

bisset battling the machine

nbody own the earth
bill bissett

House of Anansi Press
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In Bedford, Nova Scotia, near the place where I was born, the Canada Dry Company had a bottling plant with a huge glass front. You could look inside from the street, and see the bottles jerking along, stopping here for a dose of soda water, here for a cap, endlessly moving...since it was the only assembly line I had ever seen, I was fascinated by it, and more than a little frightened: if they could do that with pop bottles, they could do that with me. Of course, "they" were doing "that" with me--after I realized this, and left school (and Nova Scotia), I seldom thought about the Canada Dry plant again, though I did dream about the descent of the "capper" in one form or another a few times.

Then three years ago, a friend gave me a copy of Blewointment Press, billed with poems by Bill Bissett. And after looking at a few of them, I realized that he too must have been caught by the assembly line, and frightened by it: and his reaction has been to grab it, to slow it down in a mesh of visions and words, letters and images which sometimes parody the machine, sometimes

make love to it--but never run from it.

Sometimes the machine catches up: several of the poems in this collection were written from a jail cell. But as Bissett has said, (in a poem absent from this collection), "yu don't have to hide yr head",

all criminals are
the children of th
law makers

In jail or out, Bissett writes poems out of his experience with the machine. Some of his poems pile the same phrase in stacks twenty deep, and at first you wonder what he is trying to prove. But by the time the phrase has been read twenty times, it has set up its rhythm in your head and has become true, and you realize that the words were picked for the way in which they sing to one another.

th speling, nd lac of capital letrs mite bothr sum peopul as well, but when the poems are read you realize, that's the way we sound when we speak: Bissett is after pure sound, instant perception, and in poems like "christ i wudint know normal if i saw it when", he uses repetition of phrases, certain words recurring like echoes from a rung bell, to talk about people who "comprised but / didnt have to pay for it and as long as they dont / know what yu compromised they cant get yu to pay...".

Informing almost every poem in the book is Bissett's sense of humor. I gather that life for him has not been all that easy--probably never is when you refuse to get into the machine--yet in poems like "the average canadian nose bleed", and "TH EMERGENCY WARD", the latter relating how he was saved from psychoanalysis by a friendly nurse who decided that he actually had "a "intr cerebral bleed", you can almost see him grinning.

Of all the pomes in the collection, the best (that is to say, my personal favorite!) is "Killer Whale". It is also the most political poem in the book, and the captured killer whale which fascinates the "groovy salesman of plastic bags" is Bissett himself, is all those who chose to fight against the machine.

The poems were selected by Margaret Atwood and Denis Lee, and this probably just as well, since Bissett's earlier collections from his own publishing concern, Blewointment Press, often erred on the side of throwing too much at the reader at one time. Watching Bissett is like looking into the bottling plant: there is simply too much to see, things fit together too well, and after a time it all becomes blurred. Much better to get him in controlled doses so that it is possible to see the details.

By Sid Stephen

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Chuck Berry

"I dig rock and roll music!"

Boy of boy! and golly gosh gee whiz! Who woulda thought back in the early fifties that three guitars and a set of drums could change western cultural history? But that's what happened. From dark beginnings in dingy leather factories and tubes of brylcream grew and blossomed that musical phenomenon that we call rock and roll.

Drawn mostly from blues and a little bit from folk, rock and roll burst forth from the cellars of America and gradually bludgeoned the ears of three successive generations into happy submission.

But the old fire and raw energy of the original rock "artists" has been sublimated into more thematically and stylistically complex offshoots that, while being more intellectually (and often emotionally) satisfying, have often lost the gonad appeal of the original product.

In fact, there are very few among the present AM generation who can remember what the original real thing was like.

Well now is their chance to find out (and also a chance for those who do remember to re-live a bit of their gold For now Northwest Releasing is bringing in Richard Nader's New York production of The Rock and Roll Revival.

Actually, there are two companies touring North America composed of original artists of rock and roll and while the company coming to Edmonton does not include the incomparable Bill Haley and the Comets it does include such noteables as: Chuck Berry; Bo Diddley; Shirley and the Shirelles; Gary U.S. Bonds; and the Dovells.

And all these fine old groups will be playing the tunes that they made great! Chuck Berry for instance will be doing such hits as *Roll Over Beethoven*, *Rock and Roll Music* and *Reelin' and Rockin'*. Shirley and the Shirelles will perform such sentimental masterpieces as *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow*, *Baby It's You*, and *Dedicated to the One I Love*.

When? 7:30p.m. Where? The Edmonton Gardens. What day? November 16. What price? \$3.00, \$4.00, \$4.50, and \$ 5.00.

See you there.

By the way, if we're lucky over the weekend and Your Friendly Arts Editor manages to get a little work done, we might have a bizarre interview with the guy who runs Northwest Releasing and two Big Time Toronto promoters next week. Watch for it!

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