ARTSWORLD

By BOB LANE

When I was in Ashland at the Shakespearean Festival last summer I met a blind man, before beginning of Richard III, who was sitting on an aisle seat with his seeing eye dog curled up next to him. The man said that he came to Ashland every year to "see" the Shakespeare plays in the outdoor theatre. He said that he had not always been blind, and that he had always been interested in theatre.

Shakespeare, however, had not, he said, been a favorite of his until after he lost his sight. Once he could no longer see, he said, he began to see what Shakespeare's plays were about. He had to listen to the language now, and he found it rich and fascinating. He recreated his own sets and costumes in his mind while his ears were tuned to the nuance of pitch and feeling that performers used when delivering the lines.

He did not feel cheated, but said that his experience of the plays had deepened since his loss of sight.

This puzzled me. Was he over compensating? Being brave? Or was he onto something that has to do with the nature of a Shakespeare script?

On Wednesday I watched the first in the BBC series of all the Shakespeare plays. Over the next few years the BBC, with the financial assistance of Time-Life will be producing 37 plays for television.

Julius Caesar was the first one, and it had the solid professionalism one expects from a BBC production. The actors were more than competent; the direction intelligent; the presentation spirited if not inspired. Antony stirred me with his funeral speech, Cassius look properly lean and hungry, and Caesar arrogant and worthy of his death.

And yet something was wrong. The crowd scenes did not work. One could tell they were not a large Roman crowd, but some studio extras. The scene between Cassius and Brutus was destroyed by the camera angle which placed Brutus large in the foreground against the small figure of Cassius.

Translating scripts to television does not work, no matter how "well done." In fact it is because the camera men are very good that the plays do not come across. One just can not, it seems, leave the camera stationary and act in front of it. It demands to be used for close-ups, pans, and angle shots simply because it is a camera.

While the camera is doing what it does so well what do you do with that Shakespearean language? His language was his camera; when you add a second camera you lose focus.

I'll probably watch them all though; unless they conflict with Rockford.

---

Three highlights from the recent annual general meeting of the Vancouver Island Literary Society:

First, Mae Hill Brown presented a report of the recent VILS sponsored workshop for young writers, which brought live writers into the classroom. Some 28 visits were arranged by Mae and her crew with over 700 children having the opportunity to talk with local writers and try some writing themselves.

Part of Mae's report went like this: "Carol Matthews, Jo Merrill, Sharon Stype and myself met several times to develop workshops for Young Writers. An overwhelming response, particularly for the younger grades, made it necessary to enlarge our teaching staff. I am grateful to the committee, to the writers who participated, to Malaspina College Community Education and to the Society for making this all possible. There is nothing quite like the excitement of sharing with a classroom of young students — they are so full of wonder and sparkling imagination and I love to be able to say on entering and leaving: Isn't it great? We are a room full of poets!"

Second major announcement came from Island editor, John Marshall, who described for the membership a co-operative venture between Island and Estuaire.

Estuaire is a small magazine published in Quebec, which, like Island is publishing the best of the new writers — its voice, of course, is French.

Marshall said that the editors of Estuaire had agreed to an exchange of work to be translated and published, west coast English writers in Estuaire and Quebec writers in Island. The possibility of such a cross-cultural exchange of contemporary works is indeed exciting. The first west coast material will appear in the fall of 1983 in Estuaire.

Island will publish translations and originals sometime in the 1984 season.

Third thing to note: elections of new board members will bring Dave Stupich, Louise Morris and Charles Van Antwerp onto the board of directors.

Many of the kids had submitted poems to Mae Brown. Here are two of my favorites:

If I were a pencil
I would be very strong
Because I would be full with lead
I would try not to wear down
Because if I did
I would lose part of my body.

VILS plans to offer the workshops for young writers again next spring for there seems to be a need for the program, judging by the 41 requests for a live writer!