

the stage; alas, poor "....., he was our best fighter."

At times the reader is convinced that he is being confronted with a ghastly parody of the original, especially as the strongest epithet these lusty sea-dogs can hurl at one another is "blighter" (used frequently). Jim's reaction to Silver's treachery is equally colourful: "I hope you choke on your rotten treasure"—and so is the doctor's comment: "I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Long John Silver. Somewhere, somehow, there's punishment for men like you." Perhaps the most memorable lines belong to Ben Gunn. My favourite gem is, "Belly empty. Thirsty gut. What you need is coconut." In brief, Stevenson did it better.

*Patrick Verriour, currently a doctoral candidate in Elementary Education at the University of Alberta, has taught on three continents and has studied children's drama in Canada and England.*

## Campbell's Variety: Five One-Acters

MARSHALL MATSON

*The Heart Specialist*, J. Gounod Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 44 pp. \$2.50 paper.

*Three One-Act Plays: The Bleeding Heart of Wee Jon, Summit Conference, Was She Sown or Was She Reaped?* J. Gounod Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1975. 56 pp. \$3.50 paper.

*Midashasassesears*, J. Gounod Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1973, Repr. 1974. 24 pp. \$2.50.

These five one-act plays are to be performed by high school actors for audiences up to high school age. They require no more than six to eight actors and only one set per play.

Of the five plays, *Was She Sown or Was She Reaped?* would probably least appeal to children, although bookish or sexually precocious teen-agers might enjoy it. Formally, it is the most interesting, a send-up of melodramatic technique. The "dialogue" consists entirely of asides or addresses to the audience. The play is not merely a formal parody, however; it exposes a ridiculously teeming web of irregular sexual relationships beneath incommunicative, non-demonstrative, and apparently respectable Victorian domesticity. In the course of the play we learn that the two daughters of the family and the boy-

friend of one of them are all children of their mother's lover. Only the maid was fathered by the paterfamilias.

An oddity of the style is that much of the prose rhymes although most of it is not lined as verse. I am not sure that this adds to the Victorian character of the play, but it does save space. Casting requires four women and two men.

*The Bleeding Heart of Wee Jon* is a romantic comedy in the Chinese style. A father sets three tasks for the suitor of his daughter. The crucial complication is that the third task—bringing in the Dragon, "spirit of indomitable China," to serve the father—is regarded by the daughter as a betrayal, and she withdraws her affections from the suitor. It turns out, however, that the Dragon will not serve unless he is served and respected in turn. Thus the father's greed and arrogance are tempered, and the daughter happily accepts the suitor. They seal their union in the coy fashion of the stage Orient by standing a yard apart, puckering up, and leaning toward each other from the waist. The meeting of their lips is covered—a la *Mikado*—by a fan.

The play makes the usual comic point: it encourages youth to be patient and resourceful, and it warns age to let go its grasp. The style is traditional but energetic chinoiserie, ranging from the flowery ("My secret thoughts, like the stars in the heavens, tremble and are numerous.") to the aphoristic ("Is not courage, as seen by one, multiplied when seen by many?"). It is occasionally undercut by the colloquial ("Oh, shut up and get out!"). One girl, four men, and a dragon will do it.

*Summit Conference* and *Midashasseseears* are mythological burlesques. The first dramatizes the origins of the Trojan War. We are shown that the war was caused primarily by Greek aggression and secondarily by Trojan resistance, particularly in the form of the Wall. Paris's adultery with Helen and his presentation of the golden apple to Aphrodite (they seem to occur in that order) are incidental. By leaving the choice of Aphrodite and the consequent triumph of Discordia and Bellona to the end, however, Mr. Campbell contrives theatrical excitement where it is needed. At times he even seems to take his subject seriously, and the scene between Paris and Helen is good, but too often the burlesque descends to mere travesty, and we get the vulgar familiarity of goddesses addressing each other as "Dizzy" and "Belly-Welly," or the laboured pun of "plaster of Paris." *Summit Conference* takes six women and two men.

*Midashasseseears* tells the story of how King Midas was given asses' ears for not recognizing the superiority of Apollo's music-making, and of how his barber, the only one to discover the ears, could not keep the secret but had to say it into a hole among the reeds. When the wind blew, the reeds whispered to anyone who would listen, "Midas has asses' ears."

Because the story is not so grand or well known, Mr. Campbell has a better chance to have things his way, and the disrespectful familiarity that is a staple

of his humour seems less insistent. The plot wobbles, however, when the barber's distress at not being able to tell his secret is confused by his distress at the threat of being thrown off a turret if he doesn't tell it. The first distress is enough, and it needs uncluttered development toward the final desperate whispering of the secret into a hole. The cast is all male—seven of them. My daughter (aged 16) liked this play best.

Neither my daughter nor I cared for *The Heart Specialist: A Musical Fantasy for Children of All Ages*—surely the most tiresome of claims. Perhaps the music carries the lyrics (it is available from Mr. Campbell at \$2 a copy), but as they stand they are jejune in the extreme.

It may be soft, it may be hard,  
Extremely soft, extremely hard,  
But soft or hard or medium,  
Everybody's got a heart.

The main business of the piece consists of pulling things like mice, sausages, and tomahawks out of bodies before the heart, which everybody has, is found. At least three men and two women, and a lot of extractable properties are required.

On the whole, these plays are full of lively farce action and are written with linguistic exuberance and variety. They need to be edited and proofread, however, for they are marred by misprints, misspellings, and odd grammar. As an instance of what I mean by "odd," according to one stage direction a character "settles down with a flask of liquor which she produces unknowingly to all, except the audience."

*Marshall Matson teaches dramatic literature at the University of Guelph.*