

Edward English: poet - hustler



Edward English- ripoff poet.

Yesterday afternoon the Student Representatives Council sponsored a poetry reading for the general student body by an old (pushing sixty), grizzly-faced black poet from Selma, Alabama. It says a lot about the character of Edward English just to point out that he managed to squeeze two hundred dollars (\$200) out of the Student Council's Guest Lecture Tour Fund for his three days on campus.

Bob Poore, president of the SRC explained that half an hour before the Council meeting last Sunday, Edward English went to the council chamber and talked to the representatives. Half an hour later when the motion for giving Mr. English the \$200 came before the floor, the representatives were eager to give this man, they didn't know and had never heard of, the asked for sum.

The university of Toronto newspaper, The Varsity, refers to Edward English as a hustler and I have to agree. He arrives on a campus dressed like a tramp carrying a satchel of newspaper clippings about himself and letters from famous people in reply to his petitions for getting his poetry published. He showed me a note from Lyndon Johnston's secretary and a card from Richard Nixon's office regretting that it was not their policy to personally recommend poets, as well as a personally signed letter from John Lindsay saying the same. He also has similar notes from Prince Charles and Queen Elizabeth and many other dignitaries. The assortment of press clippings in his satchel prove that he is not fibbing when he says that he has been all over North America and Europe.

Edward English is sort of a McLuhanized hobo; he is a vagabond who comes on so strong with the medium that we get the message. Early in our conversation he explained the difference between "verse psychology" and "straight psychology". He uses verse psychology, but both are the hard sell for maximum profit.

"An example of verse psychology", he explains "is if when I left home to do a tour of readings, I wrote my most ragged clothes and just carried an old beatup bag. I would land on campus early in the morning and as I yelled 'Hey there' to a few guys they'd all walk quietly by. Then I'd walk into the Student government's office and ask if I could have a few minutes of the president's time. First he'd say 'no', but eventually I'd get him to read my poems and my press clippings and after a couple of hours of reading them he'd be on the phone to the press and getting lots of people interested in me saying 'We're going to turn this on'. Later, when I see those guys that passed me by in the morning, they'd all be wanting to take me out to dinner."

"Straight psychology is like I wear a new expensive suit and shoes and rent myself a cadillac. Then I get me a cat to drive me around for a day and I go straight to the president of

the university and he gets me all the contacts."

Well Edward English's hip talk and verse psychology certainly worked on us. He's spoken to several classes on campus including an honors English class. His poems more or less speak for themselves, and it is his character that stimulates most of the discussion. In this way he reminds me of a speaker I once heard at Speaker's Corner in London. He began by saying that he welcomed questions from the audience, but they must realize that he was interested in talking only about himself. The next half hour was spent in explaining that although he and the Queen Mother were close friends, the rumours that they were about to marry were quite unfounded. They had barely discussed the subject.

Mr. English has opinions on just about everything, particularly politics, and expresses his opinions with such entwined analogies that trying to find out what he is saying is the subject of most conversations with him.

He is rather an agent provocateur in class discussions. In one English class he had everyone excited about his view that the southern blacks were all quite happy squatting shacks, so long as they had enough to eat. If you think Edward English is serious in his socio-economic views, you begin to suspect he is an emissary for Richard Nixon and the great American way of life.

He looks like the oldest hippy you've ever seen his expressive and experienced face is half covered with a salt and pepper beard. His clothes are a hodge podge in dark colours, and he wears all sorts of metal jewelery, including a badge of the American eagle gripping the stars and stripes. He wears this because, "the USA is the greatest country on the face of this earth."

He believes that in the United States anyone can make it to the top. All you have to do is learn the system and start working it. The system? "First you've got to learn a business, then you've got to learn to do the same thing as other people for less money," he says. "Ten per cent of the people here (at UNB) are trying to learn the system, but it needs patience. The university don't give you nothing, you got to take it". Mr. English learned the system and dropped out. He ran away from home when he was twelve and wandered across the country. He had only a grade four education, so when he finally decided to settle down, he decided to become a house-painter. He quickly mastered the art of housepainting and had twenty-four employees and a profit of \$50,000 a year. He quit to write poetry because, "a lot of money was ruining my life. I could buy hashish and marijuana by the pound and alcohol by the case. It was ruining my business and was against me mentally, physically and socially."

He has given up booze, drugs and meat and his only vice is tobacco, of which he says, "this ain't no habit. This is a companion. An old

friend.

His world view is unique. He sees the world political scene as a chess board with "Queen Elizabeth pushing the pieces at the head of the game" and "the United States is the warehouse where the board is kept".

George Wallace, governor of English's home state, Alabama, rates high because "Wallace is the greatest psychologist of them all" and because he is bringing in a lot of industry which creates jobs. According to Mr. English, K.C. Irving, the New Brunswick industrialist, has recently built two pulp mills in Selma, Alabama.

But if Edward English has a message to spread it is to spread his concept of God. At one point, I think facetiously, he said that he was God, but he most commonly maintains that God is in all people. God is life. He says,

"To pray is to do something for someone who needs it. To talk to yourself ain't no prayer. Life is real, it is not fiction or make-believe. A lot of people are looking for something is the stars, but what they are looking for is out of reach. It is right down there in front of their eyes." It is what Edward English is hustling and perhaps that is why he's such a successful hustler. If a guy of his age, with his skin colour, living in the southern states, can still see God everywhere he looks, its kind of an up for all of us.

THIS IS PATIENCE

—Edward English

When you ask God for something,
You have to have patience.
He is never late.
He is always on time.
God is here.
Every living thing is God.
There is a man.
People call him Do Right.
Just Do Right!
Everything will be all right.
My daddy was a king.
He died like he lived.
He lived his part of life.
He left the other part for his son
To live his part of the game of life.
When you are a child you do childish things.
When you get to be a man
You do thing a man would do.
Try to learn the game of life.
Then you can play the game too.
God likes people that fight for Him.
God has many gifts for people that work for
God.
God is love.