

Creative writing Prof ventures from security of University

Whether non-fiction or journalism veteran York writer Govier meets social controversies head on

By PAUL PIVATO

"In Canada, contemporary writing is hooked into the university system," says Katherine Govier, a workshop teacher in York's Creative Writing Program. "It's becoming a bit incestuous."

In university circles, literary incest amounts to professors criticizing, editing, and teaching each other's work. In her second year at York, Govier is one of the few writers not tied to academia. When it comes to paying the bills, Govier relies mostly on profits from the sale of her fiction and free-lance journalism.

After graduating from York in 1972 with a master's degree in English, Govier spent a year testing out the acid waters of the fiction market. A few years later she quit a part-time teaching job and became a self-supporting writer.

Govier is currently working on her third novel, which deals with the 1889 murder of a Cree prostitute in a Calgary hotel. "The incident seems to me very emblematic of what happened in the West," she explains. "How cities came about, on whose backs they were built."

Although Canadian literature may be largely associated with wheat field tales, much of Govier's fiction is

preoccupied with urban life. Her third book, soon to be published by Penguin, is a collection of stories about young people newly arrived in Toronto. "We're quite hung up with the nineteenth century," she says. "I don't think we've gone far enough into the city. The novels that are coming out of Alberta, for instance, are still about farms and Indian reserves."

Although her roots are in the West, Govier has lived in Toronto, England, and the U.S. "I'm becoming a kind of rootless person," she explains, "which I don't think is a bad thing for a writer. You see things with fresh eyes."

Govier's first novel, *Random Descent*, received excellent reviews. However, *Going Through the Motions*, her second book about a Toronto stripper, got mixed reactions. She felt that a lot of the criticism was tainted with moral bias. One critic asked if the stripper was a worthwhile character to read about. "She wasn't such a nice girl," says Govier, grinning, "but I kind of liked her."

Last October, *Quest* published a controversial profile of Henry Morgentaler by Govier. Like all her non-fiction pieces, the Morgentaler article was written in the first person and marked by her keen psychological insight and wry humor. Free of ethical ranting, Govier grappled with the complexities of a man most often portrayed in the media as either saint or villain.

Rather than disparage the buy and sell world of free-lance journalism, Govier likens it to the more hallowed craft of fiction: "In non-fiction and the novel, what is important to me is the investigation." What Govier does condemn,

however, is prostitution of the pen: "You don't put your writing in the service of something you don't believe in just for monetary gain. I don't think you can divorce your writing ability from what you believe."

Govier feels that many tired and trodden areas of fiction can be refreshed by a feminine perspective. "People write out of their lives. You can't escape gender classification as a writer, and I don't really think that you should because we've gone past the point where the differences in women's writing are considered as failures or weaknesses. Women are starting to approach the subject of violence now, which is really good because it will be done differently."

Despite the success she has enjoyed, Govier is forever changing and learning. "I'm still finding out how to write, pushing my craft further, searching for new styles. Some people learn how to write a certain book, and that's the book they keep writing. I don't want that."

And whereas a lot of contemporary fiction has discarded plot in favor of intellectual word juggling and structural technique, Govier remains more traditional. The essence of her writing is human emotion: "I write about emotional subjects with a certain degree of detachment, hoping to crystallize what those events are to me, yet seeking to provoke anything but detachment in the reader."

But Govier doesn't want to be so easily categorized: "I'm not a regional writer. I'm really a commercial writer. I'm a literary writer, and yet I do a lot of journalism. I can't be pinned." Which, in the long run, suits Katherine Govier just fine.

Pauline McGibbon Cultural Center — York Visual Arts students' showcase

By JANICE McCLAREN

The Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre is currently hosting an exhibition of some refreshing York talent. A number of York's fourth year visual arts students have collaborated on *Painting York 1984* an absorbing show which includes a wide variety of style and technique.

The large walls and spacious setting help complement each work. A pleasant change from York's IDA gallery. Each new style breaks the mental pace of the viewer, providing him with a fresh reaction for each work. The works range from abstract to realistic renderings, bold to sombre hues. With the mediums

ranging from traditional oils to leather and wood sculptures, it is very difficult to be bored with the exhibition.

Highlights include Margaret Chen's untitled piece with suggestive yet restrained coloring and a pleasant unity of form, materials, and canvas size. Alfred Wong's sculpture/painting pieces entitled "Close-Coupled" appear to overuse the materials and the cluttered effect takes away from the viewer's appreciation of the works. The two diamond-shaped pieces have two faces. They are paintings that can be walked around and although this is enjoyable, they still seem overworked.

Color is explored to the fullest by the students. Unfortunately, some of the paintings appear exhausted by color. Tim Noonan's

"Extrinsic Celebration" is colored vibrantly. It races with a preoccupation with pure primary and secondary hues, somewhat drowning out the form. The strong use of color in Andrew McPhail's untitled piece is disturbing and almost garishly trendy. Yet the work carries with it an ambiguous sense of emotion that arrests the viewer's attention.

Two paintings displayed along the staircase, Gary Clement's "Cave Dwellers" and Shawna Earle's untitled painting act as complements to each other. Their atmospheric tones and use of color show well together. Shawna Earle's scratchy application of paint enhances the weightiness of the sombre hues and mystifying characters.

Most of the works appear well-executed

from a technical standpoint although some of the artists seem to lack in some basic drawing skills. Ultimately, this failing becomes irrelevant, the works being carried by the artists' uniqueness of perception.

It is a refreshing change to experience these works outside the restrictive boundaries of the York galleries. Only a taste of each artist, though, seems not enough. One can expect more extensive displays of these talents at some major Toronto galleries in the near future.

(The Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre is located at 86 Lombard Street (near Queen and Church). A public reception will be held Saturday, February 25 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The artists will be present to discuss their work.)

Liquid Sky has impressive cinematography, but pathetic script ruins film

Liquid Sky

Directed by Slava Tsukerman
Bloor Cinema

By W.E. OVERTON

Liquid Sky has many qualities that *should* make it a good film. Its characters are mainly drawn from a contemporary, decadent, subculture in New York. One of the co-writers, Anne Carlisle, plays both the female and male lead characters. The introduction of aliens from space into the plot may seem frivolous, but they create an intriguing parallel to the Soviet emigrés who made the film after coming to New York eight years ago. The music in the film is good and the cinematography is exemplary. But *Liquid Sky* is not the film it promises to be, mainly because it is poorly written.

The characters from the counterculture are vacant, unbelievable and contrived. Their style suggests that they are striving for glamor but they only succeed in being garish. The subculture revolves around sex, flash, and drugs ("liquid sky" is slang for heroin).

The "straight" world intervenes in the form of stereotyped characters such as a nymphomaniac, an atrophied professor, and a single-minded German scientist who is observing the aliens to the exclusion of everything going on around him.

When most of the major characters have been killed at the end of the film one feels no sympathy for any of them. All impact that such a conclusion may have had is lost.

The film chronicles 36 hours in the life of Margaret, a model in this gaudy fringe. An alien spacecraft has landed on the roof of the penthouse she shares with Adrienne, her female lover. The aliens have chosen this location because they are attracted to an opiate produced in the brain at the point of orgasm and to heroin (the two are supposed to have a similar chemical composition). Margaret's apartment is a plentiful source of both substances.

Margaret has a problem with people giving her unsolicited opinions on what she wants and what she should do. After the aliens kill the professor (a glass spike in his head when he and Margaret are in a sexual embrace), Margaret believes she has the power to kill people this way. She then dispatches most of the major characters in this manner and they dematerialize shortly afterwards. The only thing that allows her to survive is that she takes longer to orgasm. When the spacecraft is preparing to leave, and it has been revealed to her what the aliens have been attracted to, she injects herself with a large quantity of heroin and implores them to take her along with them. They do, and who cares?

The dialogue in *Liquid Sky* is trite. Some of it can be excused



Thrilling scene from *Liquid Sky*. Beware!!!

because excessive swearing is a part of the subculture but it goes much deeper than that. Lines like "I have a killer cunt, it's so fashionable" cannot be taken seriously no matter how earnestly they are presented.

There is much to commend the film's cinematography, however. The shots of an airplane flying at night and the buildings of the city are spectacular. The Empire State Building is carefully photographed to once again become an icon representing New York. Although the costumes add to the gaudiness of the characters they also make for very colorful and lively images on the screen. The special effects are very

appropriately used to depict the aliens' view of what is occurring in the apartment and their focus on the opiate producer in the brain.

Director Slava Tsukerman, and director of photography Yuri Nyman, both graduated from the Moscow Film Institute and have worked on award-winning films in the Soviet Union. This is the first feature Tsukerman has directed. There are obviously very talented people behind the cameras on *Liquid Sky*.

Liquid Sky was made for under \$500,000—a shoestring by today's standards. You can't help wondering what the film might have been with a better script and more money.