

York poets diverge in *Antifaces*

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Reportaje de los *Antifaces*, the title of Atkinson's poetry reading on January 21, seems in retrospect misconstrued. It was borrowed from the title of a poem by Rafael Barreto-Rivera which reads, in English, *Report from Antiface*. Margarita Feliciano, organizer of the reading, described "antiface" as having a double meaning in Spanish: "something that hides your face . . . and also something against your face . . ." The faces and antifaces revealed at the reading were those of York authors Claudio Duran, Rafael Barreto-Rivera, and Margarita Feliciano. Their "reports," however, differed greatly, both stylistically and contextually.

Rafael Barreto-Rivera

Claudio Duran



Margarita Feliciano

GARY BLAKELEY

These differences turned out to be the most positive aspect of the gathering.

The three poets are linguistically united by their fluency in Spanish, and, to a lesser extent, by their cultural heritages. Claudio Duran was born in Chile and came to Canada over 10 years ago as a refugee. He chose to read his work in Spanish, with Barreto-Rivera and Feliciano acting as translators.

Feliciano is no stranger to the challenge of translation. A multilingual writer, she is Italian born yet has also lived in Argentina, the United States, and Canada. Barreto-Rivera grew up in Puerto Rico, but writes primarily in English (although his phonetic use of sound often defies or at least questions the concept of 'language' itself). He is perhaps best known as one of the founding members of The Four Horsemen ensemble in Toronto.

It seemed fitting for Duran to open the reading; his poetry is spurred by a sense of intimacy which effectively drew the large group of listeners into attentive ease. He preceded each poem with often humorous anecdotes in the soft, fluid voice of a storyteller. When describing his first impressions of York, for example, Duran humbly declared, "I couldn't believe I had an office . . ."

Duran has both strong physical and vocal presence while reading. He stands relaxed almost amidst the audience, forfeiting the podium and using much eye contact. His voice is lyrical, yet he takes care to sound out vowels, fully affording them a broad emotive range.

The topics of Duran's poems are rooted in personal experience, yet he expands their scope by using imaginative metaphors. "Cold Fluid" for example compares the alienation one feels in a stark office with the experience of being "the last client at a restaurant." In another poem, "Triptych," Duran draws a strong simile between the "inextorable rules of grammar" and the migratory flight of birds. Identity and alienation through language seems to be an important issue for Duran. "A long and wooden Pentagram" points to the case; it is a mantra based on "these names . . . calling me endlessly by my name . . ."

While it was enjoyable to hear Duran read in Spanish, the translations of his poems often broke the continuity of his lyricism

announced: "Next . . . just to demonstrate I'm a rational human being . . ." and proceeded to read a 28 page lyrical yet disarmingly succinct poem, "Jersey Shore Album." The following passage illustrates how Barreto-Rivera can twist the colloquial into a linguistic double-take:

Five-foot-two, or three,
depending
on your footwear. Green
eyes. Short auburn hair,
capable of inspiring
a little panegyric
of its own. Neither major
nor minor,
you're essential.

Barreto-Rivera is both a language economist and connoisseur, capable of serving a hearty dish of literary fiber. If you're wondering now what all this has to do with *Reportaje de los Antifaces*, (as many people at the reading were probably wondering after Barreto-Rivera's poems), take heart: Margarita Feliciano was next to read and to finally explain the term "antiface."

Wearing a bright red dress and a red mask, Feliciano described her writing as attempting to address "the problem of antiface and Margarita . . . which is which?" She considers herself to be a writer faced with dual heritage and identity, and chose to read two poems in Spanish and the



rest in English. After her third poem, she took off her mask.

It is unfortunate that *Reportaje de los Antifaces* tumbled into such a poetically low pitch. The evening was redeemed, however, by the sustained diversity of the three readers. Feliciano must be credited for continually drawing Spanish performers to the York forum, as she has successfully done for many years. *Reportaje de los Antifaces* served as another example of the cultural and literary diversity fostered and shared at York.

York literary mag mixes the good with the bland in promising issue

By STUART ROSS

existere, Vol. 6, No. 1
Publishing Editor: C.J. Keep
Vanier College, 1986

It was two weeks ago. The reading by contributors to the new *existere* was running overtime and the door to Winters Senior Common Room kept bursting open as attenders of the next scheduled event peered in. Reading series organizer Chris Keep went up to the podium and announced, "Well, I guess this is it; the real world is intruding on us poets."

Literary magazines are generally quiet little ineffectual things that the 'real world' never gets to see. Why would they want to? The Winters Reading Series is tucked away where nobody could possibly stumble upon it, and publicity is limited to a few quiet posters posted a few days before the event. It's almost as if the literary community didn't want to break through its shell, and wanted, instead, to produce safe little publications that wouldn't harm anyone.

Well, the new *existere* is out, and it seems to have made a little progress since its last few predecessors, which seemed to suffer from that ever-present wish for mediocrity. The new issue isn't exactly a great triumph—it doesn't contain much that could be called excellent and it's wildly uneven—but it has enough high points to suggest that there's a good deal of potential among many of York's 'student authors.'

The mag begins with two poems by Barry Mandelker, who last year won the President's Prize for Poetry with "francis of a tea tea." This poem appears here along with Mandelker's "Brueghel's Ghazal," and they both sound like they really mean something. But, on closer examination, the vacuously-titled "francis" proves awkward and confused, with barely a line of power or poetry. The placement of the lines on the page (at various degrees of indentation) seems an arbitrary affectation. "Brueghel's Ghazal" shows more promise, but Mandelker is too allusive, too consciously striving for Meaning.

Marlene Goldman seems to have

the opposite problem: her poetry is too obvious. "Why We Never Got Married," a poem about religious incompatibility, though framed by a nice set of images, lacks subtlety and original touches. The best of Goldman's three poems, "Little Man Suite #1," is her most enigmatic: "This man's chest is a window, / inside/tiny, shimmering fish/at every angle/frozen."

The real low-point of this *existere* is courtesy of one of its editors, Peter Alexander. "Priorities" is a smug, adolescent poem about flatulence: "I doubt if I will ever fart; / I'm far too busy making art," it begins, and proceeds to get worse. Alexander is, apparently, the chief editor of the

existere
the literary anthology of vanier college



next issue: one shudders at the thought.

One poet showing great promise here is Steve Reinke. His "On Certain Fishes" is a fairly strong, Dewdney-esque list-poem, and along with "Boys Getting Serious (Ejaculation)," it demonstrates originality and wit. One gets the feeling that Reinke's going through a valuable stage of sorting out influences, and experimenting with forms and tone.

There are some other good poems in this issue (Laura Lush's "Side Glance," and Meredith Dunsmuir's "Excerpt from: 'An Activist's Diary'") but there's also the usual bunch of bland, pretentious and/or ephemeral pieces.

existere, this time around, is

strong on visuals: from Anita Boldt's striking and well-placed cover photo to Joanne Clark's great photographs of a derelict bingo temple and the entrance to the Honeymoon City Motel. There are also a couple of good collages by Robin, and a sloppy but challenging visual 'poem' by Gary Barwin. This latter is basically a map along whose paths exists a cryptic story, the narrative of which changes with changes of direction: "GRNDFTHR FRGED CSTL TNS." Barwin's piece is a nice lesson in the difference between experimentation and pretention.

The real strengths in this *existere* lie in its fiction. Paul Pivato's "The Wine Cellar" was the President's Prize Winner for fiction last year, and it seems partially deserving. The story, like most of the fiction here, is in need of some stylistic clean-up, and what little dialogue there is lacks believability. But Pivato's story of a (presumably) sexually abused little girl locked up in a wine cellar by her grandfather contains strong descriptive passages, and some real, emotionally-charged moments that never become over-stated. Perhaps the main fault with Pivato's story is its unrelenting misery, devoid of any hope for the physically and mentally-brutalized child.

Paulette Peirol's "Reprieve: Repose" also has the makings of a fine piece of fiction. It's an obsessive work about a deteriorating relationship and the possibilities of "bathroom existence." Peirol's storytelling is compelling, except for the few times she slips into a self-conscious, 'arty' style. When she avoids this and some irritating wordplay, her wit and skill come through.

"Tea," by Joanne Clark, is a well-polished piece of condensed fiction. The story and ideas move quickly, and the narrative is fascinatingly enigmatic. The characters are fresh and real, and Clark launches quickly into her story: "Dot's lover called from Wasaga Beach full up with beer and longing and asked Dot to come and get him. Dot cried as she packed some things into a bag and then she called Wyetta to come and take care of the apartment and feed the cats." What has become gimmickry in Clark's poetry works well for her fiction.

The future of *existere* doesn't bode well in Peter Alexander's hands. In his letter to *Excalibur* (6 January, 1986), Alexander lamented about the poor reputation of campus literary publications: ". . . these publications are either few and far between . . . or are embarrassingly pretentious. In turn, campus editors are forced to print whatever they can get whenever they can get it." The editors aren't forced to print anything. One shouldn't publish just for the sake of publishing. In fact, if the present editors of *existere* had made the anthology half its size, and booted out the lousy and the bland, it would have been a fairly strong issue.

UNIQUE... ANY WAY YOU SERVE IT.