

ARTS SECTION

Billy searches for animalistic poetry

By REBECCA CANN

Poetry and theatre. Combine the two and what do you have? Poetic theatre? Theatrical poetry.

York University's theatre department took the plunge to find out with their third year production of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. Based on the governor-general's award-winning book of prose and poetry by Michael Ondaatje, the play was a collective creation pieced together by cast members and director Steve Gregg. The resulting ensemble of music, vocal effects and physical expressions of imagery, combined with Ondaatje's text and original text written by cast members, afforded many powerful moments throughout the production.

Ondaatje's book explores the world of the legendary Billy the Kid, otherwise known as William Bonney. At 21 years old, Billy was known as a charming, boyish mass murderer, one of America's most wanted men in the 1880's. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* depicts a world of brutal violence, where cruel animal instincts break through the veneer of civilization.

The vibrant imagery of the book made it a potentially brilliant choice for staging. The violent intensity of Billy's world is almost overwhelming in its power and a translation to the stage of Ondaatje's images offer devastating consequences. Although the third year of production of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* was effective in its own right, it did not remain true to the underlying concept of the book.

Not surprisingly, the emphasis in the production seems to have been placed on characterization more than an attempt to evoke the images of the book. Theoretically, this is understandable; characterization is one of the major aspects of an actor's training. But even the few characters treated with any depth in Ondaatje's book are limited in their development, offering little for the actors to work from. As a result, there are

speeches and moments in the play without dimension.

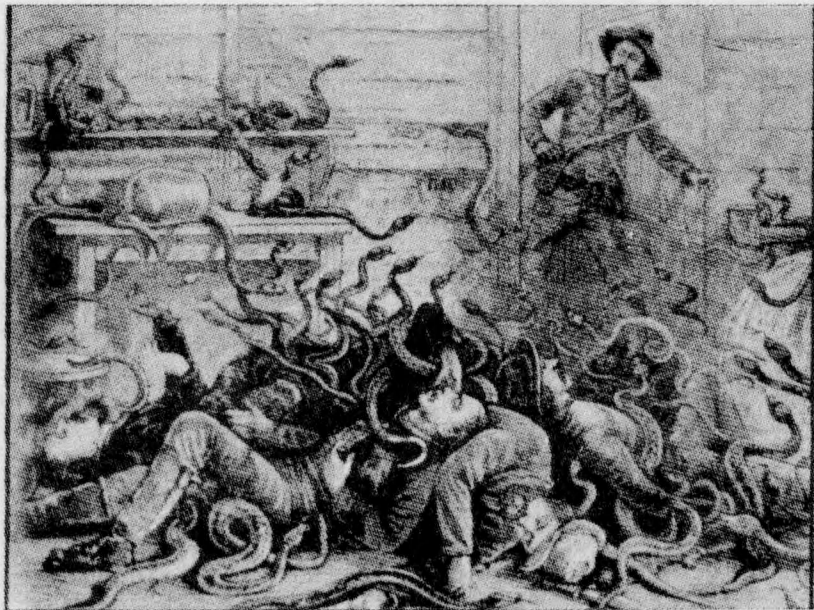
Ondaatje's book, rather than being about people, explores the base similarities of men and animals in a violent, chaotic world. Social gatherings such as a square dance portrayed in the play jar with the conceptual atmosphere of Ondaatje's work. Civilization subverts animalism. The end result is a lack of any depth of focus in the play.

The sequence of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* have been arranged in chronological order to produce a coherent account of Billy the Kid's life experience. There is no lack of fascinating material here and the cast's work in developing each sequence with a diversity of style and approach makes for a dynamic theatrical event.

But where's the poetry? It was there in the words spoken by the actors onstage but it was rarely visible. This is the inherent difficulty in bringing the images of poetry to the stage. While the cast did a superior job in expressing the more humorous and poignant aspects of Ondaatje's work, the violent animal imagery was frequently lost in their rendition. The conversational tone used to describe a dog farm of inbred, seething balls of fur, bone and teeth was totally incapable of expressing the horror brought to life in the same sequence of the book.

The eerie presence of animals in the 'wild west' came to life, however, in one of the production's most vivid scenes. From the black depths of the stage two rows of piercing green eyes stared into the audience, menacing through the imagined bars of their cages. These were indeed the animals of Ondaatje's book, silent and vicious, trapped in a world of superficial civilization.

The power of Ondaatje's work is ultimately lost in this production. It is disappointing that more time was not spent in rendering the images of his poetry, for it is Ondaatje's images, rather than the thoughts and feelings of the characters, that create the oppressive yet compelling atmosphere of Billy's world.



TROUBLE SLEEPING AT NIGHT? These collected snakes of Billy the Kid, "a charming, boyish mass murderer," may inspire your dreams.

Fine Lines LAW, Trash & Grupo

Fine Lines presents events on and off campus, past & upcoming, excellent & dismal. Read between the lines . . .

Bitching queens

Flash and trash are served up gleefully in the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre production of Sky Gilbert's *Drag Queens on Trial*. Despite the title there is little room in which to judge these ladies as they blast their ways across the stage in a whirlwind of power and glory.

This is not a simple task in light of their surroundings. The production takes place in one side of an operating porno filmhouse, with gaudy red curtains, ratty carpets and the faint musty smell of stale popcorn floating in the air—suitable atmosphere for the raunchy comedy of Gilbert's play, and enhanced to beautiful effect by the set, lighting and costume.

Tanuj Kohli's set includes dangling red Christmas ornaments and a suggestive fountain spouting surreptitiously in a corner, while and spots. Laura di Vilio's costumes scream outrageously at the audience, offsetting a vibrating cast.

The three queens hiss, howl and spit in devious fashion throughout the play. Judi Goose (Leonard Chow), Marlene Daylormé (Doug Millar) and Lana Lust (Kent Staines) all find themselves defendants in the performed trial within the play. As they struggle to justify their lifestyles, each one eventually reaches the same conclusion; as drag queens they are true to themselves, and nothing or nobody can change that fact.

The gutsiness of the queens is the gutsiness of the production. Although sometimes overpowering in its energy, *Drag Queens on Trial* is a hilarious opportunity to see true queens in action.

Dismal dancing

York Dance Labs are slowly getting into gear. Wednesday, October 16 the performance in Burton Auditorium was the first of the four Dance Labs to occur during the academic year. There was little time for the students to prepare themselves for the Lab as it is still early in the year and as a result the show offered little more than a promising perspective of what is to come.

Juan Antonio, artist-in-residence for the dance department, presented his modern dance class in an informal demonstration of the Humphrey-Wigman dance technique which involves breathing and bouncing.

The first piece to be presented was *Sometimes* by graduate student Bernadette Shanaham in which four clown-like dancers perambulated onstage. The overall concept of the piece was clearly portrayed but the sunken stage of Burton Auditorium denied the work its full potential. A proscenium stage from which the tableau scenes could have been seen from the level would have afforded the piece far more power.

Last Walk, by repertoire and modern dance teacher Patricia Fraser, completed the Lab. Unfortunately the lack of rehearsal resulted in the loss of the intense impact the piece had when performed in the alumni performance.

The next York Dance Lab is scheduled for December 5th and 6th, affording the dance department plenty of time for preparation.

Eclectic experience

The foul stench of a ship's hold, dank and grim with rattling chains, sets the scene for Eclectic Theatre Productions' latest play. *Female Transport*, by Steven Gooch, follows the journey of six women convicts from Britain to Australia in the early 19th century. It is a play of powerful realism, exposing the brutality and degradation inflicted on the women by their male oppressors, various members of the ship's crew. Opening October 22 at Tarragon's Extra Space, *Female Transport* runs till November 3.

Once again Eclectic Theatre's director, Jordan Merkur, has chosen a play with which to explore the struggles of underdogs. The company's first production, *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, delved into penal institutions for juveniles, while their most recent production of *Creeps* concerned the struggles and dreams of the celebral palsied. Both productions were highly successful and the reputation of Eclectic Theatre Productions has rapidly increased with the high standards of their work.

Every production staged by Eclectic has been heavily laden with talent from York University. *Female Transport* is no exception, with director, several actors and a variety of production people either currently studying at York or recently graduated. It will be no surprise if *Female Transport* matches or succeeds the quality of Eclectic's past efforts.

Load the laundry

Ladies Against Women (LAW) are back in Toronto with *An Evening of Consciousness Lowering*. Carrying placards with slogans such as "I'd Rather be Ironing" and "Make America a Man Again," and chanting "mommies, mommies, don't be Commies, stay at home and fold pajammies" the men and women of LAW have little trouble in getting their message across.

LAW attacks familiar political issues from a refreshingly different angle. Performed by the San Francisco-based Plutonium Players, they appeared recently at Harbourfront and will grace Trinity-St. Paul United Church on October 25th and 26th with their political satire. Their show includes cheering and exercising sessions, baking demonstrations (how to make a twinkie and have it taste like the real thing), a fashion show (featuring nearly extinct animal skins) and a prayer service led by the Reverend Jerry Fallout. At the end of the show membership cards are passed out to the women in the audience with husbands' signatures required for validation.

Dancing indiscreet

Take eight versatile musicians able to play over 40 different instruments and the result is El Grupo Moncada. Most noted for their contributions to the Nueva Trova (New Song) Movement in Latin America, this Cuban ensemble also plays folkloric songs and dance music. After last year's performance at York, the Moncada group "had people singing and dancing in the halls," says Sheila Creighton of the Atkinson Master's Office.

Support by the Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association, El Grupo Moncada will be performing at U of T's Convocation Hall this Saturday. Their music is both celebration and didactic, commemorating the Cuban Revolution and reviving Latin-American folklore. Catch these travelling troubadors in Toronto by calling 654-7105 for tickets.

This week's Fine Lines by RC, NC, PP.

Excalibur's weekly guide to arts events on Campus.

If you are planning an arts event, drop by Excalibur at 111 Central Square or call 667-3201 and ask for Elliott or Dave.

CALENDAR

Costumes a must
Tickets \$1.50 in the F.A.B. lobby, 12-1 p.m.



CALENDAR

Film Film Film Film Film Film Film Film

Women's Film Series, presented by CYSF

Women's Affairs

Nov. 4-7

Free

See CYSF ad for times and places

PARTIESPARTIESPARTIES

Fine Arts party: Bad Moon Rising

Oct. 24, 8:30 Vanier Dining Hall.

CALENDAR

the field south of Stong college.

Until Nov. 15

Lectures Lectures Lectures Lectures

Vocal Production: The singer's formant and the extra formant and their relationship with the larynx position

Lecturer Shigian Wang

Mac Hall

Oct. 30, 12:30 p.m.

CALENDAR

Galleries Galleries Galleries Galleries

Re: Union, a multi-media exhibition of the work of 39 graduates of York's Master of Fine Arts program, 1976-1985

Featured at all six York galleries: Art Gallery of York University, Founders Gallery, Winters Gallery, Norman Bethune, I.D.A. Gallery,

Samuel J. Zacks Gallery (Stong College)

Also featuring the outside installation piece "York Swings" by Alex de Cosson, situated in

