

## GUILTY OF CONTEMPT

by Frank McGinn

The first thing I disliked about the Norman Jewison film "And Justice For All" was the title. Cribbed from the American Pledge of Allegiance, its use in this context telegraphs both the intent and tone of the film. It will be a devastating attack on the American judicial system, and it will be ironic. (God, will it be ironic.) Which is all very well, possibly, but not likely. The choice of this particular phrase stinks of self-righteousness; here, it says, is a movie which is important. And it is not nearly as clever as somebody must have thought. Irony as a weapon should be supple and cutting, like piano wire; this awkward and lumpy satire has all the subtlety of a sledgehammer.

Subsequent events were to bear out my initial forebodings. "And Justice For All" is both arrogant and clumsy. It is also unscrupulous and disorderly. It does to the legal system what a bikini does to a fat lady - makes it look ridiculous. And its methods are just as unfair. Anybody can be made to look unattractive if they are dressed to highlight their bad points, and the same can be said of most professions. This movie decks out the judicial system with crazed and corrupt judges, scheming, ambitious lawyers and hapless, persecuted victims of a

cruelly indifferent court, then stands back and says look, what a mess. It's a mess alright, but who made it that way? If this movie were a case, it would be thrown out of court.

Al Pacino's role, the one dedicated, honest lawyer who cares about people, is similar to the character he played in "Serpico". Once again he is just a man of simple integrity looking for justice in a world where the term is a bad joke. And he brings much the same sensitivity and depth to the character of this incorruptible lawyer as he did to his incorruptible cop. Pacino is a vital and sympathetic screen presence and he seems incapable of striking the wrong note. He has, however, struck the same one twice now and it doesn't play at all well this time, mainly because of his backup, or lack of it. Frank Serpico was a real person and his story could be taken at face value. Doubtless distorted, as they always are in the movies, the facts were still mainly true. "And Justice For All", a string of legal nightmares that shouldn't happen to Kafka's Joseph P., seems based on nothing so much as extreme paranoid fantasy.

Serpico's ordeal, the endless appeals to higher authorities, the increasing hostility of his colleagues and his own personal fear, was bleak, simple and sad. Verified and

recognizable. By contrast, the problems this lawyer faces are right out of a comic book for masochistic liberals. He has one client who has

defend a bigoted judge against a particularly nasty charge of which the judge has complacently informed Pacino he is guilty. Not being an

murderer. But even then, it was a matter of bureaucratic incompetence, not the callous, official indifference pictured here.) E t tacked here, like a deck of cards stacked, with countless examples of minor miscarriages of justice, it is just too much of a bad thing.

Even if Pacino's problems did have some degree of verisimilitude, and they don't, the film would still be out of whack because it tries to be all things to all men. In addition to a wholesale condemnation of the judicial system, bitter irony, it wants to be light-hearted, warm and wonderful. The thematic burden is split equally between the three co-stars. Jack Warden is a crazy judge with a death wish, played for laughs. John Forsythe is a crazy judge who is also a bigot and a rapist, played for menace. And Lee Strasberg is Pacino's dotty grandfather, played for charm. These three actors are effective veterans and they render their roles well, but no one element jives with any other. The evil is omnipresent, the charm is incidental and the laughs are stuffed in anywhere at all, just to pass the time.

As a legal system unto myself, I object to this blatant attempt to cover all the bases. Objection sustained. And I find the makers of this movie guilty of extreme contempt of audience. Let them stand and await my next sentence.



been in jail for two years because his name and general description fit those of a wanted criminal. Another receives a jail sentence he can't handle because Pacino's friend is too careless to present the judge with all the facts. And finally he is forced to

authority on the legal scene of Baltimore, I am unable to assess the validity of these charges. (There was a case in the U.S. recently where a man was incarcerated for about a year because he shared the name and basic description of a known

## Bisset gives a new meaning to poetry reading

by Margot Griffiths

Poetry Readings are usually refined events, quiet gatherings of literary types who have come to receive some cultural uplifting. Canadian poet, Bill Bisset, gave a new meaning to such an occasion when he read a selection of his works last Wednesday in the Dunn Theatre.

A native of Halifax, Bisset and his verse have recently been the subject of considerable controversy. Although several Parliamentary figures have tried to cut his Canada Council support because they feel his poetry is pornographic and worthless, his readings continue to be popular and he is still supported by many well-known Canadian writers.

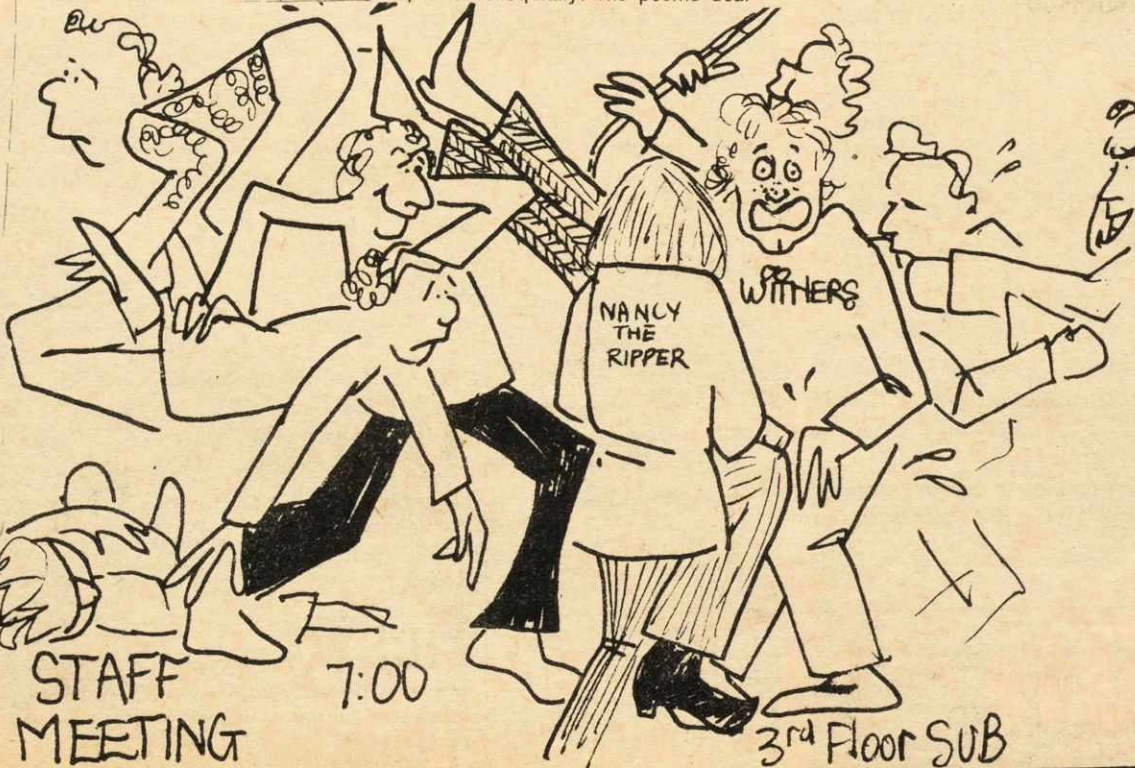
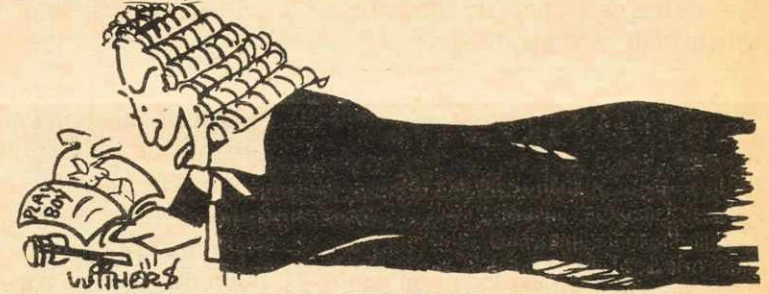
If the audience was expecting a typical reading, they were probably

shocked by the appearance of the poet-dressed in suede fringed jacket and hat complete with an Indian feather. Bisset began the evening with one of his more unusual poems, which was presented with a variety of chants, accompanied by dancing and the shaking of maracas. It quickly became apparent that this was no ordinary poet. His verse relies on sound, the rhythm and volume of the reader's voice, to convey images to the listener.

When he wasn't chanting like an Indian during a raindance, Bisset's verse was spoken in soft, conversational tones. When seen in their written form, the words appear phonetically, the way they really sound, and when Bisset reads, he speaks colloquially. His poems deal

with political, social, or moral issues, like Queen Elizabeth, or the RCMP. He relies on the power of understatement and direct yet simple speech to convey his messages. "They shine their searchlights on people embracing in parked cars and tell 'em to stay away from the trees."

The final selection made use of chanting again and this time the audience was asked to participate. Bisset's poetry is strange to some, with its primitive-like screams and unusual sounds but the message is there. Poetry, after all, is the music of literature and seeing Bisset dancing and smiling, while the audience clapped and chanted, one comes to realize the truth of this man's voice, when he said "All the people is one drum."



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