

Regional differences are Bliss

by Agnes Timar

Newfoundland, picturesque and serene, takes a foremost position in William MacGillivray's *Understanding Bliss*, and not because the director intends to present us with a travelogue. Rather, Newfoundland is the territory in which the flame of an illicit love is rekindled, only to be extinguished soon after, the place where two lovers come to the painful realization that they have little in common.

Elizabeth Sutton (Catherine Grant), an English professor from Toronto, flies to St. John's to give a reading of "Bliss," the short story by Katherine Mansfield. She is doubly excited: the prospect of her reading, and the continuation of her liaison with Peter (Bryan Hennessey), a cultural studies professor.

Planning an inconspicuous meet-

FILM

Understanding Bliss
directed by William D. MacGillivray
starring Catherine Grant and Bryan Hennessey
produced by Unreal Productions
Bloor Cinema
starting April 3

ing with Peter, Elizabeth says "I'll assume I don't know you, just professionally"—an ironic portent of things to come. Elizabeth's incomprehension of his methods of teaching, that manifestation of his identity, serves to reveal the differences between them.

Peter is the embodiment of Newfoundland's culture—he stresses to his students that it is the storyteller and not the story which is important; he displays tireless energy in rehearsing for the class' Mummies play, a Newfoundland storytelling tradition.

Elizabeth, the complete opposite, is devoted to the written word. This is

emphasized by the interesting use of voice-over: resonating through many scenes is Elizabeth's hushed verbalization of the story "Bliss," which suggests a distancing from what is important in the here-and-now.

When she makes her presentation, she is received with something less than enthusiasm, Peter's reaction included. Bored and impatient, he finds no relevance in what she does. What is relevant is the economic strife of this fishing community—of fisheries shutting down, of people robbed of their livelihoods—not stuffy English literature.

As Peter's sister puts it: "It's not that we're not interested, it's just that we don't want to be told to be interested."

Understanding Bliss makes its pointed statement on regionalism. Capable of packing an auditorium of three hundred people, Elizabeth's work finds value in Toronto. In Newfoundland, it is sadly out of place. The emphasis in this film is on the individuation amongst different cultural groups, and on the futile notion that values pertinent to one group can be imposed on another.

Understanding Bliss is slow; at times, it seems to sit still. The film's colouring is muted (it was shot first on video and transferred to 36 mm film). If you can overlook these failings, you will find in MacGillivray's film a touching story of "superficiality, deceit and realization."



The Mummer's Finale in William D. MacGillivray's *Understanding Bliss*. In the film, two people who have fallen in love find that they have irreconcilable personality differences focusing on the conflict between oral and written cultures. And it portrays Newfoundland, picturesque and serene. • photo by Justin Hall

Lush no shoegazers; Babes way beyond Nirvana

by Prasad Bidaye

Were it not for their ability to write clever songs, Lush would simply be another indie-guitar band. In the British press, they've been criticized for going soft on their current album, *Spooky*, produced by Cocteau Twins guitarist Robyn Guthrie; but the sold-out performance at the Opera House proved that beneath the hype and the studio trickery there is a credible band.

The ethereal sounds that haunt

CONCERT

Lush, with Babes in Toyland
The Opera House
Saturday, March 20

Spooky and *Gala* were stripped down by guitarists Emma Anderson and Miki Berenyi, becoming slightly harder and more honest. Their vocals, multi-layered on the albums, were divided, with Berenyi dominating the mike.

At times, such as "For Love," the singing appeared weak, until Emma's harmonious voice beautifully rose from the background. According to other band members, the addition of bassist Phil King has really tightened up their playing. He's helped move them away from their raunchy beginnings, to unleash the potential that otherwise remained stifled on their album.

The crowd loves Miki. During the two finest moments of the night, *Sweetness and Light* and *Deluxe*, the stage-divers arise, trying but failing to grab her. When they're not dancing, they call out her name in adoration, which seems to surprise her.

The light show is brilliant, showering the rouge-haired vocalist and spraying multi-coloured rays, a visual counterpart to the sentiments of the *Nothing's Natural* ep. Still, it's the songs that keep everyone excited.

I don't know why everyone calls them shoegazers: they really do move. Emma floats, Miki swings and drummer Chris Acland psychotically shakes his crazed, smiling head.

Lush's live sound is so distinct from their contemporaries, it's only a matter of time before the British press stops hounding them and they move on to take on the rest of the world.

Female noise-crazed trio Babes In Toyland opened the show. They are loud, yet very talented. Both singer and drummer take turns at the mike, and the overall instrumentation is primitively innovative.

Nirvana, a male group that's the hottest thing going, would have to take a few hundred lessons to sound this good. And the satisfied fans at the Opera House Saturday night could happily tell you that.



Babes in Toyland opened for Lush at the Opera House Saturday night. They're far better than Nirvana, which has had a greater push from the record company, proof that sexism is alive and well in the music industry. • photo by Mok Shama

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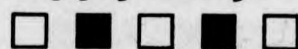
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