

**Birds in a cage of guilt**

# Frustrated family haunted by "inherited sin"

By ROSEMARY McCracken

Quebec fictional characters have traditionally been seeped in guilt complexes.

A series of Quebec hero-figures from Maria Chapdelaine to Rose-Anna of Gabrielle Roy's *The Tin Flute* have demonstrated long-suffering attitudes toward their conditions, as though in reparation for a primordial original sin. Michel Tremblay's *Montreal Smoked Meat* (En Pièces Detachées), currently at the New Theatre, evidences a similar guilt.

The plot revolves around Helene

(Linda Sorenson), a waitress on Montreal's Papineau Street who married 14 years ago to Henri (Bob Aaron), the best-looking boy on the block. Helene's subsequent life has been one prolonged nightmare of supporting husband, child and mother.

Helene's mother, Robertine (Irene Hogan), tells us that although she had ignorant parents, a degenerate for a husband and two children who were not quite normal, she still carried on: "I wasn't a quitter." She accepts her situation as though it were somehow her place in the divine plan.

A neighbour reveals that the

family's disintegration took place after Robertine's retarded son Claude was committed to an institution 15



Linda Sorenson and Mary Pirie stare from tenement in Montreal Smoked Meat.

years previously. Claude is the family's source of guilt, the bar which locks them into their trap of passive acceptance of their situation and each other.

Both the retarded Claude and Helene's unwanted daughter Francine (Margaret Keith) are characters common to French-Canadian Catholic-based literature. The retard is regarded from a religious viewpoint as an "innocent" and close to God (as in Gratien Gelin's *Bousille* and the *Just*, in which the child serves as a foil to show up the sins of the other characters).

"An unwanted bastard (as in Gelin's *Tit Coq*) is often seen as a symbol of Quebec's position in relation to the rest of Canada.

As *Smoked Meat* draws to a climax, the paralysis of guilt forces each member of the family to conclude, "I can't do anything anymore." Ironical-

ly, the guilt-free Claude is the only one who can say, "I can do anything."

Toronto's New Theatre production of *Montreal Smoked Meat* keeps the original dead-end atmosphere of Tremblay's play, set in a tenement building backdrop with downstage movable furniture (cafe tables, living room pieces), permitting comments from a chorus of neighbours from cut-out tenement windows.

On the acting side, most notable is Linda Sorenson's performance as Helene, which captures the frustrations of an aging woman watching her possibilities in life die one by one in an unfavourable environment.

The New Theatre is in the Bathurst Street United Church, on Bathurst a block south of Bloor. The play runs until March 31, for \$3 general, \$2 students, with Sunday matinees for 99 cents. Phone 534-4990 for reservations.

## Irish seminar on horizon Tiny leprechauns isgthed

For an \$8 registration fee, students can spend next week engulfed in Irish studies.

The seventh annual seminar of the Canadian Association for Irish Studies is swooning down onto campus and educating an expected 300 persons on contemporary Irish writing.

Mavor Moore, Eli Mandel, Desmond Maxwell, Miriam Waddington, Seamus Heaney, Brian Moore, Derek Mahon and Kildare Dobbs will participate in poetry panels and discussions of Irish literature.

For the \$8 fee, \$21 for non-students, Belfast professor John Whyte will tell you about *The Northern Crisis*, Dalhousie professor Walter Allen will discuss *The Irish Short Story*, and a McGill professor will reveal *Life and Death Impulses* in Stephen Dedalus and Quentin Compson.

At noon hour, the films *Man of Aran*, *The Informer* and Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* and the documentaries *Christians at War* (BBC) and *A Sense of Loss* (Ophuls) will be shown. And on Friday, March 29, David Hammond will present his award-winning BBC-TV documentary *Dusty Bluebells*, on Belfast children's street songs. Hum along. Make up your own words.

Phone Winters master Desmond Maxwell (667-2202) for further information.

## Child of the city touches the soul

By MICHAEL HOLLETT

Murray McLauchlan is another in a long line of folk-influenced Canadian musicians including Gordon Lightfoot, Bruce Cockburn, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young. His newest album, *Day to Day Dust*, re-affirms his right to be listed with the above.

McLaughlan can best be described as the city's Bruce Cockburn, with tight jeans, a leather jacket and a bottle of beer, combining Cockburn's sensitivity with an urban consciousness.

*Day To Day Dust* is on the same level as McLaughlan's excellent first album, *Songs From the Street*. His ability

as a songwriter to touch the soul of his listener and to draw on the listener's own experience, has re-surfaced, with songs about living for today and advice to a broken-hearted friend.

This album is an encouraging follow-up to McLaughlan's disappointing second album, *Murray McLaughlan*, which suffered from over-production (McLaughlan doesn't need violins) and a lack of the sensitivity so important in his songs.

*Day To Day Dust* is an encouraging work from a rapidly maturing musician and song-writer who will most likely be Canada's next "big" solo artist.

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