

## Days of whine, wine, roses and poses over as playwright Walmsley starts anew

By S.D. GOLDSTEIN

When a Toronto theatre critic wrote that Tom Walmsley's play *Something Red* showed little development over his last plays, Walmsley responded with: "I would like to piss in (the critic's) mouth."

At age 19, Walmsley quit his high school in Oshawa and set out on a journey through drug abuse and alcoholism. During this time he had two books of poetry published, three plays produced and won Pulp Press's three-day-novel writing competition.

He was 30 when he made that scatalogical comment in *Excalibur*; at 35, the days of Tom Walmsley the Angry Young Man are long over. A different Walmsley emerged when he spoke with *Excalibur*'s S.D. Goldstein about *Something Red*, being performed November 27 through December 1 at Theatre Glendon.

**Q.** How closely do you identify with Bobby in *Something Red*?

**A.** Well, I drank all day, I was being supported by a woman and there was a warrant out for my arrest. But I divided myself in two because the job that Alex has—a creel boy in a factory—was something I did. Before Alex meets Elizabeth he was living in a cheap hotel swatting flies, trying to write the great Canadian novel. I did that, too.

**Q.** In *Something Red* Elizabeth doesn't feel that she has lived compared to Bobby, Alex and Christine. Do you think a person has to get out and wrestle with the world before they he can consider himself mature?

**A.** I think it was the right thing for her, I don't think it's the right thing for everyone. What I did with Elizabeth was to start sticking motivation on her personality.

The real-life character that I based Elizabeth on was not in school, and not going through the same decisions that Elizabeth is in the play.

I think Elizabeth is the most poorly developed character. I didn't know anyone in her kind of position. She's not a comment on the rich nor is she a comment on thrill seekers. Elizabeth just feels boxed in.

It happens to a lot of people; out of high school, into university and then on to a job. All of a sudden when they are middle age they finally realize that all they have had was six trips in Europe during the summer vacations. Elizabeth is typical of that person who has never had a chance to spread her wings.

**Q.** Have you written anything recently?

**A.** I wrote two plays last year. One with Dolly Riechman who went through the York theatre program. It's called *Mr. Nice Guy*. The other is a musical I write with Micah Barnes. It's a kids' play on teenage alcoholism.

**Q.** In the plays that you write now, do you still deal with your familiar themes of drugs, sex and violence?

**A.** *Mr. Nice Guy* is basically about wife abuse and revenge which is a new topic, but the same kind of topic as before.

I know this is going to look stupid in print, but my sympathies are with the have-nots of this world. I'm more interested with their problems than I am with some guy who takes valium in Rosedale.

But I have no desire to stay in the same spot. I used heroine for a while and I wrote one little play about it (*Jones Boy*). But I am not going to turn around and become Canada's answer to William Burroughs.

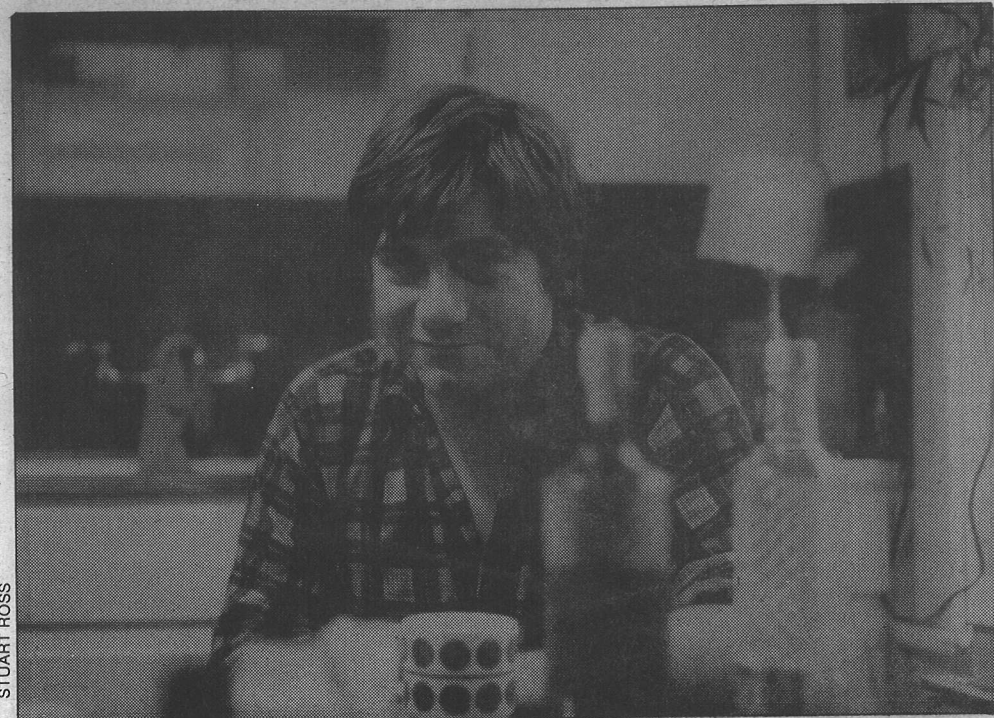
One thing about being a writer is that people expect you to stay in one spot. You write a play with Russian roulette in it and then people expect your next play to have people vomiting all over the stage.

**Q.** What do you think of the punk movement?

**A.** What I find weird about the punk movement is anyone who would dress the way they do, at least when I was being raised, was trying to say 'don't fuck with me.' But you look at some of these kids and they look so undernourished, running around in all this leather trying to look heavy duty. It's a pathetic joke. They can't make trouble. They may be saying 'don't fuck with me,' but who wouldn't fuck with them?

A guy like Billy Idol is a real joke. He's up there on stage looking like he's getting ready to fist-fuck somebody. I say to myself, 'Is anyone really scared of him? Can this guy really kick ass on the street?' This is the weird thing. The punks want the image, but you just know that they couldn't live up to the image.

**Q.** In the *Excalibur* interview you gave in 1979 you were all for the punk movement. Have you mellowed since?



STUART ROSS

A long time ago in a place far, far away: Tom Walmsley, seen here before his re-birth, says, "I used to think my basic choice in life was to drink and use drugs or become Elwy Yost."

**A.** No question I have. I started going out with a woman a little while back who works for the *Globe and Mail*. She brought home some old interviews with me. There I was with all my angry this and angry that. Well, you know, half the time I didn't know what I was talking about. It was a lot of misdirected anger. You know something—all this angry stuff is nothing but self pity.

When I was reacting all over the place I didn't know any of those people. What the hell did I know about anybody's lives? I don't know why a few years ago I had the impression that I was the only person who lived a life.

**Q.** How true is the 'Big Chill' for you?

**A.** I didn't see that movie. I don't think I've mellowed like I've made some type of agreement with the system. I don't feel like I have to apologize to anyone. I have always wanted to write and that's what I'm doing now.

If I would have turned out to be a stock broker owning a big house then maybe I might feel it incumbent upon me to apologize for my upward mobility, but what fucking upward mobility do I have?

**Q.** Is it fairer to say you have matured, not mellowed?

**A.** Yeah, yeah. I used to think my basic choice in life was to drink and use drugs or become Elwy Yost. I thought not to rant and rave was to be subscribing to the crap materialism and aimlessness of our society. I was afraid that if I would straighten out it would mean that I would be selling out.

Then I realized that I didn't have to join the Rotary Club just because I wasn't getting drunk every night. I was sick with anger and alcohol. All I had to say was fuck you. That may be interesting as a punk statement, but it was not where I wanted to be at.

When I stopped drinking, I stopped hanging around with the same brainless nitwits and arguing the same stupid things. Well, that's not where I want to fight my battles. I don't want to fight my battles on that front anymore. In a lot of ways I feel like I'm starting over.

Theatre Glendon, Lawrence and Bayview.  
487-6107. Tickets \$3.

*Something Red*  
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