

# VIRAGO

Vol. 4, Issue 1

P.O. Box 1162, Guelph, Ontario

January, 1975

## Les Belles Soeurs

The University of Guelph drama department's production of *Les Belles Soeurs* by Michel Tremblay disposes of subtleties. A very sensitive yet aggressive play, it presents a stark reality of Montreal east-end poverty, oppression and the struggles of the women involved.

The continual interplay of humour and seriousness expresses the survival mechanisms of the characters. They are perceptive of the roles they are cast in because they emerge from gut level feelings. The dirt, lack of money, loneliness and sense of futility are everyday realities.

Germaine Lauzon has won one million Gold Star stamps and invites her friends and relatives to a stamp pasting party. While most of them attempt to interact amicably, all being bingo game enthusiasts, old family fights and neighborhood disagreements emerge.

Each woman displays a unique personality yet they adopt the same attitude when they sing a song concerning the routine of their day; waking up, feeding the kids, doing the chores and at night... watching tv. Interspersed are monologues of each woman's struggle or concern. Rose Ouimet dispenses with any formality and confronts openly. She speaks candidly, stripping away any fantasies of the life they lead. She cries with anger and defeat over her husband's insensitivity and brutality in bed.

Another woman takes five minutes to try to remember the names of the people at a dinner. The uselessness of her speech appears to be humorous yet her inability to become aware of other people's mocking seems sad.

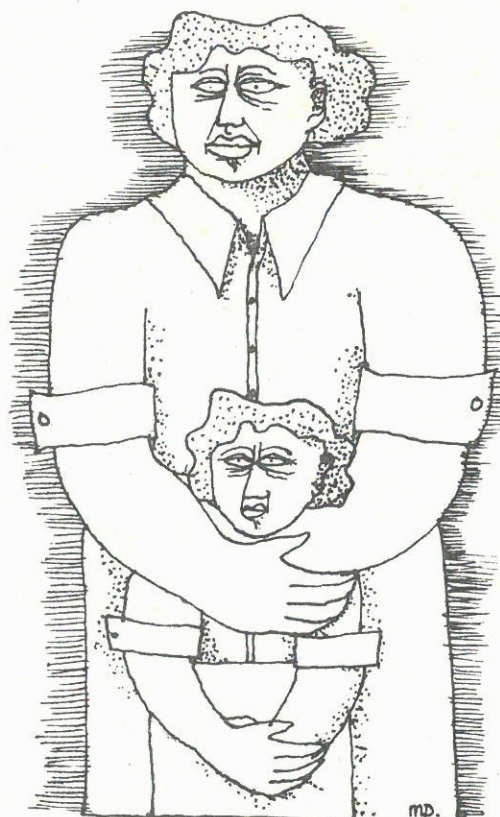
During the play, women are discretely stuffing booklets into their purses. Germaine discovers this. Denial is first uttered, but the women are defensive and a violent fight to protect their booklets follows. Germaine is left crying on the floor for her dream of buying new furniture with the stamp booklets is destroyed.

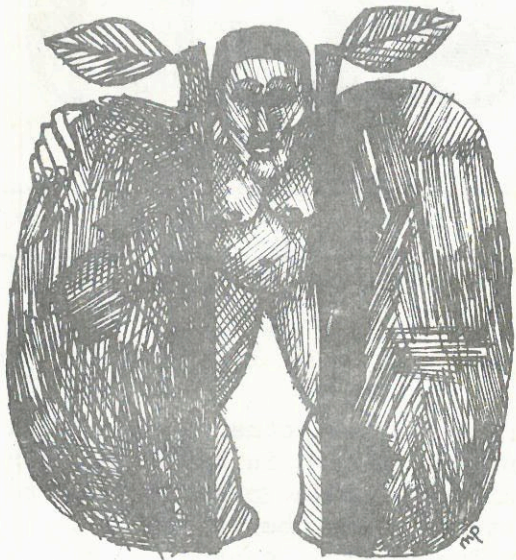
An old senile mother of one of the women invited sits in her wheelchair. She sings *O Canada* intermittently as she stuffs stamp booklets into her coat. The closing scene climaxes with all the women singing loudly *O Canada* with Germaine being covered with Gold Star stamps.

Loss is an uncomfortable word, yet it is not only Germaine who experiences it. The play focuses on women as mother, housewife and dependents and on their desperate struggles to break out. But one must also examine these women as Quebecois, an oppressed class. The senile mother, with murmurings of *O Canada* sits as a constant reminder of their position in Quebec, being women and French.

Gold Star stamps (Anglais, mais oui) triumphs, dividing and alienating the women, creating illusions of wealth and status. *O Canada*, bingo games and Gold Star stamps only speak too loudly to identify their impoverished yet real lives.

Val





the rhyming couplet

she served me poems on wafer thin plates  
and garlanded gardens with elegies,  
sonnets and prettily-turned conceits.  
together, hand in hand,  
sunset fading into  
iambic pentameter,  
we read the trees, parsed the vegetables,  
grew faint at the elision  
between earth and sky.

(Refrain)

However...  
at first such poetic fare was sweet,  
a brightly-hued ticket to tennyson's feet.  
it would melt in the mouth  
and take away dreams  
but now, volumes later,  
i'm black and blue from the lyrical scene.

i want meat and blood and sex and gore.  
to that end i've become a bloody bore.  
as she is a porcelain poem  
in metaphysical skin  
i am a four letter word  
talking in tongues.

However...  
even after all the hints  
i've given her:  
burping when the sun rises,  
farting when the sun sets,  
wearing clothes in the bathtub  
and not wearing any at all to dinner,  
that woman (for sonatas sake!)  
still calls my roller derby  
a pavanne,  
still calls us a rhyming couplet.

it's damned hard living with the  
higher educated  
for even lunch begins to taste  
like a reality sandwich  
while roses and lilies provoke  
strange seizures.

(i wish she'd fuck off,  
that two-tongued, split end  
poetic philadendron.  
i like my weeds just the way  
they are.)

## NO OTHER ROAD, 1943

There was  
 no other road to take  
 it  
 had to be done  
 in secret, closeted, alone  
 while I took the pills I'd got  
 and waited  
 until the circular saw  
 started across my lumbar region  
 time uncountable  
 long pain unscreamable  
 long journey  
 from nowhere to nowhere

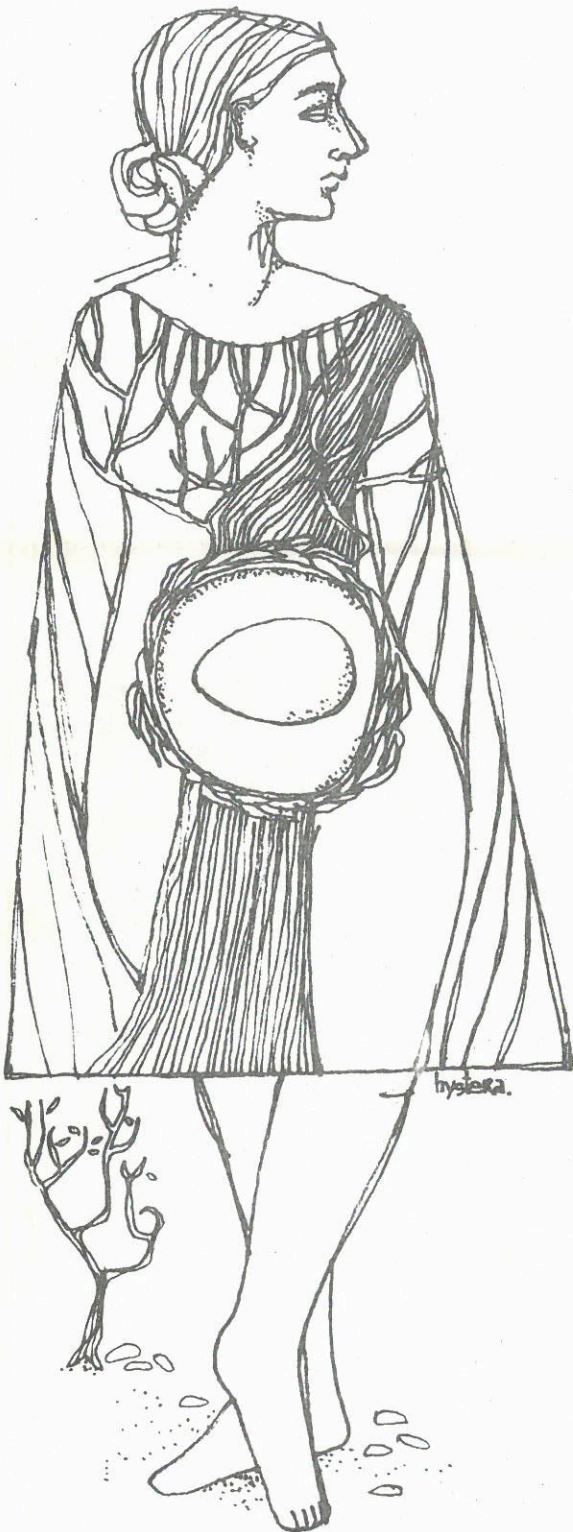
my little, little girl  
 with a pointed chin, like mine  
 (did she have green eyes, like yours?)

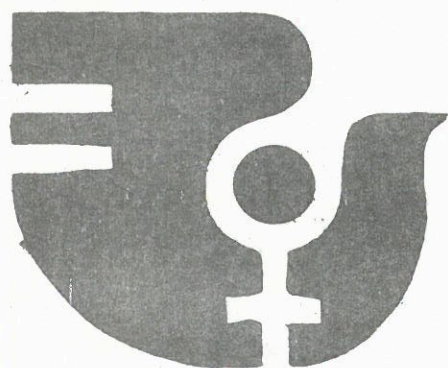
so small  
 so small  
 and my heart broken...

In white I wrapped her  
 and the flames consumed her  
 small, small calcined bones in ash  
 and my breasts wept white tears for her

and now people say  
 "No family? How sad for you!"  
 and I smile faintly  
 I'm everybody's Aunt Jessie  
 and every woman  
 is my small daughter,  
 grown.

Elizabeth Evans





# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR

1975 is International Women's Year. It will be a year of getting to know other women across Canada and around the world. It will also be a year of getting to know ourselves. As the year progresses, we will report on projects being undertaken by women, but, right now, why don't you start your own project by writing to some of the Women's Centres listed below and get to know them?

COMMUNITY WOMEN'S CENTRE  
2070 Angus St.  
Regina, Sask.

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
Students' Union Bldg.  
University of Regina  
Regina, Sask.

U.S.S.U. WOMEN'S DIRECTORATE  
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN  
SASKATOON, SASK.

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
124A 2nd Ave. N.  
Saskatoon, Sask.  
306-242-5830

WOMEN'S PLACE  
P.O. Box 4391  
South Edmonton P.O.  
Edmonton, Alberta

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
YWCA  
320 5th Ave.  
Calgary, Alberta

WOMEN'S PLACE  
605 10th St. South  
Lethbridge, Alberta

WOMEN'S CENTRE AND BOOKSTORE  
804 Richards St.  
Vancouver, B.C. 684-0523

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
P.O. Box 521  
Nelson, B.C.

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
2961 Jackman Road  
Aldergrove, B.C. 856-4204

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
523 Trutch Street  
Victoria, B.C. 385-3843

NORTH SHORE WOMEN'S CENTRE  
c/o CAPILANO COLLEGE  
2055 Purcell Way  
North Vancouver, B.C.

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
4051 - 4th Ave.  
Whitehorse, Y.T.

WOMEN'S PLACE  
P.O. Box 5021  
St. John's, NFLD. 722-4533

THE WOMEN'S CENTRE  
P.O. Box 5052  
Armdale, Nova Scotia

Hilary Prince  
Women's Info. & Referral Centre  
27 Wellington Row  
St. John, N.B.

NEW WOMAN CENTRE  
1210 Greene Avenue.  
Westmount, Quebec  
514-931-3807

LA CENTRE DES FEMMES  
4319 St. Denis  
Montreal, Quebec  
514-288-4325

WOMEN'S INFO. & REFERRAL CENTRE  
3595 St. Urbain  
Montreal, Quebec H2X 2N6  
514-842-4781

UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CLUB  
25 Shareview Drive  
Barrie, Ontario

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
P.O. BOX 1162 or 35 Priory St.  
Guelph, Ontario 823-5450

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
110 Queen St.  
Kingston, Ontario

WOMEN'S PLACE  
25 Dupont St.  
Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE  
322 Queens Avenue  
London, Ontario N6B 1X4  
519-432-8693

WOMEN'S CENTRE  
581 O'Connor  
Ottawa, Ontario

NORTHERN WOMAN'S CENTRE  
P.O. Box 314, Stn. F. or  
Fort William YMCA, 2nd Floor  
132 N. Archibald St.  
Thunder Bay, Ontario 623-3107

WOMEN'S PLACE  
262 Rubidge St.  
Peterborough, Ontario

AMAZON WORKSHOP  
12 Kensington Ave.  
Toronto, Ontario 862-0414/5

CENTRO FEMMINILE  
75 Stanley Road  
Downsview, Ontario M3N 1C2  
745-6363

THE WOMAN'S PLACE  
327 Ouellette  
Windsor, Ontario

THE WOMEN'S CENTRE  
c/o YWCA  
476 Peel Street  
Woodstock, Ontario

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE  
56 Queen St., Box 310  
St. Catharines, Ont.  
L2R 6V3

A WOMAN'S PLACE  
143 Walnut St.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 1P2  
204-786-4581

bloor street rain  
(aug. 23, 1974)

on a friday afternoon  
pouring, almost smoking  
through trees, windows, toes

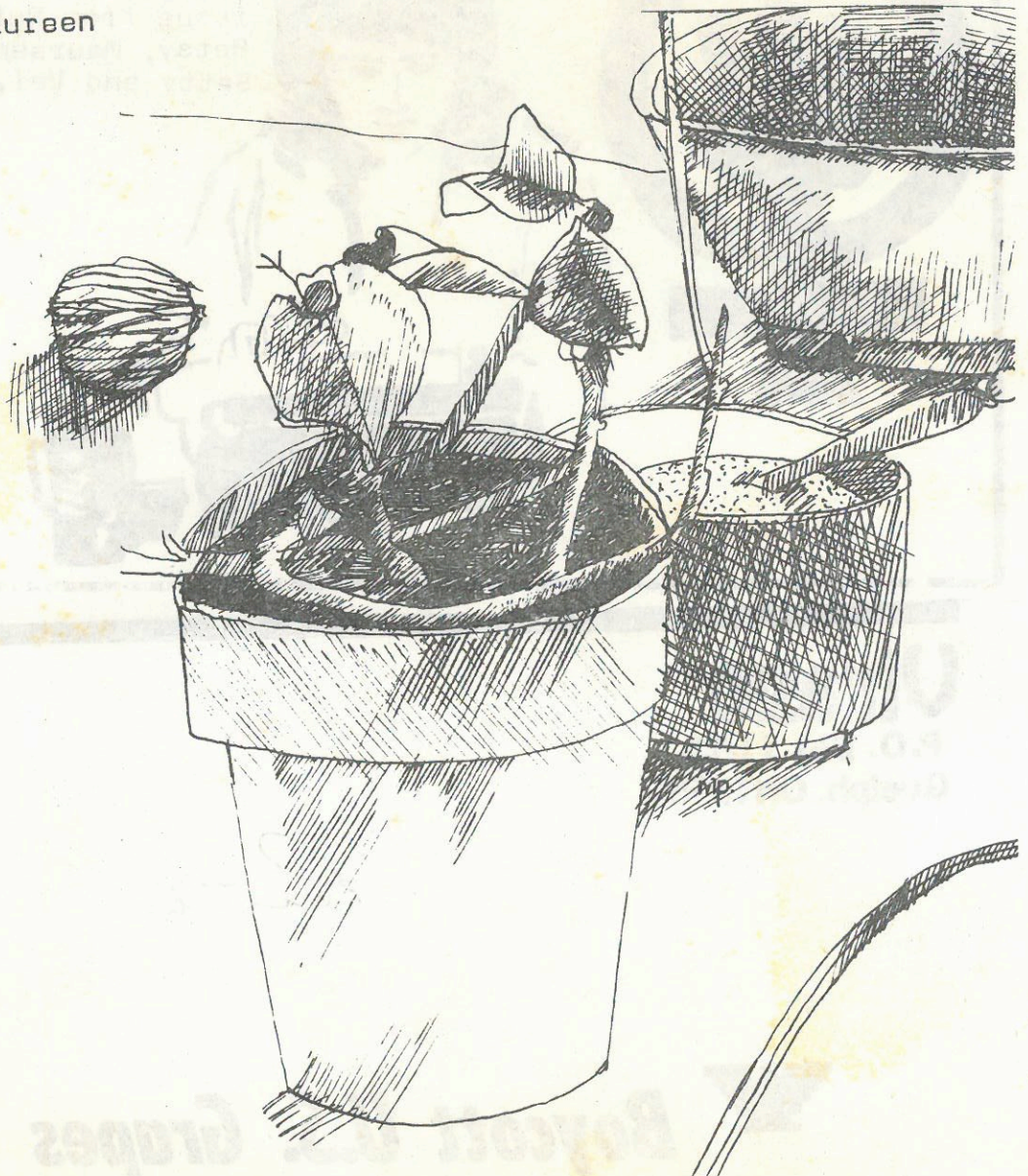
the ceiling, o jesus!

swinging through city buildings  
like an aerial acrobat,  
hired by city words no doubt,  
silver gray speeding  
to wash clean the traffic from  
our exhausted, fuming apartment  
windows, fresco faces and fallow feet.

rain really knows how to do it  
to you-  
plainly a wet war (or joke) between  
the simple and the simpleton  
warm on the sweet pastry face  
of beast or man,

bringing back arch memories  
of enemy flood  
for noah knows  
the uneasy kinship of water to solid.

Maureen



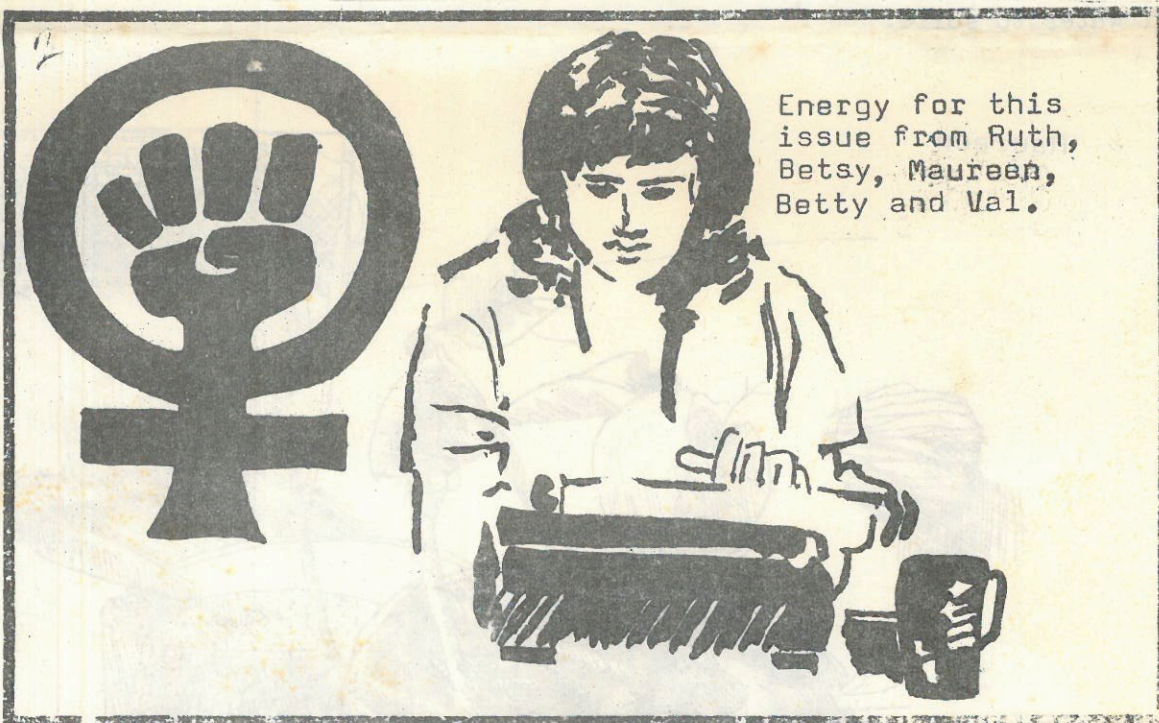
# women centre meeting

will be held Tuesday, January 14th at 8:00p.m.  
to discuss the future direction of the centre.  
All women are welcome and encouraged to attend.  
New ideas and feedback will be the order of the day.

The centre is located at 35 Priory St.,  
off Woolwich and Macdonnell, near  
the Liquor store.

VIRAGO has been publishing for  
over a year. We hope that you have  
enjoyed the paper. Anyone interested  
in submitting graphics, poems, essays,  
movie or book reviews or putting  
the paper together, contact Betsy at  
824-3208 or Val at 824-9051.

Subscriptions to Virago cost  
\$2.00 yearly or a suitable donation.



Energy for this  
issue from Ruth,  
Betsy, Maureen,  
Betty and Val.

**Virago**  
P.O. Box 1162,  
Guelph, ONTARIO

*Ruth*



**Boycott U.S. Grapes and Lettuce**