

Student lit magazines a great resource

by Liz Flagel

Existere, York University's literary magazine, has an unfortunate reputation for pretention, especially on campus.

Not many York students are aware of its existence, and those who are do not have a high opinion of it. In an effort to change this negative image, *Existere* has added new artistic elements, like art and photography.

The magazine's staff visited creative writing classes in after the first issue came out in order to make York students more aware of this creative resource. As a result, the second issue contains more entries from York students, as well as Torontonians.

Despite their efforts, it is unlikely *Existere* will be able to shake its tainted image. The magazine is filled with work that has more personal value for the author than the audience.

Most of the pieces in *Existere* are written in the first person. This doesn't

MAGAZINE

The second issue of York's *Existere* is compared with the University of Toronto's *Acta Victoriana* and *U. C. Review*.

have to be a problem, but it suggests the writers are entrenched within themselves, that they have forgotten their readers. All the work in *Existere* ends with no sharp point; the writers' arrows don't stick anywhere, but fall flat, missing their targets.

The material chosen for the University of Toronto magazines has more substance and style than the work in *Existere*. *Acta Victoriana* successfully is trying to broaden its style with a section on The Young Poets of the Revolution. This is a group of writers who are speaking out against oppression of Black people. These poems are passionately personal.

In "Reggae Is," by Minister Hakit Faust, reggae music helps explain the suffering Blacks have historically en-

duced because of the ignorance of Whites. "Reggae Is" is written in patois, a Jamaican voice, bringing the words to life and heightening the poem's humour.

The U. C. Review is more stuffy. Some of its material is overwhelmed by the authors' attempt to be profound and intellectual at the same time. The first poem, for instance, is over-long, containing three pages of quotations from various sources in an attempt at some kind of intellectual epiphany. However, it is so intellectual that the reader will lose interest.

It is unfortunate that the first poem would make a reader want to stop. But do not! There are gems to be found. *Meeting*, for instance, a short story by Stan Rogal, is a philosophical exploration of the (not so) random nature of life.

Although they are not without their problems, all of these magazines are a great resource for artists and writers trying to get their first break.

Poetry with a female point of view

by Harry Rudolfs

In her new collection of poems, Patricia Keeney distances herself from the stifling patriarchy of male academics and calls upon the collective voice of female poets who have

"spring's sap running through us whenever we are hybrid March a breezy puddle between seasons full of buried fragrance

sexy landing like pollen where the wind puts us tufted burrs hooking in what rolls randomly our way"

It's too easy to negate Keeney's work by comparing it to new age crystal-gazing; the so-called "goddess" theology that any massage therapist can tell you about. What she is getting at is something ancient, an innate healing that is self-contained and introspective, and contrasts to the external madness of a world which is all too saturated with yang power -- where the politics and sexuality of George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, and Saddam Hussein are indistinguishable.

Keeney eulogizes the dispossessed and the disenfranchised, the "heretics and wanderers/clustering at the gate...rising up remote from stony walls/with bodies and voices like an earthquake."

Rather than wait for the peasants to storm the barricades, Keeney takes the reader through a highly personalized journey of her own search for self-awareness. At times, it feels as if one were intruding on a lovers' spat. At others, her highly competent word-smithing evokes a sublime transcendental sensitivity, as in the poem "Lovemaking:"

"A hot tin light
The furry hide is brown and yellow
earth, urging
Make love, make love."

Curiously, there are at least two references to Leonard Cohen: in "Easter Rising" ("Take this waltz/This waltz, this waltz) and "Finding the Work" ("We want you/We

BOOK

The New Pagans
written by Patricia Keeney
Oberon Press

don't want you") These are clearly, but perhaps unconsciously, an allusion to Cohen's song "Chelsea Hotel."

Also, in "Languages," there seems to be an oblique mention of Ondaatje's poem "Cinnamon Peeler". Maybe this is what identifies a Canadian poet: an undercurrent of Canuckishness; a dash of Can-Lit pepper in the soup of the poems.

There are, however, threads of a much bigger picture running through her work. It is as though Keeney has caught the world unawares and is able to snap a quick photo. Take note of her portrayal of the shopkeeper in "Groundwork":

"Doris runs the store
the way a foreman handles roadcrews.
Every summer wrenches profit enough
from plastic cottage necessities
to booze up the snow months in Florida."

In "The Actress" she captures the spurious and frightening beauty of a modern city:

"A shabby comfort for this Broadway
house of gods, descending
this hoarding, halfway place.

In the high whistling town
steel and glass hum...

about as subtle as a Christmas tree; lit
declaring occasion, ready for another party."

In another vein, Keeney elevates a popular rock group to Shakespearean status so we may see the absurdity of the "lusting-cock" mentality, the tragedy of a culture primarily concerned with money, ejaculation and violence. The song referred to in "Kerri at Twelve" is probably the hit "I used to love her, but I had to kill her," but it could be replaced with any of a myriad of similar lyrics that get top 40 airplay, and burrow like maggots into society's putrescent carcass:

"After the party you ask me to hear a song
with words about loving and killing.
I think of Othello shaking to death
his blond rag doll.
You tell me it's guns and roses."

In "Letter from a Friend," Keeney comments on the maturing process a poet goes through -- if they're lucky enough to survive the triple malaise of madness, addiction and insipidness. No longer are our best poets living in garrets and wandering the streets of Yorkville trying to sell photocopies of their work for a handful of change. A few of them, at least, are worried about getting the kids to school and getting their cars started and up the Don Valley Parkway so they can get to their writer's workshop on time -- Keeney teaches Creative Writing at York University.

Luckily for us, Keeney has survived the tempest quite well:

"We were all besotted, had not the grace
to die so young.

Some of us stay infected
stagger right over the edge."

At least she doesn't have to worry about being insipid. This cleverly executed book provides us with a refreshing view of the female creative spirit at its best.



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