

Magazine celebrates Montreal's diversity

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

For Sherry Simon, living in Montreal means "accepting the overwhelming fact of difference." She has learned to appreciate another culture, she says, and to negotiate around another set of habits and customs. But she bears in mind that between her and her neighbors "difference itself remains the absolute given."

Simon is referring to the Hassidim. She lives on Jeanne Mance St. between Fairmount Ave. and St. Viateur St., and while political debate in the city is often reduced to French-English distinctions, Simon writes of a richer, more complex urban experience.

Her essay, *Notes From La Rue Jeanne-Mance*, is in some ways typical of the contributions to the current edition of *Matrix* magazine, a special issue marking Montreal's 350th anniversary. The edition portrays a city of paradox and irony, a place teeming with diverse ethnicities. The names in the table of contents partly speak for themselves: Mauro Casiraghi, Robert Majzels, Renato Trujillo, Luise von Flotow.

After languishing in the Eastern Townships, *Matrix* was reborn in Montreal three years as a thrice-yearly publication, primarily for new Quebec writing in English. Writing *Worth Reading*, the subtitle on its masthead reads, and although the prose and poetry are sometimes uneven, as befits such a magazine, the strength of the present volume reminds readers that *Matrix* lives up to its billing.

In a horrific story called *A Still Warm Ground*, Robert Majzels tells of a boy's first trip to the synagogue with his father, a Holocaust survivor. In a piece of magic realism, *The Lonely Bagels*, Jack Ruttan writes of a disgruntled bagel-maker returning to his former place of work.

Novelist Martin Kevan gives a freakish account of the founding of Montreal. In his tale, *The City of the Virgins*, Indians routinely skulked, threatened the colony and attacked it, while the settlers... led by three celibates — bolstered themselves with religious fervor. "Last autumn we saw serpents in the sky which entwined themselves into one another and flew through the air bearing wings of fire," he quotes one awed colonist as saying.

The most playful piece comes from Ann Diamond, who portrays Quebec's eternal riddle, "How do you separate without separating?" as a koan given by a Zen master to his student.

The most analytic piece comes from co-editor Kenneth Radu, who writes in admiration of Montreal poet Sharon H. Nelson, describing her book *Mad Women & Crazy Ladies* as "angry, haunting and brilliant."

The most comprehensive piece is, "*Montreal: the Movie*," by the magazine's film critic Maurie Alioff. He summarizes how film-makers have portrayed the city over the years; he looks at "*Montreal Vu Par*," the recent compilation of six shorts that officially represents the city during its anniversary year; and he previews the



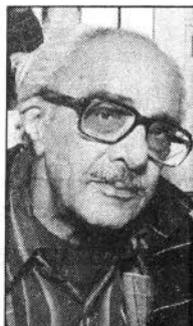
Leith: only \$2,000 spent on English magazines.



Radu: *Matrix's* co-editor.



Diamond: Quebec koan.



Tata: untroubled photos.

widely anticipated documentary, *Between Two Solitudes*, in which social commentator Josh Freed ponders the fate of Quebec-loving anglos.

"The film," says Alioff of the last project, "will explore the confusion, alienation, and growing exasperation of anglos who, one minute, are sitting down for a comfortable schmooz with Suzanne and Jean-Marc, and

half an hour later, making plans to sell the co-op flat on Rue Hutchinson and hit the road."

A secondary theme running through the volume is a kind of longing for home. The people in Sam Tata's photos from mid-century appear untroubled by questions of place, but the characters in most of the stories, essays and poems seem to be searching for a way to belong.

Gazette columnist Mark Abley tackles the subject directly. In his distinctively plangent style, he recalls a day of "lamenting my spiritual homelessness" until finally his wife, Annie, replies: "But of course you have a home! Your home is the English language."

English in turn has a home in *Matrix*, although publisher and co-editor Linda Leith dares to question how much longer the refuge can last.

In an editorial she contemplates a time, perhaps soon to come, when the Quebec government assumes greater control over arts funding at the expense of the Canada Council and the Arts Council of the Montreal Urban Community. *Matrix* now depends on federal and MUC support, Leith says, and the \$2,000 the magazine received last year under the provincial Aid to Cultural Periodicals program represents "the total Quebec spent on English-language magazines in 1991."

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