

Halton Hills Outlook

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Their Outlook

Review

Turn up the contrast

By ALEX BARRIS
 After some 35 years of presenting drama on television, the CBC has earned the right to be described as Canada's National Theatre. Yet, apart from the routine press coverage of its efforts, not a great deal of serious study has been devoted to legitimate analysis of those efforts.

Turn Up The Contrast - CBC Drama Since 1952, by Mary Jane Miller (University of British Columbia Press-CBC Enterprises co-publication, 429 pages, illustrated, \$34.95), is a sober attempt to rectify the neglect of this important subject. Ms. Miller is a professor of dramatic literature at Brock University (St. Catharines, Ont.) and has written numerous articles and papers on the subject of television in this country.

The bibliography at the end of Prof. Miller's tome lists more than 100 published sources - fully two-thirds of which are books or papers dealing with television in other countries, an indication of the dearth of printed material here.

Prof. Miller's chief argument in support of CBC television drama is much of it has been, in one way or another, superior to the bulk of television drama produced in the United States. She cautions, however, that many factors tend to blur the differences between Canadian and non-Canadian television drama.

AVOID IMITATION

Her title is a plea to emphasize those differences, to veer away from imitation, to avoid the pitfalls of cop shows and soaps and other television drama genres that have become mired in adherence to formula.

The author wastes no time on any serious considerations of the drama efforts of CTV, Global or any independent, privately owned stations. It is her view that the periodic and feeble attempts by private-sector broadcasting to make any worthwhile contribution to the annals of television drama are not to be taken seriously. Admittedly, private broadcasters are more concerned with making money than with nurturing the Canadian identity. Even so, the sum total of their contributions is infinitesimal compared to the CBC's record.

In her fairly comprehensive survey of that record, Prof. Miller certainly does not avoid finding fault. There are pointed criticisms of various programs and of the middle-management policies that, from time to time, resulted in what she clearly regards as inferior drama fare. Indeed, it is to the credit of

CBC Enterprises (the corporation's publishing and merchandising arm and co-publishers of this book) that there appears to have been no attempt to soften her criticisms of the CBC's erratic attitude toward drama.

The author's basic position is that CBC television drama has done much to strengthen the fabric of Canada's culture:

"I take it as a given that when there is a modicum of contention, controversy and risk-taking, Canadian television drama is healthy, alive and doing its job. Despite their dependence on government subsidy, Canadian theatre and even Canadian film have been remarkably free, although not wholly free, from interference. However, at a time when few Canadians stage playwrights were tackling challenging material or experimenting with new forms and few people saw what little experimental film was around, CBC television was developing and broadcasting its own experimental scripts."

Her examination of CBC television drama milestones evokes fond memories of many outstanding productions over the decades, in series, anthologies, mini-series and special programs, featuring both classical and contemporary plays, by both Canadian and other writers. We are reminded of Folio and Quest and Festival and GM Presents, and there are glimpses of such memorable productions as Galileo, The Open Grave, the Concert and others.

She analyzes in greater detail several series: Caribou Country, The Beachcombers, King of Kensington, For The Record, A Gift To Last, Seeing Things and a few more. She makes no strong attempt to compare the value of sitcoms, say, as opposed to docudramas, taking the position that both serve the greater purpose of providing a balanced diet of Canadian drama for Canadian viewers. She argues for further re-broadcasting of some of the more successful programs in CBC's history. At least this part of her crusade is being seen to: Wojtek and King of Kensington are being re-shown, and Quentin Durgens, MP, and A Gift To Last are slated for the same treatment.

Prof. Miller also rides around that tired hobby horse, regional drama. She argues, as have others, that "centrist" (i.e. Toronto) control deprives all of us of learning about each other.

-Alex Barris is the author of several books on film and television.

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



"I should've known when she said I was looking rakish this morning!"

Remember these important words

For months now, every time he gets a chance, the president of Dominion Securities has been saying things no one in his position has ever said before, at least publicly.

At the annual convention of the Investment Dealers' Association in St. John's, Tony Fell did it again: big investment dealers have not been serving their clients well, he said.



Your Business

By DIANNE MALEY
 Business Analyst
 Thomson News Service

It's a curious confession, particularly since Mr. Fell stops short of promising that his firm, at least, is changing its ways. Dominion Securities, now controlled by the Royal Bank of Canada, is one of the biggest investment dealers in the country.

Last fall, after the stock market crash, Mr. Fell blasted dealers for overpricing new issues of stock and pushing them to an unsuspecting public. Small, retail investors were particularly hurt by this practice, he noted.

His competitors were furious. Even people within his own firm began to wonder what had seized the president.

At the IDA convention, Mr. Fell waxed positively eloquent. "In 1986 and 1987 up to October, you could almost sell anything," he told reporters. He was referring to the host of fancy new investment products that dealers have been dreaming up over the past few years.

Buyers of these products have not done well. "Losses of our clients have been in the hundreds of millions of dollars," said Mr. Fell.

"In retrospect it is totally evident that those who designed these pro-

ducts did not understand them, those who sold them did not know what they had sold and those who bought them - which included some of the most sophisticated investors in the country - did not know what they had bought."

Would you buy a stock from this man?

HONEST OR FOOLHARDY?

If Mr. Fell's honesty is refreshing, it is also disconcerting. We'd like to hear him say that these things are all in the past and brokers have since mended their ways. But really, all that has changed is the market. The suckers Mr. Fell refers to have bailed out.

Next time a big corporation comes along and asks its dealer to find it some money, the dealers will revert to their old ways, getting the highest possible price for the company's stock. And why not? After all, that's their business.

The squeeze comes on the other side. People who buy the stock are the dealer's clients, too, and they are indeed poorly served if they pay too much.

Mr. Fell's startling confession seems to be designed to woo clients back to his firm. If so, it could backfire. People will not be pleased to learn that they may have been ripped off in the past, although they may have suspected it all along.

Stockbrokers faced with the job of selling their firm's new issues will have a tougher time in future. In fact, many new issues do not perform well initially, if at all. Once the stock is sold and in the market, the first price movement is often down.

Next time your broker calls with a new issue, remember Mr. Fell's words. Tell her you'll wait a while to see how the stock does, even though it means paying the commission.

Eventually, dealers will learn to think of all their clients when they're pricing a deal.

Coney Island Scenario

If you're thinking of setting up a bed and breakfast operation in Halton - beware. Your sign better conform to Halton Region's dictates or big brother might pick on you.



Staff Comment

By BRIAN MACLEOD

Yes the bed-and-breakfast establishments are becoming popular in Canada, so much so that the Niagara Escarpment Commission wants to include definitions of bed-and-breakfasts, farm vacation establishments, in-home tourist accommodations and tourist or guest homes in its plan.

But down at Halton Region last week the main concern was to avoid that "Coney Island" look in the escarpment.

Hub?
 Coney Island?
 Well it seems Councillor Bill Johnson wants to avoid "gaudy" signs all over the escarpment which could give it the "Coney Island" look.

At that suggestion other councillors jumped on the bandwagon. Burlington's Joan Little thought it might be a good idea to regulate the signs and Halton Hills' Marilyn Serjeantson wants to regulate them to the point where every bed-and-breakfast has a uniform sign.

Cone on.
 We're talking about tiny three bedroom establishments here.

They're hardly going to bring in enough money to invest in a 200-ft tall flaming red twisting sign.

Sure, keep an eye on them to make sure they blend in nicely.

But what other establishments in the escarpment are forced to have uniform signs.

Does every breakfast nook, restaurant, variety store and motel have to have a "uniform sign" to avoid that "Coney Island" look.

It's overregulation and it's just not necessary. After all the words "free enterprise" seem to be conspicuous by their absence during the conversation at Halton Region.

Perhaps it was just a case of analysing something to death.

No matter, the intentions are, as always, good. But forcing uniform signs on separate, private businesses just doesn't sit right.

Let's hope second thoughts will prevail.

Poet's Corner

To be your honey would satisfy my every wish
 Abbreviated moments spent in your company
 sweeten even the most tasteless day.

-By MARLOWE C. DICKSON, RR2, Beeton

