

benefits of creative writing programme

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"sometimes very painful."

While many creative writing students demonstrate a thorough understanding of literature, their writing doesn't always reflect this knowledge. "Students are writing poetry and prose that doesn't belong in this age," said Corrigan. "We have to modernize ourselves. There wasn't one modern writer that didn't start badly," he said. "Much of the work submitted is romantic or post-romantic. Every age has a different idea of honesty. We must take writing down to the bone, and earn our adjectives and adverbs."

Corrigan views teaching writing as a deconstruction process, with the view in mind, that it must be put back together again. He is amazed at the courage of his students, and often thrilled at the improvement that students achieve throughout the year.

One of the advantages of York's programme is the variety of approaches and background of the different professors involved in the programme. York's programme includes teachers who are writing and working in the academic field, and those who are practising writers. This year, bp nichol, a

Canadian poet well known for his "sound poetry", teaches one section of a third year poetry workshop.

"Students can benefit from workshops by seeing the variety of approaches of other writers, and from the experience of being a part of a writing community," nichol explained. However, he believes that students can not be helped with poetic inspiration. "At the moment, there must be some commitment to paper."

When asked about the negative attitudes people seem to express towards studying creative writing, and the uneasy relationship it causes between

departments of English, and writing programmes, nichol responded, "As a poet who's been doing reading across Canada for 15 years, I have seen that English departments look with suspicion at a living writer. None of us have stood the test of time."

While the Creative Writing Programme has attracted many new students this year, not all students have been satisfied with their experience in creative writing classes at York. Stuart Ross, a poet and York student, was previously registered in the Creative Writing Programme. When asked why he dropped out of the programme, Ross said, "No matter what I do, I'll be writing anyways. I wasn't getting anything out of the course. I have enough contacts whose criticism I respect."

"In my own experience in second year (Eng 202A), there were too many Sunday poets, not too many people with any guts," said Ross. According to Ross, "there are too many people writing trivial things. No one cares about it. A lot of poets are writing personal shit that is not all important." He believes that writers should be "reading and studying everything because it will all help with your writing."

Ross has recently been selling his own book *Bad Glamour* downtown on Yonge St. "I learned more about being a writer by selling the book on the street than I did at university. It has really shown me what people really think of writers and the role of the artist," said Ross.

For other students, the opportunity to major in creative writing makes the idea of a university education all the more attractive. Joy Parks, a poet and free-lance critic now in her second year, described her decision to major in creative writing. "When I went to university, I wanted to do something to make myself a better writer. And there is no better way than to write."

Fine Arts faculties provide courses for dancers to dance, and musicians to practice, why not writers?

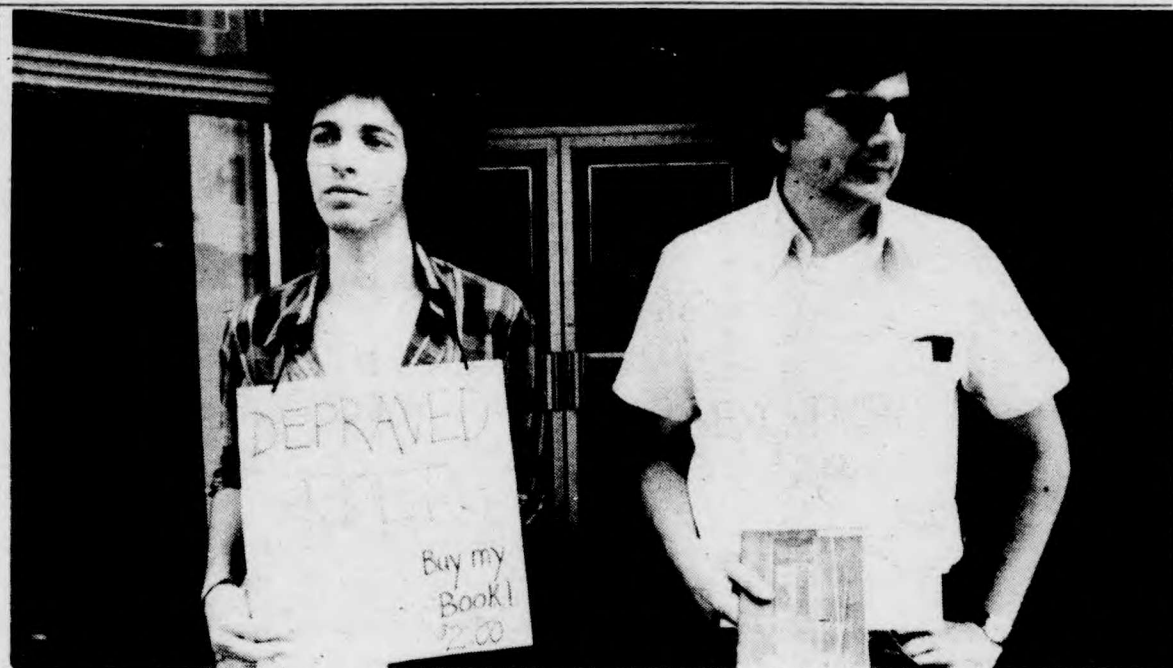
Some critics of creative writing programmes feel that writers ought to be studying literature, or even anything but their writing, in order to add some knowledge to their craft. However, as Parks suggests, "Background knowledge is definitely essential to writing, however one of those dim nights when the words just don't work, a knowledge of calculus and biochemistry isn't much help. But technique, and even better the importance of seeing yourself as a writer, now that's what saves you in the middle of the night."

The first assignment in English 202A, involves the writing and keeping of a journal. Lillian Necakov, a poet in her second year at York, was critical of the type of journal entries that have been discussed in class. "The journals are not realistic as journals, they are too perfect and polished," said Necakov.

Although her professor, Frank Davey, emphasize the importance of being open with your thoughts, and daring with your writing, not everyone meets this challenge. "All the things you think are crazy, should be included in a journal," said Necakov.

"Eng 202A includes the writing in forms that I have not been involved in before," said Necakov. However, because of the mixture of writing backgrounds of students enrolled in Eng 202, the course can be

frustrating at times. "There seem to be people who have the idea that a creative writing course will teach you how to write. There is no such thing as a formula to write by," said Necakov. "The good thing is learning to deal with criticism, like I mean shit you have to use the creative writing programme for your own benefits."



Depravity and excrement come to York: Street authors Stuart Ross (left) and Crad Kilodney will be reading Tuesday, November 18 at 5 p.m. in Winters Senior Common Room.

Depravity in the streets

Joel Kumove
Reprinted from the newspaper.

"The author belongs in the street," said Toronto poet Stuart Ross, as he stood amidst the hustle and bustle of Yonge Street peddling his wares.

His book, *Bad Glamour*, is a collection of poetry and prose which the author sells by hand for two dollars per copy. Ross first took to the streets in July in order to attract attention to his relatively unknown book, and has since sold over 3 hundred copies. He said his audience includes a broad cross-section of the downtown populace, including businessmen, students, tourists, and street urchins.

But the life of a street author is not trouble-free. He has been hassled by bylaw officers, drunks, religious fanatics and even irate passersby shouting "get a job". Ross remarked sarcastically, "I haven't been spat upon yet."

Ross has tried selling his book at several locations but finds the Yonge-Wellesley area most profitable. He spent one day at Bay and King Street, Toronto's banking centre, but found business-people unreceptive to his unusual selling technique.

"They just didn't understand what I was doing," he lamented. "Although I sold a few copies by telling people that I was a commerce student working my way through college selling poetry."

Despite these problems he said he is still optimistic about his unusual style of marketing and sees definite advantages to his street trade.

"I get an opportunity to meet people more weird than myself. I find this consoling," he said as he fished into his pocket searching for a quarter to give a panhandler.

The eccentric characters on Yonge Street help to liven up the day of a weary street author. One

of Ross's favourite people was a "born-again Christian" who warned him in a strong evangelical tone that "poetry is the work of satan" and that he ought to "stop writing filth and become a pilot for God." Ross said he was fascinated by this piece of aviatational imagery and, clutching an imaginary steering wheel, makes airplane sounds to illustrate the idea.

Ross recalled with amusement a spaced-out punk girl clad in dog collar, vinyl pants and orange wig who took a quick glance at his poems, then accused him of fraud. "You're not a poet," she said. "You just do this to pick up girls."

As this interview was taking place Ross was approached by an attractive lady who wanted to know if his poetry was similar to that of Patti Smith. He just laughed at the comparison and read an example of his verse, for which she thanked him with a warm hug.

At times a writer may be required to suffer for his art, but these moments of inspiration make it all worthwhile.

Ross said he enjoys having direct contact with his readers. Curious pedestrians stop, look, give opinions, perhaps buy a copy, then continue on their way. Ross feels this contact is a necessary catalyst to the writer.

"The author belongs in the street," he said. "He has a responsibility to the people. Atwood and Layton have lost track of the people they are writing for."

The street poet bemoaned the state of the Canadian literary scene. "All the best Canadian writers are being ignored by the Rosedale elite, the people who have the money," he complained.

Ross said that his aim as a writer is to "realize the joy found in desolation." His choice of location is appropriate to this theme. He stands in front of boarded-up storefronts, seamy bookstores and sexshops wearing a sign around his

neck that reads "Depraved Poet".

The sense of alienation and desolation, which are central to his poetry, is expressed with cynical humour in a poem called "the pig snouts lay weeping."

*the pig snouts lay weeping
in the window of a Chinatown
butchershop
they lay with their grief-stricken
comrades
on a cold metal tray
and somewhere
there's a bunch of pigs
pigs with incomplete faces
hanging on rusty meathooks
in deserted warehouses
somewhere*

*O you stupid swine
if only you had gone to college and
become
truffle sniffers*

Ross has been a part of the Toronto poetry scene for a number of years, performing sound poetry as well as writing. His poetry, prose and drawings have appeared in a number of books and periodicals. His unpublished novel, *Father The Cowboys Are Ready To Come Down From The Attic*, was called "the most promising" entry to Pulp Press's aborted Three-day Novel Writing Contest in 1979.

Stuart said his future plans are many. The publishing company he founded, Proper Tales Press, plans to publish other authors as well as his upcoming novel, which he describes as "a sub-urban vampire story."

Stuart said he intends to continue selling his works on the street. It is encouraging to know that one of downtown Toronto's more unique authors will not disappear from the Yonge Street strip.

(*Bad Glamour* is available at selected bookstores, including York's or directly from Proper Tales Press, 1555 Finch Ave. E., Suite 2208, Willowdale M2J 4X9.)

Dick Treatment

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