

ICT wins \$6000 grant to perform play

By Carolyn Ryan

*Woman is the lesser man,
And all thy passions matched with mine
Are as moonlight unto sunlight,
And as water unto wine —
Alfred, Lord Tennyson
"Locksley Hall"*

The Lesser Man — that may be the title, but it's not really how Michael Hennessey's latest play sees woman.

Hennessey, who has been working at UPEI or its predecessor institute for 22 years and is now Registrar and University Secretary, calls his first full-length play "a look at the interplay between traditional views of male-female roles and the views held by a young feminist and Island family brings into its home."

The setting is Charlottetown, the performances are April 11 and 12 at the Confederation Centre, the director is Ron Irving, and the source of funding is a \$6000 grant from the Canada Council — the first for the Island Community Theatre (ICT) Performance Group.

The grant, announced last week and specific to the pro-

duction of the Island playwright's new comedy, recognizes "the contribution ICT has made to the development of professional theatre on Prince Edward Island and cites particularly its commitment to the development of local writers and the presentation of Canadian plays," an ICT press release said Thursday.

Rehearsals have been underway for two weeks and Hennessey has been attending read-throughs to spot problems with the script as they arise.

"You watch the play, ask yourself all the hard questions, then make sure you can answer them, while ensuring that your characters are essentially the same people you started out with," says Ron Irving of the rewrite process.

Featured in the play will be Sharlene MacLean, Glenda

Landry, Cathy Grant, Bill McFadden, and Travis Pratt.

The plot concerns the confusion arising when a traditional Island family takes in two boarders from the recently constructed DVA (Department of Veteran's Affairs) building in Charlottetown. When one guest is a vocal supporter of women's rights and starts making suggestions as to the operation of the household, you know some pretty funny things can happen.

Hennessey began work on *The Lesser Man* last fall, after reading the above quote from Tennyson's "Locksley Hall".

"Having raised that poem, people ask me if I'm reinforcing Tennyson or reacting against it," says the full-time Registrar, part-time author.

He smiles. "Well, it's a little bit of both."

Hennessey says the play was written by taking an hour between 12:30 and 1:30 most working days and retreating to a small room in the Robertson Library.

"If you're actually willing to work, you can do an awful lot in that space of

time," he says.

Hennessey has no plans to jettison his UPEI career in favour of professional writing: "I'll probably be here until retirement," the former schoolteacher, (reporter, sports-writer, broadcaster ...) says.

Still, he doesn't know if he would be able to keep up a good pace (he's had two other plays performed by ICT and recently had a book of short stories called *An Arch for the King* published by Ragweed Press) if he had to write all day long.

"There's a certain discipline to writing. There was a time when I had to sit down, drunk, sober, or sick, and pump out 1000 words a day, six days a week," Hennessey says.

One suspects that he valued the experience, but wouldn't want to return to it as a livelihood.

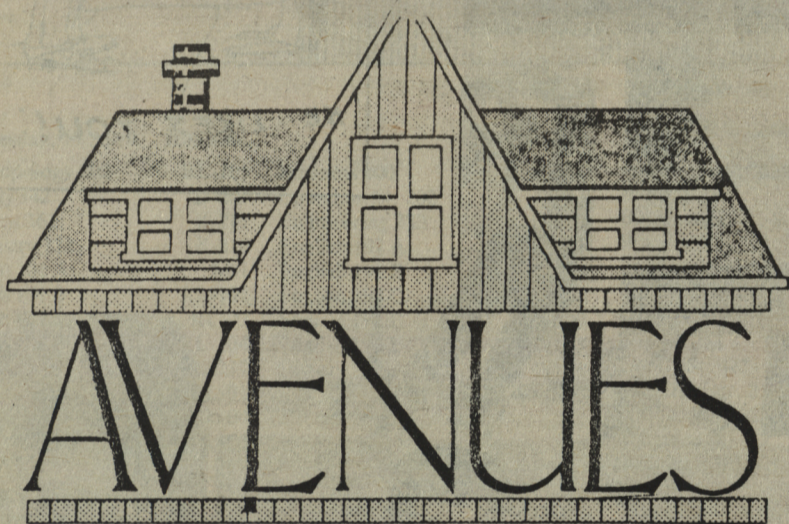
Local drama has been given an injection of vitality over the last few years with the introduction of the Island Community Theatre's *New Voices* one-act play competition for local writers, also made possible by a grant from the Canada Council.

"Local material does get a different reception. There



Playwright Michael Hennessey, author of *The Lesser Man*

are bigger audiences, more instantaneous response on the part of the audience," Irving says.



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