coventry. Thomason has also worked with BBC Radio and was awarded an ACTRA (now Gemini) for his TV screenplay, *Gentle Sinners*.

The staging of the play itself was

quite simple. It was held in the main hall of the church with chairs surrounding a centred stage. On the stage was a large trunk and a coat-rack in one of the corners. In my experience seeing Shakespearean plays, I usually find that the more simple the staging the more powerful and effective the performance, as the audience spends less time being caught up in aesthetic appearances and more time concentrating on the words and actions of the play.

This simplicity was what made this synopsis of Shakespeare quite remarkable. For in this modest church the actors were able to perform Shakespeare with as much passion and intensity as one would expect from a mainstage production. This goes to show that Shakespeare's works are indeed quite universal in that they rely on no time, space or particular setting to complete the experience of the story.

The show itself was excellent. There was a terrific mix of comedy, tragedy and poetry. And as the play

bill boasts, the transition from scene to scene was absolutely seamless. In fact there were points where I wasn't sure where one scene ended and the other began. It was only by the words in the speech that I could tell that O'Neill and Thompson had switched from, say, *Two Gentleman of Verona* to *Julius Caesar*. Furthermore, the fact that these actors could make such smooth transitions from a scene in one play to another in a completely different play is a credit to their acting and the skill of the director. For it was a combination of clever staging, acting, and delivery which sold the show.

It was a long way to travel to get to the show, but it was well worth the time it took. Unfortunately, *Shakespeare Unplugged* ran its last shows over the weekend. However I would hope that the production company (Willpower Productions) will bring back the show some time in the near future. It really is some of the most fun and entertaining Shakespeare you can see.

## McInnis reads *Hand to Hand*

BY ANDREW GILLIS

Acclaimed poet and literary critic Nadine McInnis hypnotized a small crowd at the Dalhousie Arts Centre with her smooth, realistic poetry. The poet, from Ottawa, offered a sampling of her latest writings to the public last Monday in the MacAloney room.

An uncommon warmth and intimacy was created between McInnis and the small crowd, despite the coldness of the near empty theatre.

Without the aid of a microphone, McInnis breathed out her smooth form of poetry; poetry laced with conflict and raw emotion. Her new book, *Hand to Hand*, is a collection of poetry with a broad selection of themes. McInnis' ability to capture the essence of war is rivalled only by her talent to find amour in everyday situations.

McInnis writes about the human experience as we approach the 21st century. She explores the depths of the soul to confront the terrors and pleasures within.

"It is a way of heightening life, and a way of heightening one's experience," said McInnis. "It is a way of finding connections between things that are random. It is a combination of science and religion. It orders things, but it has a mystical side."

McInnis can transport herself into another time or into another psyche to experience and divulge the emotions

there within. She sees a story in a newspaper and becomes the person in that story, whether it be a newly-wed in Niagara Falls, or a participant in a World War.

*"The biggest thing, though, is the events that lead up to writing the poetry. Writing is the fun part."*

completely about the body as a measure of society and the individual and the unconscious. That is what is predominant in my writing. The sense of conflict between people reflects in my war poems. I have been very aware of conflict; between family members or between man and woman."

McInnis' new book is a mixture of themes; some are sharp and grip the soul, as is evident in her war poems. But in a balancing act, McInnis writes cunning anecdotes about "what I was doing when Ben Johnson won the gold medal", or "what I was doing when Princess Diana was in labour." These artful entries can exemplify the errors in society.

"One of my favourite poems is *Head and Shoulders Above The World*," said McInnis. "I like how it can go from the mystic to the domestic; a small moment in the present into a kind of endless future and how the perception goes forward in time and backward in time from the daughter's perspective."

McInnis is a decorated poet and

author of three books of poetry and literary criticism. Her books, *Shaking the Dreamland Tree*, *The Litmus Body*, and *Hand to Hand*, garnered her first prize in the National Poetry Competition, the Ottawa-Carleton Book Award, and a second prize in CBC Literary Competition.

"I try not to focus too much on awards," said McInnis. "But the Ottawa-Carleton book award, in a way, that meant the most to me because poetry was in with all the other books. And for a poetry book to win was really significant because poetry is typically put to the side, and other awards are given for poetry."

"The biggest thing, though, is the events that lead up to writing the poetry. Writing is the fun part."

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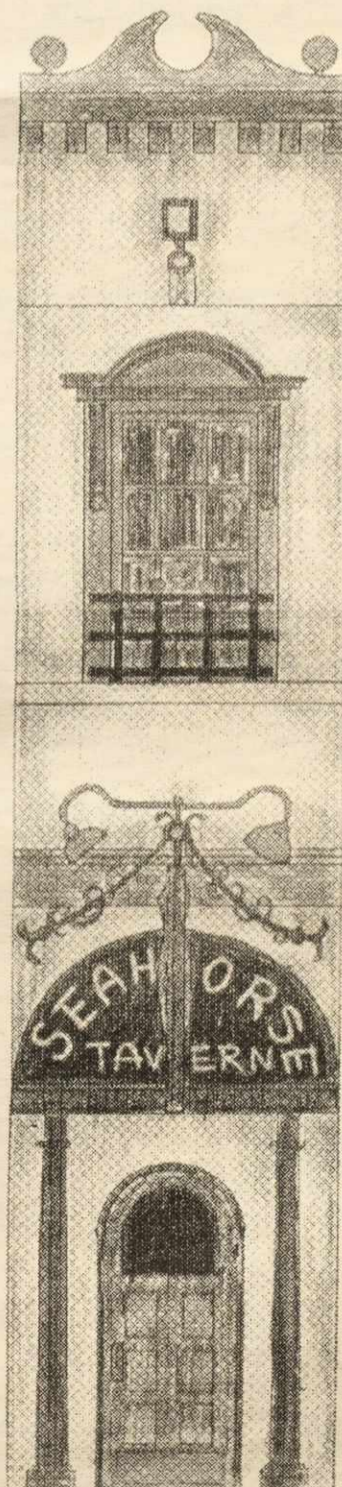
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