



Entertainment

Scottish author strives for diversity

by Elaine Ostry

An author reading from his work for one hour sounds dull and self-congratulatory, doesn't it? But William McIlvanney, dressed in jeans and speaking in a warm brogue, succeeded in giving a performance on Tuesday that was funny, interesting, and relaxed. McIlvanney is a well-known Scottish writer who is on a tour of Canada, thanks to the Canada Council and the Scottish Arts Council.

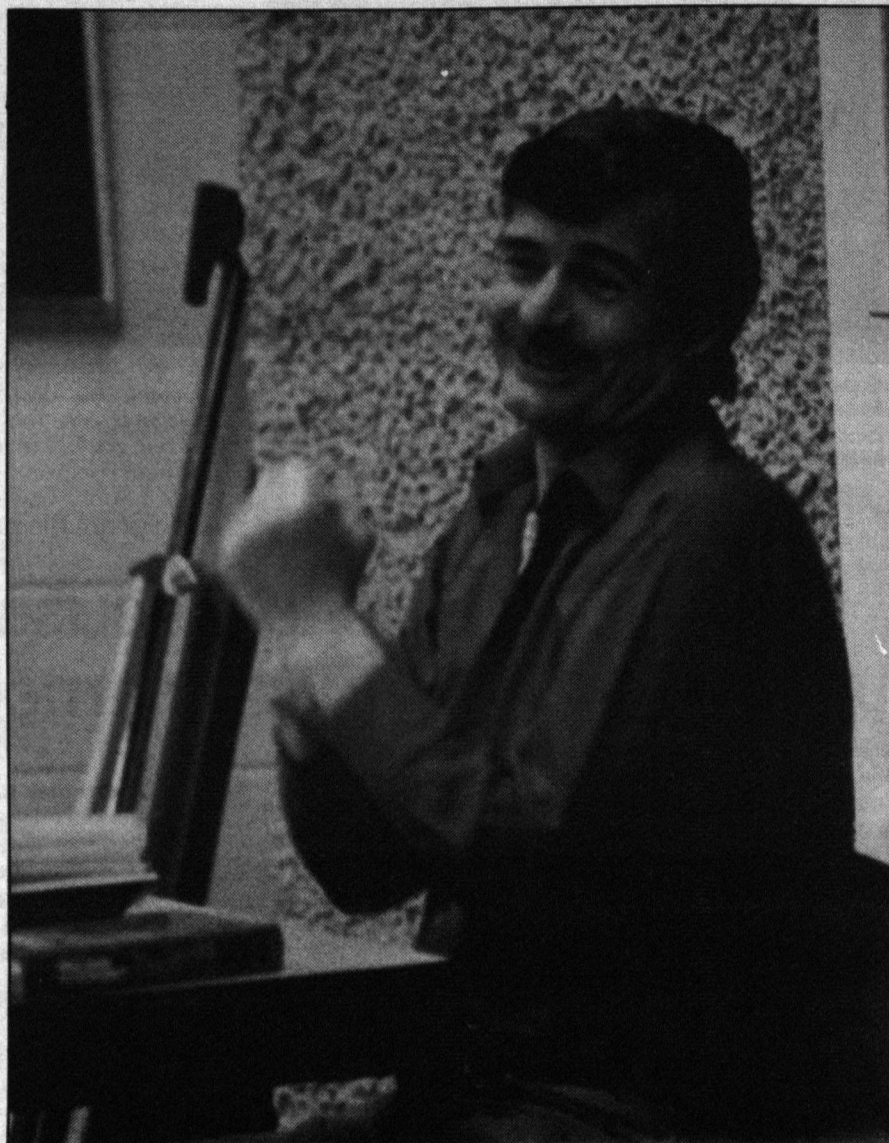
Coming to Canada, jokes McIlvanney, is like "putting your ego on a diet", because nobody recognizes him. Certainly he has gained distinction for his work in his native land. His first four novels have all won awards including the Whitbread Award for *Docherty*. He received the Crime Writers' Association Silver Dagger Award for *Laidlaw* and *The Papers of Tony Veitch*. His work ranges from poetry to essays to thrillers.

McIlvanney strives to find a diverse audience, believing that literature can "break down the barriers" between readers. His own life seems socially diverse as well. McIlvanney comes from a working class family in a town in Western Scotland that is "like a bricklayer's handshake: friendly, but rough." He graduated from Glasgow University with an English degree and became a professor. However, he did not deny his past to assume this role.

On the contrary, "little has been articulated about the people I knew," McIlvanney complained. He writes a lot about and for working class people, "many of whom will not read it." Yet he is careful to avoid being patronizing, as it is wrong to assume that the blue-collar worker doesn't read. To prove this, McIlvanney mentioned the plumber he met who was writing an updated version of *Candide*, and the electrician who wanted to write a biography of Cervantes.

However, when McIlvanney grew up, writing poetry was viewed with scorn, and a man was respected for working with his hands. "It was a good thing," commented McIlvanney, "that I was good at football. That saved me." He followed this bit of biographical information with a poem about playing football, or soccer as North Americans call it, as a child.

It is obvious from his readings of poems



"Writing is a kind of testimony of what it is to live."

and part of the novel *Docherty* that McIlvanney has used experiences of his childhood in his work. "Each nugget of experience," he said, "gains significance" as one grows older. McIlvanney seems to use ordinary thoughts from everyday life in his work, allowing the reader to relate to the literature.

He has certainly improved since his first poem which he wrote when he was fourteen. McIlvanney read this poem aloud, rolling his eyes at its pretentiousness, sarcastically explaining that it was about a man who had killed his friend and was writing the poem while he was committing suicide.

McIlvanney commented on Scottish culture, which is in conflict with English cultural influences, especially in regards to language. In schools, the children must speak standard English rather than the Scots dialect they speak at home. This is an example of Scottish teachers teaching suppression of their own background. However, McIlvanney stated that he would not want to legislate the use of Scots because "it's the quickest way to kill it". He himself claims to speak in a mix of English and Scots, and welcomes the changing of language, because it makes it more dynamic.

The writer recounted several anecdotes about his childhood and his time in school, imitating his teachers. His readings showed a sense of humour, irony, and pathos. An example is the excerpt heard from his novel *Docherty*, in which a boy gets the strap from his schoolmaster because of fighting in the school yard; the master shouting "I will NOT have violence in my school!!" The boy gets in further trouble for speaking Scots to his teacher.

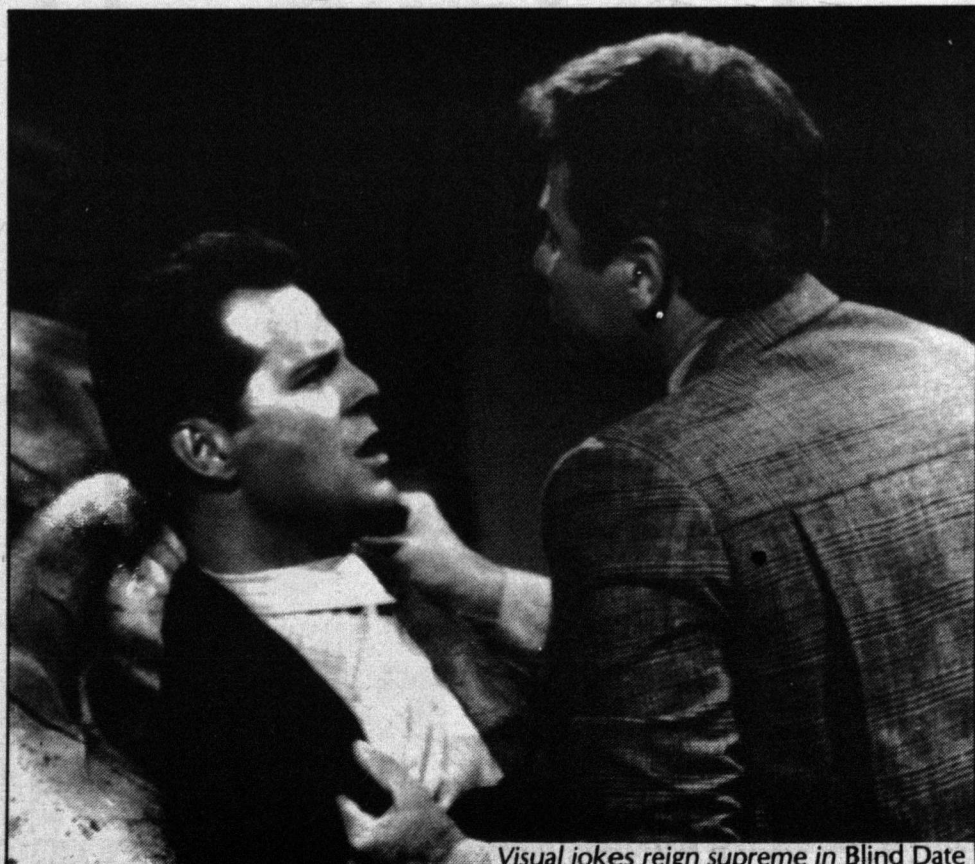
McIlvanney read well, and his introductions to excerpts or poems were quite funny. "A lady came up to me once and said, 'I've written a poem about cats.'" McIlvanney paused. "Now what can you say to that?" He then proceeded to recite his poem about cats.

Turning to the subject of writing, McIlvanney stressed the need to "see what's really there" by both creative writing and creative reading, and not simply accepting the opinions of others. "Writing," he said, "is a kind of testimony of what it is to live." It is a "compulsion" that is "inexplicable" but which can be "harnessed".

This writer has certainly enjoyed his success, but it has been the result of patient, hard work. Getting his first poems published, he said, was "a bleak situation". When his serious works began to create interest, he surprised his readers by turning to the detective thriller. "When people think they know where you're going," said McIlvanney, "go somewhere else." He enjoys the genre of thriller because its events "can go anywhere" to include any level of society.

His advice to would-be writers? "Convince yourself that you'll do it." This advice has obviously worked for McIlvanney.

No insights in *Blind Date*, but a lot of laughs



Visual jokes reign supreme in *Blind Date*.

Blind Date
Tri-Star
Rialto

review by Dragos Ruiu

You can remember Blake Edwards for one of two kinds of movies. The first kind is the hilarious slapstick comedies he had directed, like the Pink Panther movies; the second being the bitter, sappy real-life films like *That's Life* or *S.O.B.* Fortunately for us his latest film, *Blind Date*, is in the best Clouseau tradition.

This film is guaranteed to make you laugh. Ignore the fact that the acting simply isn't there, the plot non-existent, predictable, and the characters are straight out of a sitcom. You will laugh in spite of it all.

Bruce Willis plays the hard-working corporate yuppie — he's got "a nice car, a nice job, and next year I'll be able to get a condominium." So what's the problem? Well, he's not very flashy, he is always being snubbed at work by his less industrious but better dressed peers, and his date for the big corporate dinner is off at the firing range(!).

Reluctantly, he accepts a blind date recommendation from his car-salesman(!) brother. But, "don't let her drink, she gets crazy." Can you guess what happens...

The blind date is Kim Basinger who looks mildly frumpy compared to her previous stunningly seductive performances. She gets

drunk, she's crazy, ruins Willis' life and car, and gets a hangover, in that order.

Somewhere along the way, John Larroquette (*Night Court*) crashes into the action as Basinger's amorous ex-boyfriend. Larroquette plays the goof, the same conceited character he plays on TV, but his stuffy acting along with Edwards' slapstick directing leave tears of laughter in your eyes.

There is only one redeeming value to this film: it's funny. See Willis try to get past Rambo the guard dog. See Larroquette try to get his hand out of the modern art(?) he just punched. See people trying to climb the trellis rail past the caretaker's window. See Willis make Larroquette moonwalk by shooting at his feet. See the police car arrive. See Larroquette get the monkey that sneaked into his car when he crashed into a pet store off his head in time for him to crash into a paint store.

You get the picture, this is a movie full of non-stop juvenile visual jokes, all perfectly timed so by the time you should be groaning you are actually laughing at the next one. There really isn't time for you to catch your breath enough to realize that this isn't a great film, but merely a good one.

See Willis explain to the bouncer why he is peeing in the ladies' washroom. See the judge bean the stenographer with his gavel. See this movie.