PRRB the Pacific Rim Review of Books

Issue Three, Spring 2006 Publication Mail Agreement Number 4123503 $4.00 ISSN 1715-3700

SPECIAL EDITION

No fun: Two Innocents in the coffee shop, Iggy Pop and Tom Waits.

CUBA, SI!

DAVID MCFADDEN DOES CUBA

TWO VIEWS OF ALAN TWIGG'S ABORIGINALITY

A PRRB SYMPOSIUM

KRISTINE ARCHIE AND LAURA CRANMER

BRUCE SERAFIN CONSIDERS STAN PERSKY'S ABC'S

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER... READING TOM WAITS

JOSEPH BLAKE ON MUSIC'S POET MAUDIT

WHERE TO BEGIN? REMEMBERING CID CORMAN

GREGORY DUNNE

DIPLOMAT REG LITTLE EXAMINES THE SECRET WORLD OF U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

REX WEYLER GETS SERIOUS ABOUT HISTORY

CANADA'S PUBLISHING INDUSTRY GIVES JOHN MOORE NIGHTMARES

REXROTH'S CENTURY: MIKE DOYLE

PAM MADOFF LOOKS AT ARCHITECTURE

PRRB

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Editor Trevor Carolan at the Malcolm Lowry Memorial, Cates Park, North Vancouver, B.C.
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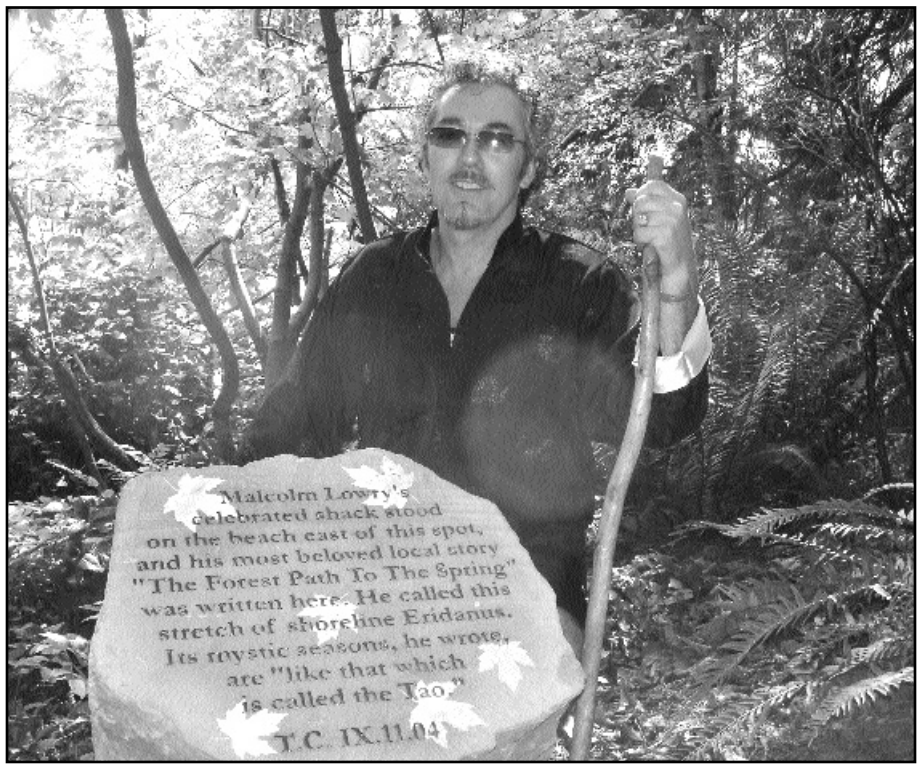
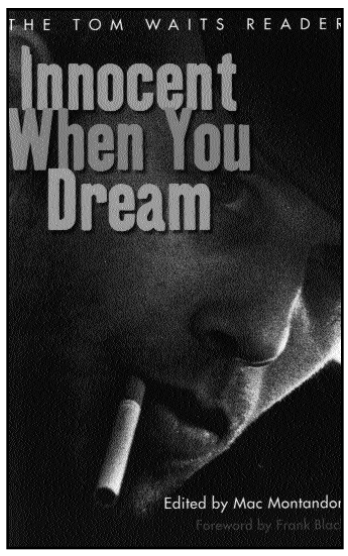


CONTENTS

Beautiful Dreamer: Reading Tom Waits

Joseph Blake

Innocent When You Dream: The Tom Waits Reader
Edited by Mac Montandon. Thunder's Mouth. 394 p.



Like Tom Waits, I lived in San Diego as a boy, worked in downtown L.A. near the Nickel, (Fifth and Main), moved north to raise a family. I've been to the clubs where he broke into the music business and the wine country where he now hides out. I haven't bought all of his records, but I've been a fan of his music since the early 1970s. I love the sound of an ugly beauty, and Waits' ground-glass-gargled vocals are about as ugly a beauty as you'll ever find.

Waits doesn't tour often, but I've seen him perform a couple of times, most memorably in the 1980s at UVic's 1000+seat auditorium in a show opened by Leon Redbone. I'd scalped an extra ticket from a walking pharmacy from Prince George who went through his stock throughout the show while pausing only briefly to offer his overflow to nearby audience members. It was a strange show.


Tom Waits at the mike.

Innocent When You Dream brings Waits to life on the page. Divided into three sections representing the musician's career path from romantic bohemian to studio noise experimentalist, to the strange synthesis of these elements that Waits has conjured-up in the last decade from his northern California, rural retreat, *Innocent When You Dream* is a book for music fans and idealists.

For more than 30 years and a recording career spanning over 20 records, Waits has carved an honest portrait of the world around him and his place in that world. This collection of magazine profiles, record reviews, press releases, interviews and transcriptions work-up a collage-like portrait of the musician and his life. The editor thoughtfully includes a couple of Charles Bukowski's poems to help complete the picture.

The first section of the book focuses on Waits' background and emergence on the L.A. music scene in the 1970s. It's a little flabby from needless repetition of one-liners (as great as Waits' con sounds.) and the cartoonish, drunken image projected onto the musician by too many fawning, rock journalists from *Creem, ZigZag, Newsweek, The New Yorker,* et al. One classic case, David McGee's 1977 piece in *Rolling Stone,* calls his story *Smellin Like a Brewery, Looking Like a Tramp.*

Despite that title, McGee catches most of the essential biographical info behind Waits' youthful interest in Kerouac's crew and the songwriting pantheon of Irving Berlin, Johnny Mercer, and Stephen Foster. Throughout these early pieces about Waits, references rain down on the page. It's a deluge. Armstrong, Redd Foxx, Wilson Pickett, Wally Cox, Larry McMurtry, Gershwin, Stravinsky, Dizzy Gillespie, Rodney Dangerfield, John Hurt…on and on it goes. It's oppressive.

Todd Everett's story from a 1975 *New Music Express* digs a little deeper into Waits' aspirations as a writer. After citing Corso, Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Lord Buckley, Ken Nordine, Ray Charles, Mose Allison, James Brown, and most importantly, Kerouac's recorded collaborations with Steve Allen as influences, Waits adds, "Poetry is a very dangerous word. It's very misused. Most people, when they hear the word 'poetry' think of being chained to a school desk memorizing 'Ode on a Grecian Urn". When somebody says that they're going to read me a poem, I can think of any number of things that I'd rather be doing. I don't like the stigma that comes with being called a poet – So I call what I'm doing an improvisational adventure or an inebriational travelogue, and all of a sudden it takes on a whole new form and meaning."

Although the Eagles had a hit with Waits' *Ol' 55,* Rod Stewart topped the charts with Tom's *Downtown Train*, and Bruce Springsteen made Wait's *Jersey Girl* one of his arena anthems, Waits was stuck with a caricature (albeit purposeful) of himself on-stage. Irony hit a home run in 1990 when Waits won a $2.6 million judgment against Frito-Lay for its unauthorized use of his music in a 1988 Dorito commercial. The impersonator used in the commercial sided with Waits. The musician's battle with commercialism in the music business paid off. This September, Waits filed another suit against a unit of General Motors and a German advertising agency for using a soundalike in a series of European ads.


Tom Waits in an innocent moment

In a statement, Waits said: "Apparently the highest compliment our culture grants artists nowadays is to be in an ad – ideally naked and purring on the hood of a new car. I have adamantly and repeatedly refused this dubious honour."

Waits' legal victories haven't changed his career course much. By the time he won his $2.6 million judgment, he'd already starred in Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law* with John Lurie and Roberto Benigni and *Ironwood* with Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep (Not to mention his 1978 appearance in *Paradise Alley* with Sylvester Stallone.)

More significantly, Waits had married Kathleen Brennan and released a trilogy of noisy, experimental, daring soundscapes that carved even deeper into his psyche. (*Swordfishtrombones, Rain Dogs, Frank's Wild Years.*) With his muse and co-writer wife riding shotgun, Waits broke out of his romantic wino narratives and began breaking it up in the studio while unleashing an array of otherworldly, Harry Partch-inspired instruments.

Innocent When You Sleep's second section documents journalistic attempts to define and describe these assaultative, surrealistic sound poems. They produce some very ripe, but poetic journalism. Capturing Waits' *film noir* narratives always eluded the writers. Now, his music provided the highwire without a net for his journalistic pursuers. Interviews by Elvis Costello and Jim Jarmusch are the most insightful and interesting offerings from a collection of very fine stories.

Waits' recorded work gains even more depth and so does the journalism covering the artist's musical maturation when Tom and the family (Brennan and three kids) move to the country. Even the stories' titles are inspired. *Sewers of Budapest* in the 1999 *Village Voice, The Man Who Howled Wolf* from a 2004 *Magnet, Play It Like Your Hair's On Fire* from a 2000 *GQ.*

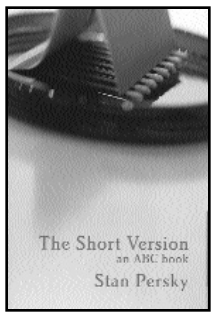
Elizabeth Gilbert's *Play It Like Your Hair's On Fire* describes Waits' struggle with noise and melodic beauty as he reached hi artistic zenith on the simultaneously released *Alice* and *Blood Money*, a pair of song cycles Waits wrote for theatre-great

(*continued on Page 7)*

Persky's ABC's

Bruce Serafin

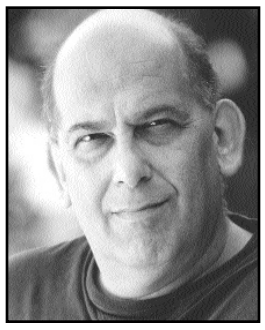
The Short Version:
An A.B.C. Book by Stan Persky.
(New Star Books: 2005)



A generalization first. Canada produces formally feeble fiction. It produces formally feeble writing. Rarely do we experiment with fictional and documentary forms. We rarely try new things, new ways of envisioning the world.

The result for me (and maybe you) is I don't read Canadian writers. Why should I? They bore me.

But I do read Stan Persky. Starting with his excellent *Buddy's: Meditations on Desire* and continuing through *Autobiography of a Tattoo* and now *The Short Version: An ABC Book*, Persky has produced a series of books I've liked from beginning to end. These books have a distinctive look. When you flip through them you see that some pages have just a couple of sentences on them with a title at the top of the page; some have a paragraph or two, again with a title; and some have a narrative which extends for the full page and continues on. Each book in short is made up of discontinuous scenes; together they give a lively sense of what Persky thinks and who he is — one of the things I most look for in a writer.



Are they memoirs, then? Yes and no. Yes, Persky does write autobiography. But no, he doesn't write, "This happened, then this happened..." Instead he cuts up his prose. He places pieces of memory together side by side. He varies the nature of his texts — now a meditation, now a story.

All this I like. I like the way Persky's books move — the continual surprises, the white space around the pieces of text. I like the way things add up as you read. I like the gossip. I like how Persky combines a tender tone with formal audacity. *Buddy's* was his tightest, juiciest book; *The Short Version* is his loosest and most digressive, comprising a series of shorter or longer essays presented in alphabetical order: baldness, Bangkok, Lawrence Bantleman, bar mitzvah... The arbitrariness of this structure could have ruined the book. But Persky has become so skilled in producing discontinuous prose that he manages to unify *The Short Version* with his style: faintly elegaic; clear; warm; careful.

Persky teaches philosophy at Capilano College. He writes about philosophers and being a teacher. He likes to travel, and he writes about the places he travels to. He loves books and he has many friends. Let me mention that he's gay. In this book, unlike his earlier ones, that fact doesn't determine what he writes about; but I do think it affects his tone. Persky is an older man who lives alone. He knows a lot of people. Some are famous, some obscure. He writes about them all with tenderness, and I like every one of his book's well—judged appreciations.

Consider Persky on the poet Robin Blaser in the early 1960s, a once-gawky youth now turned strikingly handsome: "There was a slightly fey edge to him, but he was unlike full-fledged homosexual queens I'd met who enacted the wounded bitterness found in much of camp behavior. Rather, Blaser's manner derived from an older connection to the world of faerie, as he called it in a subsequent poem he'd written that played on Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*." Here you see the beginning of the cultivated, self-cherishing, white-haired aristocrat who would infatuate generations of students up at SFU.

And listen to Persky on George Bowering: "The Bowering who's a third-person character in Bowering's novel about George Vancouver — a lonely writer in the dismal drizzle of a far-away city — is, in some ways, more present to me than the Bowering I've known in a casual friendship over some 35 years. The Bowering I know is tall, has a mustache, and a craggy face. He's, to my mind, quite shy — what hells reside behind the shyness I don't know." I've met this Bowering; and watching him, his jokiness, I've sometimes wondered, like Persky, what baleful thing I'd just seen.

Again and again reading *The Short Version* I came across something interesting. Often it was brief, like this bit about books: "At whatever writing desk I sit — in Vancouver, Berlin, a hotel room... — I stack up my books, however few or many, in piles, rather than as they're laid out horizontally on book shelves. Then

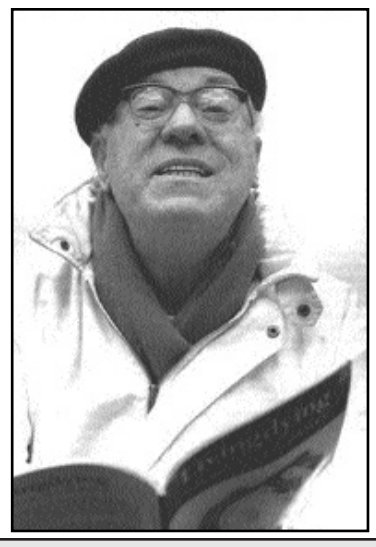
(*continued on Page 10)*

WHERE TO BEGIN: *Remembering Cid Corman*

CID CORMAN & THE POETICS OF TRANSLATION

Gregory Dunne

Part I. in memoriam

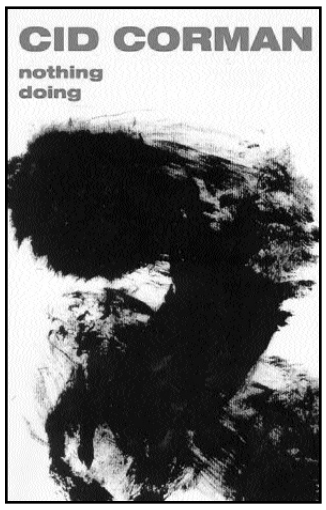


Cid Corman was an American poet, a translator, an essayist, and an editor. He founded the seminal literary magazine *Origin*, which would introduced its readers to some of the most vital poetry written at the time in North America and beyond, a magazine that would offer an alternative forum by which poetry could be shared, an alternative to the larger magazine and the university-associated magazines then seemed to dismiss much of the newer, more unconventional poetry being written at the time. It is generally, well known now, for example, that poets such as Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Chares Olson, Gary Snyder, Lorine Neidecker, William Bronk, and many other excellent less conventional writers saw some of their earliest work published in *Origin*.

> *Poetry is the most important thing that human beings can be aware of. Poetry is life itself, a central thing. It is the most important element in the world, human world and even beyond the human world because it gives us respect for everything else. It is taking every thing into account and bringing it to point. . .*
>
> Cid Corman

Cid was my friend of fifteen years. On March 12th, 2004, he passed away in Kyoto after battling the debilitating affects of a heart attack suffered in January. For several months, many of us held our breath and hoped for recovery. There were moments when it seemed Cid might pull through. He would drift in and out of consciousness and communicate in limited ways. Chuck Sandy, a good friend of Cid's and of Shizumi's, Cid's wife, would travel down from Nagoya, to be at Cid's side throughout much of his hospitalization. He would send messages around the world via e-mail to concerned friends and relatives. I remember one such:

Cid was moved from that Critical Care Unit room to a more regular room yesterday, and now can have visitors with no break in-between and no limit to time spent. That is a very good thing as what I feel he needs now is stimulation. He got a lot of that this past weekend and there was the feeling at least that Cid knew it was a big day. Shizumi had done a huge calligraphy of one of his poems for him for their anniversary and had brought in a yellow rose. These were on the glass wall on his right and as I came in he was looking at them. I brought the rose over, close enough for him to smell it, and he did. A very good sign.



Cid was a gentle soul and a man who treated his wife with unusual tenderness, respect, and love. As a couple, they were known in their neighborhood for walking hand in hand together on frequent strolls throughout the neighborhood, and often to the famed Ninnanji Temple close by. They had lived in this neighborhood for over forty years. Japanese couples seldom walk hand-in-hand, especially older couples as it is not the custom of the Japanese to do so.

In the days following Cid's passing, I visited restaurants and shops in the company of Shizumi and Chuck and was struck by the outpouring of emotion I found neighborhood people exhibiting when they were told of Cid's passing. I am talking about post office clerks, waiters and waitresses, cooks, and small shop owners. In many instances, I saw tears welling up in their eyes as Shizumi passed on the news. In the case of one waitress at the Big Boy hamburger restaurant, a frequent stop for Cid and Shizumi, the waitress was so overcome with tears she had to leave our table before taking our order and when I saw her a half hour later she was still crying by the water dispensing machine near the back of the restaurant.

What was all this outpouring of emotion about, I wondered as Cid was not someone who visited and talked with people much? He simply went about his daily rounds as many of us do and got the job done. In his case however, it was different, in so far as he could not speak the native language of the people. He couldn't speak Japanese. How did he communicate? How did he touch these people's lives? Chuck thought it was his benevolent nature. Simply, the way he smiled at people, accepted them, respected them and loved them. It was in that sense a felt thing. Japanese people are generally very reserved in showing emotions publicly, even at times like this. Clearly, there was something to what Chuck said. Cid touched these people with his life as they in turn no doubt touched him. He had communicated with them in a meaningful way despite the obstacles. He had become family and friend, more than neighbor. The local people respected him; loved him.

Cid was a man who, the day before going into the hospital for his long delayed check-up, would go out and spend some of his near non-existent income on a large bag of dog biscuits for the old dog that lived next door and which greeted him each day that he stepped out for a walk. Cid did this because he knew he might be away awhile. He stacked the boxes of biscuits in the entrance way of his home so that Shizumi could step out the door and feed the dog in his absence. If he knew you were visiting with a small child, he would go out and buy gifts for the child. And when the child arrived, he'd likely spend more time talking with the child and playing with her than he'd spend talking with you. Cid exuded a warmth to all, a generosity to all. He respected people for who they were, whether they were child, adult, famous writer, or aspiring writer. He treated all the same. He treated himself the same. He never put himself above others.

There was something profoundly humble, yet wise about Cid Corman. What Robert Creeley said of the late British poet Basil Bunting could equally be said of Cid: "if you start listening to what he's actually talking of and about and to what purpose, he's an absolutely extraordinary man. I think he's lived the human life as successfully as any man I've met." Here, is something Cid said to me that I still find myself listening to:

Life is the music — Greg — and your life your music. No one can take it from you — or give it to you (beyond those who did) — but you may need time to hear it or let it come through. It happens when you are moved beyond yourself into the open. It requires an honesty with oneself that is always rare — and often when you think you ARE being honest — you are deceiving (kidding) yourself most. It needs a terrible ruthlessness.

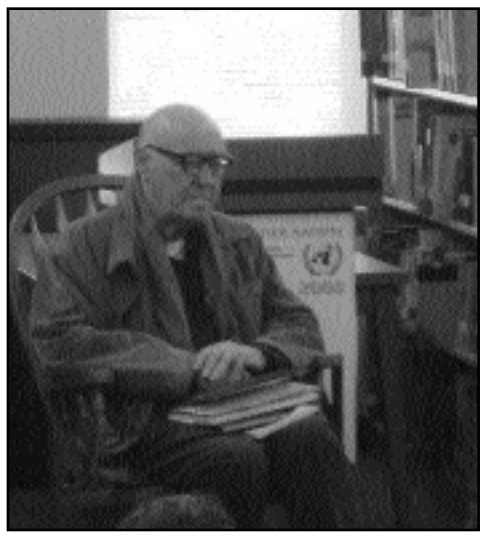
It isn't a matter of sounding good but of being good - living each word in its fullness as they OCCUR. Not to get ahead of yourself, but not to fall behind either. It WILL come, if you have the staying power. And even if you fail — it may still feed richly into your life.

Ego — despite all the accent put upon it – isn't the issue. But how to share life with others and in a way that makes it even yet (in the face of what we all face) possible. Given what it is — for any of us — there's nothing to get hoity-toity about.

We're all small potatoes — Novelists and Presidents, Kings/Queens and Champions.

(*continued on Page 6)*

On the first anniversary of his death, friends of Cid Corman's put together the following linked Renga. Shizumi Corman wrote the second stanza. The eleventh stanza is a poem of Cid's:



'SLEETY SNOW', RENGA FOR CID, CID—KI, 12 March 2005, Kyoto

Talking of those absent
a sudden downfall
of sleety snow

The memory of us walking
hand in hand

Facing the nothingness
which direction to go?
sunlight on the cold air

Green leaves tremble
with a hidden bird's cry

At the waterfall shrine
flowers have been offered
beneath folded rocks

One wet kiss
embracing all of this

A hint or tint of
music as if the silence
were being turned on

Rain wakes me during the night
the color of dream

Removing
the toy airplane
from my sleeping son's hand

White moth
lightning strikes the flagpole

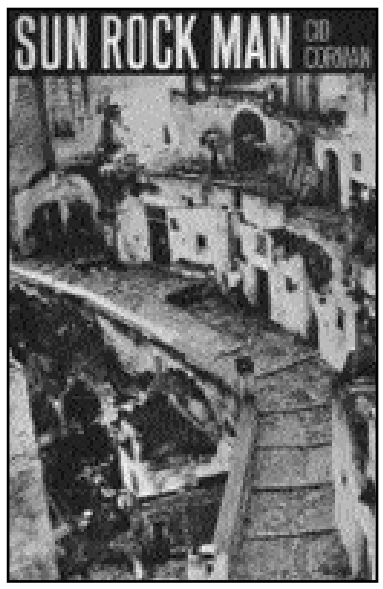
In kimono,
whacking the shit out of
her airing futon

The kids tell me the way
via the ice cream kiosk

Catching snow
flakes on my glove
has been enough

First breeze of spring
and the swallows' turning wings

Whoosh
down down down we go
into the flower's throat



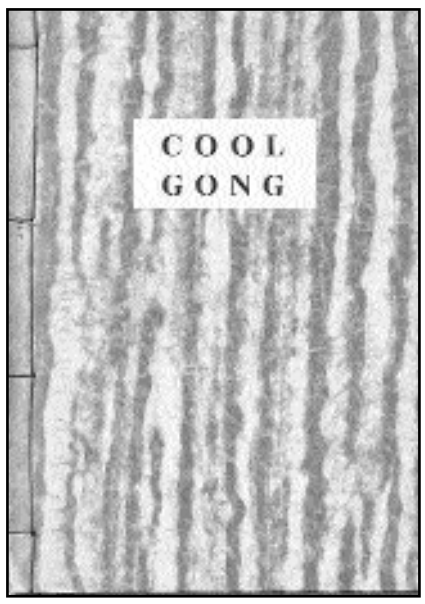
Underground parking
no space for the moon

So much yet to discuss
those 20-odd crows
sitting on a dusk-hued roof

Color above the shadow
spring twilight

Early plum blossoms
yet nothing as sweet
without your say so

The language you gave us
read, heard, received



Cid had been having health problems for some time. Nothing very major — small persistent problems like finding himself overly-winded from walking to the nearby bus- stop. His doctors advised him to come into the hospital for a check-up. They wanted him to stay overnight for tests. Stubborn to the end, Cid refused to go into the hospital for about as long as anyone could. On the very day that he was going to check himself in to the hospital, he collapsed in the hallway of his home after having finished off some his morning's writing.

In his large black leather duffle bag that day, he had carefully packed the two-volume collection of William Carlos Williams' poetry. Nearly every page had been marked with small pieces of paper that hung out along the edges — bookmarks with hand written notes scribbled over them. Cid was still reading, enjoying, and studying WCW all these years later. Sitting in Cid's living room with Shizumi and Chuck, going through the books and getting things ready for the estate administrator, and lifting those volumes from the overnight bag, now brought home from the hospital a few days after the funeral, I thought it fitting that Cid would take these volumes with him. In many ways, WCW was the beginning for Cid, the beginning of his life as a poet fully committed. Cid had come full circle, and perhaps, in a sense, I had too. Here I was in the living room of a older poet who meant a great deal to me, a poet who opened his home to me and showed me a way in to poetry. And here I was, holding in my hands the texts of Cid's late master. I realized that Williams had made it possible for me to be here at Cid's home — that it was the example that Williams set many years earlier when he invited Cid into his home that had made a lasting impression upon Cid. At that time, their first meeting, Williams sat and read "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" in draft to the very young Cid Corman. He listened to Cid and spoke many hours to him and later corresponded actively with him.

Cid tells the story of Denise Levertov waiting out in the car while he visited with Williams. She was afraid to come in and visit with the great poet. Williams would have none of it, he went out to the car and encourage Denise in. It was this generous hospitality of Williams' that Cid admired and would emulate for the rest of his life, making him an inveterate letter-writer, writing thousands and thousands of letters, actively working to connect people sharing interests in any way that he could. In speaking with me of this influence of Williams upon him, he put it this way: "In the early 50's when WCW and Floss took me into their house like one of their sons — I learned decisively to want to share such cordiality in my own life — to the extent I could. To share life is what life is all about."

Cid was one of those rare people who was wholly committed to one thing in his life. For him, it was poetry, straight and simple. Although he tried stints as a teacher and as a small business owner with his cake and ice cream shop in Kyoto, he never left poetry. This commitment meant real work and effort over a sustained period of time. As he tells the story, "The first poem came on 21 Dec. ,1941 and I've worked every day since, dedicated to poetry. And remain so." Anyone who knew Cid, knew that this was not an exaggeration. Even when ill, Cid wrote. That means that Cid wrote everyday for something like 63 years. I like very much what Robert Creeley had to say in relation to this dedication of Cid's, this whole-hearted commitment: "Cid Corman's steadfastness as a poet is as much a benchmark as his long practiced skills. His authority has been earned absolutely."

(*continued on Page 7)*

CORMAN (*continued from Page 6*)

Cid's method, at least in his later years when I knew him, was to write from around 8 in the morning until about 1 in the afternoon. If you wanted to visit with him, you had to come in the afternoon. If you came by, you could look forward to many hours of talk and instruction, direct and indirect. His poetic output was vast, more than one hundred books published — most of them coming from small presses. His life's work, his *summa poetica*, *Of*, goes five volumes and includes 3750 poems — the largest book of poems ever by one author. It is a book that "that draws from all" as Cid would say. In part, this means that it drew from all periods in his own life but it also means very much that it draws from: "all cultures, and all times from the earliest literature that we have, and even discussion of prehistory and so forth up to today as it is."

Cid was not only a prolific poet, but indeed a highly accomplished one, working language with an exacting eye and ear. It would be difficult to find any writer up to his accomplishment in getting our language to simply come alive with such precision and economy in all of its mysterious beauty — like the sphinx in the Egyptian desert. The poem is there before us, clear and direct and what it speaks to, in addition to the inexhaustible richness of the language, is how poetry can once again make a community for ourselves to share.

Beyond all critique

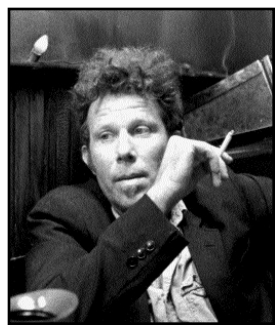
and all judgment,
I have to care

for one, anyone

who has the nerve
to believe in poetry

This is the first part of a memoir of Cid Corman. Gregory Dunne is a scholar living in Japan. He was a friend of Cid Corman's.

WAITS (*continued from Page 3*)



Robert Wilson's stage. Released in 2002, they showcase what Gilbert calls "All that Tom Waits is capable of. All the beauty and all the perversity. All the talent and all the discord. All that he wants to honor and all that he wants to dismantle. All of it gorgeous, all of it transporting."

"So gorgeously transporting," Gilbert continues, "that when you listen to these songs, you will feel as if somebody has blindfolded you, hypnotized you, given you opium, taken away your bearings and now is leading you backward on a carousel of your past lives, asking you to touch all the dusty wooden animals of your old fears and lost loves, asking you to recognize them with only your hands."

By the time I had read Keith Phipps' 2000 interview in *The Onion* and *Proust Questionaire* in the 2004 *Vanity Fair* (Where Waits lists his favorite writers as Rod Serling, Breece D'J Pancake, Charles Bukowski, Woody Guthrie, Bill Hicks, Fellini, Frank Stanford, Willie Dixon, Bob Dylan, O. Henry), I couldn't wait to get to a record store and start buying my way through Waits' discography. Lucky for me, Montandon clips another Bukowski poem as a coda to the tail of section three. (*Nirvana* from *The Last Night of the Earth Poems).*

After reading that, I closed *Innocent When You Dream*, closed my eyes, and imagined the young man pretending to sleep, "listening to the sound of the engine, listening to the sound of the tires in the snow." When I finally woke up, my teenaged daughter was playing her copy of Waits' *Blue Valentine.* When it reached the end of the last track, I hit the play button again. *Innocent When You Dream* also helped me remember that Tom Wait's music gets better with repeated listening. Highly recommended.

Joseph Blake writes on jazz from Victoria, B.C..

Writing History

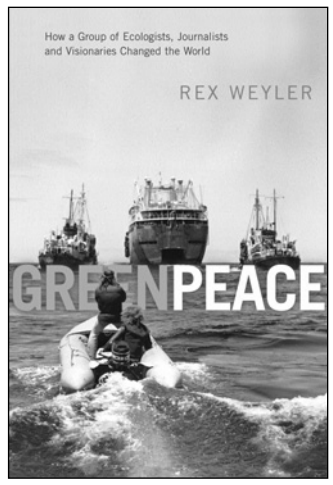
Rex Weyler

On April 16, 1968, communications theorist Marshall McLuhan composed a letter from his study in Bronxville, New York, to the new leader of the Canadian Liberal Party, Pierre Trudeau. He wrote from the height of renown, occupying the Albert Schweitzer Chair for Humanities at Fordham University after *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* had redefined the power of media. Trudeau remained four days shy of becoming the Prime Minister of Canada.

McLuhan wrote about the specialization and mechanization of print cultures and the emerging simultaneity and coexistence of electronic culture. He claimed Canada's status as a "backwater" presented an historical advantage, allowing the flexibility to embrace a rapidly shifting worldview. Conversely, he pointed out, "The men of the press," and they were typically men in those days, "can work only with people who have fixed points of view."

Culturally bound errors haunt written history, biases repeated by later scholars, and taught to wide-eyed students. Shaking loose from status quo points of view – one's own and those of other observers – remains the challenge to writing good history. "A fish," says Einstein, "is the last one to discover water." We must leave the pond to write about it, but to achieve that we must evolve legs and lose the gills.

"Our world," wrote McLuhan, the media scholar, to the young politician in 1968, "substitutes mosaics for points of view and probes for targets."



No logic

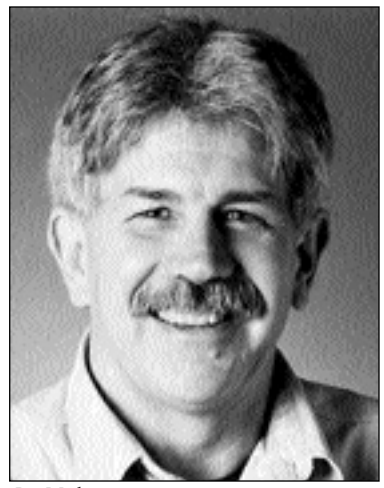
Russian folk wisdom tells us, "No one lies like an eye witness." The closer one stands to the swirl of events, the more influenced by self-serving or group-serving mythologies. As with quantum physics, we disturb the world we're attempting to witness, it disturbs us, and objectivity merges with subjectivity. We live in a world of spin, political, personal, and cultural. Journalists, who allegedly write the first draft of history, can turn meek in the face of a publisher's paradigm, and we leave it to artists and criminals to rock the boat and bust the myopic culture.

To write history is to observe fleeting, complex, and often contradictory causes and effects. History offers no grand logic, but rather small, competing logics, which fall apart and go extinct like species. Entropy never sleeps, imperialism makes the empire poor, and the rigid crack. In politics, we treat conservatives and liberals as mutually exclusive, but Gregory Bateson points out that nature is simultaneously conservative and creative, and for good reason.

Most historians – those who write school textbooks, for example – have a culture to endorse. Thus in the west, students grow up believing natural philosophy started in Greece, Columbus discovered America, and that slavery was abolished in the 19th century. They don't learn that invading Europeans butchered some 50-million indigenous people on this continent. In our newspapers, we read about some spoiled heiress' new perfume fragrance, but we don't read that 24,000 people starve each day from malnutrition. Historians impose logic on history as often as they actually discover it. Dark Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment. Dickens got much closer to the truth with "the age of wisdom… age of foolishness."

Cyrus in cyberspace

Humanity's first information explosion, language itself, allowed ideas to propagate through stories. Oral history edits by evolution, as generational renderings polish off the short-term prejudices and preserves some diamond core of taboo truth: wicked parents, evil kings, poisoned apples, envy, pride, and power. The oral rendering of history remains more balanced, feminine, ironic, and contradictory, simultaneously tragic and hopeful, conservative and creative. We may not know if Rama actually walked the earth and made cause with the monkey king, but we cannot doubt the tragedy of pride and the heartbreak of choosing reputation over love. "The history is confused," wrote Antonio Machado, "but the pain is clear."


Rex Weyler

Once clever kings learned to manipulate language for power, the first wave of paradigm-busters — Buddha, Pythagoras, Lao Tsu, Jesus — appeared in an oral world, but their ideas propagated in a written world. They may only seem as a first wave to us because they appear early in the written record. Writing, fixing the story in time, changes everything. No entropic fairy steals in at night to cajole away cultural bias. Story edits grow more brutal, taking shape as purges and pogroms.

After King Cyrus sacked Damascus and Jerusalem, he adopted the local religions, and then sent legions of scribes and priests to rewrite the texts, obliterate unfavorable stories, mock gods, and erase goddesses. Five hundred years later, Roman emperor Constantine launched a new rewrite, torched the library of Alexandria, and neatly separated the heads of those who defied the orthodox story.

A millennium later, movable type broke the monopoly of scribes, Luther nailed his theses on the door of the Pope's Holy Roman Church, Copernicus slipped subversive notes to trusted colleagues, revolutions thundered, kings fell, and empires withered as the old story broke containment. By the time the new power elite learned how to control the presses, radio and television scrambled the story again, and the computer chip has already crashed the culture only fifty years later. The FBI has learned to post phony web sites pretending to be the voice of the people, King Cyrus in cyberspace.

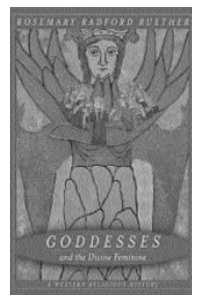
We live in a world of spin, and those with the power to control the story will always do so for their own benefit. The trial for the writer of history is to escape the spin and touch the heart of the matter. The best writing of history embodies contradiction, catastrophes, fears and desires, the miracle and terror of survival all scrambled together and tumbling down through time, each event serving as both effect and cause. And this endless, complex, roll of events is history. Our chapter headings and "ages" are not history.

The window pane

Rosemary Reuther's *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine* is a stunning history of western religion precisely because she avoids modern clichés and refrains from replacing the old invented history with a new invented history. Likewise, In *Paris 1919*, Margaret MacMillan shatters illusions about the U.S. and Britain without imposing new illusions. Rather, she allows contradiction to speak for itself. Michael Herr captures the visceral experience of the Vietnam War in his 1968 *Dispatches,* by exposing chaos. The off-hand diaries of William Shirer and Anne Frank reveal the horror of war better than any account of troop movements.

Diaries and letters often provide real history, because the writer relaxes out of the cultural paradigm and observes. A recent column by Ann Quindlen in *Newsweek* magazine included no comment other than excerpts from letters between soldiers in Iraq and their families, laying bare the impact of war, not just on these families, but on all families, through all time. Quindlen's column showed that good journalism, history's first draft, is not about writing at all, but about observing.

History can turn on happenstance more often than logic. The birth-control pill changed global culture more than any president or prime minister. So did soap, fire, or the asteroid that snuffed out the dinosaurs 65-million years ago and gave mammals a shot. As Stephen Jay Gould says, evolution may be the survival of the luckiest, not the fittest.



"Good writing," according to George Orwell, "is like a window pane." The good historical writer scrubs the window clean from the grunge of society's fixed ideas.

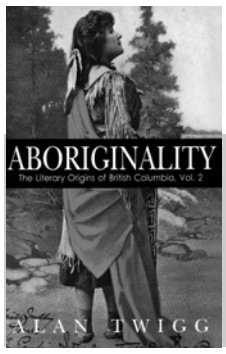
Rex Weyler is a journalist, writer, and ecologist. He co-founded Greenpeace International.

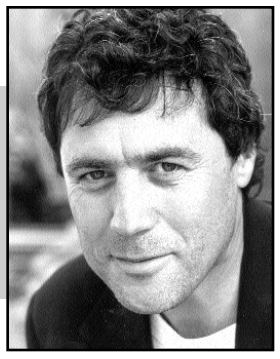
TWO VIEWS OF ALAN TWIGG'S ABORIGINALITY:

A Symposium

KRISTINE ARCHIE AND LAURA CRANMER

Aboriginality, Alan Twigg (Ronsdale, 2005)





For over 25 years, Vancouver journalist, publisher, and anthologist Alan Twigg has documented B.C.'s literary history with originality and penetrating insight. In this inaugural PRRB symposium, two B.C. First Nations writers consider Twigg's pathbreaking new work Aboriginality (Ronsdale Press) from contrasting angles. Their independent views establish how there are many vantage points from which to receive such contemporary research. We encourage readers to discover this richly diverse harvest of literary portraits for themselves. The Editors.

KRISTINE ARCHIE

"Hey cuz…have you seen this book yet? One of my aunties is in it, you know?"
"Really, hmm…Hoe-la… My grandpa is in it!"

It's not often you see a book on a shelf somewhere with aunties, grandpas, cousins and fellow community members inside. Nor are aboriginal people often given a fair shake in books, especially when written by a white guy. But this book is a rarity. I give it a rating of 2.5 on the four bannock rating system—enough to stave off hunger and keep you begging for more.

I initially had some reservations (no pun intended) about the book, and I was a little skeptical about what kind of tone the content may have due to him being a *seme7* (secwepemc'stin for white man) who grew up in North Vancouver. But I have to say, after reading the introduction, I felt excited to continue. Twigg readily admits a limited knowledge of aboriginal cultural and is open about his own cultural location. It becomes clear that his purpose is to talk about what he knows well—books and authors in B.C. As the publisher of *BC BookWorld*, his contribution to B.C.'s literary history can't be disputed.

Twigg has clearly done his research for this book which strives to present the literary origins of aboriginal people in British Columbia. Although there are some flaws, as there are in any worthwhile literary/historical accounts, those here, I believe, can be remedied should someone decide to take up the task. I think the improvements to be made next time around are to have an aboriginal author. Additionally, it would be great to set the tone for the book by acknowledging the historical context of aboriginal peoples in BC. This book sets out to educate and document, but it lacks a certain sense of cultural knowledge, something, thankfully, Twigg didn't try to create. For an interesting read regarding contemporary native culture read Valerie Guthrie Valaskakis essays in *Indian Country* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005). Another area to be worked on would be to create some thematic groupings that are easily understood. I propose groupings under the following headings next time around: *Groundbreakers* (ones who cleanse, smudge, break trail); *Warriors* (ones who readied for battle, brought strength, truth and passion); *Drummers* (ones who introduce new sounds, voices, styles, mix traditional with contemporary, healers of the past) and *The Pow-Wow Trail* (others along the way, ones who taught lessons, family and friends).

Although the book does cover some non-BC resident artists and writers, I don't feel that this takes away from the overall point of the book. Aboriginal peoples can be nomadic. As travellers themselves, they are also welcoming to others who enter their territory with due respect. So, though some might see that it is a problem to mention non-BC resident artists and writers including Tomson Highway and Norval Morrisseau, it didn't bother me any, nor did it take away from stellar work of BC-born and raised authors and authors.

Among Groundbreakers, Twigg covers off renowned Pauline Johnson; the unheard of Martha Harris; unravels some of the mystery of Mourning Dove (inspiration to Drummer Jeannette Armstrong); discusses George Clutesi (which famous female artist gifted him with her brushes in her will? Read and find out); Chief William Sepass, the man chosen to be the bearer of the cultural knowledge of a people, the representative of a nation in treaty discussions and my friend's great great grandfather (includes a story about why "the Chilliwacks would not eat oolachan"). In this group I would also include trail-breakers Eden Robinson (*Traplines*) and Richard Van Camp (*The Lesser Blessed*) for it was their words infused with humour, reality and creativity that inspired me, and I bet many others to pursue the art of writing. The groundbreakers break trail, cleanse the path and serve as markers of strength for future generations.

The Warriors I identified for their contributions to the world of authorship and artistry in a strong dignified and powerful (sometimes political) way are: Chief Dan George, the coolest looking Indian ever!; Lee Maracle, a firey and determined woman, "inspirator" for other aboriginal authors from her involvement in Red Power Movement, and through her resisting European writing models and forging fresh growing space for others to follow: she's the ultimate woman warrior of aboriginal

(*continued on Page 23)*

LAURA CRANMER

The cliché, you can't judge a book by its cover may well apply to Allan Twigg's *Aboriginality: The Literary Origins of British Columbia Vol 2.* Twigg makes his mark on a "hitherto unmarked literary zone" as if he were an intrepid explorer sallying across this virgin territory to produce the first compendium of BC First Nations writers, carvers and cartoonists. The 170 entries are enclosed between the two cover images of Pauline Johnson and Jeanette Armstrong, who mark the signposts of the Twigg zone. Written for a broad mainstream audience, the book is highly readable and accessible. In fact, Twigg acknowledges that he is writing for most people, since most people, he says, are ignorant of the literary history of BC.

Divided into seven sections, most of the author entries are contained in the first two sections titled "Voices from the Wilderness" (for whom is it a wilderness?) and "Seeing Red" (a multilayered pun if ever there was one) with the remaining sections covering "Artists & Carvers", "Also Noteworthy", and "Context". I was disappointed to find that my uncle Doug Cranmer, a widely acknowledged master carver and painter in the Kwakwaka'wakw style, didn't deserve an entry in the Artists & Carvers section.

However, Twigg does include many more writers and artists than he omits, and the assembly does reveal an important dimension of talent and creativity not previously collected in one volume. Unlike Penny Petrone's *Native Literature in Canada,* Twigg does not attempt to develop an interpretive literary argument that would identify themes or tie the writers together in some way. Nor does his volume pretend to be a boring encyclopaedia of artists. Instead, each of Twigg's entries includes interesting bits of information, often but not always about the artists themselves.

As a 'Namgis instructor at the Malaspina University-College who is sensitive to issues of voice and representation, I must acknowledge that I read Twigg's text with a somewhat critical eye. Perhaps my interpretation can be attributed to a habit of pestering colonial texts. Whatever the reason, I find there is much more to say about the subtext than the text itself. By juxtaposition, selection and implication, Twigg manages to convey a lingering residue of colonialism.

Take a look at the Acknowledgments page. Twigg lists many noteworthy representatives of the infrastructure of BC's publishing and academic industry, some of whom are experts in matters of "Indianology", but apart from Madeline McIvor, where is the acknowledgement of his Indigenous sources? Purporting to celebrate the "uprising" of BC Indigenous literary productions in the Foreword, Twigg cannot avoid conflating literary history with colonial history, making this collection of "cultural news" a text to approach with caution.

Next, take a look at the writers Twigg includes. For a book purporting to focus on Indigenous writers of BC, *Aboriginality* includes a surprising number of writers and artists who have been born elsewhere, studied elsewhere, worked elsewhere before settling in BC. Marilyn Dumont, Marie Clements and Tomson Highway are certainly accomplished and acclaimed writers, but how realistic is it to claim them as Indigenous BC writers? Whatever might be characteristic of BC First Nations writers (in all of our diversity) is certainly diluted by stretching the criteria for inclusion so far.

Further, Twigg apparently has some difficulty with the ideas of accuracy and respect when it comes to naming people and places. In his Foreword he declares he will leave "the literary policing" to others. This phrasing may seem humorously flippant at first, but we glimpse the same tone again and again in the entries. In the report on Tomson Highway, Twigg focuses on Highway's disdain for Aboriginal only theatre in which his plays have suffered as a result of "political correctness". Why would Twigg emphasize this controversy within the Indigenous theatre community rather than giving us at least some sense of the power in Highway's plays themselves?

By juxtaposing certain entries, Twigg provides the words of the Indigenous authors to indirectly comment on the issue of voice and representation. In the John Sky and Walter McGregor entries, Twigg uses Bringhurst (a figure reviled or revered depending on which circle you happen to travel in) to authenticate their stories.

(*continued on Page 23)*

Don't Eat This Book

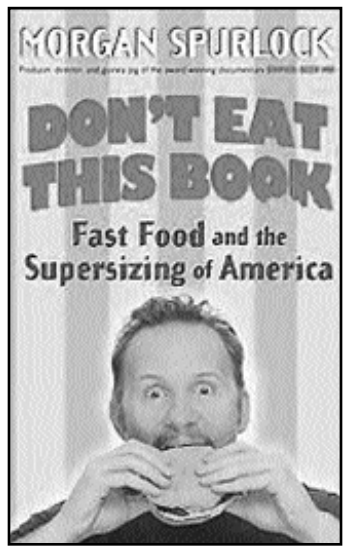
Dr. Nicolas Kats

Don't Eat This Book. Morgan Spurlock. (Putnam. 308 pgs.)

Making a documentary out of eating and drinking at McDonald's for a month is brilliant. The result, *Super Size Me*, released in 2004, is the third most popular documentary ever.

Why the appeal? Several factors. McDonald is the flagship of the fast food industry. No other franchise comes close. It is enormously successful globally. This tiny low-budget documentary hits where it hurts.

Fast food is junk, and it causes health problems. Everyone knows this. What health problems will happen to Morgan Spurlock during a month of McDonald's food? The last question holds instant fascination for doctors. When the sequel to the documentary came out – *Don't Eat This Book* — I instantly bought a copy. I couldn't wait to read the details of this macabre experiment.



Spurlock, in the prime of his life, vigorously healthy and active, and on an extremely healthy diet, is the perfect guinea pig. During the experiment he acquired the following problems:

— acne.
— overweight (he gained 25 pounds).
— hypertension (can cause aneurysm, stroke or death).
— high cholesterol and triglycerides (leading to atherosclerosis, angina, heart attack, death).
— massively elevated liver enzymes (indicating liver inflammation and damage, can lead to NASH — nonalcoholic steatotic hepatitis, characterized by massive fatty deposits in and irreversible damage to the liver).
— elevated uric acid (leading to gout and kidney stones).
— impotence.
— severe loss of energy and stamina.
— reduced mental facilities — loss of concentration, stunted thinking, in a stupor.
— addiction to McDonald's foods. On the first night of his experiment, 3 hours after a huge meal and still bloated, he got hungry. He developed massive migraines that were alleviated only by eating at McDonald's. He continually dreamed about eating at McDonald's. The only time he was happy was briefly after eating at McDonald's. He continually craved McDonald's, even when bloated.

The implications are enormous. The highly addictive nature of McDonald's products is clear. This is why the fast food industry is so successful. Many of the problems Spurlock experienced have serious sequelae, including death. He took a major risk. Asked about continuing the experiment, his cardiologist predicted highly accelerated coronary heart disease.

Spurlock did not develop Type 2 diabetes (caused by a high-sugar, low-fiber diet), but his risk was high. He was not a pupil in elementary school and therefore diagnosable with attention deficiency disorder. He did not get cancer as this requires years (trans-fats, superabundant in McDonald foods, are proven carcinogens). In short, a lot more could have happened to Spurlock.

Immediately after the experiment Spurlock went into detoxification. It took two months to clear up most of his problems. That he developed disease on a poor diet, and that he reversed them by returning to healthy eating, says something fundamental. Anyone on a poor diet can expect health problems. And anyone with health problems and a poor diet has a way out. This obvious truth is underutilized by most doctors.

The book is much more than an experiment. It is an indictment of the fast food industry. In the last 20 years the number of calories from fast foods has quadrupled, from 3% to 12 % of total US consumption. The proportion of refined sugars and trans- and saturated fats are extreme and dangerous (Spurlock ate a pound of sugar and half a pound of fat per day). Obesity is exploding (Spurlock's calorie intake nearly doubled). Fast foods are a chemical brew — the Strawberry Flavored Burger King Shake has 46 additives. Fast foods won't decompose — in 2004 someone told Spurlock that he collected one McDonald cheeseburger annually since 1991, all lined up on his living room bookshelf. I had to verify this with a Big Mac in my home, and it is true. Try this easy experiment!

The waste of cattle slaughterhouses is fed to poultry; the waste of poultry slaughterhouses is fed to cattle. Slaughterhouses are unhygienic, and food poisoning is widespread. The practice of purchasing dogs and cats, put down at animal shelters, to grind up for cattle and poultry feed is widespread.

One hamburger comes from hundreds or, according to the CDC, possibly thousands of cattle – no one really knows. This has implications for the spread of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (spongiform encephalopathy).

The NewLeaf potato was genetically engineered by Monsanto to manufacture its own pesticide, and was registered with the EPA as a pesticide. This potato was brought by McDonalds until 2000, and by Pringles, Hardees and Frito Lays.

Fast foods operate in 23,000 US public schools, often exclusively. The pupils are captive consumers that provide the next generation of fast food addicts.

Many hospitals — 6 of the top 16 US hospitals — have fast food franchises. This is an absolute contradiction of health priorities.

Though *Don't Eat This Book* is primarily an indictment of the fast food industry, Spurlock sees it as part of a bigger problem. Fast food is simply a type of processed food. 90% of money spent on food goes to processed foods. Processed foods are characterized by excess of sugar, additives, and saturated and toxic fats, and deficiency of minerals, vitamins and fiber. The shelf life is greatly lengthened. This is great for the middleman and the supermarket, but difficult for the digestive tract.

This diet fits the hurried lifestyle of the American. Divorce, one-parent families, long working hours, and the rise of the professional woman, all contribute to the loss of quality home cooking. Processed foods need little or no preparing, hence the proliferation of fast food, convenience stores and the frozen dinner.

The public has chosen a dangerous and highly deficient diet. The diseases Spurlock had on his fast food diet – hypertension, high cholesterol, overweight, stunted mental facilities (ADD) and impotence are widespread in the US. This is no coincidence.

Spurlock discusses diet change. A growing number of schools, including inner city public high schools in Los Angeles and New York, switched to healthy foods, with astounding improvement in behavior and academic performance. Education is another approach; schools might add to the curriculum courses on nutrition and easy, tasty cooking. Fast foods could be taxed, like cigarettes, and this income used to promote healthy eating. The trend of healthy eating is growing. Organic food is an explosive new industry. Farmers markets are popping up everywhere. Interest is widespread, with numerous articles and books on food.

Don't Eat This Book has great stories and hilarious anecdotes. Spurlock's style is folksy and easy-to-read. He writes clearly about the fast food industry and puts it in its broader context. This an easy and entertaining read of great value.

Dr. Nicolas Kats writes from his practice in County Galway, Ireland.

PERSKY (*continued from Page 3*)

I see that what I'm making is a child's fortress, or fortified foxhole..." Equally often it was something longer. Persky is a Scheherezade with a bald head. With no apparent effort he produces things like the wonderful anecdote involving an awkward little boy which shows his great affection for his friend Lannie Beckman. At even greater length Persky outlines his life as a British Columbian. This piece starts with the Skeena River, and ends with it too, in a narrative movement that evokes the pathos of lost time without any sense of either injury or grief.

Pathos flits in and out of this book. Persky is a son, not a father, and he has a son's bravery. I was often touched reading *The Short Version* (in a way I hadn't been reading Persky's other books), by his depiction of the various means he uses to outflank loneliness: friendship, reading, travel, the absorbing work of producing prose. We are all alone, ultimately, but Persky doesn't allow himself some of the comforts we usually use to hide the fact. He has produced a happy book which is also poignant.

Bruce Serafin is the founder of the Vancouver Review. His book,* Colin's Big Thing, *was chosen as one of the Globe's Best 100 books last year..

THE WRITING PASSPORT

FROM BAFFIN ISLAND TO BANFF

Rachel Wyatt

On a fine morning in May three years ago, I was sitting at a table outside a little café in Bergamo. No one knew where I was. I wasn't sure myself. I was only glad that my daughter's partner had warned me that Milan's airports were a long way from the city. I'd arrived late the night before, re-routed because of a strike in Paris, and had no hotel reservation. The tourist office in the airport was closed but on the wall was a poster advertising a nice-looking hotel. I took a taxi to it. They had a small room available but there was no restaurant and no coffee shop. I wandered the silent dimly lit streets staying close to the hotel, hunger overcoming fear, but everything was shut down and I went to bed empty.

I was on my way to the Book Fair in Turin. The Italian Translation of my collection of stories, *The Day Marlene Dietrich Died*, was being launched and Canada was the star of the show that year. Many writers I knew would be there. I was looking forward to it.

Drinking my third cup of coffee that morning and eating my second roll, watching Italian children on their way to school, I was enjoying a rare kind of freedom. No phone would ring for me. No one would call out my name. It was a moment of absolute peace. But it couldn't last. I was expected in Turin.

The train was full of noisy football fans; Juventus and AC Milan were playing that evening. I was in the midst of life again. Because of my late decision to attend the Fair, I was booked into a small hotel a little distance from the one, fully booked, where all the other literary people were. There was no welcome package to greet me, no phone message. (I learnt later that the envelope had been sent to the wrong place.) Luckily I remembered that my contact from the embassy in Rome was staying at the Meridien. Otherwise I might have spent a few more days sitting in cafes and pondering alone on the life of an itinerant writer, and returned home without ever going to the Fair. And the Fair was splendid. I narrowly missed meeting both Alessandro Barrico and Roberto Calasso. I was disappointed but at least I had been where they were.

In a fit of literary madness given a choice of hotels to stop at in Milan on the way home, I picked the one called I Promessi Sposi because I liked Manzoni's novel. As I left my coffin-sized room and walked down the street, I looked longingly at the Sheraton with all its lights and its comforts and vowed to be more careful in future.

A few years before, in what I called my year of island-hopping, I was in the land of leaping marsupials. I couldn't hop myself because a helpful man in Sydney airport had lifted my box of books off the carousel and accidentally dropped it on my toe. So there I was sitting on the platform at the university in Canberra, the visiting Canadian writer, my slipper-clad feet tucked under the seat, waiting to give my fifth talk in three days. The audience looked friendly, my hosts were kind, and I was far from home listening to the man who was introducing me get the titles and numbers of my books wrong.

The previous day I'd been in Wagga Wagga reading to Wagga Wagga Writers Writers Group. When the WWWWG meets, it's party-time. There were many readers, several musicians, possibly a conjuror, though after midnight my mind goes blank. Families were gathered from the country round about and the night had gone on and very enjoyably on.

In order to stay alert, I was looking back over the past twelve months, counting islands and recalling moments of delight and dismay. A few months before, I'd been in Sicily standing outside Catania airport and watching darkness begin to settle over Mt. Etna as I asked myself why no one had come to meet me. Had I mistaken the date? How was I supposed to find a place called Giardini-Naxos on my own? Did I have enough cash for a long taxi ride? What if the taxi driver was a kidnapper? Most of my Italian vocabulary I'd picked up at the opera and words like perduto and abandonata were flashing through my mind. At last a van came and an irritable driver collected the few of us who, unknown to each other, were bound for the same conference.

Baffin Island

Next morning, out early, I came upon the altar of Aphrodite and the remains of houses lived in two thousand years ago. A professor from Waterloo picked a medlar from a tree in that garden and handed it to me with a courtly gesture. There were moments of enchantment. But stereotypes travel with the traveller. Out to dinner in Catania that evening, a professor and his wife attending the conference were scared out of their minds as they waited in an eerily silent street for a bus that didn't come: It was Mafia territory. No one dared be out on the street after dark. Bullets could be flying at any moment. In what order would they be shot and robbed or taken to a mountain cave and held to a ransom that no one would pay?

At breakfast next morning they began to relate the horror they had escaped only by the eventual arrival of the bus. Aha! they were told, there was an important soccer game every Wednesday and the inhabitants, even the bad guys, were all indoors watching TV.

In another part of Sicily, I took a ferry to the Aeolian Islands, and saw people bathing in volcanic sludge and marvelled at the many, many ancient relics in a tiny museum. As one writer said, The first hundred amphorae are the best. The tourism though came with obligations. I read and I talked and answered questions and recorded words of doubtful wisdom for an Italian student who was writing about my work. I was sorry to leave Sicily and it wasn't easy to do. Possibly there are days when the airport in Catania is a model of order. It seemed to me with my small knowledge of Italian that it was like a hectic party game. Someone shouted out the name of a flight and the crowd rushed towards the voice. I clung to a man who was also flying to Rome and wherever he went, I followed. Embarrassingly I have a feeling that I was holding onto his belt.

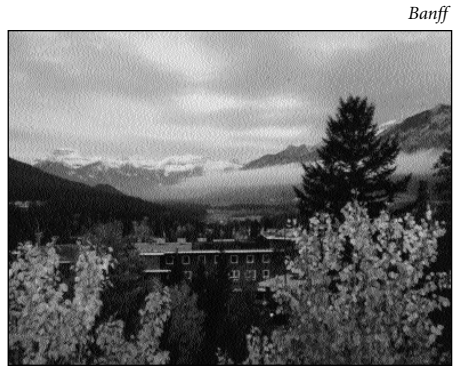
In July, it was Iqaluit. Baffin Island may be part of Canada but it was the most 'foreign' of my islands. And my favourite. For a few years I taught a summer school course in English to Inuit teachers. I learnt far more there than I ever taught. I learnt about the past lives of the inhabitants, the huge changes that had come upon them not always for the better. But in 'summer', tiny flowers flourish and pussy willows creep low to the ground, giant mosquitoes abound in 8C temperatures, and people leave their homes to camp by the shore. The icebreaker chugged metre by metre into Frobisher Bay to clear the way for supply ships. Over the radio, the ship's captain could be heard commenting on the depth of the ice and how it compared to last year. And the teachers in my group, temporary students, told me about their lives now and about the old ways. One woman who had lived on the land with her family till she was eleven when asked about the difference between those days and the present, said, "I knew that God was with me then."

The Banff Centre in Alberta is a different kind of island. Down in the town, the tourists gape, admire and take pictures, and skiers wait for snow. But on the side of Tunnel Mountain, at the Centre, music, visual arts, and writing, are given space and time to flourish. Artists of all kinds from all over the world mingle there and it was my good fortune to be Director of Writing that particular year and many other years besides. Herding writers, making sure that they didn't break their necks climbing, get kicked by rutting elk or fall into despair about their work or a new romance, was a full-time and fascinating job with long term rewards: I get a thrill every time I see that one of the writers from the Studio has won a prize or received a great review.

So here I was in Australia in January. A continent surrounded by sea. A very large island indeed. In a park near Canberra, I had my picture taken with kangaroos. They are staring at me as if each one has a manuscript in her pouch that she would like me to read. Or as if to ask what the hell I was doing there. My journeys were a writer's dream really, the kind of dream that has nightmare elements. Could I remember the names of the people I'd met last night? Would my shoulder ever recover from thrusting bulky bags into the overhead bin on the plane? And how was it that the weight of my luggage increased even though I sold all the books I'd brought with me?

The introducer was winding down. It was time for me to get up on my hind legs, expose my feet, and bring some enlightenment or at least entertainment to those foregathered. All of them probably had better ways of spending their time. It was always wise to remember that. I began to talk about the various islands I'd visited in the past twelve months.

Banff



My writing was a passport, I said, and it had taken me to places I might never have seen and given me a chance to meet people who would remain my

(*continued on Page 14*)

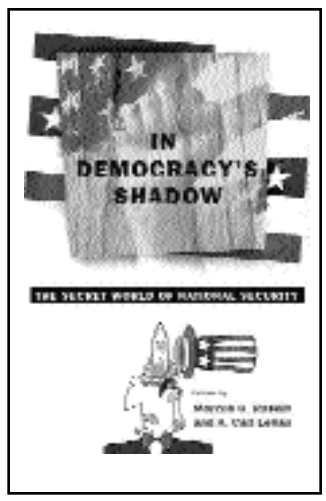
In the Shadow of Democracy

review by Reg Little

In Democracy's Shadow
Edited by Marcus Raskin and Carl LeVan. (Nation Books. 2004) 392 pp. Paperback

In Democracy's Shadow shows why American President George W. Bush and Vice-President Richard Cheney should not be regarded as the only scapegoats for the problems of contemporary Americans.

It could even be argued that some of their less repugnant actions have done Americans a service in prompting a closer look, through books like *In Democracy's Shadow*, at how the 'National Security State' has evolved in the U.S. for over a century. Indeed, the Security State has long shaped democratic processes into something very different from what is assumed by Americans and others who see democratic values as one of the great achievements of mankind's progress. At the same time it could be argued, from a perspective like that of Niall Ferguson in *Colossos,* that it is the very preoccupations of *In Democracy's Shadow* that have inhibited America from fulfilling its role as the central imperial authority in the early 21st Century global community.



This collection of essays suggests an American people who have been sleepwalking – although perhaps no more than their British predecessors, who founded the Anglo-American imperial order of the past two centuries. Marcus Raskin and Carl Le Van, the compilers of this penetrating series of essays, say in their opening essay, *The National Security State and the Tragedy of Empire*:

> *As part of this system of invincibility the society cedes to the corporate economy the planning and regulatory function. While the state can, if it so chooses, intervene directly, the decision-making system is a coordinated effort between the national security budget and the largest corporations.*

They recall that:

> *By the time America entered World War I, it had occupied the Philippines and intervened in Central America and the Caribbean no less than forty-five times.*

and that in 1933:

> *…..Walter Lippmann counselled the president, "The situation is critical, Franklin. You may have to assume dictatorial power".*

In the first passage above some will hear echoes of the role of early British corporate interests that used the African slave trade, American riches and the Asian opium trade to establish the foundations of imperial wealth and power. There are also echoes of the situation described by William Engdahl when he wrote in *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order*:

> *British secret intelligence services at this time also evolved in an unusual manner. Unlike the Empires of France or other nations, Britain modelled its post-Waterloo empire on an extremely sophisticated marriage between top bankers and financiers of the City of London, government cabinet ministers, heads of key industrial companies deemed strategic to the national interest, and the heads of the espionage services.*

Of course, unlike Britain where democracy could be seen more readily as a political artifice, America was founded on the ideal of democracy. It required skilled, subtle and resolute management to overshadow democracy and establish the 'National Security State' that is detailed in the essays collated by Raskin and Le Van.

Indeed, one of the major questions posed by this work for further evaluation is that of how a modern democracy can prosper without the powerful and central driving influence of the corporation. Even as the aberrations of giant corporations become increasingly pervasive in the contemporary world – whether in medicine, in food, in energy, in the environment, or in something else – it is not easy to see how Anglo-American communities can wean themselves from practices that have delivered them such imperial power, wealth and influence. It would be folly to forget that corporate power has been fundamental to the creation and maintenance of Anglo-American Empire and all the rewards that have accompanied it. After all, Anglo-American corporate entrepreneurship has proven itself with an unprecedented record of creative, innovative and successful imperial expansionism, at comparatively little cost or risk to government.

The first of four parts of the collection, entitled *Cold War Beginnings*, contains, apart from *The National Security State and the Tragedy of Empire*, essays titled *The Centrality of the Atomic Bomb*, *The Cold War and the Fate of Democratic Culture* and *The Nuclear Crucible*, which illustrate how the Bomb and the Cold War were used to cultivate both arrogance and fear amongst people awed by a previously unimaginable might. Gar Alpervich and Kai Bird explore how the atomic bomb created a unique sense of American power, without which much would have evolved in other ways. Norman Birnbaum relates how the Cold War "could have been ended decades before it actually ceased". He goes on to conclude:

> *Events like Watergate show how much of our public life it [the Cold War] corrupted. Watergate was the invasion of domestic politics by the techniques of the Cold War, just as McCarthyism was the extension to foreign policy of the primitivism of much of American politics. Whether the war on "terror" can be stopped from defining all of our politics depends on a reflective citizenry's engaging in critical scrutiny of the past century.*

Trerrence Edward Pope concludes this first part by explaining how the Nuclear Crucible creates a "serious moral, political and legal crisis" in an environment where:

> *…..the "dictates of public conscience", in an age of propaganda and a media saturated monopoly plagued by censorship, are left without the means to attain the velocity of moral outrage, political comprehension, or legal sensibility.*

The second part, titled *Finding Our Recent and Present Past*, reviews *The Nuclear Legacy of the Cold War*, *The Iraq War and the Future of International Law*, *Weapons of Mass Destruction and Human Rights*, and *Cold War Continuum*. Initially, John Steinbrunner and Jeffrey Lewis argue that "the most insidious of the Cold War legacies – the apparent commitment of the United States to active military confrontation for decisive national advantage – will have to be adjusted to reality, not merely in words. Richard Falk's essay concludes darkly, however, that:

There exists ample flexibility within international law to deal with legitimate claims of self-defence, but with respect to illegitimate claims, such as Iraq, there is no occasion for innovative evasions of international law.

Peter Weiss and John Burroughs refocus attention on some hard and troubling questions:

> *When leaders speak of waging the war against terrorism to its final victory, one can only wince and wonder what they have in mind. What war? Against whom? Where fought? With what weapons? The final question is probably the crucial one.*

William Blum, former State Department analyst and author of *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*, highlights the way America's handling of Serbia and Milosevic demonstrated "the kind of power that any Emperor of the past would have deeply envied' but not "the kind of post-Cold War world that critics and victims of American foreign policy had hoped for."

The third part, titled *National Security Substructures*, contains three essays: *A Report on NAFTA and the State of the Maquilas*, *Courts and Universities as Institutions in the National Security State* and *The Pentagon's Welfare Budget*. Saul Landau illuminates the manner in which the contradiction between the relentless corporate search for reserves of cheap labour, facilitated by the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement, and the resurgent demands of the security establishment, inspired by the war on terror, has left both land and people devastated in the northern parts of Mexico. Anabel Dwyer and David Dwyer, lawyer and anthropologist, reveal in a penetrating, but not necessarily politically hard-headed, way the success of the 'National Security State' in mobilizing educational and legal institutions to ensure citizens accommodate its needs. They note its dangerous character due to its "flimsy 'foundation in nuclear weapons" but do not progress far in highlighting politically practical remedies. Seymore Melman details the cost of the American military budget with over $4 trillion spent by 1996 on nuclear weapons alone, with only 8 percent of the nuclear stockpile capable of obliterating the populations of both Russia and China. He notes that military expenditure "is encouraged by the myth that the economic capability of the United States is, for all practical purposes, without limit". He then goes on to outline the neglect of spending on road, bridge, transit, aviation, school, water, waste, energy and other infrastructure.

The fourth and final part of *In Democracy's Shadow* is titled *Accountability and*

(*continued on Page 13)*

DEMOCRACY(*continued from Page 12*)

Democracy and includes papers on *Security's Conquest of Federal Law Enforcement*, *The Seeds of Secrecy, Then and Now*, *The National Security State, War and Congress* and *Myth Verses Hypothesis*. Peter Raven-Hansen boldly states his central thesis in his opening sentence:

Since 1986, presidents have taken international terrorism, drug trafficking and international organized crime out of the law enforcement closet of ordinary crimes and re-labelled them as "national security threats".

Anna K Nelson's final paragraph captures a similar lament:

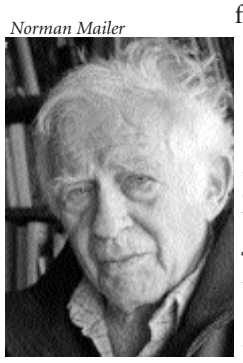
> *Once again we are at war, and once again it is war without end….Regrettably, Americans have simply grown accustomed to the national security state and its partner, secrecy. After fifty years, the seeds of secrecy are still bearing fruit.*

Marcus Raskin and Carl LeVan then come to the crux of the whole book with the words:

> *Something has to give. Either the imperial system is dropped, or the Constitution is dismantled.*

The novelist Norman Mailer rounds up the essays by writing of *Myth Verses Hypothesis* and captures the essence of much of the drama concerning the 'National Security State'. He suggests the careful and artful construction of a mythology that has disguised the imperial character of American government and preserved the perceived and comforting illusions of democracy. Moreover, in this he goes to the heart of the failure of the elite guiding the imperial state with the words:

Norman Mailer



> *…..the nation's future , and its technological skills, seemed to be in distress. American students at STEM studies – STEM, science, technology, engineering and mathematics – no longer appeared to be equal to those Asian and European students who also were studying advanced courses at our universities.*

Raskin's final essay, *Conclusions*, delivers a type of *coup de grace* with the question:

In the twenty-first century, can the United States wean itself from being the dominant warrior nation, which balances itself on the steep ledge of fear, omnipotent fantasy, decline and destruction?

In Democracy's Shadow leaves little doubt that previous warnings about the perils of American Empire, delivered by writers like Paul Kennedy and Chalmers Johnson, were well conceived. It is worth remarking, however, that perhaps more important than the painful post 9/11 initiatives in Afghanistan and Iraq in signalling the failure of empire was the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Much evidence, including that of Nobel Laureate and former World Bank Chief Economist, Joseph Stiglitz, in *Globalization and Its Discontents*, now indicates that it was the product of decisions made by financial authorities in America who felt threatened by Asian economic growth and were concerned to re-establish American economic authority. On the contrary, it gave Americans the illusion of triumph over 'Asian values', exacerbated an already excessive and perilous boom and catapulted China over America's ally Japan into an Asian, and perhaps global, leadership role

In Democracy's Shadow is a product of the failure of the 'National Security State' and if it has a weakness it is the omission of any consideration of the international implications of the reassertion of democratic preoccupations over the global concerns of empire. America cannot escape easily the legacy of more than a hundred years of global assertiveness and expanding authority. The tragedy is that the United States, like the United Kingdom before it, knew how to build an empire but has not demonstrated the capacity to govern one. The world may have to look to a resurgent China, with its long history of far-reaching imperial government and recurring revival after decline, for lessons on how to meet this challenge.

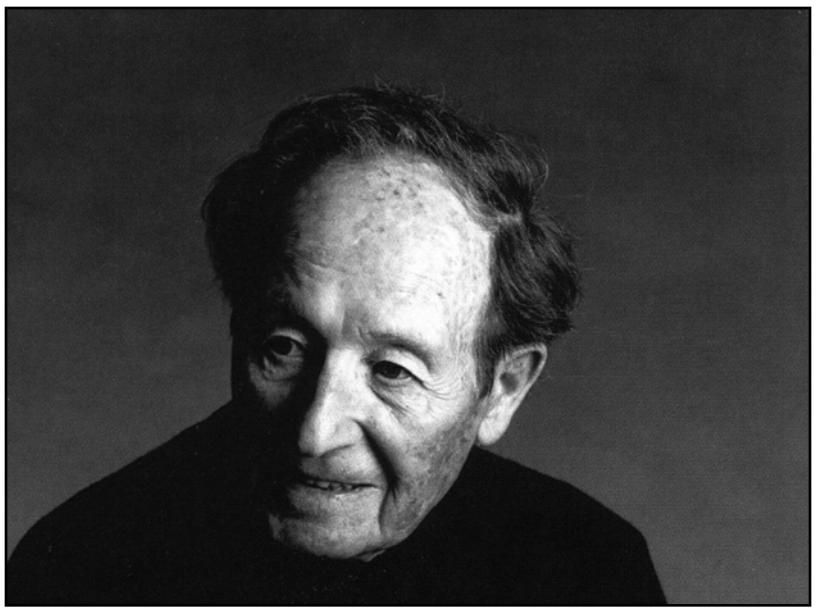
In the meantime, are there ways for America to return to a more representative and viable form of democracy without relinquishing both the rewards of Empire and the capacity to prosper in an increasingly competitive global economy"? Or does the restoration of democratic ideals, and the surrender of the American 'National Security State', carry with it a necessary acceptance of a humbler, much reduced form of Anglo-American corporate wealth and activity?

To date, President George W Bush and Vice President Richard Cheney have succeeded mostly in highlighting the seriousness of the dilemmas that now confront America's leadership class. *In Democracy's Shadow* sketches vividly the trail of decisions that have led them to their present range of choices.

Reg Little writes from Brisbane, Australia. His previous PRRB review was "On the Rise of Civilization in the East."

Brush With Life, the Way:
an interview with John Koerner
Linda Rogers

A Brush with Life, by John Koerner, Ronsdale Press, hardcover, 134 pages, $39.95



The title of John Koerner's memoir/ars poetica reveals the overflowing cup perspective that has seen the émigré painter through a long and eventful life, which includes several painful brushes with death. A determined positivist, Koerner, supported by his lifetime spiritual guide Bo Yin Ra, author of "The Book on the living God" and "The Book of Happiness", has transcended dislocation and grief to become a huge formative influence on Canadian West Coast painting.

His joyful oeuvre is the light side of the rainforest. Where his contemporaries Jack Shadbolt, Gordon Smith, Tony Only and Takao Tanabe often painted the experience of stormy weather in West Coast landscapes, Koerner has recorded the facets of rain, all of them reflecting light. Many painters describe the effort to capture the light. John Koerner grabs it in handfuls and he refuses to let go, no matter what happens to disrupt his life or the view from his aerie apartment on Larch Street in Vancouver.

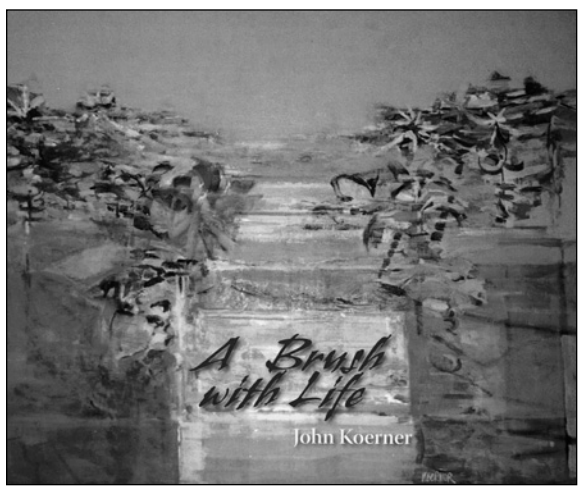
From dust cover to colour plates the design of this important book is appropriately joyful. The volume is a gift to everyone who realizes what John and his family have meant to the province of British Columbia. Just as his family, who escaped the Holocaust, transformed orphan hemlock into acceptable wood products and helped the frontier society of British Columbia evolve into a civilization, John has changed our perception of rain. With the help of his spiritual mentor, he has refused the human compulsion to surrender to darkness.

Life has conspired to test John's optimism. In his memoirs, which take up the first third of the book, he ingenuously describes a life of privilege in an assimilated Jewish family in Czechoslovakia and as a student in Paris. All around him he observed glassblowers, painters, writers and musicians for whom "Writing with light" was the norm. Grace was the medium of his childhood.

Disbelief was the forerunner to tragedy as a polite culture unprepared for barbarity succumbed to insanity when the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia. The Koerners, helped by my diplomat uncle I am proud to say, especially since the Canadian government has a shabby record for assisting Jewish refugees, left abruptly, bringing their vast knowledge of forestry and civilization to Canada.

During his young adulthood in Vancouver, John, who had studied law in order to assist the family business, worked at the new family business and raising his two daughters, Sidney and Diane, and he painted for pleasure.

It was clear to everyone in post-war Vancouver that John Koerner was not only blessed with artistic talent and the admiration of contemporary painters like Lawren Harris, but also with a happy marriage to his wife Eileen. It was his wife's encouragement that helped the artist make the decision to give up his day job and give himself permission to do the work that he loved, painting and teaching art at the Vancouver School of Art and the University of British Columbia.



His paintings, held in major private collections and galleries, are a catalogue of joy. In 2002, a very large storm cloud obstructed his light. Eileen died and John was disconsolate. They say widowers who have been happy marry again; and now the ninety-two year old ideal husband is living in energetic bliss with journalist Lisa Hobbs Birney Koerner. The couple even traveled to Australia for their honeymoon.

Koerner keeps his eye on the light, even when it is at the end of the tunnel in the near death experience. Pneumonia last year might have extinguished his flame, but the painter survived to paint an extraordinary collection of celebration paintings, some of which conclude the generous selection of colour plates separating the memoir from the essay sections of the book.

I was surprised, after purchasing one of his Lighthouse series of paintings drawings and serigraphs, when the artist told me he had never read Virginia Woolf's novel, To the Lighouse. So close is Woolf's vision of Lily, the painter, to Koerner they could be breathing the same air. The Lighthouse paintings, so well represented in this book, are a beacon.

A music lover, Koerner listens to his favourite composers while he paints. Having assimilated the classical advice of Giorgione, the austerity of the Japanese masters and the playful surfaces of Matisse, his paintings have the architecture of Bach and the lightness of being so present in Mozart.

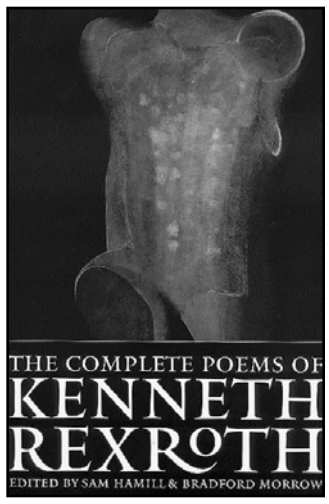
Tutored by oriental philosophy and art, Koerner has deliberately painted his way to enlightenment. Living on the Pacific Rim, he has had access to the sea that joins west and east. He belongs to neither and to both. Refusing dogma, he insists in his painting and in his philosophical writing that, because the phenomenal and philosophical worlds constantly reinvent themselves, we are all in flux. As we breathe in and out, we change. Religion is not spirituality. It is death. John Koerner is anti-death. There is no end to the unity in multiplicity.

Movement is evident in every brushstroke. As leaves depart the tree, they enter the wind and eventually fall on the ground to become new earth. Earth, air and sea are all colour transparencies through which other truths are evident. The sea is a garden. The air is a garden. Everything is a garden, its' colours singing all the time.

The author photo, which shows the artist in a quiet and balanced netsuke like pose, reveals the reasoned getalt of the narrator taking us through his canon of extraordinary work. Although his face is contemplative, his hands and body are ready to spring into action in the next frame of his ongoing story. His palette is clear and joyful. His brush keeps moving. An inextinguishable intelligence informs his path to the light.

A Rexroth Century

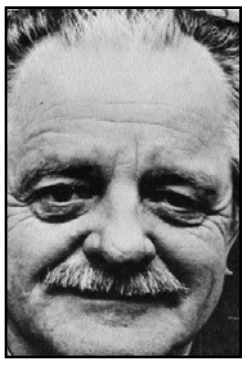
Mike Doyle



The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth, edited by Sam Hamill and Bradford Morrow.
(Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press).

This huge 'Collected' from Copper Canyon is a welcome gift. When I first travelled to North America nearly fifty years ago, arriving from New Zealand, I landed in San Francisco, stayed there for a month. Attempting to free myself from English influences (most immediately, the New Apocalypse and George Barker), I had become interested in American poetry, first, predictably, in Whitman, then John Crowe Ransom and 'court' poetry. When Wallace Stevens' Collected Poems came out in the mid-1950s being set to review them was a huge excitement, but eventually I settled into a dozen years of reading and studying William Carlos Williams. In San Francisco that segued into an immediate interest in the Beats, and through City Lights Books and Lawrence Ferlinghetti (in the present book quoted as naming Rexroth 'the father of us all'), I discovered Rexroth's poetry in the form of an elegant hardback, *The Signature of All Things* 'printed at the Stamperia Valdonega, Verona' in 1949 (retail price: $3 American!)

At that moment, holed up in a steampipe hotel in North Beach, I wanted to meet everyone indiscriminately, even attended one of Jack Spicer's workshops, met



Robert Duncan, Gary Snyder fleetingly, was befriended by Ferlinghetti, but no Ginsberg (in New York), no Creeley (in New Mexico), no Rexroth (in Europe, I seem to remember). To cut to the chase, I read Signature and have 'read in it' a good many times since, with the sense of Rexroth's range, inwardness, and urbanity. Later, I discovered that he was largely self-taught, by reputation many-sided, one side being anarchist. Gary Snyder, in a jacket blurb, calls Rexroth, 'elaborately learned, precisely and passionately political, sardonic and witty, an expert high mountain rambler; poet of love, wisdom, and righteous anger...a great teacher to so many, a warm, cranky, personal mentor to me'.

Born in 1905, Rexroth has poems here from 1920 to 1979, three years before his death. With five years of formal schooling, otherwise self-educated, in the early 1920s he hitch-hiked all over the USA, working variously as farmhand, cook, forester, once working his way to Paris and back, all of which can be read about in An *Autobiographical Novel* (1966), which tells of the wide range of people he met, from Emma Goldman, to Diego Rivera, Marcel Duchamp, Louis Armstrong, &c. The book, first tape-recorded in 1959 for his young daughters, evokes among much else an early C20 radical-libertarian sub-culture, now vanished, and a bohemianism foreshadowing the 1960s counter-culture, plus his rebellion against an inherited Catholicism and, in particular, its sexual morality..

In 1927, Rexroth moved to San Francisco where he settled for the next forty years, though he roamed the West during the Depression. He was a conscientious objector in WW2, at that time, specifically because of wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans, declaring 'disaffiliation from the American capitalist state'. A few years later, he was leading spirit of the San Francisco Renaissance (I still have my $1 copy of Evergreen Review,vol.1, no2, 1957, 'San Francisco Scene', its opening item Rexroth's 'San Francisco Letter'.) In these years he wrote poems, plays, essays, and social commentary — much of it for station KPFA; he translated poems from several self-taught languages, and pioneered readings of poetry and jazz. In the mid-fifties he emceed the famous movement-founding public reading of Ginsberg's 'Howl', but soon abjured the 'Beat' movement and had a particular contempt for Jack Kerouac.

As a poet, Rexroth had two complementary gifts: by the time he was twenty he could already write the extended discursive poetry best exemplified, for me, by the work in The Signature of All Things (1950); his other gift was the brief luminous lyric, or epiphany, the incandescence of the moment, which he so much loved in the work of the C8 (Western calendar) Chinese shih poet Tu Fu. Something of each combines in a fine early poem, 'Noretorp-Noretsyh' (CP 18), where he combines imagism with historical reportage, with love poetry. Typically, Rexroth's longer poetry has a prose base, often meditative, but fundamentally explanatory. Like William Carlos Williams, he repudiated Eliot's 'impersonality' theory, and is characteristically personal in his own way. Widely read, ranging through history, ethnology, geology, politics, and related to activities such as cookery, jazz, and much more, somehow all his experience is distilled into 'felt life' and the spoken voice, a voice is that often quiet, seldom showy.

Rexroth believed in meditation, but had his own ideas about it, feeling that it came from one's daily life rather than 'manipulation', Buddhist empiricism rather than technical striving. For him 'real objects are their own transcendental meaning'. He believed in the inner life, but only as counterpart to the outer. One of the immanent areas of spirituality for him was human love, 'the subjective/ Aspect of contemplation', as in 'Quietly':

Lying here quietly beside you,
My cheek against your firm, quiet thighs,
The calm music of Boccherini
Washing over us in the quiet... [qu.CP 541]

Strongly in Rexroth's most personal poetry is the sense of finitude, of accepting the moment for what it is. Spiritually, he is something of an eclectic, but in this sense of acceptance he seems to have been Taoist. Writing of Martin Buber in The Bird in the Bush, he considers, the fullest realization of self comes in the acceptance of the limits of contingency. It is harder, but more ennobling, to love a wife as another human being, fugitive as oneself, than...to carry on conversations ...with an imaginary Absolute' (SE, 100). Rexroth seems to have been one who, in modern parlance, was 'hard-wired' with a spirituality gene. But he was no passive transcendentalist, rather an ethical activist. "Ontology is ethical', he declares in his long poem 'The Dragon and the Unicorn' (CP, 361), a paean to community, and 'being is/Responsibility'.

This swiftly moving long poem, at the centre of this volume, may be looked upon as the book's fulcrum. Here is a history, a travelogue, and a compendium of Rexroth's spiritual ideas, identification simultaneously with the natural and human worlds, knit together by poetry:

Poetry like the unclouded
Crystal and the uncut block,
And the details of the mirage of life,
Presents contemplation
With its instruments. Then isn't
Contemplation a kind of judgment?
It is all the judgment there is.
The others are paranoia. (CP 389).

Good at verbal river-capture, later he can assert that contemplation instrumentally includes particulars. Here is one captured from the philosopher McTaggart:

'Better worship a crocodile
Which being a sentient being
Has some value, than the State, which
Being an instrument, has none.
As well worship a sewer pipe
Which may have considerable
Instrumental value'. (Cp 445)

Rexroth was socialist revolutionary, but no Communist, seeing that Bolshevism

(*continued on Page 17)*

Tales of Two Cities:

the passion of George Fetherling

Tales of Two Cities by George Fetherling
(Subway Books, 2005)

Linda Rogers

Literary references aside, I am not sure that *Tales of Two Cities* isn't intended to be a pun, as is the cover shot of a trans-gendered male by photographer Lincoln Clarke. The novella, which is accompanied in the book by several short stories and excerpts from the writer's notebook, is a chiaroscuro portrait of ambiguities. From the shadows and fog of Toronto and Vancouver, the bi-polar /bi-coastal realities of English Canada, come half realized characters searching, in Ionescan terms, for their author.

The aimless, nameless protagonist is a literary agent busted for infidelity by his unfaithful wife. Upon discovering his offenses against the sacrament of marriage, she pulls up the tender roots the child of holocaust survivors has established in Hogtown and throws him to the pigs, some of them the almost recognizable "usual suspects" in stories about literary Toronto. The poor man, who long ago and far away washed up on the metaphorical beaches of Lake Ontario with a yellow star sewn to his psyche, has no name and no country. He is a lost and wandering boy — Cain, Peter Pan, EveryJew. Even his psychiatrist divorces him.

Breathing hard due to an as yet undiagnosed malady, the Canadian Woody Allen shuffles westward in search of hearth and home, a warm place to make love and scribble as frustrated writer/agents are wont to do. Unfortunately, far from lying on a fur rug in front of blazing cedar logs, he ends up in the fireplace of his long distance inamorata. Wise men know the ear is an erogenous zone and the reader watches helplessly as phone sex leads to cybersex while our hapless hero is divested of his dignity in a series of murky hints and revelations about the true nature of his grail, a woman looking for a sperm donor.

Even his spawn is of no account. The younger woman does not get pregnant, and, when his shortness of breath and vascular tightness is diagnosed as oat cell carcinoma, his genes (Jewish therefore intelligent) are no longer useful to her. Oat cells do not a haggis make. Neither his territorial ex nor the girlfriend wants to dine out on him. His malaise, with the classic signs of anxiety and disease of that lonely muscle, the heart, is his character. There is simply not enough room for him anywhere in this huge geographic entity we are proud and sometimes foolish enough to call a country. Lonely in a crowd, he chooses the biggest crowd of all, the Internet. We already know what the outcome will be.

This picaresque, happening against the background of that magnificent oxymoron the Canadian literary community, is as depressing as Vancouver on a grey November morning. The wry Fetherling keeps us moving through the mist with his insightful ironies. His foghorn sound is the dusky laughter of sexually ambiguous individuals for whom everywhere is a no man's land. The character unpacking a suitcase on the cover is every rootless individual looking for definition in love.

We do not know what is in the suitcase, although Fetherling gives further hints in the following short stories and his insightful notes, " The Oxford Book of Everyday Life (excerpts)." It could be costumes for the various incarnations of lost boys, or it might be books recording their journeys. Fetherling has many in his own baggage. The perennial wanderer has written a baker's dozen, not to mention hundreds of articles for Canadian magazines and newspapers. His maps are clear and easy to read. He knows his territory and his trade. In the end it is all about sex, people banging up against one another in all the permutations and variations of night, trying to make sense out of the darkness, hoping to find the light.

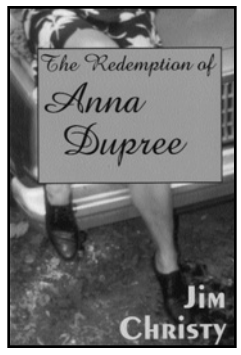
Linda Rogers next book,* The Empress Letters*, is a novel about a Victoria family caught in the opium triangle, will be released in 2006.

The Redemption of Anna Dupree

Jim Christy's tale of late-life passion

Al McLachlin

The Redemption of Anna Dupree by Jim Christy
(Ekstasis Editions, 211 pages. $21.95)



Jim Christy, known for his short stories of hobos, streetwise hucksters, hipsters and fringe characters in collections such as *Junkman* and *Tight Like That* has finally written a novel centred on one such delightful eccentric, Anna Dupree.

Anna is not the usual societal outcast Christy often celebrates. She is a 75 year-old spirited former actress who has been incarcerated in Valley View, a 'retirement' home in Kelowna, B.C. by her estranged daughter. She is almost reluctantly reconciled to this unpleasant predicament when a new counsellor, with the befitting name of Colin Childs, a man of 28 with a Masters degree but with paltry life experience, joins the staff. On his first day he overhears Anna talking in the hall.

"When I was a girl in England, in the orphanage," Anna confides to two women in the hall, "there was a dildo, they were wooden then…" Colin is both embarrassed and intrigued by this outspoken, ribald old lady. And this sets the theme for the rest of the novel.

Anna, who has squeezed as much juice out of life as was possible, has acted on the stage and in movies, passes on her incredible life experiences to the naïve, but captivated Childs.

I know it's not fashionable anymore to have pages of dialogue — probably because most writers don't have an ear for it — but many of the great writers had this gift, and Anna's incredible recollections and unconventional attitude come from her sharp-tongue and enchanting language, so the dialogue works perfectly.

Christy has also struck a universal theme in Valley View — for western countries at least — what to do about the old folks? Is taking away their power of attorney and locking them up in institutions really an option?

Increasingly, boomers have been dumping their parents into these senior care facilities. Christy, through his old-timer characters, exposes this sad state where elders, unable to shop or deal with everyday affairs are placed in these institutions by busy progeny too caught up in their frantic lives to realize what they are doing.

"We were just put here," says one cantankerous old man. "Yes, dumped. We had no control over it. Families did it to us. In my case, they had me declared incapable of caring for myself. …. All they require is some doctor to sign all the papers."

So, naturally Anna wants to escape from this virtual prison, which seems to remind her of the orphanage she grew up in; and by this time Childs is quite enamoured of Ms. Dupree and her theatrics. Particularly due to a film that she was in about the Blitz of WW2 London. A movie that at first he believes she has fabricated, until he finds it in a video store and watches a young and very sexy Anna in a brilliantly executed supporting role.

(*continued on Page 17)*

REXROTH (*continued from Page 17)*
had destroyed international revolutionary impulse towards a better world. He gave voice to his dismay at what was happening in 'Thou Shalt Not Kill', ostensibly a memorial poem for Dylan Thomas, but written in a very un-Thomas-like voice and spirit. 'They are murdering all the young men', he opens, 'Under the Welcome sign/ Under the Rotary emblem'. Parts II and III are litanies of writers and artists killed by the Moloch of our society. Part IV finally comes to Thomas, but is a diatribe against capitalism, ending with deep sea birds shrieking; 'You killed him! You killed him!' (CP 573). This vein in his work has occasioned comment that he is a source for Ginsberg's 'Howl', but he and Ginsberg denied that. Rexroth had weaknesses, both as man and poet. As this poem shows, his fluency could degenerate into rant, though the rant gave voice to the times in which it was written.

Two adjacent poems from *In Defense of the Earth* (1956) can exemplify Rexroth's lyric gift. 'The Mirror in the Woods' (CP 555), tells of an abandoned summer house, a mirror which has fallen to the ground, so the speaker finds it and puts it in his daughter's room. On the wall, on the floor, in the daughter's room, the mirror reflects a succession of images: the vegetation outside, a rat scuttering across its surface, his daughter's ballet arabesques, a silent succession of images of light and shade reflecting life itself. Just before this poem is 'My Heart's as Gay as a Young Sunflower' (CP, 553):

Oh, who will shoe your pretty little foot,
And who will glove your hand,
And who will kiss your cherry red lips,
When I'm gone to the foreign land?

Here, neither form nor sentiments are original, but the poem shows Rexroth's gifts for lightheartedness and for mimicry. Carlos Williams once remarked of Rexroth, 'He is no writer in the sense of the word-man. For him words are sticks and stones to build a house — but it is a good house'. This is acute. Rexroth is characteristically literal-minded, but to good purpose, not without irony when called for, as in the opening lines of 'Strength Through Joy', from 'The Phoenix and the Tortoise' (1944):

Coming back over the col between
Isosceles Mountain and North Palisade,
I stop at the summit and look back
At the storm gathering over the white peaks
Of the Whitney group and the coloured
Kaweahs. September, Nineteen Thirty-Nine.
This is the last trip in the mountains
This autumn, possibly the last trip ever. (CP222).

Here is no W.H.Auden, at the same moment, retrospecting on a 'low, dishonest decade', but a man in his natural habitat looking back and realising how bad a moment this is for the world, and how events elsewhere are changing everything. In this poem converge two of Rexroth's characteristic strengths, the weaving of his political consciousness with his gift as a nature writer, especially of the California mountains.

By the end of his life, Rexroth's perspective had become predominantly Buddhist and this permeates his last two collections, *Love is an Art of Time* (1974) and *The Morning Star* (1979) and the preceding long poem, *The Heart's Garden, the Garden's Heart*, written in Kyoto in 1967, just before he moved to Santa Barbara for the last fourteen years of his life. We find a recurring liminal quality in this late work, as in 'Parity':

My uncle believed he had
A double in another
Universe right here at hand
Whose life was the opposite
Of his in all things - the man
On the other side of zero.
Sometimes they would change places.
Not in dreams, but for a moment
In waking, when my uncle
Would smile a certain sly smile
And pause or stagger slightly
And go about his business. (CP 696)

In 'Suchness', from the same period, he writes:

Our substance
Is whatever we feed our angel.
The perfect incense for worship
Is camphor, whose flames leave no ashes. (CP 702)

['Suchness' is an English equivalent for 'Tathata' (Sanskrit, 'the soul').]

In this last span of poems is a disembodiment, which is yet the culmination of a life lived so much in the concrete world. All this was influenced by Rexroth's late trips to Japan, his intense interest in Japanese poetry, particularly by women poets, even to inventing his own, in Marichiko, which Morgan Gibson says 'is Rexroth's most enigmatic work. Was he using Buddhist traditions primarily to write love poems, or does he join the ranks of great contemplative poets, symbolizing the experience of nirvana in sexual union? Or both?'(fn.1). Marichiko is his Muse, a distillation of his life, perhaps, too, a vanishing act, or 'a metamorphosis/ Kept secret even from myself'.

Rexroth is a poet best read selectively, though an assiduous reader will discover a bedrock of true quality. At each stage one encounters a mind at work on human problems, political solutions, on the natural world and humanity's place in it, on love in all its forms from the erotic to the spiritual, and the freeing of mind and body in transcendence. Finally, a life's work such as this has something to offer Canadian readers and writers, among others. The editors and Copper Canyon Press are to be congratulated.

Mike Doyle is the author of* Living Ginger *and of an ecellent biography of Richard Aldington. He has written books on Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams.

WYATT(*continued from Page 11*)
friends. But speaking isn't writing, I said, and travelling isn't always a source of inspiration. Preparing for long trips can be exhausting. I didn't mention that having to introduce yourself over and over to people who ask what you write and whether you use a computer can make you want to hide in your hotel room. But that may be no refuge because often, the maid in your hotel is a writer and wants to tell you the plot of her play.

I talked about the ways of a writer, the beginnings of a narrative, the importance of a true voice. I tried to inject into the speech I was giving a sense if not of martyrdom at least of self-sacrifice. But who was I kidding?

I sat down. Applause. There was a speech of thanks. The pleasure was all mine, I said, and truly I meant it.

I could have travelled less and written more but I have seen the place where Poseidon's son kept the Four Winds. And I have known a perfect moment of solitude in a little town called Bergamo.

Rachel Wyatt is a writer and world-traveller based in Victoria, B.C.

CHRISTY(*continued from Page 16*)

As it happens, Childs has developed an ulcer, and is given a leave of absence and keys to a condo in Mexico. Anna sees her chance and cajoles him into taking her with him.

This is the plot, and it works remarkably well, leading the story into an odd-couple travel 'On The Road' rollick.

Throughout, Christy's humour is on the dark side, but not entirely black either. There are echoes of the acerbic wit of Joseph Heller, and the writing is superb taking the reader along on a bumpy trip across a land of throwaway cultures, full of people who seem to have ordered their stereotyped personalities from ads on late night television. Anna, true to herself always, smashes through the little lies of the pre-packaged lives doled out by a "totalitarian mass media."

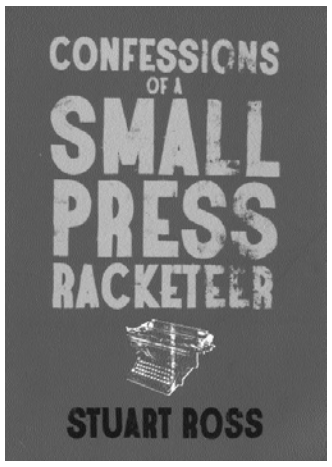
At times hilarious, with a tragic undertone, and some wonderful offbeat characters, this uncompromising novel should be on everyone's Christmas list. Anna Dupree is a compelling character in an absorbing story. And when they finally do make good their escape into Mexico surprises await.

The title, though, may be misleading to some. If you're expecting any spiritual redemption of Anna you're shit out of luck.

Al MacLachlin is a writer fliving in North Vancouver. He is about to release his first novel.

Is Stuart Ross the Future of Publishing?

John Moore



Stuart Ross isn't a famous writer even in the best-read households in Canada, yet he may be something a lot more significant than this year's ChickLit diva who has the cheekbones to make good author photo on a bookjacket or some skateboarding doofus major media can turn into a "spokesman for Generation Z". Ross is a kind of Tiresias called forth from the publishing underworld to read the riot act to a dispirited, floundering industry and issue dire warnings for all national literatures that subsist like mushrooms in the shadows of a U.S. dominated global popular culture. *Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer* may turn out to be the most prophetic and important book published in Canada in a decade or more.

This is a tall order for what initially appears to be an amusing but slight 125-page collection of the "Hunkamooga" columns Ross wrote for Word: Toronto's Literary Calendar between 2001 and 2005. Ross is one of the typical minor personae in the cast of the long-running Canlit sitcom — the irrepressible iconoclastic poet for whom even the oft too forgiving standards of our subsidized national literature constitute a climate that is sluggishly cold, careerist and elitist. Like Vancouver's pennywhistle poet, Tim Lander, and hundreds of others across North America, Ross has obstinately refused to don the knee-pads and Chapstick of the careerist writer and instead published his own work in dozens of chap-books and hawked them on streetcorners for more than twenty years; a proud decendant of the old Grub Street pamphleteers.

Just so no myopic fan or critic might mistake his writing a column for Word as some kind of sell-out, he frequently takes Word's editors to task for underpaying him, paying him erratically and not paying him at all. He also castigates ECW Press, a small but prestigious firm that committed the sin of taking him seriously and publishing three of his books, thus making themselves the unlikely personification of Big Commercial Publishing Incarnate and the Great Satan in the Ross pantheon, a role for which ECW editor Michael Holmes may be the least qualified actor on the planet. Ross rails against ECW, then apologizes, yet manages to qualify the apology in such as way as to make it more corrosive than the original insult.

Classic passive-agressive antics of the self-marginalized writer, but relatively minor schrapnel compared to the scathing barrages he unloads at "open mic" cattle-call readings where nascent poets are perversely allowed to precede featured writers and drone on forever, driving the negligible audience to flight or excess of drink. Playing Hi-Low, Ross also flogs the CBC, established literary magazines and just about everyone else who might possibly advance his writing career. Yet in "I Am the King of Poetry", "How to Not Write", "A Quarter-Century of Badly Folded Leaflets" and "I, the New Rod McKuen!", he's just as funny and just as hard on himself as he attempts to rationalize having spent most of his adult life as a literary guerilla in the boonies of CanLit, constantly exposed to rejection and depression, for a cause that would have long ago driven most poets to the kind of surrender Tom Wayman called "A Government Job At Last!".

What sets Ross apart is that, unlike most guttersnipe poets, he's not merely a monomaniac on a misson to acquaint the world with his peculiar genius. He's actually a huge fan of other self-published outlaw poets all over North America, some of whom he loves enough to have re-published under his own Proper Tales imprint. Even in the demi-monde of shirt-tail publishing, this qualifies him as a masochist with a ravenous, nay epic, appetite for suffering.

This is the point at which The Reviewer should make some patronizing concluding observation to the effect that since Ross is demonstrably a more talented humourist than he is a poet — (a verdict arguably endorsed by Anvil's publication of these columns rather than his poetry) — he'd be well advised to focus his energies on literary journalism in the future. And so I would, except that it would be missing the point by an even wider margin than most Canadian publishers mis-read the market for their books.

In fact, as Ross notes somewhere in these inspired rants, peddling poetry chap-books on streetcorners at $2 to $5 a pop actually generates unit sales figures — not to mention the infinitesimal cost overheads — that should inspire grand mal siezures of envy among most so-called 'legitimate' publishers. Thus, the question that raises its envenomed head is: what is a poet/publisher who is barely a paper-cut above being a squeegee boy or liquor store mariachi doing Right that most Canadian publishers of poetry are doing Wrong?

Conventional wisdom holds that poetry, former pageant queen of the literary arts, has become a streetwalking crack whore so wasted she can't give it away, to be indulged like some faded diva for whatever faint prestige still adheres to her once-illustrious name. Yet Ross sees poetry cavorting like a buff 18 year old porn star with a mass audience to match. His ability to sell poetry directly to the very audience that supposedly "doesn't buy poetry" suggests the difference may have something to do with his knowing how to spell the word H-U-S-T-L-E, a verb that seems to have been omitted from the dictionary employed by most Canadian publishers due to conceptual difficulties.

Granted, poetry itself is sometimes the problem. Far too much of it isn't poetry at all, but some mutant hybrid of broken up prose and observational standup comedy — a point Ross makes in "No Mere Mr. Nice Guy". I may not have endured quite as many open mics as Ross, but I've learned to always sit near the door and wear shores that don't squeak. Yet I've also witnessed the stunning response poetry can arouse, even in a reluctant audience, when it's the real thing. It's idiotic to argue that there's "no market" for this kind of transforming catharsis: it's the essence of all great literature. I've seen people line up to buy books of poems by someone they'd never heard of only forty minutes before — and probably would've ducked out on if they'd had the foresight and relfexes to beat me to that chair by the door.

When a nation boasts as many good, even great poets as Canada does currently, there have to be more telling reasons that "poetry doesn't sell". Chief among them, I suggest, are these three:

a) people who publish poetry have great literary taste and an over-abundance of faith, but no sales skills;

b) book retailers don't know how to sell poetry and would rather flog fat $40+ hardcovers that make the payola-hyped "bestseller" lists, or
even pricier flashy coffee-table books whose content can be absorbed from the title;

and c) large chain bookstores who sell books as if they were tires or tampons rely on national advertising and display space PAID FOR by big publishers to sell "products" store staff don't actually have to know anything about—other than where to stack the pile of crap.

If Stuart Ross has achieved nothing else by spending most of his adult life shuffling along freezing or sweltering sidewalks flogging "badly folded leaflets" of poems, he's proved that the asssumption that "poetry doesn't sell" is not only a retail myth — it's a black lie promulgated by marketing thugs who've never actually read a book, never mind a poem, in their entire blighted lives. At BookExpo in Toronto last year, publishers were treated to a marketing seminar by a Chapters/Indigo rep who pointedly avoided using "the B-word" throughout the session, persistently referring only to "product" and the movement thereof, as if bookselling is the cloacal end of some kind of disgusting digestive process. When booksellers refuse to carry or to actively promote poetry titles, they contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Canadian publishers whose lists are tainted by poetry already know their cards are marked. In recent years, orders for poetry — and literary fiction — from Chapters and Indigo have dropped by approximately two-thirds. Rumours that the merged chain may soon excise ALL poetry titles from its shelves have been circulating in the industry, and that's just the thin edge of the wedge that's about to be driven up our collective backsides — *sans* Vaseline. At that'n' BookExpo, Victoria bookseller and writer Robert Wiersma quizzed Toronto literary agent Denise Bukowski about the future of literary fiction and she observed curtly, "Nobody wants it".

When former Borders point-person Heather Reisman's Indigo Books chain gobbled up the ailing giant Chapters, veteran Vancouver bookseller Celia Duthie pointed out at the time in a prescient column in Maclean's, by killing off approximately a third of the independent booksellers in major urban centres, Reisman has ended up with a commodity she can sell — a single entity that effectively constitutes monopoly control of Canadian retail bookselling.

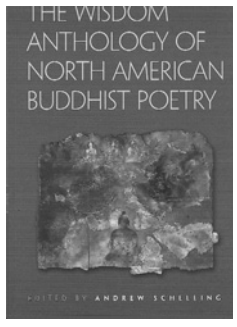
Who will buy this debt-ridden dragon choking on its own tail, opening new stores as fast as it is forced to close unprofitable existing ones? After the Chapters bankruptcy and its domino effect gutted General Publishing, garrotted major houses like Stoddart and Harper/Collins and even maimed M&S, no Canadian firm is likely to go swimming in that piranha pool again. However, there are rumours that representatives of a major American bookselling chain have already done a "walk-through" of the Chapters/Indigo operation, looking smug as real estate agents at a funeral.

Naturally, incoming American owners will want to avoid the odium of being perceived as foreign corporate interlopers whose first act is to slit the throat of a Canadian publishing industry nurtured by four decades of tax-funded government patronage, not to mention the incalculable effort and energy of tens of thousands of Canadian writers and publishers. The elegant corporate solution will be to have

(*continued on Page 31*)

An Anthology of Wisdom

Trevor Carolan



The Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry.
Andrew Schelling, Ed.
Wisdom, 398 pp.
by Trevor Carolan

In a rich preface and introduction to this volume, editor Andrew Schelling of Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Writing and Poetics insightfully places poetry firmly at the centre of North American Buddhist engagement. Significantly, in the kind of bold gesture that we saw in his exceptional essay collection *Wild Form, Savage Grammar* (La Alameda), Schelling contends as a consequence of Buddhism's gradual migration and evolution throughout Southern, Southeast, Central, and East Asia, and now the Americas, poets from these regions themselves collectively comprise "a tangle of unnamed but deeply influential lineages" within the religion's 2500 year teaching tradition. Milarepa, the Tang and Sung Chinese masters, Japan's wandering Zen bards, the American Beats…suddenly it's so obvious, but no one else seems to have mentioned it quite this way before.

Schelling, who has arrived as one of America's most masterful writers, consistently demonstrates this instructional quality in his writing, while remaining earthy and plain-spoken. His introductory essay here will make useful reading for any college or university introductory poetry course. Setting out modern poetic history, creative movements, East-West linkages, and the importance of the spiritual transfusion that Chinese and Japanese poetry brought to North American arts and letters, it establishes a dry, compassionate tone for the contributions of the 29 poets whose work follows. An excellent supplementary reading list providing bibliographic support into Buddhist, poetic and ecological practice will also be appreciated by anyone seeking information about, or working with dharma.

The anthology roster is a judicious mix of front-liners including Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, Diane Di Prima, Joanne Kyger, and Michael McClure, with important second-wave figures Sam Hamill, Jane Hirshfield, Arthur Sze, and a provocative bundle of others—monks, priests, teachers, mid-career veterans, unknown novices, even Phillip Whalen from heaven. It's a starting squad of powerful range, depth, perception, virtuosity, that—O, merciful Buddha—can also laugh at itself.

The Editor, Andrew Schelling

Tyler Doherty, a newcomer, writes with wry humour in "Raven's Revenge" and "Bodhidharma Never Came To Hatboro." Ferlinghetti's "A Buddha In The Woodpile", with its furious lament on the Waco, Texas Davidian shootout is compassionate, angry, despairing, but never hopeless: "If there had been only one / calm little Ghandi / in a white sheet or suit / one not-so-silent partner / who at the last moment shouted Wait…" Surely this is one of the great modern American poems by an old dharma politico who still kicks ass after all these years.

Dale Pendell, who is discussed elsewhere in this edition, contributes an exegesis entitled "Amrta: The Neuropharmacology of Nirvana." In a tour de force, Pendell takes all those difficult to read pharmacopian, ethnobotanical, way-out consciousness inquiries that float by from time to time, and gives them a stripped-down architecture with enough intellectual horsepower to fuel a shot at the Paris-Dakar Road Race. It's a brilliant exposition on the spiritual intoxicants Mother Earth has made available to us. Whether it's poetry or poetics is anyone's guess, but Pendell borrows a concept from beloved Honolulu Zen master Robert Aitken that reaches to the heart of our contemporary flower-garland queries—" A deep dream of participation in the Buddha Dharma."

In "The Quality of Striving", Chase Twitchell reflects on Bob Dylan, saying, "I want words half zendo / half casino, like his…", then uses her words in "Marijuana" to record "a flash of mind, a memory: / [of] how after each deflowerment/ I became the flower."

Diane Di Prima, one of North America's most persistently under-valued poets, offers a lovely, surreal conversation with the late Suzuki-Roshi that you won't forget ("For Suzuki Roshi"), and a prayerful "Death Sunyata Chant":

> *If the paths of the bardo are glorious*
> *or frightening*
> *if the light & sound is deafening*
> *overwhelming*
> *everything is illusion*
>
> *…If you will be judged by a bureaucratic god*
> *or wear golden shoes in the golden fields of the Lord.*
> *or carry to death yr guilt about kinky sex*
> *If the faces you hallucinate are a last judgement*
> *Everything is an illusion…*

Sam Hamill, literary jack-of-all-trades, and perhaps best known as a translator of East Asian master texts, contributes one of the collection's real dazzlers in "The New York Poem." Not many Westerners have Hamill's bittersweet Tang sharpness:

> *…Alone among ash and bones and ruins,*
> *Tu Fu and Basho write the poem.*
> *The last trace of blind rage fades*
>
> *And a mute sadness settles in,*
> *Like dust, for the long haul. But if*
> *I do not get up and dance again,*
> *The savages will win.*
>
> *I'll kiss the sword that kills me if I must.*

Reminding us that we need to see more from Afro-American sangha members like her, Haryette Mullen shakes the shake in "Kamasutra Sutra." It's short, but oh, so sweet:

> *This is a story I have heard:*
>
> *Entwined in a passionate embrace*
> *With his beloved wife,*
> *The holy one exclaimed,*
> *"I have reached enlightenment!"*

(*continued on Page 21*)

Stumbling in the Bloom

a review by Allan Brown


John Pass

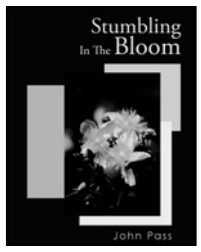
St***umbling In The Bloom b***y John Pass, Oolichan Books, 2005. 120 pp. $17.95 Cdn.

This vibrant and well-produced volume completes John Pass's four book poetic project *At Large*. The set began with *The Hour's Acropolis* in 1991 and *Radical Innocence* in 1994, both issued by Harbour Publishing. The third book, *Water Stair* (Oolchan Books) appeared in 2000.

These collections sometimes include and set in a new context prior material that was published independently —with the chapbook *Mud Bottom* (High Ground Press, 1996), for instance, preparing for and being included in *Water Stair*. Similarly the individual longpoems *nowrite.doc* (Leaf Press, 2004) and *Twinned Towers* (Fox Run Press, 2005) are re-printed and thus poetically realigned in Parts I and III respectively of *Stumbling In The Bloom*. These pieces are indeed crucial to an understanding and appreciation of the book as a whole and deserve close examination and regular back reference.

The four sections of *Stumbling In The Bloom* all bear subtitles taken from one of the poems, the first being "Trumpet Vine,"a thoughtful and contented celebration of the writer's fiftieth birthday. But the centre of Part I is "nowrite.doc," a wryly humorous and gently affectionate account of his struggles with his project, moving somehow "in the labyrinth" of the awkward. obsessive thing, with any and all writings or art makings, and his all so recognizably human response to them "standing there blank in my head splashed bright, hopeful." The struggles repeat, but they also become more specific as the "writing-against-not-writing" effort pushes into "entries, entrances at domesticity's margins—" and a richer kind of humanity returns; and then a place apt to these writhing energies at "garden edge, lake edge, kitchen counter, rooftop—" and a bit further and a bit further yet till it becomes "certain onto beauty's / shade-shifting sun-splashed / high ground."

Not all of the work in the book is so intricately woven, though all of it maintains an equally high professional sheen. There is an easy and open, chatty tone to the anecdotal "Dismantling The Treehouse" in Part II ("The Crowd All Over The Sign"). Here is the poet plain as he remembers and recognizes the "scrappy superstructure" of the old fort in all its details, even the "nails / pulled and bent are those I took up // with me, driven to enter and hold." His theme, how the energy of a taking apart becomes another putting together, is presented merely, and rests quite openly with a kind of insouciant grace, allowing us to hold or release it as we wish.



In Part III ("Idiot Of Place") he deals with the causes and effects of human anxiety, in its historical as well as its existential dimensions, with the persistent uncertainty of the personal/artistic as well as the political forum: "No straight lines in art or nature.: ("Twinned Towers"). Our changing, ever distorting perceptions may well be the only instruments we have to fully or at least sufficiently understand the limits of death or life. They alternate in "Twinned Towers" and other poems in this section with a compulsive rhythm. "The world is terrible with names," he brusquely states in "Ground Zero," and he names/speaks the history and terror of them in "Twinned Towers," a massive meditation upon the 911 attack that isolates and considers the Hagia Sophia, anonymous minarets, the Old Testament's Babel, our own CN tower, Hart Crane's Brooklyn Bridge, and with a grim irony, the leaning tower of Pisa, near which the re do, to enlarge our existence in the direction of shared human experience." Persky shares these thoughts with Pass, and provides another opportunity for the rest of us to share them as well.

Allan Brown's poetry has been published across Canada since 1962 and is partly collected in seventeen books and chapbooks. His reviews have appeared since 1976.

IN MEMORIUM

Remembering Gwladys Downes

M. Travis Lane

The literary community were saddened to learn of the passing of poet and scholar Gwladys Downes shortly after Labour Day this past fall. It was especially poignant at the Pacific Rim Review of Books as Gwladys was among our greatest supporters. Her final piece of critical writing, "The Last Time They Saw Paris," was published in our Fall issue, published the same week as her death. This final work evokes the romance and beauty of the finest city in the world, where Gwladys studied as a young woman. Two weeks prior to her death, I came over to her small Oak Bay bungalo to study the proofs before setting them in type. She had a fine eye for detail, and sharp as ever, made swift and pointed corrections. She complained that her body could not keep up with her mind, and that her body had given up but her mind had not. She spoke of Rilke, and discussed the merits of various translations (provoked by Kuldip Gill's essay on Rilke in the same issue). She remembered a conversation she had years ago with Paul Valery's wife. Who today has had any contact with Paul Valery!? She talked to me about a future article, perhaps for the next issue, a memoir of her meeting and conversations with TS Eliot in London during the late forties. I got up enthusiasticaly, full of the busyness of life, never realizing that this would be the last time I would see her. I was so looking forward to receiving her memoir of Eliot. "But I must warn you," she said in her cautionary tone, "I write very slowly, very slowly, so no promises. I cannot guarantee that I can meet your deadline." I never saw her again. As her good friend, Anne Saddlemyer said, "We will not see her like again."

Richard Olafson, Editor, PRRB

I first met Gwladys Downes in 1983. She was a friend and former student of my husband's uncle, Dana Rouillard and his wife Harriet, who both recognized Gwladys's scholarship, skill as a translator, and poetic talent. They felt we would have much in common, and, at their urging, Gwladys invited me to visit with her during the West Coast Women and Words conference. I was also to be a guest of Gwladys's friend Rona Murray, and I had been asked to read at the conference by my friend Sharon Nelson. The conference gave us much to discuss and share. Since that time I have visited Gwladys only twice, once with my husband, and once by myself.

But she was so much a companion in poetry! We shared the same interests and tastes in poetry. I know she influenced me and certainly what influenced her also influenced me; we shared a poetic/"spiritual" vocabulary. For both of us the power of the great myths that have shaped human thought lies in the truths these myths speak: about us; and to us; and, for those of us who, like Gwladys, can touch the deep foundations of our collective, animal, and historical psyche, through our poetry.

Many poets try to find deep truths by recording their dreams but dream too shallowly, become amusing rather than profound. And some of them either resist the frightening material we find deep within us, or "goth" it up, making tattoos or t-shirts of genuine horrors. The "ancestral voices" are often frightening. What they tell us has to be understood by poetry, not by reading tea-leaves, or by numerology, or by applying quantification to the unquantifiable. For Gwladys, neither poetry nor religious faith should be literal, translatable, quantifiable, or reducible to Wal-Mart "science" or pseudo-science of the sort that studies the effect of prayer on variably unhealthy patients.

Poems, like music, can tell us truths we can not "check out." The "soul," for example, can not be found or defined or measured, nor can its mysterious relationship to identity or community be adequately described. The term is both meaningful and, scientifically considered, meaningless. But in her poetry, Gwladys revealed "soul." Perceptive, rational, courageous, witty—a secular humanist Christian agnostic believer, lover of nature, art, and friends, she was a shaman, and a very grand poet.

While I have been thinking of all the debts I owe her, all the illuminations she has provided me, I began to look over not just her books but the single sheets of poems she has over the years sent me, often poems in early drafts. And I found to my great surprise that I have two poems by her that were not included in her most recent book. Perhaps they did not live up to her high standards; but they seem very good to me. Perhaps she misplaced them? I suspect that I am not the only poet to whom she sent copies of poems she was working on, and I think that poems like these should see print. They should be available for us all to read. And perhaps, if we can find enough of them, we can produce another small chapbook of Gwladys's poems?

M. Travis Lane was a long-time friend of Gwladys Downes. She is a poet living in New Brunswick.

TWO POEMS BY GWLADYS DOWNES

The poems were prepared for publication by Sharon H. Nelson in consultation with M. Travis Lane and in light of Gwladys's hand-written notes.

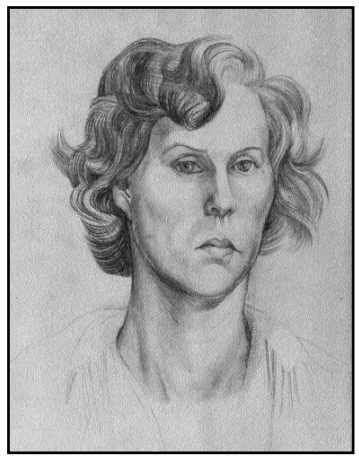
woman as model

loggers swear
the old woman down by the creek mouth
is mad, is Irish
a witch who mutters to stones
they say
an ill wind blew from the Western Isles
dropped her along this slope
grey egg-shaped pebbles shifting underfoot
bruising the fragile bones

a scavenger silver as an old wild mink
or logs that fed her fire
she has forgotten
how city studios once went crazy
over her apple colouring
crescent breasts and curving shadows
marking the violet thighs

but the portraits were skewed, each one
the mere distortion of a blinded self
reflecting half-tones made of different lies
at the last exhibition
all the curious eyes from the walls
tracked her round
"who are you?" "who am I?" and she ran
circling like a singed cat from flame
until she crashed entirely out of time
into this still lagoon

now raccoons and passing deer
know her only as a twisted stick
charred by her burning



Gwladys Downes Portrait
by Jack Shadbolt

House of Cedars
by *Gwladys Downes*

Slippage

Yes, call me alien, stranger,
out of place,
torn from my moving corridor
sideways, and back through thinnest membrane,
interface, surface of skin
into our parallel lane.

What loop is this
curving out from my linear thread,
an arabesque where I dance?
In dream the pattern changes;
I am mare
sullenly pacing in a white-washed stall
visited by hands which offer
sugar, a little ginger, apples
wrinkling in dead air.

I have stumbled onto the wrong stage
with a script
not of my making. I am uncertain
about these masks, calling them mere personae
donned for a secondary role
in your predictable drama.

What's honesty? At least
the deep-laid nerves don't lie;
lost and neglected, dumb,
an eyeless doll in straw, Psyche,
resurgent, needs no mask to veil return
flashing through fields of undivided time
where a mare treads lightly
in her luminous skin, the steps a ritual
under rein and rope.

CAROLAN(*continued from Page 19*)

His devoted partner responded,
"I'm truly happy for you, my love,
and if you can give me another minute,
I believe I'll get there too."

Miriam Sagan, Janet Rodney, Shin Yu Pai—likely you haven't heard of them, but after reading them in this collection you won't forget their works. Nor will you remain unmoved after encountering Lawson Fusao Inada's simple elegy to Nyogen Senzaki, the self-effacing Zen dishwasher who lived in obscurity in L.A., and without whom Buddhism in the West would still be wandering in the dark.

There is so much one could say about this compendium, especially from gilt-edged sages like Snyder, Kyger and Sze. As a Wisdom edition its production values are underscored by integrity throughout, and though other Buddhist poetry collections are available these days, nothing else comes close to the excitement packed into this one. Nobody gets it more right than Mike O'Connor in his meditation on the poet Han Shan—Cold Mountain—in his epic-titled, "On The Road To Denver In A Coat And Tie, I Think of My Old Friend Master Red Pine And the Example He Inspires"—"You're all a band of angels / in a leaking boat at sea."

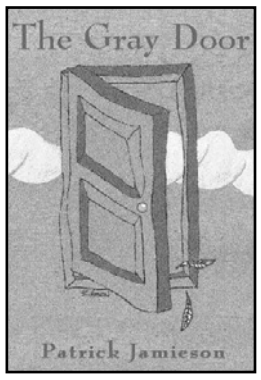
Well, indeed we are, but finally someone has explained it all for us: O'Connor, Master Red Pine, and Han Shan,—they go together like ham 'n eggs and hashbrowns, and even tofu aficionados will find plenty to read and love in Schelling's gritty anthology, where thanks to the Buddha, the hits just keep on coming.

Trevor Carolan is an editor with PRRB. He lives in Deep Cove, B.C.

Behind the gray door

Martin Van Woudenberg

The Gray Door, Patrick Jamieson. Ekstasis Editions, 2004.



It almost feels wrong to read Patrick Jamieson's book of poetry *The Gray Door* in the heat of summer. His reflections and musings find their birth in Nova Scotia, and his imagery is significantly effective at bringing many of the sights and sounds of the Atlantic province into Pacific minds – so much so that they invoke a desire to put on a thick sweater and inhale the crispness of late fall air. Reading the poems, one has the pleasure of standing on the porches, watching the breakers, and sipping hot tea in the places Jamieson captures in memory and pours onto paper. It is precisely in such small and distinct images that *The Gray Door* is, even simply on the surface, worth reading. However, the true value and pleasure of the collection comes in further reflection upon the themes this poet offers without pretension.

Jamieson was born in Vancouver, has travelled the length of Canada, and has now returned to the West once again. Actively involved in the Roman Catholic Church, he has written several books about the politics and challenges faced by the institution in general and by Bishop Remi De Roo in particular. There is spirituality in his work that is notably Catholic, but it also carries traces of Carl Jung, whom Jamieson has read at length. There is also the air of experience, the kind you cannot find in books of religion or philosophy, and will not acquire without actively living a life worth talking about later on.

The book is divided into four sections. Each is cohesive enough to justify the division used, but there are no dramatic shifts in emotion or revelation as the book progresses. A great many poems are reflections on events, often what anyone observing them at the time would likely label as insignificant: The quiet talk at the church, the walk along the beach, the actions of the traffic lady, and the patterns of birds. Numerous poems are also deliberately dedicated to specific people. However, to the author's credit, the reader never feels like someone missing an inside joke, staring pointlessly at an image, or intruding into a private conversation. Jamieson's style is easy and accepting, as though the reader would have been welcome at those occasions. It is this sense of casual intimacy that makes the book so comfortable to read.

The poet's main focus is on relationships with friends, family, community, and lovers. The memories shared, the tender moments savoured, and the hurts that both teach and scar. Consider: *You will recall, Beyond your final call / Fall and curtained hall, / How I read at her funeral, / Cared about her / And grew through it all,* is a good example of Jamieson's tone and occasional melancholy style that unfolds throughout the book. There is a concern for self-growth and enlightenment, and the reader comes to feel that we understand Jamieson in some small way. The challenge, subtly presented, is that we likewise become introspective and willingly examine the small moments of life, gleaning from them what we can.

There is no great density to the poetry in *The Gray Door* — certainly this is not verse that requires significant investment and effort in order to unpack its subtle

Watcher of Shadows

Isa Milman

Shadowcatcher, Wendy Morton, Ekstasis Editions 2005.

In her new, third collection of poetry, Wendy Morton writes:

> *I want my bones to show*
> *so anyone could name them:*
> *heartbone, painbone*
> *soulbone, deathbone*

and so she bares her bones for us, while she takes us on a walk through in her garden, along the beach, or on the road in her travels. She loves company. Friends, strangers that she meets in a hardware or dollar store, or flying across the continent on WestJet—it doesn't matter. And she loves to perform, especially her brilliant Gypsy Rose Lee number; so skillful is she that we suddenly become aware that her beautiful bones are showing.

Morton knows how to make us laugh, too, as she brings out the stuff of her life, and we recognize the things that we hold most dear, but usually overlook or underrate—clam shells wrapped in bear scat, ladles and ice-cream scoops pulled out of the kitchen drawer. These everyday objects hold the richness of our everyday, if only we'd stop and pay attention. Morton holds these up for us to see their beauty, and what that beauty has to say about our lives. She urges us to remember the small skeletons, offers us a cure for melancholy, and advises on how to find comfort in our tear-stained lives: go to the VV Boutique and be helpful to the guy who wants advice on the fit of a cocktail dress. Ask if it fits. Make sure the bear has had enough apples before shooing him out of the summer kitchen.

Morton's voice is infectious. She's a diva, who would have been wowing us at the opera, if only she could sing that way. Her music is in her feet, as Fred Astaire's partner, dancing on the ceiling, one arm gleefully hugging Fred's waist, the other reaching out, beckoning us to come on up and join her. She's a person of huge generosity, palpable on each page. Morton is our Billy Collins, writing poems so inviting, that all who enter have a wonderful time, and when it's time to leave, notice that something about them has changed: now the heart beats differently. You have been inspired and nourished, and exposed to some mighty fine bones.

Isa Milman lives in Victoria, B.C. Her poetry collection,* Between the Doorposts, *won the Jewish Book Award for Poetry.

THE GRAY DOOR (*continued from Page 26*

meanings. Words and images are laid out on the page and presented merely for what they are. Use of symbols and types is infrequent, and Jamieson focuses on concrete imagery and short, tight, descriptions to create the mental pictures for his audience. This is, in other words, not poetry for poets and academics exclusively, though many of them will undoubtedly find much to appreciate here. Jamieson's work is an excellent read for those who traditionally ignore this literary art form, serving as a worthy introduction to the emotions and appreciation that poetry can invoke.

In an age where religion has fallen decidedly out of favour, *The Gray Door*, and especially the author's other works, makes no apology for faith and conviction. Instead, Jamieson reveals how strong ties, strong faith, and a life lived by principles is not a crutch for the weak-minded, but a source of considerable strength and inner peace. This is not shock poetry, designed to agitate and arouse, but a welcome progression of clear and reflective imagery that allows the reader to appreciate the small things in life and the people around them that make it all worthwhile. As such, it is a worthy read, even in the heat of a Pacific summer.

***Martin VanWoudenberg lives in Aldergrove, B.C. where he works at web design and completing an English degree. He is the author of* How to Fake Romance.**

THE LAST MODERNIST:

Eldon Grier in Canada

review by Stephen Morrissey

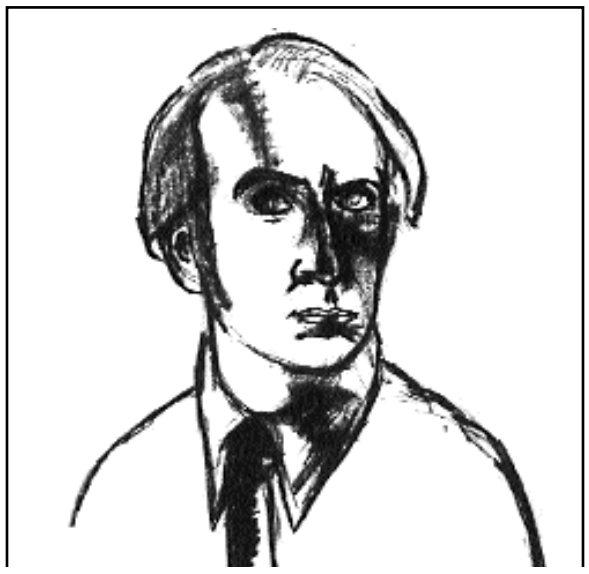
Eldon Grier, Collected Poems, 1955 – 2000
Ekstasis Editions, 2001

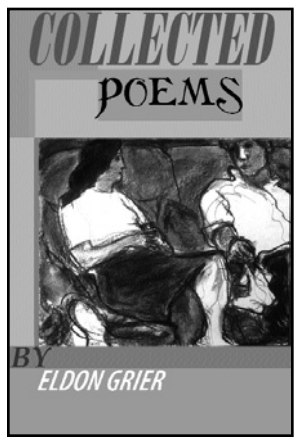
The publication of Eldon Grier's Collected Poems, 1955-2000 establishes Grier as a modernist Canadian poet, and allows for an excellent overview of his poetry, gathering work written over four decades and published in eight previous books. Grier considered the book as his "autobiography in poems"; indeed, the different periods of the poet's life are the background or content of many of the poems. Some readers who are acquainted with Eldon Grier as a poet are not aware that he was also an accomplished visual artist, or that he spent over half of his life living in Montreal before moving to Vancouver in 1968.

Eldon Grier's *Collected Poems, 1955-2000* is a portrait of a creative man. Already a visual artist, Grier turned to writing poetry in the early 1950s, after contracting tuberculosis and being confined to a sanitarium for over two years. Still, Grier is primarily a visual artist who also wrote poetry and his poetry needs to be seen in this context. He is not a poet who is concerned with creating the perfectly crafted poem as much as he is a poet of self-expression. P.K. Page, the modernist poet and a contemporary of Eldon Grier, is primarily a poet but she is also a visual artist under the name P.K. Irwin. There is an established tradition for this kind of cross-over of the arts. For instance, bill bissett is well-known poet but also a painter. Kenneth Patchen and e.e. cummings are known as poets, but they were also visual artists. The French-German artist Hans Arp is another example like Grier of a visual artist who also wrote a great amount of original poetry.

Grier's Collected Poems, 1955-2000 is divided into seven sections. These sections are largely autobiographical in content, beginning with growing up in Montreal; time spent in Mallorca; more poems on Montreal; his long poem "An Ecstasy"; time spent in Mexico; another section of poems on Montreal; and, finally, later poems on Montreal and British Columbia. Grier's poetic and psychic centre is Montreal. Norman Levine's book title, Canada Made Me could be applied in a modified form to Grier; it would be "Montreal Made Me". Grier is one of the English-speaking Montreal modernist poets, along with Louis Dudek, F.R. Scott, Irving Layton and others.

One of Grier's Montreal poems is "November





1956". This poem describes a panoramic view of city. He refers to the refineries in the east end of the city, the University of Montreal, and so on. Another poem, "Lafontaine Park", is an opportunity for Grier to remember

My father and his brother Harold,
You should have known them,
Left no works only legend.

Grier, the artist, has left both works and legend. The poem is a reflection on family, and concludes with a memory of his daughter,

Strolling in the park with Sharon,
Doing the backward multiplication
Of conception—
Awaiting the new words.

Grier also writes a poem entitled "Point St. Charles", about the working-class neighbourhood in Montreal that David Fennario writes about. Grier seemed to live and breathe the city, to go beneath the surface of things to find the essence, which then became a part of his very being as a human and an artist.

While teaching at The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in the early 1950s, Grier met his wife, the artist Sylvia Tait. Among his colleagues in Montreal were Arthur Lismer, Jacques de Tonnacour, and Goodridge Roberts (see Grier's poem "Following Goodridge Roberts"). He also studied fresco under the Mexican artist Diego Rivera. "Meeting in Paris" is about an uncomfortable meeting with John Glassco; Grier, in the poem, describes feeling somewhat inferior to the urbane Glassco. One of Grier's most vivid portraits in words is of another of his teachers, the artist John Lyman, with whom he had a personal relationship; this helps make the poem more engaging and Lyman more sympathetic to the reader. Grier writes,

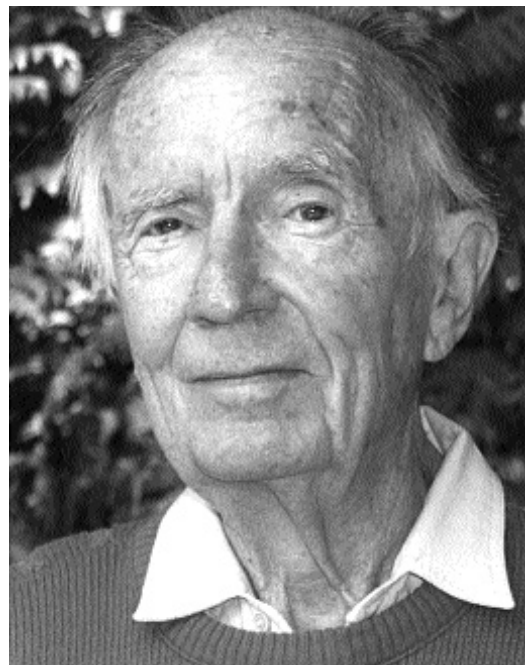
"even before the flattest
Quebec landscape I feel more…"
he wrote in his diary 1927
coming home to Montreal
ah the miserly stale
humanity of being "French"
the rootless monied sickness of "English"
ankle-deep in the good grey slush
we stood our ground

Finally, in the second of three poems that make up "Traveling Via Rail" Grier writes,

it's hard to take but
Canada still equates — will always
it seems equate — with "region"
only in the island state of English Montreal did
something rise above those racked preoccupations
dictated to by landscape isolation

Of course, when Grier was growing up in Montreal, the city did seem the centre of Canadian culture and business, although it began to transform during the first years of the twentieth century. This attitude, upheld by the social milieu Grier experienced as a child, is one that he continued to resonate to most of his life; he continued to return to Montreal until only a few years before his death.

Grier's major poem is "An Ecstasy". This long poem doesn't so much talk about the experience of



ecstasy as much as provide a vehicle for the poet's experience of writing. He writes, "As a poet I need to experience ecstasy". "An Ecstasy" reminds me of John Newlove's extraordinary long poem "White Philharmonic Novels" (The Night the Dog Smiled, 1986). These long poems by Grier and Newlove don't seem to be held together by much more than the individual author's consciousness, and both poems are amalgams of sometimes disjointed and disconnected perceptions. Grier's poem has an apparent logic that Newlove's poem lacks. Grier's poem is made up of twenty-four sections; in section fifteen he calls for "poems of the insatiable emptiness", and in section sixteen he writes,

Our poets must give themselves to a kind
of insensible madness;
they must hear music not meaning as they write.

Grier dedicates another poem, "I Was Brought Up By The Sea", to the composer Istvan Anhalt, whose composition "Cento" put excerpts of Grier's "An Ecstasy" to music. In "An Ecstasy", Grier writes,

A famished man
I savour the smallest morsels:
a pale blue star at the bottom of a pond,
a rocking headlight swarming with locusts…

The joy of writing, an experience that includes Grier's "ecstasy", is found in creativity, the act of writing in and for itself. With the publication of Eldon Grier's *Collected Poems, 1955-2000*, this poet who found meaning and depth in creativity, now joins other poets in representing the Canadian vision.

Stephen Morrissey writes from Montreal.

ARCHER (*continued from Page 9)*

authorship in Canada; and Mary Augusta Tappage, a proud elder woman who defines spirit and resiliency.

Drummers, those who are known for their work in mixing contemporary and traditional art forms, and for bringing clarity and healing for people through their work are: Susan Point (check out her artwork on the Spirit of British Columbia ferry); Anne Harte, poet-on-the-beat, whose work pulses with an urban voice; Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas cartoonist, and myth maker of ecological tales, logging and history; and the visionaries of En'owkin Centre and Theytus Books who work at providing academic education and culturally relevant opportunities for aboriginal people. Executive Director, Jeannette Armstrong is also well known for her contribution to BC's world of authorship. Additionally, Vera Manuel brings healing to the community through her poignant theatre scripts and work as a healing workshop coordinator. Métis-Cree poet Marilyn Dumont, whose work continues " the struggle to assert the legitimacy of Métis identity" is also featured. All these and other uplifting and educational portraits of proud Drummers are found in Twigg's book.

On the Pow-Wow trail you find many people, and I'd be lying if I didn't admit to knowing some of these individuals in some way. That's the thing with the Pow Wow trail, everyone who reads this book will likely find their own familiar faces, family members, friends and admired others to point out. There is Harold Eustache, prompted by his *Ke7e* Mary Augusta to write a small tale (Harold and I had a short conversation in Secwepem'stin at a funeral fire whereby he showed me my own ability to speak and understand my own language); Agness Jack was a co-worker of mine at the Northern Secwepemc Treaty Society and, as I found out, was also the editor for a publication that has lead to residential school healing in our communities. Also find Garry Gottfriedson a Secwepemc man, rancher and poet; Harry Robinson, who has recently been featured in BC Bookworld; and Phyllis Chelsea, a woman respected for her work in the community in Esketemc. Then there is the politically charged and passionate work of George Manuel who is still respected today in many circles both provincially and nationally.

Overall I think this compilation of BC authors and artists is a great start to recognizing the varied and impressive work of aboriginal people in the written and artistic realms. Anyone who reads this book and is aboriginal is likely to form their own pow-wow trail within its pages. One of the most interesting things about this book as I read through it was the way in which so many writers and artists were related to others who are also featured in Twigg's work. Ha, we are all connected somehow, and it's refreshing to see these connections featured.

This compilation shows that the work of BC writers and authors is still being handled with tradition. Sure, its adaptations are felt in how the work is being documented and presented, but overall it goes to prove, yet again that aboriginal artists are interconnected, the family lines of storytellers and artists runs strong, being passed from one generation to another. This book can be devoured in one or two sittings, front to back, from one section to another, or in small doses. It's a satisfying read for anyone who is interested in knowing more about the work of aboriginal writers and artists. It has piqued my curiosity and left me wanting more. As mentioned, a full two and a half warm pieces of bannock with peanutbutter and jam!

Kristine Archie is Northern Secwepemc from Tsq'escen' and momma to Shadowhawk. She currently lives in Victoria and working as a B.C. Child and Youth Officer.

CRANMER (*continued from Page 9)*

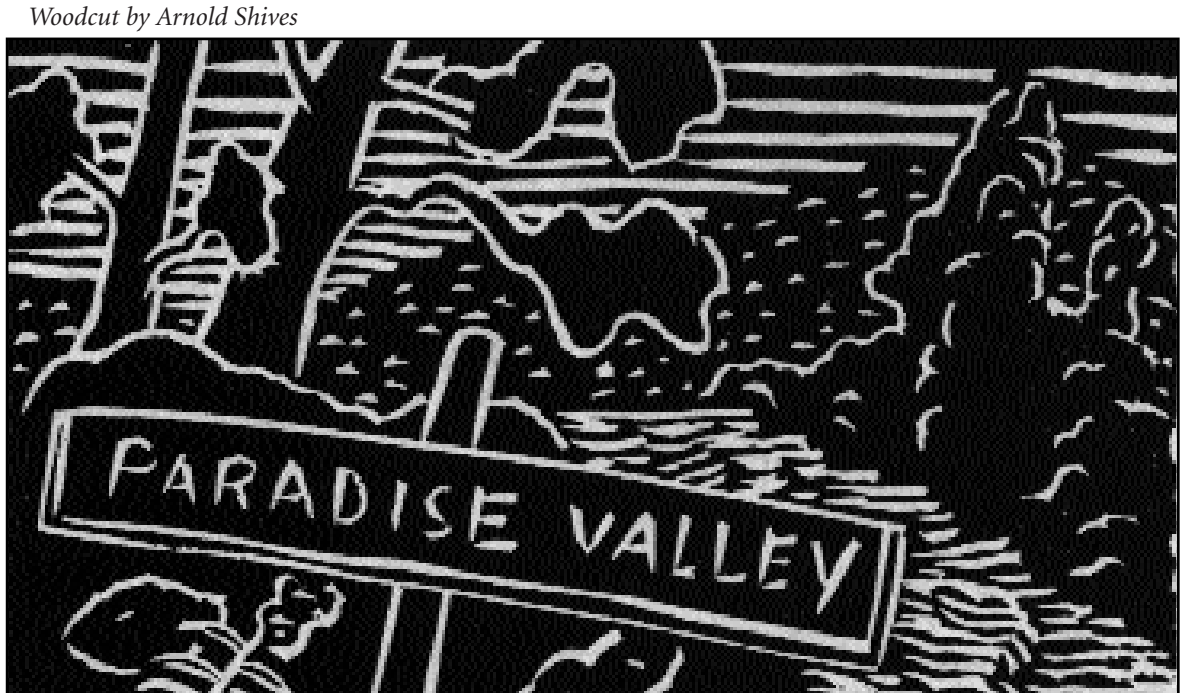
Almost ironically, Twigg's next entry begins with a statement by Larry Loyie: "Don't let anyone steal a good story you remember. Write it down. The written word strengthens our oral tradition." So what is Twigg's point? The issue of appropriation and representation becomes veiled in ambiguity, at best.

Where Sky and McGregor's oral traditions are affirmed primarily through Bringhurst's scholarly validation, Indigenous academics are implicitly marginalized in Twigg's attribution of Howard Adams' position on this subject: "Adams was critical of the emphasis on traditional storytelling at the expense of rationalist dialogue and academic standards." Twigg then concludes the Adams entry with the following quotation from Adams' essay *Challenging Eurocentric History*: "I am deeply concerned by the incredible lack of authentic Aboriginal historical writing." But when I examined Adams' essay, I found he was making an entirely different point. Adams does express a concern about the "lack of authentic Aboriginal historical writing" but goes on to say: "By muffling the voices of protest or simply by ignoring them, the corporate ruling class hopes to keep Natives out of sight. . . Our struggle for liberation should expand and advance in all dimensions." In short, Adams is not attacking Indigenous scholarship but advocating a revolution in Indigenous thought. Twigg's disturbing misinterpretation of Adams 'concern' contributes to an increasingly colonial sub-text.

The Twigg zone, for all of its embedded assumptions in what amounts to "cultural news", might be an easy read for the mainstream, but I suggest that this text includes elements of "Indianology—the study and marketing of First Nations culture" that Twigg derides in his Foreword. Resting comfortably in the arms of the mainstream's publishing and academic infrastructure, *Aboriginality* will satisfy casual readers desiring a taste of Indigenous literary and artistic productivity in BC. Undoubtedly, the book is a worthwhile start, providing countless entry points for further study. But serious readers will remain wary of Twigg's failure to clearly and cleanly surface his assumptions from the outset.

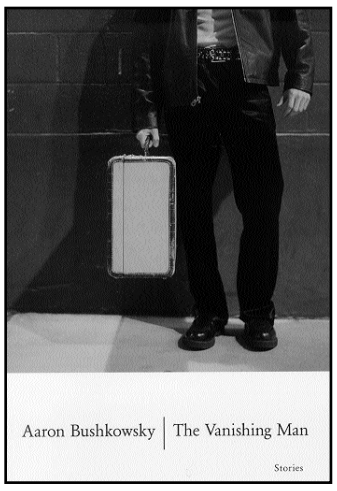
Laura Cranmer is a 'Namgis instructor and playwright who currently teaches First Nations Studies at Malaspina-University College.

Woodcut by Arnold Shives



PAPER HOUSES, THOUGHTS ON AARON BUSHKOWSKY'S *FRAGILE WORLD*

review by Linda Rogers



The Vanishing Man, by Aaron Bushkowsky, (Cormorant Books, paper, 248 pages, 2005)

What an interesting genre, a hive of poetry and fiction from the fallen children of Prairie fundamentalists: Mennonites, Baptists, Kabbalists, their wisdom forged in the stone age rhetoric of the Pentateuch. Shunned, banished from the Promised Land, they are a fascinating swarm of writers. Their Exodus from Paradise provides witness to the corruption and decline of the idealism that brought many of our ancestors to the New World.

Aaron Bushkowsky has been quietly chewing paper for years, building a mansion to house the ephemeral lives of men about to endure a loss of faith in this collection of linked stories. The Good News is that they are all programmed with the ethical architecture that helps them to survive disillusionment. As the sacraments of marriage and faith are dissolved in a series of painful epiphanies in these stories, the notion of goodness and the vanishing men edure.

Bushkowsky has been quietly working at his craft for years, polishing dialogue, the glue of community, even, no especially, in beehives humming with the activity of building and repairing, shaping the poetry that makes every word count in his form of secular prayer. Only occasionally do the men and the writer falter, reminding us that they are human and that the notion of divinity that drove their forefathers was not only an impossible dream, but also an act of pride.

God's house has many mansions. It is a beehive. Bees see with compound eyes and so does the writer/outsider refracting light and reflecting the many colours of faith in ordinary human existence. Betrayed by hyprocrisy and intolerance, these men, who are one man in the one story of man, persevere. They learn the lesson we all learn as we move from innocence to experience — there are no absolutes —no definition for man or God in the language of mortals. We all fall down and the falling is an act of faith, somebody will say "horrible, just horrible and another will probably say, beautiful at the same time." Amen.

Linda Rogers writes from Victoria.

A BAKER'S DOZEN

review by Wayne Cunningham

The Magician's Beautiful Assistant...and other stories
by Rachel Wyatt
Hedgerow Press www.hedgerowpress.com
173 pages $19.95 paper
ISBN 0-9736882-2-X

Rachel Wyatt's baker's dozen of 13 tantalizing short stories in *The Magician's Beautiful Assistant…and other stories* are marvellous, simply marvellous.

The stories in her collection take place world-wide – in homes and apartments, in an artist's studio, a writer's cottage, a gallery, an office, a town hall, even on the street, and in Toronto, Barrie and North Bay, in Victoria, Vancouver, Ottawa and Paris. In one story a man injured in Iqualuit is medevacued to Montreal and in another a visual arts student vividly imagines her mentor has murdered "the woman who now and then came from Calgary and stayed the night." An engineer with a poetic bent considers the consequences of travelling to Kabul, and a woman ponders the merits for her charitable organization when a prolonged rainfall hits Bangladesh. Another part of Wyatt's wide-ranging world contains an entire story about, "The Woman Who Drowned in Lake Geneva." And from reading between the lines she obviously enjoys telling every one of her tales.

When just the right words or ideal images are needed, Wyatt finds them. Consider the crowd, for example, in which "a frown moved from face to face." Or the replica of Admiral Nelson's telescope "identical in every respect," for which you can, "Buy two and get the third one for free." And how about the 1923 town planned by a left-handed architect without any consideration for "the rights of the right-handed?" She depicts the aftermath of a party as, "Four dishwasher loads and a mess of icing to clean off the rug." A boss bosses with a voice "like the sound of a rasp on metal." A mother "might as well have used a blowtorch" for her cooking. A police station smells "of vomit and despair." A young woman gets a windfall of money as "a kind of fantasy Fedex." And a Muskoka cottage has "no city sounds of sirens and impatient traffic." In her love of word-play she has an entire story, "Goats," turn on the mangling of the words, "Goat's smell." She's adept as well at wordsmithing a quirk of speech that some people have, that of leaving a sentence unfinished, the meaning hanging mid-air as in "...a wife who was beautiful but." Or in "...but we hope that."

Wyatt's a grand master at keeping her readers interested. In one story she has a character named "Someone." In one about a writer's intern she teases us with musings about a potential murder and a body dumped into a lake. At other times she marries the mundane with the unconventional with a long-time psychiatrist adopting a new career as a paid professional worrier worry-working at home in his "worry room, a converted closet." And in the title story, "The Magician's Beautiful Assistant," the longest of the lot, Wyatt intriguingly juggles stories of political shenanigans, May-December disappointments, extended family relationships, elements of a coming of age transition, and the activities of a lawyer-magician who makes all manner of things, including a lawsuit and her young, "beautiful assistant," disappear for the most unexpected of reasons. Throughout, she knows exactly how long to tease out an idea before revealing its substance, when to tickle the funny bone and when to tweak the heartstrings.

Equally laudable is Wyatt's ability to get ever so deeply into her characters, good or bad, and through them to reveal humanity at its best or worst, at its most charitable or at its most crass, even its most superficial and silly. Surely we recognize ourselves or others as the daydreamer imagining a famous writer will become enamoured of us and our scribblings, as the individual returning only half of the money found in an envelope stuffed in a discarded chair, as the put-upon younger sister at a funeral service, or as the daughter reacting to an aging mother's complaint that, "You're never here"? Or as the husband whose wife doesn't follow his wishes? Or even as the grandmotherly movie fan writing her poignant letter to Omar Sharif to ask for his photograph "as you are now … a picture that reflects our age"? And who among us hasn't taken sides in a public debate with stubborn, thick-headed opponents arguing about whether a new sewage system or a new arena is best for our town?

Something that definitely is best for our town, and nobody will argue about it, is that thanks to Hedgerow Press we have this anthology of superbly crafted stories from Rachel Wyatt's fertile imagination. If you're looking for a must-read book for the top of your list, this is it.

Wayne Cunningham is a B.C. writer.

LETTERS

Books for Indonesia

We are a student study group for Comparative Literature, Faculty of Letters, Bandung Padjadjaran University, Indonesia. Our study group has a weekly discussion. It's very nice to learn together. We would like to exchange and expand our knowledge. Unfortunately, our English library is very small and consists of old books.

So, we would like to accept book donations. We are hoping that your PRRB readers could help us, especially in themes of Literary Theory; American, British, and International literatures; Classics, Poetry, Feminism, Cultural Studies; and related subjects. Thank you very much for your help and kindness. Our mailing address is:

Ahmed Dsuki (Coordinator of Study Group for Comparative Literary)

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Dear Editor,

Kudos on your new publication and continued success.

I just wanted to comment on the article [in issue number one] about Douglas Coupland who grew up in the British Properties. In his the article Coupland is credited with the hilarious comment that he has "street cred." I wonder if that would be where the streets are paved with gold.

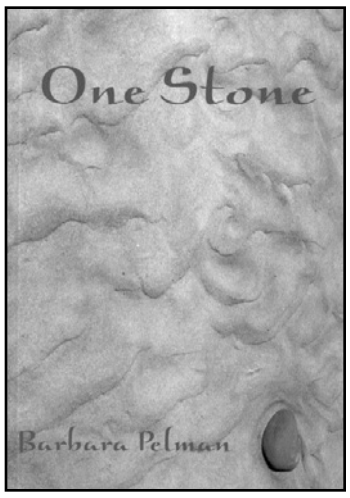
Continued success.

Grant Shilling

One Stone, Many Meanings

review by Brian Campbell

One Stone by Barbara Pelman (Victoria, BC: Ekstasis Editions, 2005)



One Stone may be Barbara Pelman's first trade collection, but poetically speaking, Pelman is no neophyte. At 50-something, she has been a full-time secondary school English teacher for more than two decades, teaching and writing poetry all that time, patiently developing her craft in various writer's groups, submitting here and there, and publishing occasionally in some of Canada's more established journals.

At the League of Canadian Poets' new members' reading, she read "Coming Through", a poem that took my breath away — and impressed me enough to buy her book. The book is about coming through a divorce after 20 years of marriage. In this poem, the final one in the collection, that painful process becomes analogous to the Israelites wandering through the desert into the Promised Land. This association —she said as much at the reading — is a private one, but that level of meaning becomes clear in the context of the collection itself.

Coming Through

400 years in a narrow land,
our veins thick and stagnant;
blood runs thin in a place of dust.

When we crossed the Red Sea,
the waves rising like walls
and the land dry before us,
we thought we were free.

But there was the desert —
our minds could not fathom
the space, saw only sand
and no water. Sand.
No water. Our garments,
of Egyptian cotton, fell from our shoulders,
in strips and rags. The sun beat
our backs, burned our hair
white. Soon even our tears
dried in the desert air. There was rock
and no water. We sat on stone,
looking back at the green fields,
the small huts of Mitzrayim.
Why look forward
upon nothing?

Miriam led us from well
to well, cool water at the end
of a long day. But there was no place
to build, only a moment
of shade, sun reflected
on the palm frond, wind
scratching its spiky fingers:
wind on the hot face, a cup
of water.

Now is the time
for turning. Between us and Jericho
is only a stretch of grass,
tender green in the spring breeze,
and a wall. In my hand,
the ram's horn, a smooth bone
of sound —' with my breath
I can shake the walls, stir the stones
into flight.

In front of me, the shadow of a wall,
In my hand, a trumpet.

The writer of *The Journey of the Magi* could do no better.

Thematically, this poem is immense; technically it works so well on many levels. Particularly striking, for instance, is that "smooth bone of sound" amid all that aridity, and water/heat contrast is so natural one is somehow not immediately reminded of Eliot. It's been a while since I have read a poem where the line breaks were so effective. For instance, in the third stanza,

our minds could not fathom (SPACE)
the space, saw only sand (NOTHINGNESS)
and no water. Sand. (AGAIN NOTHINGNESS)
No water. Our garments, (SOMETHING ELSE?)
of Egyptian cotton, fell from our shoulders,
in strips and rags. The sun beat (WHAT? WHO?)
our backs, burned our hair
(SURPRISE) *white. Soon even our tears* (WHAT?)
dried in the desert air. There was rock (PAUSE — WHAT ELSE?)
and no water. We sat on stone,
looking back at the green fields,
the small huts of Mitzrayim.
Why look forward (NOTHING)
upon nothing?

In many poems this kind of "pregnant pause" or "leave the reader hanging" line breaking seems a kind of cheap trick, as in say (I'm making up something here, but I'm sure many of you have seen similar)

I turned the light
off. Was thinking about
calling you up as I went to
bed.

In Pelman's poem, however, because of the weightiness of its subject — coming through such an inhospitable environment towards such an uncertain goal — the line breaks serve their purpose well in slowing the reader down, in suggesting the angst of uncertain possibility faced by the narrator with each and every step.

One Stone, at a 104 pages, is longer than most first books, but Pelman takes us on quite a journey along which she delivers a number of poems as strong, or nearly as strong, as this one. Personal favourites include "Stone", "Hunger", "Letter to Pygmalion", "Demon Lover", "Biography", "How They Met", "Writing a Sestina", "Palindrome to a Married Man", "You're Married", "Shattered", "Wear and Tear", and "A Paltry Thing". All of them show a masterful control of line, including a number of poems in fixed forms: 4 sestinas, 4 gloses, 9 more or less free-form sonnets, and a palindrome. This heavy reliance on form makes me wonder if at least some of these poems are spin-offs from a form poetry workshop. In their naturalness, however, they transcend the feeling of constraint that such forms – so often called "constraints" in the workshop setting – frequently generate.

If there are weaker poems in her collection, they are the two or three that fall back on pathetic fallacy and poetry-of-quietude niceness:

… and the dead twigs that were almost
thrown out in November are now
quick and laughing.

Even the maple must admit
the mouths at the end of her dead branches
thrust tongues out,
preparing to sing.

Poems paying homage to nature and the writers' ancestors are, for the most part, the ordinary ones in the collection. They also, however, provide interludes from the book's relentless underlying narrative, and are indeed informed by that narrative: the anguish of divorce, dealing with the resulting loss of self-esteem, and finding integrity in solitude.

Perhaps one of the singular strengths of this collection is its powerful sense of unity. This is accomplished not only through the personal narrative just referred to, but by the frequent reference to a journey of some sort, as well as the leitmotif of the stone itself. The introductory poem, Stone, is an incantation on the word stone and its various possibilities; besides this, "stone" or "stones" are placed no less than six times in various poems throughout the collection. Among related objects like bones, bowls, shards, jade necklace, sand, etc. — the placement is evenly spaced and deliberate, functioning much in the way that the elaborate repetitions of a sestina do: meanings build on each other with each mention, so we have the stone as hard truth, as selfhood, as unity, as offering, as wish.

One Stone is the work of a fine and seasoned writer, and its length and diversity suggest that the poet wanted to have this published as a definitive collection before the end of her life. Will Barbara Pelman produce another? My guess is it will be quite a wait before her second collection. It will, however, be a collection well worth waiting for.

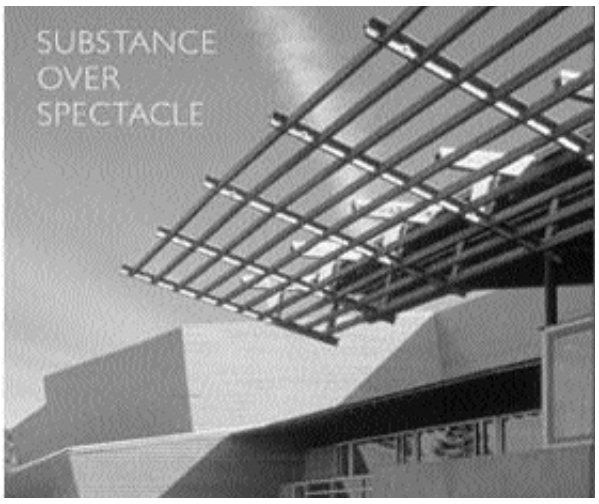
Brian Campbell's first book,* Guatemala and Other Poems, *was published in 1994 by Window Press in Toronto. Brian Campbell lives in Montreal.

ARCHITECTURE

NO SUBSTANCE WITHOUT STYLE

Pam Madoff

Substance Over Spectacle: Contemporary Canadian Architecture by Andrew Gruft, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005



With scant attention being paid to the subject of architecture in Canada ,any publication on the subject should be met with celebration and enthusiasm. As noted in the introduction to *Substance Over Spectacle: Contemporary Canadian Architecture* by Andrew Gruft, it has been 18 years since the last survey of Canadian architecture was undertaken. The book, published in association with the exhibit of the same name, includes 5 essays as well as extensively captioned photographs of 27 projects from across the country. The projects range from single family homes designed by the West coast firm of Battersby Howat and the East coast firm of Brian MacKay-Lyons to theatres, artists' housing, university buildings, residential towers and sky-train stations.

The premise of the book is that Canadian architecture has expressed; "…its resistance to the spectacular and pursuit of a more balanced design approach….. architecture that favours substance over spectacle, distinguishing itself from the work of many other nations…" An approach that is somehow more democratic but at the same time; "…requires a commitment of time and effort on the part of the viewer to understand……"

In his introduction Mr. Gruft bemoans the fact that architecture in Canada attracts little attention. In Spain, for example he states that the locals are involved "with their architecture; how it seemed part of everyday life, routinely discussed in the newspapers as if it were regular news and accorded the same sort of attention as any other topic of civic or political interest." Unfortunately, Mr. Gruft's book will do little to expand on the discussion of architecture in Canada at a grassroots level. The introductory essay is mired in jargon that creates a subculture of high design, replete with its own secret code. Its stilted and stuffy tone is what one might expect of a paper being presented at an academic conference and is unlikely to inspire interest in architecture by anyone other than architects. It is ironic that a book that purports to celebrate architecture which embodies substance over spectacle would fall victim to the folly of the spectacle of language versus the opportunity to communicate in a substantive way. The book is richly illustrated by technically competent, but strangely soulless photographs, whose clinical coldness further serves to alienate all but the most determined of readers. It is a puzzling notion to suggest that Canadian architecture is somehow democratic by nature and then go on to state that it can only be appreciated by a particularly committed viewer.

Substance Over Spectacle will make a worthy reference document containing as it does an all-too-rare opportunity to sample architectural works from across the country but it will not result in the creation of a new constituency of interest in the subject of architecture. The survey in itself is encouraging as it shows that there has been a return to modernism in architecture in Canada and that post-modernism is dead, hopefully never to be resuscitated. Rhodri Windsor Liscombe's lively and informative catalogue, which accompanied the ground-breaking architectural exhibit, "The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver 1938-1963" at the Vancouver Art Gallery a number of years ago, showed that an engaging and approachable style need not sacrifice substance. Gruft's book will serve only to preach to the converted and to further the myth that the appreciation of architecture requires membership in a private club replete with secret signs, symbols and codes. An opportunity to be inclusive rather than exclusive has been lost and with it goes the hope of inspiring a broad-based community interest in architecture. Perhaps there should be a rule that architectural academics should not write about architecture, at least not for the masses.

Adele Freedman's late-lamented column in *The Globe and Mail* did more to promote a national interest in architecture, and to make it of interest to average folks, than anything we have seen since. Until the mainstream media takes an interest in architecture and design there will be few opportunities available to encourage the interest of the general public. A general public that has repeatedly demonstrated a desire to be engaged in the design and development of our cities. A public that should not feel it is required to join a secret society in order to engage in discussions on architecture and design.

Pam Madoff is a long-time Heritage advocate. She currently is serving as city councillor on Victoria City Council.

THE MACHINERY OF LOVE

Jan Drabek

People's Act of Love by James Meek, HarperCollins Publishers, 391 pages, 2005)

This novel seems to work on so many levels that at times it makes the reader long for an oxygen mask. There are the highly poetical descriptive passages, characterization that clicks practically all the time, plot twists which at first seem fairly incongruous, until it all begins to fit together snugly, like the parts of an intricate engine which propels the story through time and space. All with an ease that would make even the great fiction masters envious.

And what other setting would be as appropriate for a memorable epic novel but Russia? The largest country in the world, connecting Europe with the Pacific and -- perhaps because of it -- offering extremes in erudition and ignorance, spirituality and stark realism. Start with the multiple and exotic conflicts, throw in a bit of Dostoyevsky's mysticism, Tolstoy's historical sweep, Pasternak's poetry, Solzhenyitsyn-like musings on human wretchedness, and any Russian writer would be well on his way to greatness.

Except that's not the case here. This thoroughly Russian novel was written by a Scotsman named James Meek, a Guardian correspondent with many years of Russian experience under his belt.

The setting is a town called Yazik on the Asian side of the Urals, home to the skoptsky religious sect of castrates, who believe that by giving up their genitals they have lost their "Keys to Hell". Yazik is occupied by a company of the Czech Legion, composed of former prisoners of war, whose exploits historically count among the most spectacular of World War I. Once this body of men had controlled most of the Trans-Siberian Railway, but now it's 1919. Only scattered groups of it remain along the railway, demoralized and longing to return to the newly formed Czechoslovak Republic. The shortest way would be across the Urals, but that is controlled by the Reds and therefore impassable. The only way out is eastward to Vladivostok and over the vast Pacific to North America, then across the Atlantic to Europe.

Out of the taiga and into the nervous Yazik comes Samarin, a mysterious character who claims to be an escapee from a deadly labour camp called the White Garden. As soon as he enters Yazik, a mysterious shaman is killed and Samarin is put on trial. Not for the murder – which he has indeed committed -- but for having an "undefined personality". In a country in the throes of a civil war, the death of a medicine man is of considerably lesser importance than the presence of a suspected spy.

The juxtaposition of the culture of the Central Europeans over the spiritually-motivated and isolated Siberian Yazik population lends an ethereal aura to the happenings. Also that of immense urgency: just outside of town a Boshevik contingent is poised for an imminent attack.

But that's just on one level. Through the various characters Meek brilliantly sketches the shape of things to come. Samarin's vivid description of the as yet non-existent White Garden already portends the rise of the gulag system. What's more, his skillfully woven lies, murder and subterfuge make Samarin a perfect candidate for a high party post once the Bolsheviks takeover is complete. On the other hand, a perfect bellwether for the rise of fascism and Nazism is the megalomaniac leader of

(*continued on left column*)

DRABEK (*continued from previous column*)

the Czechs, the Captain Matula.

Embodied in the czarist officer Balashov is the death of an epoch. There is a powerful description of one of the last cavalry charges in the history of all wars, romantic, elegant, but in the end suicidal. It bears repeating here:

"And we did feel strong, as the ground began to thunder with the sound of our hooves, and we were young, and there seemed to be so invincibly many of us, almost a thousand, a flood of horse power and khaki stretched back in the wind…"

Perhaps that's the highest value of this intricate book. It is also a chronicle of an end of an important epoch in human history, the onset of dictatorships which would soon dominate the entire century. In that sense Yazik thus becomes a microcosm and the vast taiga around it the universe that to many is both indifferent and cruel.

Jan Drabek is a retired Ambassador. He served as a diplomat under Vaclav Havel, and helped rebuild Czechoslovakia.

CUBA, SI!

An Innocent In Cuba by David W. McFadden. M & S. 396 p.

Joseph Blake

I visited Cuba in 1999 in search of the Cuban music Ry Cooder and the Buena Vista Social Club had introduced to a worldwide audience. We stayed in *casas particulares*, $20 U.S. bed and breakfast rooms in private homes in Havana's Vedado neighborhood and in Santiago at the other end of the island nation. We ate at *paladares*, 12-seat restaurants in private homes and apartments, checked out Hemingway's house outside Havana, and caught a couple of baseball games in the city's 55,000-seat Pan American Stadium. We used my press pass to sneak into one historic contest between Cuban all-stars and the Baltimore Orioles and even saw Fidel at the game, a rare Cuban experience.

We heard Cuban jazz at the venerable, basement club Zorro Y Cuevo and the brand new Jazz Café in Havana, saw the Vegas-like floor show at the stately Hotel Nacional, and witnessed passionate *son* music at the Casa de Cultura in Santiago. We spent a forgettable couple of days in Varadero and a pair of much less touristy days at the beach at Santa Maria del Mar, where we bagged a suite overlooking the sea with two bedrooms, two baths, a kitchen, cable TV, and lots of hot water for $40 U.S./night.

It was a great trip, but I haven't yet revisited Cuba despite my desire to see how such an obviously dynamic society might continue to change. I was seduced by Havana's crumbling beauty and renewal, inspired creativity of the society's lifestyle in the face of adversity, and the omnipresent sounds. The Cubans' mask-like, multiple personalities were seductive too. I was never quite sure what was really going on behind guarded conversations. My high school Spanish played a part in my confusion, but intrigue was a constant companion in Cuba.

During our visit, the state was emerging from the shock of the Soviet collapse and the loss of a reported $9 million/day subsidy on top of the four-decade U.S. blockade. We bought Cuban pesos, but couldn't find anyone who would take them. Everyone from our landladies, to the physicians and engineers moonlighting as taxi drivers, to the box office at ball games wanted American dollars.

Cuba is now trading doctors and teachers for Hugo Chavez's Venezuelan gas and oil, using the highly literate and educated population's people-power resources to bring literacy and medicine to Venezuela's poorest citizens and fuel for Cuba's 50-year old fleet of cars. Tourism has been de-emphasized, but it is still growing steadily despite the new, three-peso note called the convertible peso or chavito. It's artificially pegged at the same value as the U.S. dollar and designed to equalize Cuban incomes and get a handle on the dollar-driven tourist trade. I hoped David M. McFadden's new book, *An Innocent In Cuba* would explain how the chavito was faring, but McFadden doesn't write much about it. He seems to have been too busy falling in love with Cuba, playing the fool for his hosts, and charming the locals to spend much time doing economic analysis.

The author's open hearted, non-judgmental observations and interactions are at the core of his Cuban odyssey, and the breezy, diary-form, poetic notes are delightful.

I don't usually re-read books, but when I finished McFadden's Cuban travel notes, I immediately turned back to the first page and started again. I just didn't want to leave the playful, sexy world the author had conjured up.

The Toronto-based author has published over 20 books of poetry and prose including *Gypsy Guitar* and *The Art of Darkness*, both nominated for a Governor General's Award in the mid-1980s. His travel guides include *An Innocent in Ireland* (1995), *In Innocent in Scotland* (1999), and *An Innocent in Newfoundland* (2003). Each has garnered praise for the author's insatiable curiosity, self-effacing humour, and gift for penetrating poetic image.

An Innocent In Cuba marries these strengths with a palpable passion for the singular revolutionary island nation. McFadden's love for Cuba and its people is deep and contagious, but *An Innocent in Cuba* is not perfect. The book could use a map as a reference tool to better explain McFadden's travels in a rental car visiting cities and small towns during a month-long jaunt. He gets some things like the daily *peña* wrong. It's a daily, emotional discussion of the last night's baseball game by groups of men in city parks that he mistakes for some kind of riotous argument. I made a similar error, mistaking the peña for an anti-American rally when I first was confronted the loud shouting punctuated by "strike", "American", and "steal" in English. I thought they were talking about the first Iraq war.

My favorite story is McFadden's investigation of the anti-cholesterol drug PPG that was developed by Cuban scientists. Trade named Policosanal, it is derived from sugar cane and is rumoured to have Viagra-like side effects. McFadden buys a three-month supply at a pharmacy in Old Havana for $25, describing the effects an hour after ingesting a pill as he meets a middle-aged tour guide at an undisclosed government building.

"I was smitten and she knew it. I have no idea if it was the PPG or the woman herself. Perhaps a combination," McFadden writes. "It was insane. I wanted to smother her with kisses. It was like being back in high school. It wasn't all that one sided either, for there was a certain electricity emanating from her lovely self."

Thus, we are introduced to Mimi, one of the author's Plutonic companions during his Cuban vacation. Their relationship is sad and beautiful, as are other briefer meetings the author experiences during his 33-day tour. He picks up hitchhikers, gets lost, collaborates on car repairs, reflects on Cuban art and artists, and stays in the room where Che Guevara once slept in Baracoa. McFadden gets his Santeria saints confused and mistakenly calls some of the music he hears mariachi, but it's worth overlooking these errors to see the Cubans through his eyes. With McFadden, we meet a man who got into his car and left his wife behind to hitchhike on her own and a woman who cries, because McFadden won't eat her miserable soup. We meet an old, long-lost Canadian friend and learn a little more about McFadden's past. It's a funny, soul-revealing book.

Canada sends the most tourists to Cuba each year followed by Germans, English, Spaniards, French, Italians, a few east Europeans, Mexicans, all the other Latin Americans and a few Americans flying in from Canada, Jamaica and Mexico. McFadden's new travel book made me want to call my travel agent and begin reading his back catalogue of travel books. His approach is a very humane lesson in how to travel, and he writes wonderfully.

FESTIVAL REPORT:
THE GABRIOLA WRITERS BASH

Fortner Andersen

Gabriola Island sits in the Georgia Strait a twenty-minute ferry ride from Nanaimo, B.C. Home to about 2500 people in the off-season, in summer its population doubles with an influx of tourists and vacationers. It, like many of the island communities with ferry connections to Vancouver, is grappling with accelerating and fundamental change as development, an ageing demographic, and a collapsing resource base transform the population, their livelihoods, and physical aspects of the island.

Hilary Peach, poet, pipe-fitter, entrepreneur and singer, came to the island 5 years ago. Arrived, she decided that its eclectic and eccentric population of artists, artisans, non-conformists needed a poetry festival.

The festival, now in its 3rd edition, runs three days each November. Though focusing on local and regional work, this year the festival invited several poets from away. Sixteen poets attended from Holland, New York, Montreal, Vancouver, Nanaimo and from the island itself. Though there is no stated theme to the festival and there is much whimsy found in the programming, the festival allows local poets to take a role in the definition of serious issues at play on the island.

Islanders are a transient group. The young people escape to the city, newcomers arrive fleeing the same. One constant concern of the people of the island is that of identity, what defines appurtenance to the island; time spent on the island, a shared concern over water use, a political belief?

Much of the poetry presented spoke to issues of community, and sense ofplace. Ian Ferrier from Montreal read work describing the trials of a Gaspé fisherman as time obliterates his traditions and livelihood. Corey Frost from New York via Montreal read of the demise of the Q-line subway in New York. Tejebbe Hettinga reading in Freisan, his native tongue, spoke of his people and the wind-swept isles of northern Holland.

Though appreciative of these poets, the Gabriola public came out to see their own. Naomi Wakan, Bill Richardson, Leslie Pearl and Jacob Chaos, all from Gabriola read to full-houses and warm acclaim, but it was Nanaimo poet Tim Lander that read the keystone work for event: his prosaic ode to the city of Nanaimo "The Ghosts of the City", published as a chapbook in 1991.

This poem is dedicated to a forgotten and concealed early history of the city, the story of its beginnings as a mining town perched on the Georgia Strait.

Lander was born in London in 1938, and arrived in Canada in the late 1950s. Trained as a geologist, he supported his family for many years playing a penny whistle for tourists visiting Granville Island, a popular Vancouver destination. For years, he refused to publish books with established houses insisting on self-publishing his chapbooks, refusing even to typeset the text, writing the pages out longhand in a dense small script
and salting them with his simple and spare line drawings.

In his ode to Nanaimo, Lander speaks of the men who worked the coal-mines the city is built upon and the widows and children who survived them. He tells of their struggles against fire-damp, inhuman conditions, always at the mercy of fluctuating commodity prices and the crude, bitter and violent struggle of labour versus capital.

The bard is defined as a national poet, a poet that incarnates the passions, stories and soul of the community. They are the repository and guardians of the songs and stories of the people, the creator of their myth. Nanaimo may be provincial, its pit-heads overbuild with mini-malls and factory outlets, but Lander, a bard, writing in a 24-hour coffee-shop, resuscitates its dignity and shapes its identity. Lander read early on the second night of the

(*continued on Page 31*)

Telling It as it Might Have Been

A Review by Jenny Weatherford

The Flourish: Murder in the Family by Heather Spears (Ekstasis Noir, 2003)

Most families have them—stories that are suppressed, relatives who are never mentioned, people who seem to have dropped off the family tree. In 1990, award-winning Canadian writer and artist Heather Spears discovered one in her own family when she asked an aged aunt to identify a young woman in an old photograph. She was startled and intrigued by her aunt's reply: "that's Aunt Charlotte .... We don't talk about her—she was murdered." Some years later during a trip to Scotland, Heather Spears began to investigate local sources to see if she could find out something more about her great aunt's violent death. Sure enough, the newspapers of the time reported the gruesome occurrence in considerable detail. Her curiosity sparked by what she found, Spears undertook the project of unveiling as much as she could of her aunt's life in Kirkfieldbank, a small village near Lanark, Scotland, in the years preceding the killing in 1883.

The outcome is *The Flourish: Murder in the Family* in which Spears combines historical information uncovered through painstaking research on numerous trips to Scotland with her own imaginative meditation on her great aunt's life. The novel tells the story of Charlotte Spears' sojourn in the small Scottish village where she served not only as music teacher and caretaker of her aunt and uncle's house, Annville, but also as nurse to her cousin Willie Brown, a medical student stricken with "milk fever," or brucellosis. Though she had intended to pursue her career as singing instructor in Kirkfieldbank, Charlotte devotes more and more time to caring for the struggling Willie whose illness comes in unpredictable waves and ultimately wears not only on his body but also his mind. Charlotte finds herself increasingly constrained by the expectations of those in the provincial society she inhabits and her duties as live-in caregiver for her cousin, who behaves evermore unpredictably.

Spears' novel imaginatively portrays what life might have been like for a single career woman in provincial Scotland in the late nineteenth century. It also stands as a remarkable linguistic feat in its recreation of the language of the time. Drawing upon both the Scots spoken by her father during her childhood and the written language of the 1880s as gleaned from numerous documents, Spears writes Charlotte's story in the idiom of her own day. Should readers find the language challenging, they can turn to any number of Internet resources like Dictionary of the Scots Language at www.dsl.ac.uk for help with vocabulary. The Flourish is a testament both to the silenced story of the author's great aunt and to the richness of the Scottish tongue.

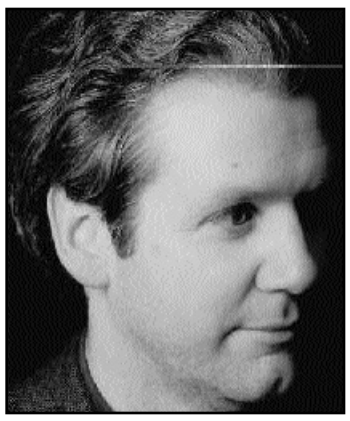
As the imaginative resurrection of a woman who had been consigned to oblivion by her embarrassed relatives, *The Flourish* provides a spicy and poignant tale based upon historical documentation. As a reconstruction of a fading regional vernacular, it helps to preserve the exquisite variety of the English language.

Jenny Weatherford lives in England.

Suggestive Poetry Leaping Beyond The page

review by Yvonne Blomer

Elsewhere, Michael Murphy, Nottingham, UK, Shoestring Press, 58 pages



This is a book of love poems, but not to a specific lover, rather each one calmly praises things in nature, in humanity. From a series after Hungarian poet Attila József to a series on the conception and birth of Murphy's daughter to the title poem of the book where Murphy explores the memory of a thrush's burial so that the after-life of the bird takes on the hopes and beliefs of the two humans in the poem:

Elsewhere

Do you remember burying the thrush
we found laid out stiff on the cinder track
beside the railway; perfect as a mammoth
swaddled in a coat of soil and permafrost,
how you wrapped him in a Kleenex
among broken pots, split canes and bulbs
sprouting in the loamy darkness
under your dad's shed?
All night,
at opposite ends of the city, we waited
to see if — if — feathers, beak and all the
intricately coiled stuff

had, with morning, ascended.

In this poem we get the details of the thrush's burial and the hope held within the act. The words "All night" suspended at the end of the line gets the reader to take a breath, to wait with the characters; gets the poem to wait too, and allows it to have a sonnet-like turn. Then the repetition of "if" surrounded by dashes allows for a moment of contemplation on the conditionality of the birdís existence. It also opens up the possibilities held within hope to be suspended there on some unknown condition — if there is a god and then if bird things — feathers, beaks can transcend — then... "Elsewhere" is a poem rich in simple language but intricately complex in its suggestions making it exemplary of the collection.

Michael Murphy was born in 1965, he lives in Liverpool and has worked as a theatre director in Britain and Eastern Europe. In 2001 he won the Geoffrey Dearner Prize, awarded by *Poetry Review* (www.poetrysociety.or.uk/review) to the New Poet of the Year. Though ***Elsewhere*** is Murphy's first full collection of poetry, in 1998 Shoestring Press published *After Attila*, a chapbook that included a number of Murphy's acclaimed versions of Hungarian poet Attila József's work.

The poems in this collection are self-contained in that they hold a single moment within them, yet they leap beyond that moment to leave a sense of further potential, a lightness shadowed, but there, nonetheless. Murphy has a knack for mystery in his lines so that a line is clear, and yet wholly unclear and so beautiful in its need for contemplation, as in the last line here:

But like the thin baker's boy who flogs a hundred to earn one
I don't have any bread, much less a fire to roast it on,

And sleeping rough, the morning dew my blanket,
Like an umbrella's silks my genius perishes.
("The Poet")

He also makes use of rich language that is auditory, clicks and grinds away in rhythm and also shows a flare for linguistic humour, as in the poem "The Fox & the Crow":

Crow! Magnifi-
crow! O chanterelle,
sing I beg, and charm
our rapt plebeian ears.
Yours truly is the voice
by which mortals hear
the burden of the angels, perched
in their ranked spheres

This poem is a retelling of the fable, though not much changes in this retelling, the voice of the narrator is so undeniably ironic and playful that it brings a childhood delight back to an old story. This is a poem that sings on the page, is meant to be heard, but even read resounds:

I can see you've guessed
what falls out next

Imagine, as the poet says, a house
With bare flags and dead starlight for a roof

Got it? Now, knock off the lights.

That'll give you some idea
what goes on
between a birdbrain's ears.

The line between poetry and philosophy is growing finer and finer in Canadian poetry and this is true in the UK also. The ability to contemplate and give image to moments and ideas just beyond our comprehension is the task of the poet and the philosopher and here Michael Murphy does both, and he does them in song.

Yvonne Blomer is soon to give birth to her first book of poems.

HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

a review by Michael Platzer

50 Facts that should change the World by Jessica Williams (Icon books: 2004)

Jesssica Williams believes that pieces of information can change the way people think. She has written a highly readable book about inequality, the environment, changing values, 50 problems facing the planet and what is needed to be done. Ms Williams is inspired by Margared Mead "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

She produces the BBC show "Hard Talk" but has friends at Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Equality Now!, Transparency International, Privacy International, and Barnado's Children Charity. We know where her sympathies (and mine) lie but she has managed to dredge up facts and present them in a way that should shock any reader.

For the Pacific Rim countries, there are some particularly relevant truths that should be exposed and brought into public discussion. Japanese cows are subsidised to the tune of $7.50 every day (many people in the developing world survive on a few cents per day). It has been joked that each of the EU's 21 million cows could go a round the world trip (London, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Hanoi, Siem Reap, Brisbane, Rarotona, Los Angeles, Vancouver) with $600 spending money. The US increased its subsidies to farmers by an additional $180 billion in this decade. Another shocking fact: America spends $10 billion on pornography every year – the same amount it spends on foreign aid.

Cars kill two people every minute. At the current rate, 1.17 million people die in road accidents, mostly in developing countries(70%). The people most affected are the world's poor – sixty five percent of those killed are pedestrians. It is the second biggest cause of premature deaths for men aged between fifteen and 44- beaten only by AIDS. If the breadwinner dies it has disastrous effects on the family. In some countries road crash victims occupy 10% of the beds. WHO estimates that traffic accidents cost developing countries $100 billion each year (1-2% of GDP)- twice the amount of development assistance they receive. Road safety plans, however, do work and are inexpensive. One of the success stories is Fiji where vehicle insurers agreed to pay ten percent of their premiums to fund a Road Safety Council, whose programmes led to a 44 percent fall in road deaths. Roads must be improved but promoting vehicle safety, providing high visibility jackets to children, and encouraging motor cycle riders to wear helmets, as the Vietnamese have done, also have dramatic effects.

More than 12,000 women are killed annually in Russia as a result of domestic violence. Another estimate says 3 million women are physically abused by their husband or boyfriend each year- or from another perspective, one in three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused during her lifetime. At the 1995 UN Beijing Conference, 189 governments pledged to stop violence against women. Yet few men are prosecuted worldwide and in Russia there are only six shelters.

China has 44 million missing women. According to the latest census, for every 100 baby girls born in China, there are 116,8 baby boys. In addition to the moral issue of abortion and infanticide (some girls are killed or left to die in reprehensible ways), such sexual imbalances can cause long lasting social, economic, and family problems. The prejudice for sons which is widespread in China, India, and parts of South and East Asia is such that if a girl is lucky enough to survive babyhood, her birth may never be registered- leading to a life on the margins, where education, healthcare and even getting enough food to eat will be denied her. In India, girls are twice as likely to die from diarrhoea-a treatable disease. Female children cost money and the demanded dowries can bankrupt families (as well as the support demanded even after marriage) According to India's Bureau of Investigation, violence related to dowry claims sixteen women every day. There is hope, as societies urbanize. In South Korea, the sex ratios are starting to even out- today there are 110 boys to 100 girls. However, in agrarian economies the problem remains.

More than 150 countries use torture, according to Amnesty International. Whereas countries like China, Burma, Indonesia, and Malaysia have long been reprimanded for using torture, now the United States Department of Defense has approved "stress and duress" techniques (sleep deprivation, maintaining stressful body positions, being kept naked or in isolation for long periods of time, exploiting phobias or religious prohibitions) in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Guantanamo. In addition, the US also sends persons back to countries where torture is routinely practiced. All this is against the UN Convention against Torture.

Eighty-one percent of the world's executions take place in just three countries, China, Iran and the United States. President Bush's support for the death penalty is well known and Texas still leads the US states in the numbers executed annually. In Iran, there has been a sharp rise in public executions. However, Chinese executions run into the thousands annually and there have been reports of "mobile execution vans". China has come under some pressure from human rights groups to changes it policies in view of the 2008 Olympics and there are indications it is modifying its barbaric practices.

Two million girls and women are subjected to female genital mutilation each year. This happens not just in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East but in immigrant communities in Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United States. There are 27 million slaves in the world today- mostly bonded laborers, often children sold by their parents, in South Asia. There are 44 million child laborers in India but child labour is common in other parts of Asia and in North America. There are 300,000 child soldiers fighting in conflicts around the world, including in Asia. Some 120,000 women and girls are trafficked into Europe every year but equal or larger numbers of girls from villages in Nepal and Bangladesh are sold to brothels in India, Phillipine women to Japan, and women from the former Soviet Union to serve as prostitutes in Korea and other Asian countries to provide "variety". The sordid sex industry in Asia but also in the United States victimizes hundreds of thousands of under-age girls.

Then there are surprising but nonetheless alarming facts. A kiwi fruit flown from New Zealand to Britain emits five times its own weight in greenhouse gases. While the exponentially increasing international food trade causes damage to the environment and destroys local production, animals are being packed into horrible tight containers, often without food and water (contributing to disease);at the same time, industrially grown fruits and vegetables have less nutritional value, but often consume precious energy resources. Eighty-two percent of the world's smokers live in developing countries. Nearly 5 million people die as a result of smoking; 500 million will die from prematurely from tobacco related diseases. In China alone, 300 million men smoke. But as smoking declines in the West, the US has threatened a number of Asian countries with trade sanctions if they do not open their markets to American tobacco manufacturers – Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan eventually dropped their import restrictions. In Taiwan, smoking then increased 100% among boys (now 50% smoke). In Sri Lanka, a tobacco company hired glamourous young women to drive around in branded cars, handing out free cigarettes. In Malaysia tobacco companies account for 25% of all advertising (although they are not allowed to advertise cigarettes directly). In India, half the men who died from TB-400,000-would not have, if they had not smoked. This places a tremendous burden on overstretched health systems- the World Bank estimates smoking related problems take away 15% of developed countries' health budgets.

A third of the world's obese people live in the developing world. More than 300 million people are obese, 115 million live in developing countries. This is partly a result of urbanization, imitating Western tastes, eating processed foods, heavy in fat, sugar, and salt, and the sedentary life styles. Which, in turn leads to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, strokes and cancer. In China, 20 % of the urban population is classified as obese (many of them children, "little emperors" created by the one child policy). Obesity among Thai children has increased to 16% of all kids; in Japan 10% of nine year old boys are now fat (only 3% a few decades ago). Aggressive pushing of lamb and mutton flaps from Australia and New Zealand (once only deemed acceptable as pet food or fertilizer) is seen as "dietary genocide." In Tonga, locally caught fish is 15% to 50% more expensive than mutton flaps. Samoa's health minister described imported meat as "junk food dumped by richer countries on poorer countries". Fiji announced at a ban on the import of lamb and mutton flaps but New Zealand immediately lodged a complaint with the World Trade Organization. Other food industry lobbies, such as the US Sugar Association have launched stinging attacks on the WHO for suggesting that sugar should only make 10% of a balanced diet.

As a kind of justice, people in industrialized countries eat between six and seven kilos of food additives every year. Seven million American women suffer from an eating disorder. More people can identify the gold arches of McDonalds than the Christian Cross (not just in Japan and India but also in Australia, Britain and the US). The world's illegal drug trade is estimated to be worth $400 billion- about the same as the legal pharmaceutical industry. Half the British fifteen year olds have tried illegal drugs. The US and Britain have the highest teen pregnancy rates in the developed world. The average Briton is caught on camera up to 300 times a day. British supermarkets know more about their customers than the Government. The average Japanese woman can expect to live to be 84. 13. million Americans have some form of plastic surgery.

(*continued on Page 31)*

STUART ROSS (*continued from Page 18)*

Reisman do the dirty work of "streamlining inventory", reducing stocks of "products" to those endorsed by Oprah's Book Club, before she picks up a suitcase full of cash and departs for Bermuda to peruse the *Complete Works of Sidney Sheldon* over fluffy beach drinks. The new owners can thus present themselves with hands as clean those of Macbeth and his Lady after framing Duncan's grooms. "A pitcher of Margaritas clears us of this deed", to paraphrase Old Bill.

Have I forgotten Stuart Ross? No way, because when the deal goes down the Canadian publishing industry will be sucked back through some kind of time-tunnel, (imagine the cheezy graphics yourself) to the year 1970, give or take half a decade. Antique typesetting and bindery equipment willbe salvaged out of scrapyards. Obsolete Xerox copiers will be reborn. An ancient Gestetner machine will be worth its weight in complimentary copies. Canadian literature will become an underground movement, like the 'samizdat' outlaw publishing industry that flourished under the Soviet regime in the former USSR. Canadian publishers who devoted their adult lives to turning amateur artisan vocations into a viable national publishing industry will experience a refreshing and youthful sense of deja vu as they find themselves once again living in lightless basements and breathing the fumes of real printers ink as they hank-crank out blurry pages of chapbooks and tiny magazines.

And Stuart Ross will be right where he's always been; standing on the corner, touting his little books to people who pass by— "hand-selling", booksellers called it back when they could remember their real business.

Or maybe not. He might just set up as a "marketing consultant" to Canadian publishers, with a literary agency on the side. In the post-Chapters /Indigo world of CanLit, Ross could emerge as the only guy in this country who knows enough, and cares enough, to see that our national literature survives.

John Moore has published three novels and countless reviews. It's a dirty job but somebody's got to do it.

FIFTY FACTS (*continued from Page 30)*

The author not only provides sources for the Facts as well as footnotes but also proposals about how things could change and appendix with names of human rights groups and aid organizations one can get involved with.

Some of the facts related to AIDS, world poverty, landmines, corruption, oil depletion, pollution, and world conflict are well known. Nonetheless, Jessica Williams presents them in an eye-catching, thought provoking way. Some of the international campaigns are decades old but unfortunately the reality in many areas of concern have not changed. In addition to the self-absorbed consumerism that Ms Williams documents so well, the Fact she has me worrying most about is that "a Third of Americans believe aliens have landed on Earth."

Michael Platzer writes from Vienna. He was originally hired at the UN by U Thant, and he continues to work in the field of international diplomacy.

GABRIOLA POETRY (*continued from Page 28)*

festival, finishing early so he could make the last ferry back across the strait, home to Nanaimo. As he left the audience roared their approval. Here was a poet who defined their specificity, their difference. Here was history, struggle, and an honourable past for a rootless and transient people. The public recognized and approved this essential work, assuring perhaps that as the people and poets of Gabriola grapple with who they are and what they might become, the small yearly gathering of poets at the Gabriola Festival will continue to be a touchstone in that struggle.

Fortner Andersen writes on international poetry festivals. He lives on Gabriola Island.

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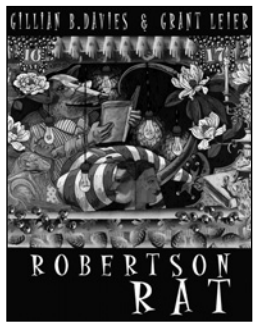

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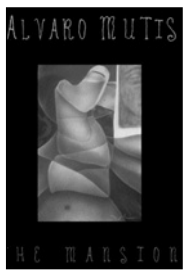

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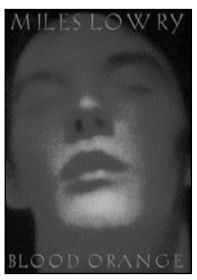
Trevor Carolan is the author of a book of poetry, Celtic Highway. *He is married with two children and lives in North Vancouver.*



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ANYTHING YOU WANT TO BE

Carol Ann Sokoloff
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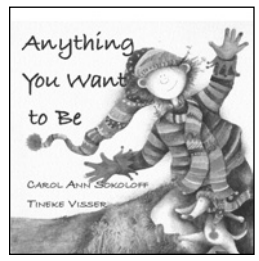

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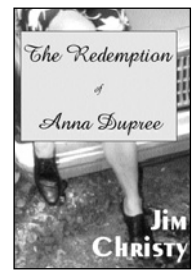

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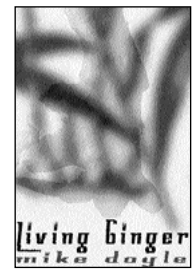

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