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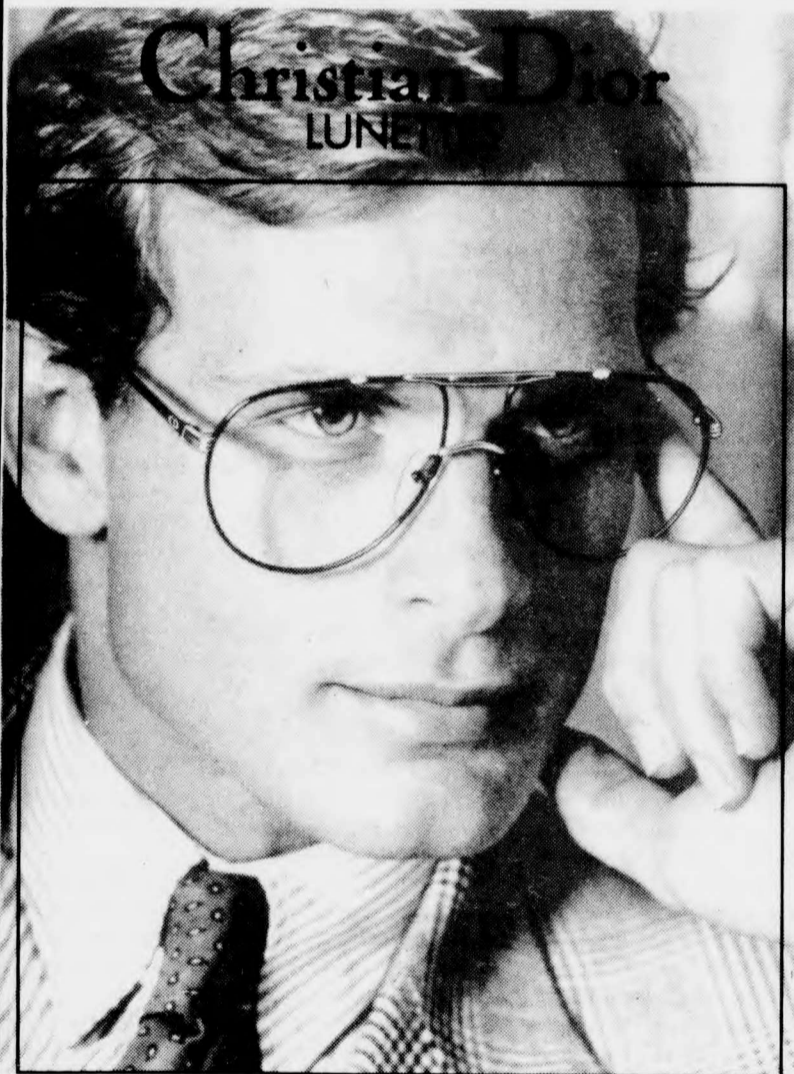
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start of first
review

Existere examined

by HOWARD KAMAN

Poetry is an unusual art.

In a world based on visual imagery — television and other mass media — poetry seems to be losing ground. However, magazines such as *Existere* are working to keep it alive.

Some look at the magazine as pretentious and inaccessible, but this is only because poetry has become an alternative form of entertainment. People who read poetry for enjoyment are often looked at as being outside the norm.

Looking between the covers of *Existere's* April 1989 issue, there is a lot of material to satisfy even the least literary of minds.

The issue is a whopping 40 pages thick but is cleverly split into two halves to create a "reversible magazine" with the "centre-fold" being a different cover.

The editorial, by Kate Reider-Collins, comments on the similarities and differences between sentenced author Salman Rushdie, controversial professor Philippe Rushton and the late critic Ken Adachi, who committed suicide several months ago.

Collins looks at the divisive nature of people — how easily people are labelled as being right or wrong. "People walking across campus barely repress the urge to yell 'Rushdie lives!'" she says in a perceptive and thought-provoking piece which essentially hinges the public's perceptions of a writer on the writer's ability to provoke thought.

One of the issue's fine pieces is Gretchen Sankey's "The Rockies threw open their arms." In a stroke of genius, Sankey has incorporated both her prose and a map of the Rockies to create a "travelogue." The prose gives the reader an impression of a vacation in the Rockies as a catharsis where, as Sankey puts it, "years of silence were broken, our first words were spoken."

Another reflective piece is Louise Hooley's President's Prize-winning "To Julie Campbell," prominently featured in the issue opposite an interesting photo by Ruth Czarnecki. The photo of children playing on a beach in the wintertime and Hooley's poem, a reflection on the photograph, complement each other nicely.

In a similar fashion, Voula Anastakis' "Dali" is accompanied by a Paul Sheridan photo almost as surrealistic as the artist's paintings.

As these examples prove, poetry is only as accessible as the reader wants to make it. Any piece that can shed new light on the stories of Rushdie, Rushton and Adachi — each a major media event — should be welcomed. While each story touches us in a different way, Collins points out similarities not only in the stories of the people themselves, but in the way the public instantly labels each of them as good or bad.

Similarly, each poem reflects on a personal experience of the writer and a good poem enables the reader to put him/herself in the writer's shoes. Reading a piece like "The Rockies threw open their arms," allows one to take the poet's place in the story and to create one's own perception of the same situation.

As a result, *Existere's* poetry should not be looked at as pretentious or snobbish, but as a window through which readers can look and see themselves staring back.

The importance of words.

That is the dominant theme of Robert Williams' editorial in the second part of the latest edition of *Existere*. It is an imaginative and sincere argument for freedom of artistic expression. If works such as Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* are condemned, then magazines like *Existere* will eventually follow.

The inside cover of the magazine takes full advantage of artistic liberty. However, the interesting and provocative collage hardly seems congruent with the contents of the magazine. It's well done and certainly catches the eye of a prospective reader, but such a reader may be expecting something altogether different from what he reads.

For the serious reader, the works contained within the cover are often a pleasant surprise in their quality and readability. Of particular note is President's Prize winner Jonathan Kahana's "Its Gleaming Surface." Striking in its realism, the short story explores the thoughts and experiences of a young girl as she prepares for, and performs, an ice-skating routine. Every detail of the story rings true, from the descriptions of sounds and smells to the details of an ambiguous parent-child relationship. It succeeds in faithfully capturing not only what the main character perceives through her senses but also the intangible anxieties and resentments that inform those perceptions.

"Ode to Greta Garbo," by Jorge Etchevarryn, makes for more strenuous reading. The beginning is (deliberately?) disorienting. The whole piece places the reader on very uncertain ground and leaves him there. Is it a tribute or a satire? And of what, or who? If the work was meant to make the reader a little uncomfortable then it succeeds admirably.

The second part of the magazine also offers three very different poems. Filled with vivid, thought-provoking images, deron mitchell's "the village masseur" is an excellent piece. Its verses seem like a distillation of actual experience. It is one of the few poems found in literary magazines that does not exasperate the reader by its sheer inaccessibility.

"just ends and beginagains," a longer poem by brposer, makes use of clever wordplay to explore relationships between language and time, and language and life. Beginnings and endings, means and ends, all lose their denotations to begin again as the means to a better understanding of words and what they represent for each of us.

Gerry Stewart's "Monarch" is a less substantial poem. Depending on one's taste in poetry, its compressed form may or may not be engaging.

The art works by Robert Cabral, Claudio Iacoe and Paul Sheridan provide a contemplative counterpart to the literary works and fit in quite nicely.

The magazine ends appropriately with a listing of the winners for the poetry, prose fiction, playwriting and screenwriting categories for the President's Prize contest: one indication of the significance of words, and of freedom of expression in the university community.

by BOB SHAIRULLA

end of
second review

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