

ARTS FEATURE

By PAULETTE PEIROL

New rags, mags and chapbooks join *Existere* on York literary scene

publications, making for a unique representation of York literary talent.

"*E.M.L.*'s desire is to . . . help fill the chasm that should be swimming with countless vehicles of expression," writes its editor, Richard Gustafson, in an opening editorial. "It's about time someone took some initiative," he told *Excalibur*.

"We're out to stir up a few of the apathetic people," Gustafson said of his brash magazine, which features an "anti-glossy cover" consisting of a paper bag with EML spray-painted on it, and 30 repetitions of the word "fuck," according to Gustafson's last count.

"In part, *E.M.L.* is an attempt to show all you apathetic commie wimps out there on this all-to-(sic) Canadian campus that if you really want to, you can do anything . . . yes, even without institutional funding," qualifies "Another Editor" John Barbisan, a guitarist for the Toronto punk band The Hype.

"Rejected, eh?" an aspiring writer, fist clenched, shouts at the *Existere* office.

"What does that guy know anyway?" the character raves. "This is great poetry! This poetry must be heard! I must be heard!—Even if I have to start *my own magazine* . . ."

Although this is merely an outtake from Clark Hodgkin's cartoon in the new issue of Vanier College's *Existere* magazine, it succinctly summarizes the current state of creative writing publications at York. For the past six weeks, no less than four literary publications—*Yak*, *Ten Tandem*, *Eat Me, Literally* (*E.M.L.*) and a long-awaited edition of *Existere*—have emerged.

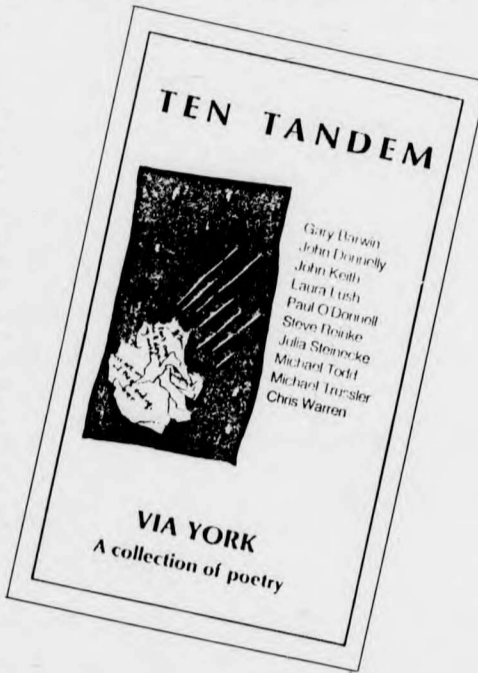
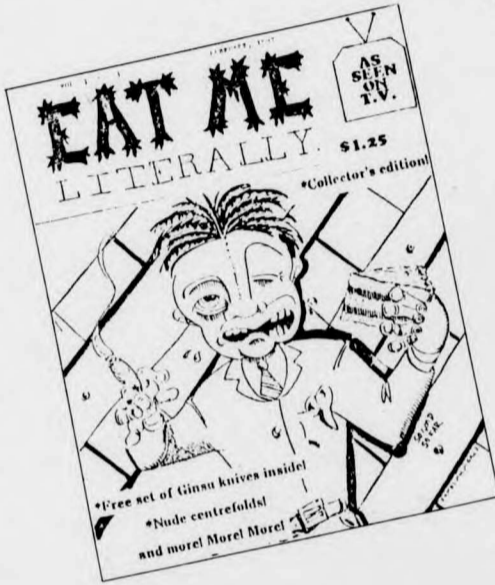
(A fifth magazine, *Per Verse*, is rumoured to have been issued from Glendon College, but so far, hasn't reached York's main campus. *Excalibur* was unable to reach *Per Verse* editors for comment.)

There was a time (for a long, long time), when *Existere* was the only campus publication to feature creative writing and graphics exclusively by students. More recently, there were wide-spread fears that due to mismanagement, *Existere* would soon become defunct.

Fortunately, these fears have been alleviated, thanks in part to Vanier College's newly formed Publications Board, which oversees all of the college's publications and has now established an editorial constitution to ensure accountability.

Last year witnessed the emergence of a new campus literary rag, *Fuck Poetry*, which proclaimed itself the antithesis of *Existere*. Yet the magazine was short-lived and after much public criticism, succumbed to the fate of the dinosaur.

It is these precedents, however, which are largely responsible for the bumper crop of new literary publications that York has reaped this year. Editors of *E.M.L.*, *Yak*, and *Ten Tandem* all concur that the motive behind their publishing ventures is to provide an alternative forum to expose the work of their fellow student authors. Yet each editor has also imprinted his or her own personal mark on their respective



ticular editorial guidelines by which submissions were judged, he noted "as editor, I had final decisions." Secord added that he made it a policy to not print any of his own material.

For the most part, each editor's intents were reflected in not only the content and design of the publications, but also in their chosen methods of funding and distribution.

Ten Tandem and *Yak* both opted to publish only poetry, without graphics (except for the covers). To this end, their chapbook format was well-suited to the poetic form, as small pages prevent shorter poems for becoming stranded in the white landscape which encompasses them. (*Existere* ran into the opposite problem, often grouping several poems too closely on a single page, thereby obscuring each poem's visual effect.)

Both *Ten Tandem* and *Yak* displayed a graceful balance between the title, body, and author of each piece. This point may appear trivial. But it is attention to detail which often indicates to a reader that the publisher is concerned about exhibiting a contributor's work in its best possible light. While judging a book by its cover is more than often misleading, sloppy layout makes a reader question the publisher's sincerity.

Power, as editor of his own Gesture Press, has had much experience in design and marketing. Redhill and Bourne, as first-time publishers, are to be commended for their artistic integrity in *Yak*.

Secord's addition of photographs in this year's *Existere* made the issue more visually appealing than some earlier ones, and the drawing by Claudio Iacoe is truly outstanding. The magazine's design, with pieces hugging the right margin of each page, worked well, especially for prose pieces. Designer Jean-Guy Runet took this concept a little too far, however, in pages with two columns of poetry by different authors. On page one, for example, two poems by Sheldon Inkol and M. Andrade overlap. As a result, Inkol's name has suffered a severed "I", while M. Andrade's poem ends up reading "Peter/waterproof/ Sheldon Inko Jesus/nail-proof/once."

Hopefully Runet will rectify this problem of overlapping in the magazine's next issue, slated for the first week of April (deadline for submissions: March 13). In addition, it would be much easier on the reader if the authors' names were printed only once, instead of up to three times per page.

Yak editors Lesley Bourne and Michael Redhill hold a stance diametrically opposed to that of *E.M.L.* editors. "We purposely stayed away from writing that was just going for effect," said Redhill. "We're looking for competent writing of any sort that is honest, intelligent, and polished."

"We want the magazine to reflect the real publishing world," Redhill noted. *Yak*'s seven member editorial board and its insistence on form letter rejection slips reflects this attempt to be "professional," or at least standardized.

Yet *Ten Tandem* editors Nicholas Power and Chris Warren hold a slightly different view of professional accountability, as they gave personal feedback to all writers who submitted work. "Why be impersonal?" Power said. "We're not McClelland & Stewart." Power added that it "was satisfying for us as editors to work directly with people, and was good for the writers too."

Ten Tandem—a pun on York's motto *ten-tanda via* (the way must be tried)—was initiated by Warren as a publication to "bridge the gap" between graduating student authors and the literary world outside of university. The book's full title, *Ten Tandem Via York*, suggests a group of York writers "making their own path" and collectively "trying the way," according to Power. All 10 of the writers in the book are either York graduates or students graduating this year.

Walter Secord, this year's *Existere* editor, said he worked closely with the Vanier College Publications Board and the Creative Writing Department. While he did not specify any par-



E.M.L. is a grab-bag of mediocre poetry (with some humorous and delightful exceptions), and tasteless jokes. Yet it is saved by a meaty proportion of bold satire, a rare commodity at York in these conservative times.

Its layout, spiked liberally with the heavy metal cartoons of professional animator Chris Labonte, is somewhat haphazard. But it matches the rag's mandate of not taking itself too seriously, and the reader too finds himself caught up in the joke.

A perfect example of the magazine's spontaneity can be found on page seven, where the reader is requested to write her/his own poem on the blank page, thereby becoming an instant contributor to *E.M.L.* It's a cheap trick, but in the *E.M.L.* scheme of things, it works.

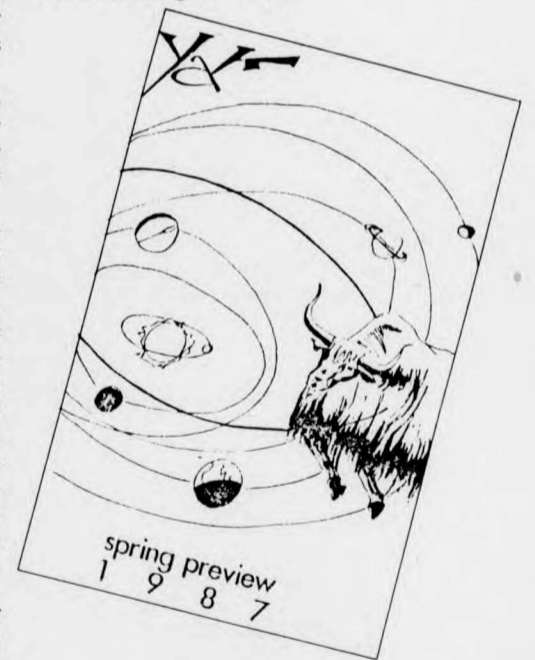
E.M.L. and *Ten Tandem* are the only two publications which carry price tags, of \$1.25 and \$3.00 respectively. (*Yak* charges only for back issues, which cost \$2.00 apiece.) There is a good reason the editors of *E.M.L.* and *Ten Tandem* are charging for their works; the budget for *E.M.L.*, which cost \$1.36 a copy, came entirely from the editors' own pockets, while *Ten Tandem* received only one third of its \$500 budget from York, through the York University Staff Association. The rest of *Ten Tandem*'s funds were derived from Gesture Press, and any profit from the book's sale will be funnelled back into the press.

Yak was funded by York's Creative Arts Board, the Fine Arts Festival committee, and the Dean of Fine Arts, Joyce Zemans. The magazine received a total of \$700, and spent only \$600 of that budget. The remaining \$100 will be used for the *Yak*'s next issue, expected by the end of March. The deadline for submissions is Friday, March 6.

Existere received its entire \$2,000 budget from the Vanier College Council. Secord estimates that he was "a bit under budget," but said that "the total cost is not officially in yet."

Copies of *Existere* are available from the Vanier College Council, and *Ten Tandem* is on sale at the York Bookstore. *Yak* and *E.M.L.* have both exhausted their print run.

Ten Tandem will be launched as part of the Winters College Reading Series this Tuesday (March 10) at 5:00 p.m. in the Winters Senior Common Room. Several of the contributors will be reading their work.



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Yak: 610 Vanier Residence or 257 Concord Ave., Toronto, Ont. M6H 2P4
E.M.L.: Room 1205 Vanier Residence

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