

Nothing bland in B-poetry

By STUART ROSS

Off the Pigs
ed. Patsy Cline and
Veronica Lodge
No. 1, 1986

Off the Pigs looks like it cost someone about \$10 to produce—for the entire print run. But that's probably what makes it a lot more exciting than other York literary magazines/anthologies. What it's got that the others (*Existere*, *Excalibur* literary supplement, *Fuck Poetry*) lack is a genuine feeling of spontaneity and raw emotion.

Made up of 15 letter-size sheets, xeroxed on one side, and stapled top left, *Off the Pigs* has been 'typeset' simply by typewriter; it's cleanly done with very few typos. Newspaper headlines, photos and drawings are splattered irreverently throughout. The magazine is aware of its own disposability, and this sense of immediacy and enthusiasm makes it just about devoid of pretension.

But the folks who put together *Off the Pigs* sure are angry. Under their masthead it is "A SUBVERSIVE ALTERNATIVE," and under that, "(how to get published at York University)." Flip to the introductory statement: "We are expressing our disgruntled, nay outraged anger at the sheer impossibility of being published at this school of elitist, self indulgent scum of the earth. why is it that a poetry pantheon exists at this school?" It goes on to mention "the feeling of gloom and hopelessness that heralds any submission to the shitcaliber etal. And the bitter and feeble criticism that the above-mentioned spewcaliber prints in response to any attempts at innovation are almost touching in their pathetic pomposity. Yes, this is an open affront to said ivory tower . . . Long live the underground! Viva Che!" and so on. It's refreshing to see someone getting upset enough to actually do something about it. But they could have done without the wailing. They refer to the "impossibility of being published at this school" but *Off the Pigs* disproves that by its very existence. You don't need to go through institutions and you don't need institutional funding to get your work around. You fork out a few bucks and just do it yourself.

The invocation of Patsy Cline as an editor demonstrates there's some very good taste lurking amidst the 'anarchy,' but I have reservations about co-editor Veronica Lodge. In something that's trying to be radical, I hardly think Reaganite materialist Veronica Lodge is an appropriate choice. Betty Cooper, more of a humanist, would have been better. (Though it should be mentioned that the entire Archie gang are Reagan supporters. Witness their enthusiastic reception of the President on his arrival to Riverdale in *Archie at Riverdale High*, No. 103, June 1985.)

Although very little of the work in *Off the Pigs* is of very high quality, there's a spirit at work among most of these poets that is exciting. It's not the usual case of a bunch of third-rate *Waves* or *Poetry Canada Review* imitations (the bland leading the bland?). There are writers here who are striving to do something new, develop their own languages and

worlds. So even when the stuff is just plain bad, it's rarely pretentious, and it is interesting.

The best writing here is by Lynn Crosbie. Though uneven, there is real originality in her point-form, chopped-prose style. Her "friday the thirteenth (horror poems for Jason)" sequence is an assault on 'poetic' language, and its occasional terribleness is a reflection of its subject matter. Good poems inspired by *One Day at a Time* are probably few and far between, but Crosbie's "MONOLOGUE" is generally successful, and contains some very powerful stuff. It ends:

No, say mother, say father, say
dream-girl say
white lilies say me in my
bathroom,
a lobster claw,
a lobster fin,
tearing the sleep from my face.

Imagine my fear at thirty and
having to listen,
well thirty, well no.

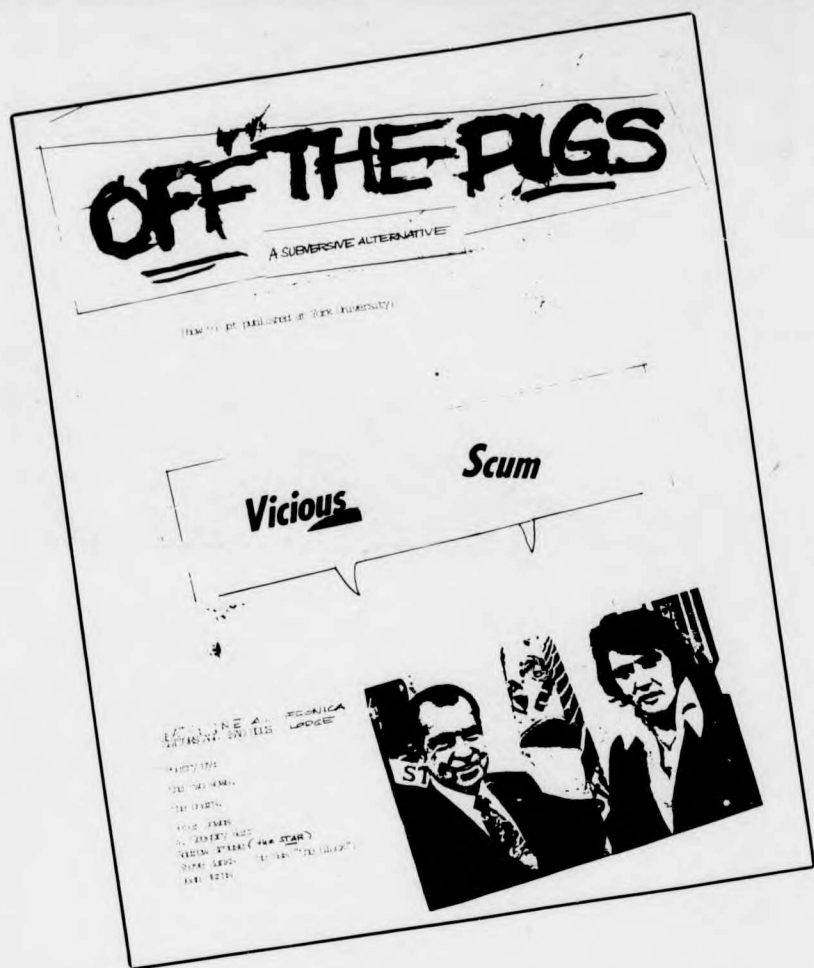
Andrew Brouse's "You are pulling me to the centre . . ." is reminiscent of American poet Tom Clark's *At Malibu* days: "Makes me feel just like I did the time/I saw a UFO wreck my car". The piece is rough and could stand to lose a few lines, but its intent isn't polished product—it celebrates its own disposability.

Strangely present in *Off the Pigs* is Dean Burns' "Jockos Grill Calabogie." This piece appeared a couple of months ago in *Excalibur's* literary supplement. Weird, in light of the magazine's editorial statement.

Off the Pigs closes with a page of 'reviews' of Roger Corman films. Written by Steve Banks (of Ministry of Love?), it defines the aesthetic of the whole mag, offering TV-guide style entries on great works like *Humanoids from the Deep* and *Angels Die Hard*.

As I said, there's lots of bad stuff in here, but *Off the Pigs* recognizes that one antidote for a nation of boring, pompous, redundant poems is a quick, disposable collection of B-poetry.

(To get a copy, try writing to 971 St. Clarens Ave., Toronto M6H 3X8).



Films foster misfits and bores

By ALEX PATTERSON

Continuing this week at Harbourfront is the decidedly uneven festival of New French Cinema. In addition to the new Claude Chabrol thriller *Poulet Au Vinaigre* there are also at least two films worth mentioning, though for very different reasons.

Friday, April 4 will see the Toronto premiere of *Escalier C (Stairway C)*, a comedy-drama from Jean-Charles Tacchella who scored an international hit a decade ago with his farce *Cousin, Cousine*. *Stairway C*, concerning the inmates of an apartment building in Paris' artsy 14th Arrondissement, is definitely something to make a trek to the lakeshore for. The building's collection of painters, divorcees, under-achievers, drunkards, gays and expatriates make up a charming if rather odd kind of extended family. Central among them is an arrogant 30ish art critic (Robin Renucci) who specializes in negative reviews and

misogyny. He toys contemptuously with all around him, until the death of one of his neighbors instills in him some much-needed humility. Renucci is equally adept at divining his character's disagreeable superiority complex in the first half of the film as he is at portraying awakening vulnerability in the second. He is ably supported by the other cast members; the movie's women, in particular, are excellent.

Stairway C has a lot of comedy, a little tragedy, smart dialogue, insightful characterization, great clothes, a Memphis chair, and a likeable bunch of misfits. It also has a surprising amount of humanity, considering that Tacchella is a director renowned for his sardonic view of the species.

Benevuta, however, is neither funny nor tragic—it's merely a colossal bore. Touted by its distributors as "an exploration of a sadomasochistic relationship between a young pianist and a Don Juan," the film is a

dreary and pretentious love story with little to recommend it. The makers seem to be of the opinion that women enjoy being treated like dirt by obnoxious old geezers, especially if they further complicate everything by heaping religious guilt upon them.

Fanny Ardant and Vittorio Gassman are the "lovers"; both have done much better work than this in the past. A problem that the movie just cannot get around is that the attraction of Gassman for Ardant is inexplicable—why, of all the unpleasant men twice her age, does she choose him? Why does she risk a promising concert career and her best friend for someone who causes scenes in restaurants, is married, and is old enough to be her father? The filmmakers would probably answer "love is blind." Perhaps, but unfortunately that doesn't make for good cinema.

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