

BOOK REVIEWS

Glass Treehouse a trend-capturing novel

By BARRIE HAYNE

The Glass Treehouse, a first novel by a Canadian writer, strives to capture just about every trend going these days in conscientious fiction: Woman as homemaker, mental retardation, homosexuality, Americans north of the border, especially during the Vietnamese War, cancer - all this set in modern day, rural Quebec. If author Jacqueline Nugent had waited a few months, she might have included a few Mohawks as well!

Those of us born before the baby boomers should probably begin our reviews with a disclaimer of interest in further explorations of the 1960s and their Canadian

equivalent, the '70's, which have become a bit of a bore. However, it is also fair to begin by noting that Jenny Dubois, the heroine of The Glass Treehouse, now happily living in a ramshackle house in the Quebec countryside (though with a distinct nostalgia for the American past), is largely free of the usual guilt, and is bringing up her 2½ year-old-son, Niko, with dedication and good sense. Though as we view her from outside she is not an especially interesting character, her insight into herself is fairly keen.

SIDE BY SIDE
The Glass Treehouse (Viking,

416 pages, \$24.95) brings together two neighbor-families and weaves their stories side by side: Jenny, who has come to Canada in 1970 with a draft-dodger and who stays (when he goes back to the States to recant and join the war) to marry a Quebecer, and the Lacostes, Therese and Yves, with their retarded daughter, Marie-Helene, for whom her father has built the play-platform of the title - in which the final tragedy (which a review should not reveal) takes place.

The two stories are given to us in much the way Dickens gave us his in Bleak House, with the first-person narrative of the heroine

alternating with the third-person omniscient narrative. Dickens, however, allowed his all-seeing observer the sardonic viewpoint that offsets the naivete of his heroine; Nugent is merely telling two different stories, observing Jenny from within, and Therese, who eventually dies of cancer, from a safer distance.

In both narratives, there is touch of mysticism, or at least of the fey. Therese has visions of a winged and feathered deity who intervenes from time to time in her life (and who asserts its importance of appearing on the dustjacket, as a reminder of the kinship between these two women). And Jenny's story is told in a series of letters to "the Nowhere Man," to whom she unburdens the details of her life, through her father's madness after the accidental killing of a child, her own love affairs and her lifelong obsession with the homosexual boy she met at a crucial moment in her childhood. At the end of the novel, she picks up her life and returns, after a brief ecstasy with the boy, to the dull but safe life with Jean-Paul in Quebec.

The Glass Treehouse is, finally, a novel about a woman's development and her acceptance of a rather narrowed social role, supported and made possible by a rich inner life. While she has her difficulties of his novel (and perhaps one of its strengths) is that the focus of our attention is too often turned away from Jenny and her family to the Lacostes. Not the least interesting character in the novel is the retarded Marie-Helene, and the most interesting

and touching relationship is the one between her and her father, Yves. The part they play in the final tragedy, and the subtle implication of Jenny and Jean-Paul in that tragedy, is the best thing in the book.

To end on a carping note, directed at the publisher rather than the author: there are more misprints - a general problem these days - than there should be in a book from a major house, poor punctuation and misspellings (imposter, vigorously). And the author, for one at least in part concerned with delineating the life of an American Anglo in Quebec, does, not always subtly, translate every French word that is dropped in conversation - except the untranslatable tabernac!

This is an interesting novel, especially to those of that generation that crossed the northern border to be culture-shocked in rural New France.

Prof. Barrie Hayne teaches English and cinema studies at the University of Toronto. He is a former vice-president of the Popular Culture Association.

Thomson News Service.

Anecdotes of modern art a compilation of research

By LISA BALFOUR BOWEN

Some books are meant to be read from cover to cover. Others seem programmed for more occasional reading or to be used as anthologies by the TV generation whose literacy capacity has been moulded by the 60-second clip.

Anecdotes Of Modern Art, a 377-page volume by Donald Hall and Pat Corrington Wykes (Oxford University Press, \$24.95), falls into the latter category. It offers a somewhat random and arbitrary selection of short anecdotal snippets about nearly 200 so-called "modern" artists. Among these are familiar giants such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Joan Miro, Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Salvador Dali, Barnett Newman and Jackson Pollock.

We learn, for example, that Pollock was a taciturn, bellicose alcoholic who loved jazz and baseball but was sometimes so dazed and depressed that he took weeks to actively get down to painting.

We also learn that, at 25, Dali was so terrified when he first arrived in Paris that he couldn't even cross the street. "He was afraid of almost everything, from travelling by boat to insects in general... Whenever he went out, he hung on to an elaborate cane and always carried a little piece of driftwood from the beaches of Cadaques to ward off evil spirits."

Similar lightweight tidbits revealing various artistic foibles, quirks and eccentricities occur throughout the book. Only occasionally - and briefly - do we come across poignant and disturbing

tales of sickness, suicide and death.

Mostly we are served a cocktail party mixture of gossipy revelations, including some pretty bizarre stories about how friends or lovers were treated or how work was produced. Along the way, reference to nudity, sexual preferences and body parts are not uncommon.

Of Piet Mondrian, for instance, we read that although he gave others the impression that he was sexually "pure," he was in fact an ardent embracer of women and no stranger to prostitutes.

Andy Warhol apparently had a "great passion" for drawing people's penises with "a little heart on them or tied with a little ribbon," whereas Henry Moore considered the umbilical area "as absolutely central" to his work. ("The cord attaches to your mother, after all.")

We are informed that, on hot days, Georgia O'Keeffe worked stark naked at her easel and that Marc Chagall thought nothing of having his nubile 15-year-old daughter pose for him in the nude.

As for Picasso, it comes as no surprise to learn that he once affectionately undressed his wife Olga, made love to her, and then promptly served her with divorce papers.

Picasso, in fact, dominates the book. Not only is the section on him one of the longest and most thorough, but tales of his dynamic escapades keep cropping up in other chapters on artists like Braque, Matisse, Douanier Rousseau, Giacometti, Lipchitz, Miro and

even Sol LeWitt.

The volume actually begins with a section on Rousseau and includes an episode about a banquet organized for him by Picasso. During the festivities, the hapless Douanier fell asleep while wax droppings from a lantern overhead formed "a small pyramid like a clown's cap on his head."

While such anecdotes sometimes wet one's appetite for more, they usually prove downright frustrating. The reason is that the authors provide little or no true context for their selections, which are unimaginatively stitched together and usually lifted, holubolus, from other people's writings.

The end result is a compilation of research material masquerading as a book. Ultimately, the reader must absorb 136 unequal chapters about a series of internationally renowned figures whose contributions to modern art are submerged beneath a ton of trivia about their personal lives.

FINAL TOUCH ESTHETICS TANNING & TONING
We Specialize in Full Body Care

- Facials
- Make-Up
- Manicures
- Pedicures
- Waxing
- Lash/Brow Tint
- Electrolysis
- Back Treatment
- Ear Piercing
- Sun Tanning
- Passive Exercise Machines

873-6013 JUST ARRIVED!
New Line Of Fall Accessories

The Indoor Mall
318 Guelph St.
Georgetown

HOURS
Mon-Fri 9:00-9:00
Saturday 9:00-6:00

MY GENERATION
"Fashions For The Young At Heart"

115 MAIN ST. S., GEORGETOWN
Across From Knox Church 873-2851

\$4,000⁰⁰ SHOPPING SPREE VALUE STORE

Satisfaction We assure you of total satisfaction with everything you buy - Guaranteed!

SOLID ANTIQUE BRASS Outdoor Lighting

A. COMPARE AT 59.99	39⁹⁹
B. COMPARE AT 69.99	54⁹⁹
C. COMPARE AT 77.99	59⁹⁹

Polished Brass Slightly Higher

SHOP THE LIGHTS **LIVING LIGHTING**

245 GUELPH STREET Georgetown 873-2996
HOURS: Mon. to Fri. 9-9 Saturday 9-6

OPEN Mon.-Sat. 9-6 Fridays 9-9

Sussman's for Her
MAIN STREET ARTHUR

fabulous Pre-Season **COAT SALE SAVE 20% OFF**

A superb selection of this season's newest coats and jackets from today's leaders. Choose leathers, suedes or lush wools with leather trim, faux furs, all weather fashions too, in styles that range from casual to high fashion. London Fog, Sterling Stall, Novelti, Pizzaz and Far West are just some of the famous names you will find in sizes 6-18. Petites 6-16.

SAVE 20% OFF!!

Save 10% off exciting new designer fall and winter fashions.

And be sure to visit Casually Yours...
Sussman's too! Now featuring Sun Ice.

Open Mon.-Sat. 9-6
Friday 9-9