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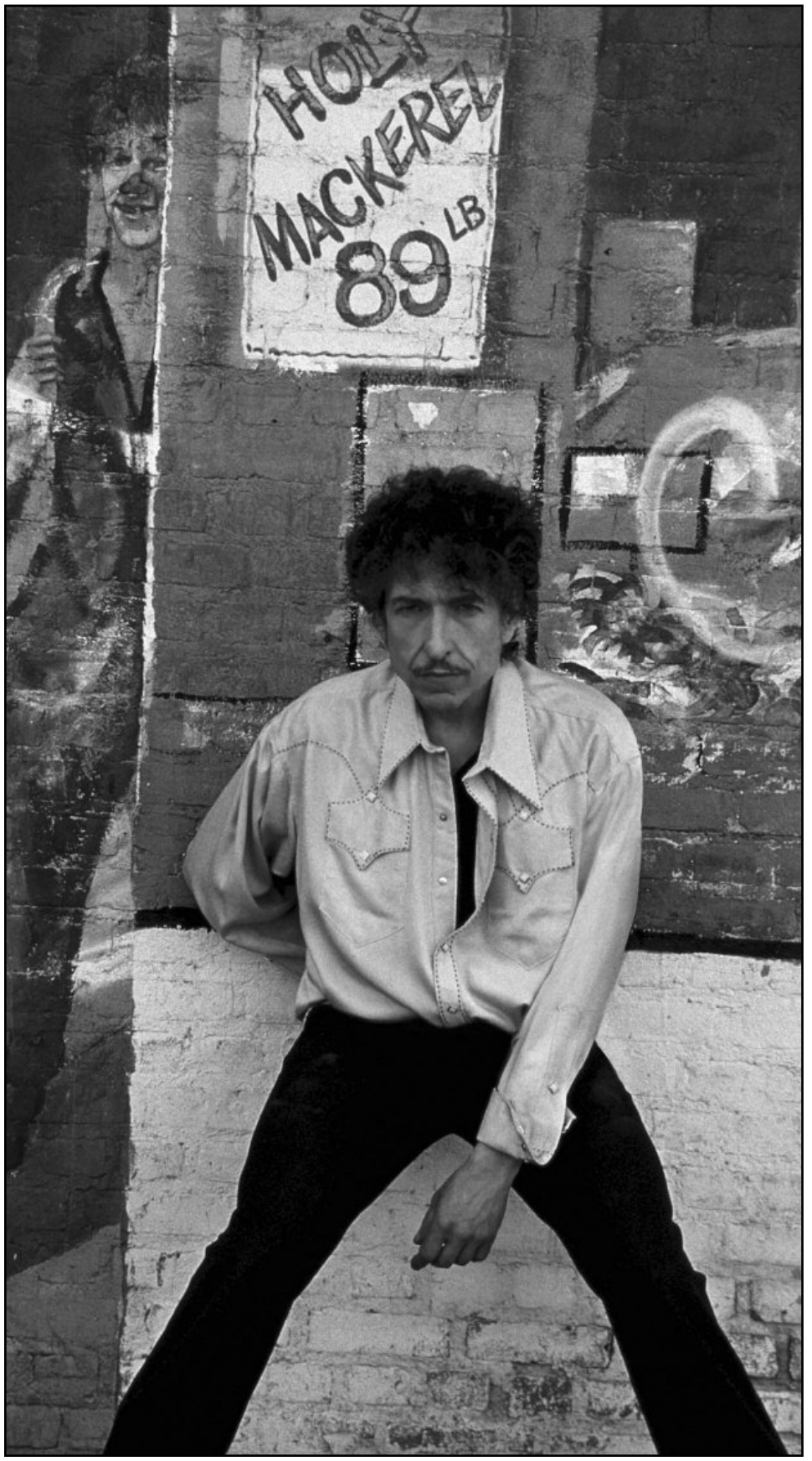

BOB DYLAN

"ALWAYS CHANGING"
THE PRRB INTERVIEW WITH
BOB DYLAN
BY VOJO SINDOLIC

THE ENGAGED POETICS OF
DENISE LEVERTOV AND THOMAS MERTON
BY SUSAN MCCASLIN

LOWRY'S VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS:
READING *THE VOYAGE THAT NEVER ENDS*

"A PAIR EXTRAORDINAIRE"
JOSEPH BLAKE LOOKS AT DYLAN AND WILLIE NELSON

DAVID WATMOUGH AT 80
BY JAN DRABEK

PLUS:
NEW BOOKS BY PAULINE HOLDSTOCK, MARY NOVIK, LINDA ROGERS, ATTILA JÓZSEF, THUONG VUONG-RIDDICK, ANDREW SCHELLING, AND DEPARTMENTS TRAVEL, ECO-LIT, PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW, AND REG LITTLE ON DIPLOMACY

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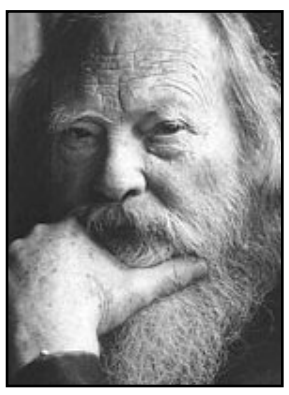
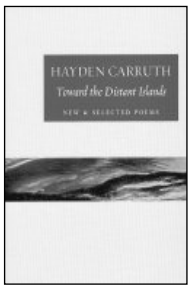


This issue of the *Pacific Rim Review of Books* is dedicated to the memory of Hayden Carruth (1918-2008). Author, poet, editor, essayist and jazz fan. One of the most important of modern masters, he will be missed.

Collected Longer Poems. Copper Canyon Press. These ten long poems are the companion to *Carruth's Collected Shorter Poems*.



Toward the Distant Islands: New & Selected Poems. Copper Canyon Press, edited and introduced by Sam Hamill. Gathers the essential poems.

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Always Changing: An Interview with Bob Dylan

Vojo Sindolic

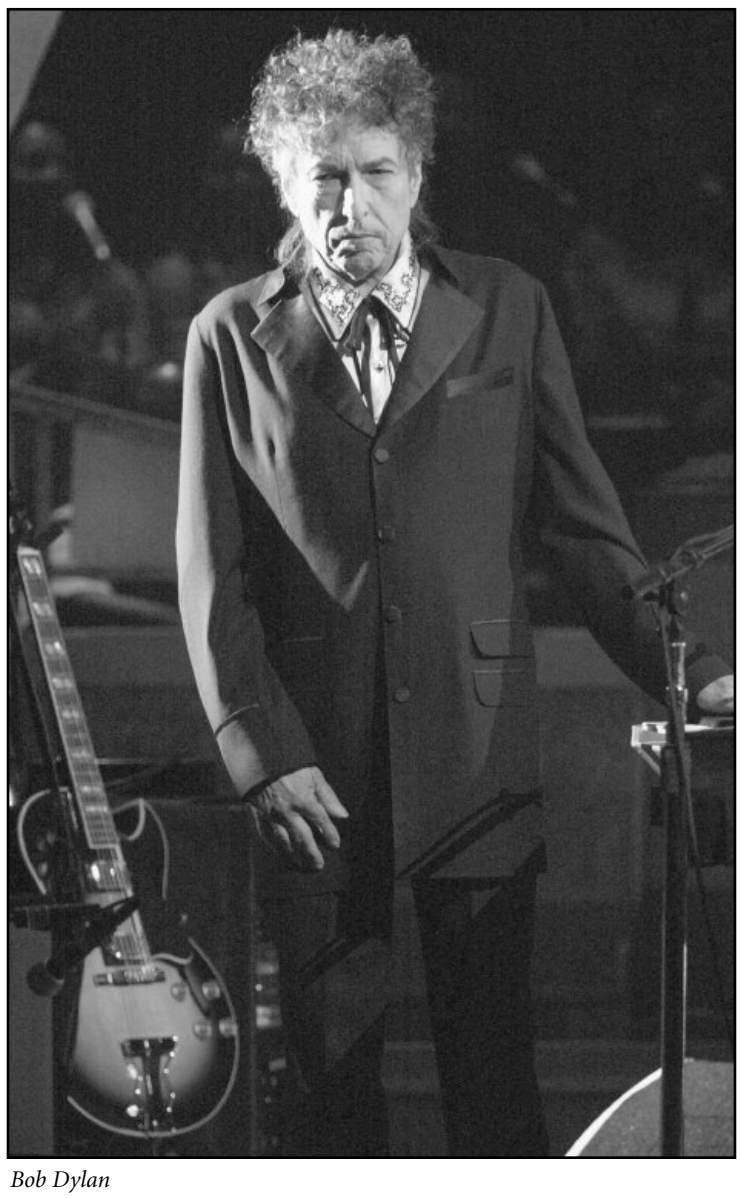
Bob Dylan and I met for the first time way back in the late Seventies, when I was editor-in-chief of then only Yugoslav rock and roll magazine called *Jukebox*, and I was often travelling to England and USA to make lengthy interviews with such rock stars and interesting persons like Leonard Cohen, Kris Kristofferson, John Lennon, Patti Smith, Neil Young, and members of rock groups like the Grateful Dead, the Pink Floyd, the Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, etc.

As in all other cases in my literary life connected with the Beat Generation and other related writers, it was the Beats goodwill ambassador Allen Ginsberg who put me in contact with Bob Dylan. Later, which means mostly in the Eighties, Bob Dylan and I met several times, and almost on each occasion I did an interview with him. Usually, we talked about just everything – from politics to religion, from movies to literature. I must say that I never had, not even the slightiest impression that Bob is such a difficult person to talk to, or to approcah to. Maybe the reason lies in the fact that Bob knew and was aware that Allen Ginsberg highly appreciated my friendship and my decades long and successful efforts to translate the works of not only Beat Generation writers (Jack Kerouac, W. S. Burroughs, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, etc.) but also the works of songwriters and poets like Leonard Cohen, James Douglas Morrison, Patti Smith, etc.

But, on the other hand, it's also true that talking to Bob Dylan is the hardest thing to get going. Actually, talking to Bob is always a great pleasure and a big challenge because you never know if he's going to be very exuberant and on a roll; if he's really into something, he'll want to keep talking about it. But it's hard to get Bob to sit down and actually try anything.

While during the Spring of 2008 I was working on Croatian translation of Sam Shepard's *Rolling Thunder Logbook*, in fact Sam's recollection of Bob Dylan's famous Roling Thunder Revue Tour in the Fall of 1975. I got news that Bob and his band will be performing only concert in this part of Europe on June 13, in the old city of Varazdin, Republic of Croatia.

So, with some help of my old friends from the States, I managed to get again in contact with Bob and got his agreement to do an interview with him upon his arrival to Croatia.



Bob Dylan

Well, Bob appeared together with the members of his band. It's the same band that plays with him for the last few years (Tony Garnier – bass; George Recile – drums; Stu Kimball – rhythm guitar; Danny Freeman – lead guitar; Donnie Heron – banjo, violin, etc.). Some 15.000 people from Croatia, Serbia, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Germany gathered together on a local football stadium in Varazdin, Croatia. Despite rain and bad weather, Dylan and his band played almost two hours and I got impression that he seemed to enjoy himself, took a little bow after most songs and sort of jiggled and bowed a lot at the end looking quite sheepish throughout. Even the selction of songs was quite interesting. For the perfectionists who may want to know what songs Dylan performed that night, here is complete setlist:

Rainy Day Women,
Lonesome Day Blues,
Rollin' And Tumblin',
Don't Think Twice, It's All Right,
Just Like A Woman,
Tangled Up In Blue,
Things Have Changed,
Love Sick,
Desolation Row,
Ain't Talkin',
Ballad Of A Thin Man,
Like A Rolling Stone
Honest With Me,
Highway 61 Revisited,
It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding),
Summer Days,
Thunder On the Mountain,

VS: *Since I just finished translating Sam Shepard's book on your famous Rolling Thunder Revue Tour from the Fall of 1975, I immediately want to ask you about your present-day feelings in regard to that tour, but also your movie* Renaldo & Clara.

Bob Dylan: Well, Renaldo's intense dream and his conflict with the present – that's all the movie's about. My main interest was not in literal plot but in the associational texture – colours, images, sounds. It's obvious everyone was acting in that movie for dear life. Nobody was thinking of time. How else? Life itself is improvised. We don't live life as a scripted thing.

VS: *There's also no sense of time?*

Bob Dylan: You've got yesterday, today and tomorrow all in the same room, and there's very little that you can't imagine happening… What I was trying to do with the concept of time, and the way the characters change from one person to another person, and you're never quite sure who is talking, if the first person is talking or the third person is talking… but to do that consciously is a trick, and if you look at the whole thing, it really doesn't matter.

In *Renaldo & Clara* I also used that quality of no-time. And I believe that the concept of creation is more real and true than that which dose have time… The movie creates and holds the time. That's what it should do – it should hold that time, breathe in that time and stop time in doing that.

VS: *What do you think about your performance in* Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*? And what about song-writting for the same movie. Obviously, they are two completely different things?*

Bob Dylan: I think that Sam Peckinpah had cast me quite intentionally. But, you know, nobody asked me what had been my concept of the soundtrack for the movie. And then of course I discovered that they took my music and they re-laid it, the studio did, behind Peckinpah's back, so I would write a piece of music for particular sequence, and then the studio afterwards, in post-production, re-edited the whole thing and put that piece of music against another sequence and just completely screwed up what had been my concept of the music and movie.

VS: *What about the movie* Hearts of Fire*?*

Bob Dylan: What about it?

VS*: How did you get involved in that?*

Bob Dylan: The way the script came to me was through someone from the William Morris Agency and that person told me to look at the role of Billy Parker, and that the

Bob Dylan, Varazdin, Croatia, June 13, 2008

director Richard Marquand had me in mind to play that part. I stayed drunk most of the time. It was a terrible script and we (actors) had no control over it. I did it for money. I mean, why else would I do it?

VS: *Do you still read a lot?*

Bob Dylan: Some.

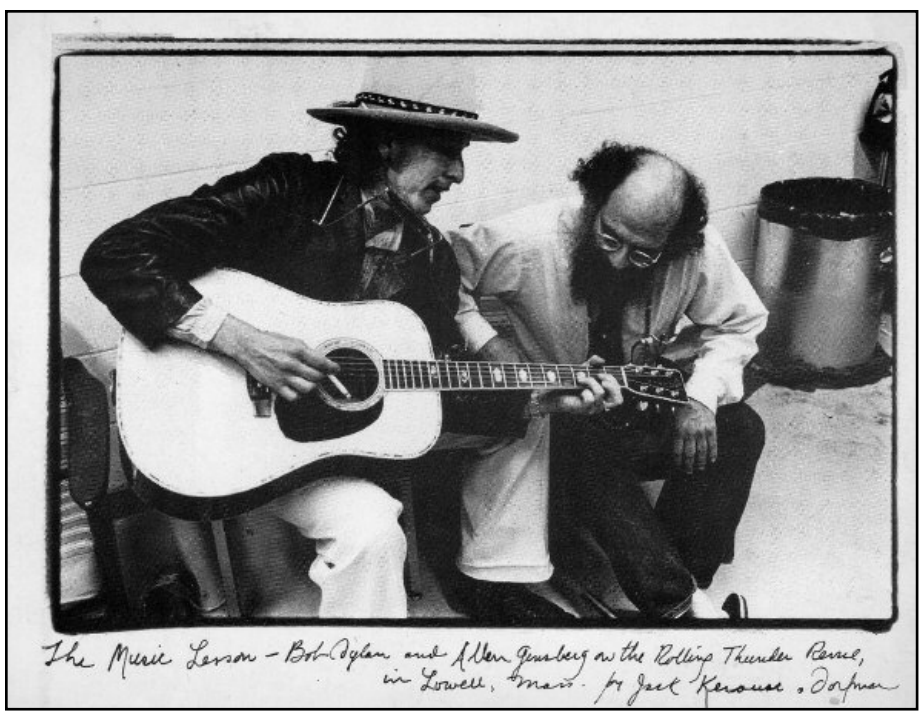
VS: *Did you always read a lot?*

Bob Dylan: I always read some.

VS: *What about your new songs?*

Bob Dylan: You know, when I was growing up, I used to listen to Hank Williams, Gene Vincent, Little Richard and all those people. I think they formed my style in one way or another. I can't help this type of music I play, this is just the kind of type I've always played…

VS: *I want to ask you few things about your poetical, literary works, not only "songwriting". Not long before his death, during one of our last encounters, our mutual friend Allen Ginsberg told me something about you that I think is very significant so I want to repeat it to you: "Over Kerouac's grave [during Rolling Thunder Revue Tour in the Fall of 1975], Bob Dylan told me that it was* Mexico City Blues *that 'blew his mind' and tured him on to poetry in 1958 or 1959 in St. Paul. And I asked 'Why?' and he said, 'It's the first poetry that talked American language to me.' So you get a line in Dylan's* Gates of Eden *like 'the motorcycle black Madonna two-wheeled gypsy queen and her silver studded phantom lover' which comes straight out of either* Howl *or Kerouac's* Mexico City Blues *in terms of the 'chain of flashing images'. Kerouac's spontaneous pile-up of words. And that's the way Dylan writes his lyrics. So poetry's extended itself in its own lineage afterward into John Lennon, the Beatles, named after Beats, and Dylan, so that it's gone around the world. And I think after the wave of Whitman and then maybe another wave of Pound, it's probably the strongest wave of American influence on world literature – the combination of Whitman, the Beats and Bob Dylan."*



"The Music Lesson": Bob Dylan with Allen Ginsberg, photo taken by Elsa Dorfman

Bob Dylan: I don't know if people have seen me sometime in 1963 or 1964. Anyway, I was singing songs back then. One was a song called *Desolation Row*. It was, "What's he singing about?" They didn't understand what I was singing about. I don't think I did either. However, I understand now pretty much what I'm singing about. So it must have taken a while for *Desolation Row*, *Maggie's Farm*, *Subterranean Homesick Blues* and all that stuff to catch on, because it wasn't accepted very well at the time. I've always been prepared for adversity. I was always prepared back then, and now I'm even more prepared.

VS: *So to say, is there any real difference between "Improvised poetics" and hard re-workings on some poems? I mean, what is the final result?*

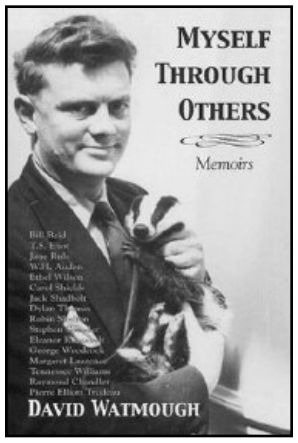
Bob Dylan: You can make something lasting. I mean, in order to live forever you have to stop time. In order to stop time you have to exist in the moment, so strong as to stop time and prove your point. So that you have stopped time. And if you succeed in doing that, everyone who comes into contact with what you've done – whatever it might be, whether you've written a poem, carved a statue or painted a painting – will catch some of that. What's funny is that they won't realise it, but that's what they'll recognise.

My lyrics speak of the inner soul, of private pain, of the self, personal recognition – a private awakening. But people quite often want to be dulled… Don't wait until it's too late now. Lotta people wait until they're old, lotta people wait until they're at the end of the line. You don't have to wait that long. Salvation begins right now, today.

Vojo Sindolic was born in Dubrovnik in what is now Croatia. A poet and painter, he has translated the works Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure, Robert Creeley, and many others.

Imagining David Watmough

Jan Drabek



Myself Through Others – Memoirs.
David Watmough.
Dundurn. 2008.
200 pp

Editorial note: *Thirty years ago, David Watmough rewrote the rules on what fiction could discuss in Canada. Still writing in his eighties, and with two new books and a first collection of sonnets forthcoming, his place is secure as a wise, compassionate elder of the nation's literary tribe. Retired ambassador Jan Drabek, a regular contributor to PRRB, offers his thoughts on Watmough's late career achievements.*

David Watmough, an octogenarian living in Tsawwassen, British Columbia, is the author of some seventeen books, mostly of fiction. With *Myself Through Others,* he weighs in with another genre: descriptions of encounters ranging from Stephen Spender to Premier P.E. Trudeau, on the way stopping to chat with W.H. Auden, T.S. Eliot and Graham Greene.

For this West Coast writer of particular interest were his chats with Robin Skelton, Carol Shield and Jane Rule – all personalities who figured prominently in the birth of British Columbia literary awareness during the 1970s and the consequent birth of organizations such as the B.C. Branch of the Writers' Union of Canada and the Federation of British Columbia Writers.

It's important to note that Watmough is gay. Also, that his life-long relationship with his partner has lasted over half a century, a record which beats many of the greatest heterosexual love stories. This should be mentioned right at the onset because some of the early encounters seemed to have been either through or due to his homosexuality.

One reviewer of this book rather dismissed it as an exercise in name-dropping, To my mind she may have missed its essential, central point, which is already evident in its title. While most memoirs have the author as their central character, this one doesn't. Despite it, we still find out more about Watmough himself than one would expect.

He explains why the volume is not a true biography: "I have raided my life so often and so extensively on behalf of my fiction that not only am I unsure now what is a fact and what is invention but also the skeletal remains are altogether resistant to my probing."

To me, there are three main qualities to this work. The first has to do with Watmough's keen observation of his characters, interspersing broad strokes with fine details, in the end emerging with an amazingly clear portrait nearly every time. Whether it's his quick departure from a lunch in Victoria when he discovers his mercifully unnamed hostess is a crypto-Nazi, his observing of the Ready family's trademark of leprechaun ears, or the dying Raymond Chandler proposing to hire him, we see each scene as precisely as if it were a digital camera image.

Then there is Watmough's keen awareness of place. The first encounters take place in Cornwall, where we are confronted with a plethora of characters which, were it not for differing accents, could roam any countryside. Anywhere.

This is where Watmough's keen ear for local dialect comes in, helping to paint each encounter so well; whether it's Cornwall, New York, San Francisco or Vancouver. Perhaps it has something to do with his explanation that as both an ardent Cornishman and proud Canadian "unlike some North American emigrants I am happy with a prefix."

It's Watmough's style that wraps this book into a highly palatable literary fare. Granted that one may have to look up words like "decanal" and "plangent" and that the commas between his numerous clauses call for frequent shifting of attention, but that's the price to pay for prose which offers uncommon literary satisfaction.

While highly readable there are occasional factual question marks. By the late 1930s most people in his London neighbourhood may have owned cars and telephones, but Watmough's claim that they also "received regular television programming from the BBC," sounds a bit like a tall tale. Not so, it turns out. A quick check with Wikipedia brings out the proud British truth that they were indeed pioneers in this endeavour.

But definitely incredible is the story of his meeting Eleanor Roosevelt while she was at a United Nations meeting in London in the fall of 1945 and sending best wishes to her husband.

David Watmough

FDR had died in March of that year.

On a note of different tenor, in the steady flood of dreary puerile and middle-aged navel gazing and whining, which to such a large extent constitutes contemporary literature, Watmough's novel *Geraldine* is welcome relief. Inevitably the character of the ageing Geraldine will be compared with Margaret Laurence's superb Morag in *The Stone Angel*, but there are significant differences. After all it's been 44 years since the Stone Angel was first published.

Geraldine.
David Watmough.
Ekstasis Editions,
2007. 144 pp

First of all, Geraldine is much older than Morag was – she is almost 97. It's an age that in Margaret Laurence's time would have usually signalled a doddering human wreck at best, incapable of much coherent thought or normal movement. In ours, Geraldine's physical condition may be nothing to write home about, but her mental one certainly is.

Perhaps more importantly, while Morag was certainly an uncommonly straight thinker, she was essentially an uneducated woman, desperately fighting for her dignity in a world she understood less and less. A sympathetic character indeed, but nowhere near as fascinating as the worldly Geraldine, who has a PhD in science and should have one in Weltanschauung.

Geraldine has the world pegged for what it is and knows exactly what she wants from it. There is no confusion. Coming to the end of her life, she is also largely successful in arranging her perfect exit from it.

If this aspect of the novel does not ring quite true, everything else does. Once again the issue of homosexuality plays a significant role here, as Watmough confronts Geraldine with a gay grandson, whose partner plays the important role of her biographer. This is a neatly placed device that allows the author to tell us about Geraldine's colourful past and that, in turn, expose us to her strong feminist views.

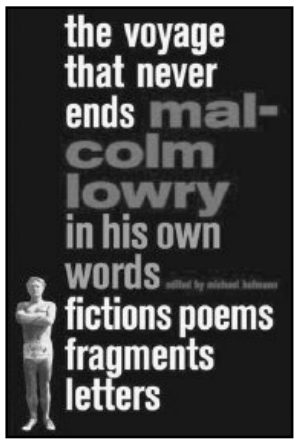
Mind you, not excessively so. Geraldine has fought a fair fight to rise to the top in her profession. In the course of the book we are also quite unobtrusively presented with the contemporary Vancouver social scene. Geraldine' biographer is Chinese who, while in many ways thoroughly integrated into the Canadian culture, is also adding to it from his own. There is a Serbian apartment manager with a chip on his shoulder, Geraldine's straight-laced son and her granddaughter whose incessant phone calls get on Geraldine's nerves and who has "earned further degrees of contempt by spattering her speech with references to Lord Jesus and the joyous space He

(*continued on page 18)*

Lowry's Volcanic Eruptions of the Soul

Trevor Carolan

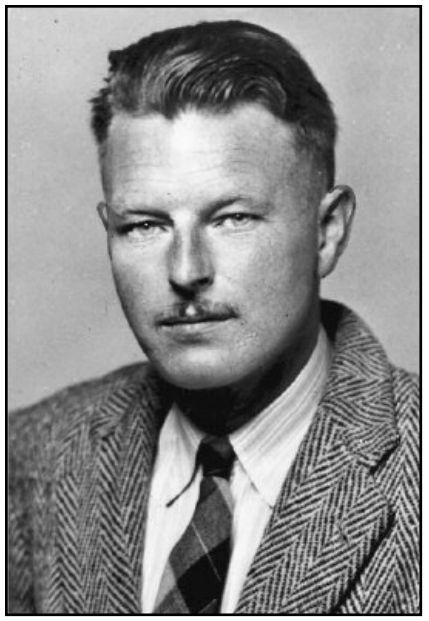
Why does Malcom Lowry still fascinate us? One might well ask. Undoubtedly, and in large part, it is because Lowry is a great failure, as opposed to a minor success which is always less alluring. Like Artaud or Delmore Schwartz, he had a genius for a great vision which eventually remained unfulfilled, and in this he failed magnificently. If you were a young poet in the 1920s when Lowry was on his way up, you were either in Eliot's camp or Conrad Aiken's camp. Unfortunately, Aiken who arguably had greater range as a writer, was unable to sustain his early promise and lingered on the precipice of depression and alcoholism. It was to Eliot that fell the crown of high modernism—odd for a poet with a yen for High Church Anglicanism, enthralled by monarchy and social convention.



The Voyage That Never Ends: Malcolm Lowry in his own words. Michael Hofmann, ed. New York Review of Books, 2008. 518 pp. $35.cloth

Lowry was clearly in Aiken's camp, and as his protégé, he continued in that other tradition of modernism which is actually fulfilled by grand and "magnificent" failure. It is interesting to think of modernism as divided into two streams, or lineages—one, the Apollonian tradition of success and self-control, exemplified par excellence by Eliot; the other, a Dionysian tradition of grand failure and chaos, read Lowry. That is why the Liverpuddlian continues to interest us, the way that his fellow Merseysiders John Lennon and Arthur Dooley, the artist and sculptor, interest us: all their work is tinged with a great "What if..?"

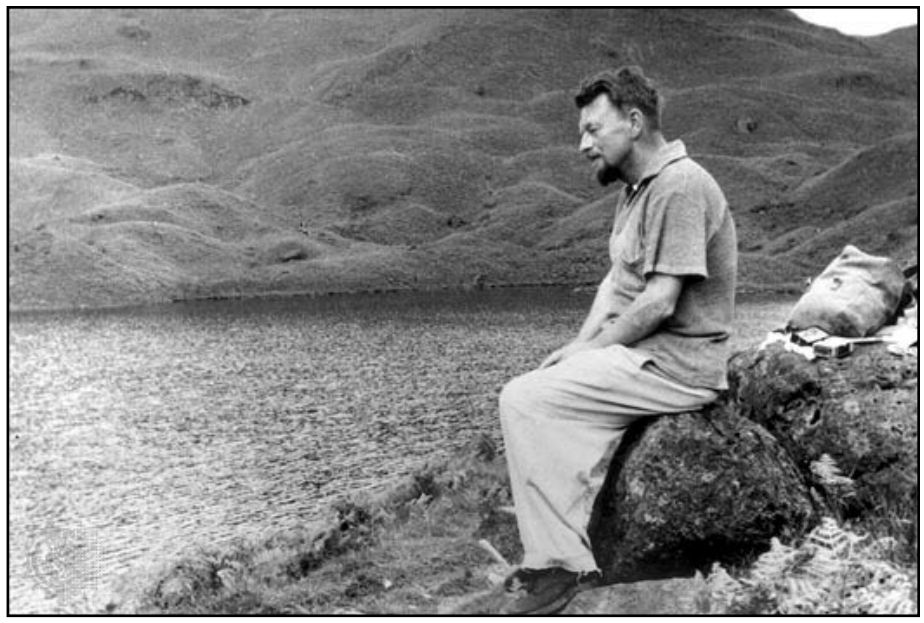
Published by the *New York Review of Books* as a tribute volume, and commented upon in newspapers and reviews from New York to London to Toronto and back again, weirdly, this hefty volume makes little critical mention of Dollarton, North Vancouver, where Lowry found solace for 14 long years. This is also where the bulk of his major writing, such as it is, and the eventual final manuscript of *Under The Volcano* was undertaken. Certainly his novella "The Forest Path to the Spring", the loveliest work he ever wrote, is one long homage to the shoreline forest home he knew there. And we know from Lowry's closest Canadian friend, the late Harvey Burt, that the novelist still yearned desperately for his beloved shack at Dollarton immediately before his death in Sussex, England.



Miles Lowry in 1946

Lowry arrived as a confirmed alcoholic in Vancouver in 1939, where he hoped to be joined by his wife, Margerie. As they had a habit of repeating themselves wherever he lived, things had not been working out for him in Mexico where he'd begun Volcano. In August, 1940 the Lowrys took a squatter's shack in North Vancouver and it was here that much of what we know as the Lowry corpus was created. Earle Birney described the Lowrys' cabin as "a twenty-square foot dwelling", and the echo here of Kamo-no-Chomei's *Hojoki* from medieval Japan or Bai Juyi, the popular poet from Tang dynasty China, is obvious: the Asia-literate Birney was acquainted with both and paid Lowry the honour. Dorothy Livesay, the poet and longtime social activist, was also Lowry's neighbour for a time and it is interesting to speculate on the extent that the two Canucks had on Lowry's modest, but still significant poetic output which was published by City Lights after his death.

This particular addition to the Lowry industry is comprised of chapters of fiction from his finished books, poems, letters, and fragments of this and that. Borrowing the title from Lowry's self-conceived grand cycle of works he intended to complete, but never could finish, it symbolizes what editor Michael Hofmann, a fair poet and translator in his own right, sums up as "three or five or however many novels in search of an author." With the exception of the hard to love shorter early works *Ultramarine* and *Lunar Caustic*, little Lowry wrote after his one big book "Volcano" ever really got nailed down tight. Yet the man could write.



Miles Lowry

As a ramble through this collection confirms, Lowry was essentially a landscape painter and internal monologist. His epistolary style frequently reads like a long letter to a friend—god knows, he had the experience, as examples of his message-in-a-bottle correspondence to Jonathan Cape, David Markson, Aiken, and his brother Stuart reveal here. Peppered with a good knowledge of jazz, traveller's conversational gambits, international literature, booze, and the bible, it is disciplined prose. No stranger to the weaving eight-line sentence with its qualifiers, non-restrictive clauses, and unusually light punctuation—the natural ammunition of a seasoned raconteur—like Hemingway, whom we are told considered him a fierce rival, Lowry uses short, declarative paragraph-ending motifs like a middleweight's jab: "*Their starry night and sea wind. Their love.*"

But then he was well-travelled, had known the high life, and had succeeded in wooing a minor Hollywood cinema beauty. With his drunkenness and family remittances, this is what made him a target. Yet in his way, he gave a damn. He tried to enlist for the war, unsuccessfully, and with more than a passing care for what would come to be known as human rights, his Volcano in particular radiates affection for Mexico's impoverished *campesinos.* He cared for Dollarton's local Sleil Waututh aboriginal people too, and they cared for him. His writing is imbued with all of these things.

Sloppy rich-kid drunk or unfulfilled genius? Neither really fits. Who but a prodigal might write, "As a bird wandereth from his nest, so is man who wandereth from his place. Now they understood the meaning of this proverb" (from *October Ferry To Gabriola*). Neverwasbeen or *poet maudit*? Perhaps, but his insight is frequently as compassionate as anything in Alice Walker or as corrosive as Gore Vidal:

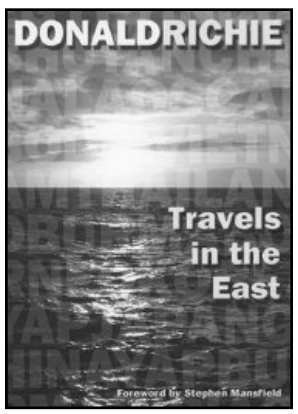
> *Success is like some horrible disaster*
> *Worse than your house burning, the sounds of ruination*
> *As the roof tree falls following each other faster*
> *While you stand, the helpless witness of your damnation.*
>
> *Fame like a drunkard consumes the house of the soul*
> *Exposing that you have worked for only this…*
>
> (from "After Publication of Under the Volcano")

In the end, it is fitting that Hofmann's edited volume lets Lowry's work do the talking, leading us, as ever, to ask the overwhelming question, "What if only…"

Trevor Carolan is the international editor of PRRB.

New On-the-Road Books from Japan

Hillel Wright



Travels in the East
by Donald Richie,
Stone Bridge Press
(Berkeley 2008), 180pp,
US $14.95/Can $16.50

Donald Richie has lost count of the number of books he's written, but at the last reckoning there were more than forty. His latest is a collection of travel pieces covering 13 Asian countries plus Egypt, spanning 42 years of travel.

Many of the articles first appeared in periodicals, including *Time, Newsweek, The Partisan Review, The Japan Times, The New York Times* and *The San Francisco Examiner.* All but one of the visits took place between 1988 and 2007. One, to Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, was made in 1963. Since Mr. Richie was born in 1924, we get a Senior Citizen's view of travel, except for the Kyoto visit, which we see through the eyes of a mature, but still relatively young man of 39.

Leigh Norrie, on the other hand, was born in 1972 and made his six month journey to all of Japan's 47 prefectures in 2005. *Japan: 6,000 miles on a bicycle* is his first book and while only one chapter was published in print before the book came out, the journey was presented online as it unfolded, on the author's blog.

Richie begins his book with his visit to Egypt in 2001, floating down the Nile on the "Cheops I", lying in his stateroom reading Flaubert's journal of the same voyage made in 1849. "I notice many of the same things", Richie notes. "'The barber, dog barking, children crying, a visit *ces dames.*' Well, not the latter. 'The ladies' are now nowhere in evidence."

Day 1 for Leigh Norrie begins in Saitama Prefecture, a suburban area of Greater Tokyo, on May 24, 2005. "Waking up in my dear friend Suichi's house was surreal to say the least…I was alive for the first time in years. Confidence morphed into apprehension as I swerved off. I had to ask Suichi which direction to go."

Norrie, once oriented, makes a good start, covering 72 miles by riding out of saitama, through a small part of Ibaraki Prefecture, and stopping for the night at a Love Hotel in Tochigi Prefecture. "Love Hotels are everywhere in Japan," Norrie tells us. "…they usually have enormous rooms with all the necessities inside: fridge, huge bathroom, TV with porn on almost every channel… 'Relaxed' to the evening's entertainment: an abject high school teacher being pissed on by his students. Female students that is."

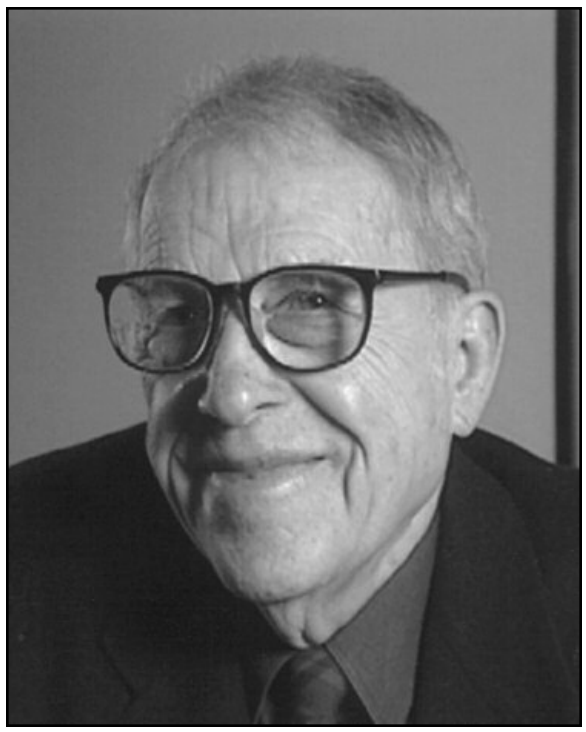
Richie, progressing ever eastward, although skipping back and forth in time, next takes us to India, 1988, and on to Bhutan in 1997. As a tourist, Richie is impressed by the general lack of amenities he finds in "'the hidden world'". "Tourism changes things," he observes, "always for the worst. The Bhutanese need only look to their neighbor for proof. Nepal gets about a quarter million tourists a year, while Bhutan still gets only a fraction of that. A result is Katmandu International Airport, big hotels clamoring to be filled, and a cultural invasion that has changed the country forever."

By Day 23 (June 15) Norrie has his first epiphany, in northern Aomori Prefecture, after nine days in the wilderness and two days in dense fog. "Cycling for two days in this kind of environment is depressing, but it talks to you. It tells you things you never knew about yourself, it strips away your soul by the minute and takes no prisoners. I found out I'm a tough son-of-a-bitch. I found out this adventure is a living breathing beast in itself. I found out the only possessions I need are alongside me. I found out I'm living a life very few people are lucky enough to live. I found out I'm going to write a book some day."

Richie touches down next in Mongolia in 2004 and remarks on another modern phenomenon: "When a country is developed it is always over-developed, because there are no limits to this kind of advance. It obliterates what it feeds upon. When this occurs in Mongolia it will be a great loss, because this country is still one of the most natural and consequently one of the most beautiful."

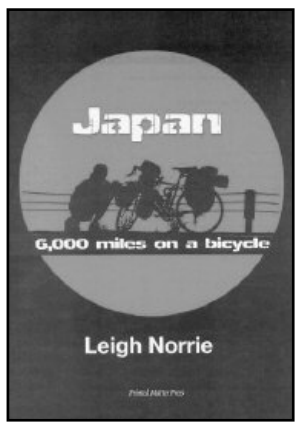
This trend, Richie soon discovers, has resulted in the advent of "Mongolands" – theme parks where the tourist can purchase imitation artifacts: "dull machine-made 'Mongol' knives, woven 'snow leopard' hats, 'Chinese' scarves, rayon masquerading as silk. And there, in a corner, as though admitting fraud, candidly sits a stuffed Mickey Mouse."

After skipping through China (1989) and Laos (1999), Richie wanders through Cambodia in 2001, visiting a number of ancient temples, both ruins and reconstructions. Among the ruins is Ta Prohm, built in the 12th Century but now overgrown by the jungle. "It is all extravagantly impressive," Richie says. "My small guide, seeking to augment, tells me that *Laura Croft: Tomb Raider* was actually filmed here, but even this information could not lessen the tremendous dignity of the place."


Donald Richie

Continuing eastward through the former Indo-China, Richie jumps back in time to Viet Nam in 1996. "I stood in the Cham Museum in Da Nang and looked at the remains of this Indonesian civilization that had taken over the country, then I stood in the Forbidden City in the Citadel of Hue and looked at the Chinese civilization that had taken over the country, then on the streets of Saigon and looked at the pleasure pavilions of McDonalds and Col Sanders and Haagen-Dazs, where Americans had taken over the country. The Vietnamese have had to be resourceful. The wonder is that they kept their humanity."

By Day 110 (Sepember 26) Leigh Norrie finds himself in the beach resort town of Shirahama in Wakayama Prefecture, cycling through "gorgeous countryside" and later having another epiphany: "*How did it come about? Where did it start? Or was there no beginning? If there was no beginning, how did it all come about? One of those three in the morning stoned debates….*



Japan: 6,000 miles on a bicycle
Leigh Norrie
Printed Matter Press
(Tokyo & New York
2008), 228pp,
2100yen/US $20.00

In Sukothai, Thailand (2005), the historic site of the country's first capital, 81-year-old Donald Richie rents a bicycle and pedals through the humidity and heat – "like pedaling through molasses" – to see the giant Buddha at Wat Si Chum. "I look at the Buddha. In Thailand he has a roundish face and an expression that has been called feline, as though he has just swallowed something good….He meditates in other places, but in Thailand he is already enlightened."

On Day 121 (October 7) Leigh Norrie reaches Okayama, a city on the Inland sea made famous in the English-speaking world by Donald Richie's book of the same name, perhaps the most recognizable of all his books. The day is a microcosm of the trip – tunnels, rain, drying out in a supermarket, and the comic relief of "Japanglish" signage: "Saw a sign LOVE DRUGS. Either this was a sex shop or a very honest statement about how much the owner thoroughly enjoys getting out of his box once in a while."

In the last chapter of *Travels in the East*, author Richie returns to Japan, which has been his home since 1947. A 1963 visit to a stone garden in Kyoto offers a valuable insight into the values of Japan and the Japanese: "Like the ancient pyramids, it is always the same, but unlike the pyramids it does not proclaim this. Hidden away in a corner of a temple off in the suburbs of a city, it has the value of a whisper in a world of shouts."

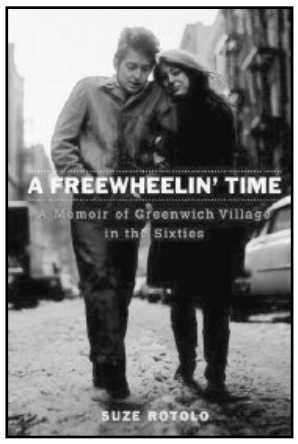
Richie hikes on Koya Mountain in Wakayama Prefecture in 1990 along with some of the half-million pilgrims who come each year to see the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi, the bodhisattva who brought Buddhism from China to Japan in the early 9th

(*continued on page 18)*

Dylan and St. Willie: "A Pair Extraordinaire"

Joseph Blake

Suze Rotolo may now be a painter and teacher at the well-respected Parsons School of Design, but for millions of Bob Dylan fans she's still the blonde teenager strolling with the musician on the cover of his breakthrough 1963 album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.*



A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties
Suze Rotolo
Broadway Books
371 pages

Rotolo uses that famous photo for the cover of her recently published memoir of those halcyon times too, but the story she tells is her own. Rotolo is a thoughtful, introspective writer, and she has a great tale to tell. *A Freewheelin' Time* is the story of young love caught in the hurricane of fame. It's her story from four years shared with the musician in Greenwich Village, but it is no tell-all about the famous musician. This is a wise woman looking back at her younger self.

> *"As Bob Dylan's fame grew so far out of bounds, I felt I had secrets to keep. Though I kept my silence, I didn't relish being the custodian of such things. Time passes and the weight of secrets dissipates. Articles are written and biographies are churned out that trigger memories only because they are often far from the reality I knew. They tend to be lackluster yet fascinate in their fantasy. I acknowledge that memory is a fickle beast. Fragments of stories stride in and out; some leave traces, while others do not. Secrets remain. Their traces go deep, and with all due respect I keep them with my own. The only claim I make for writing a memoir of that time is that it may not be factual, but it is true."*

Calling herself a "red diaper baby," the Queens-bred Rotolo was a 17-year old in a dress with thigh-high slits when she met Dylan at an all-day folk concert at Manhattan's Riverside Church. In his 2004 autobiography, *Chronicles: Volume One* Dylan remembers her as "the most erotic thing I'd ever seen."

Rotolo's father was an Italian-born artist and union organizer, and her mother worked for a communist newspaper during the McCarthy era. As a teenager, Rotolo worked for civil rights organizations like CORE and made an illegal trip to Cuba in 1964 where she met Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Dylan might have been a few years older than his girlfriend, but she was the political veteran in the relationship. She was a pre-feminist advocate of women's rights too, not wanting to become her "boyfriend's chick, a string on his guitar."

Bob Dylan

The book describes an impulsive decision to study art in Italy at the University of Perugia just as Dylan's folk music career began to take off. That was the turning point in the relationship, with Rotolo choosing independence over submersion into the music business madness. Dylan describes the couple's messy break-up in *Chronicles* with the vague "the alliance between Suze and me didn't turn out exactly to be a holiday in the woods. She took one turn in the road and I took another."

Rotolo rejected the role of nurse, muse, and gatekeeper for the emerging star, but upon reflection feels "entombed by the legend of Bob Dylan." She writes that "Bob Dylan has always been a presence, a parallel life alongside my own, no matter where I am, who I'm with or what I'm doing."

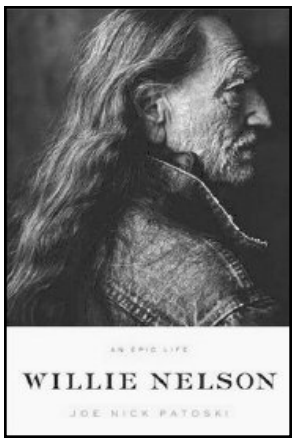
"Bob was charismatic; he was a beacon, a lighthouse. He was also a black hole," Rotolo writes of the man who kept his real, Robert Zimmerman/Minnesota identity secret even to her. "He required committed back up and protection I was unable to provide consistently, probably because I needed them myself. I loved him, but I was not able to abdicate my life totally for the music world he lived within."

She describes the long feud between her mother and older sister and Dylan. Rotolo also mentions an illegal abortion just before the couple broke up, but she doesn't say much about Joan Baez's part as the other woman in the break-up. Much of the book is spent describing her life in off-Broadway theatre, her travels in Europe, odd jobs like waitressing at a macrobiotic restaurant, and the suspicious fire that burned her Greenwich Village apartment and all of her art work and belongings.

At the end of the book she frames her very personal story with the political, social madness of the U.S. at the end of the sixties. It's a lament for the Greenwich Village bohemian scene she shared briefly with Dylan, but her book brings it back to life in its optimistic, naïve glory. I found the last couple of sentences particularly inspiring.

"The sixties were an era that spoke a language of inquiry and curiosity and rebelliousness against the stifling and repressive political and social culture of the decade that preceded it. The new generation causing all the fuss was not driven by the market. We had something to say, not something to sell."

* * *



Willie Nelson: An Epic Life.
Joe Nick Patoski
Little Brown, 567 pages

Joe Nick Patoski is a Texas-based music journalist who has been writing about Willie Nelson in magazines ranging from *Spin* and *No Depression* to *Texas Monthly* and *Rolling Stone* for 35 years. This extensively researched door-stopper weaves more than 100 interviews with Willie, his family, friends and associates into a detailed, moving narrative of a true American hero. It's a warm, funny, warts-and-all portrait almost matched by Annie Leibovitz's striking, stark, black and white profile photo of Willie on the cover.

Music is at the heart of this biography from the Nelson family's Arkansas hill country roots and shape-note singing, through the musician's long career as a Nashville songwriting star, outlaw country revolutionary from Texas, and beyond to a career of wide-ranging music that encompasses unlikely duets with schmaltz maestro Julio Iglesias, jazz man Wynton Marsalis, reggae star Toots Hibbert, and soul music great Ray Charles. They've all recorded hits with Willie, but his family band (now expanded to include his sons as well as his keyboard-playing sister) has been at the heart of a career best described by the movie soundtrack hit *On the Road Again.*

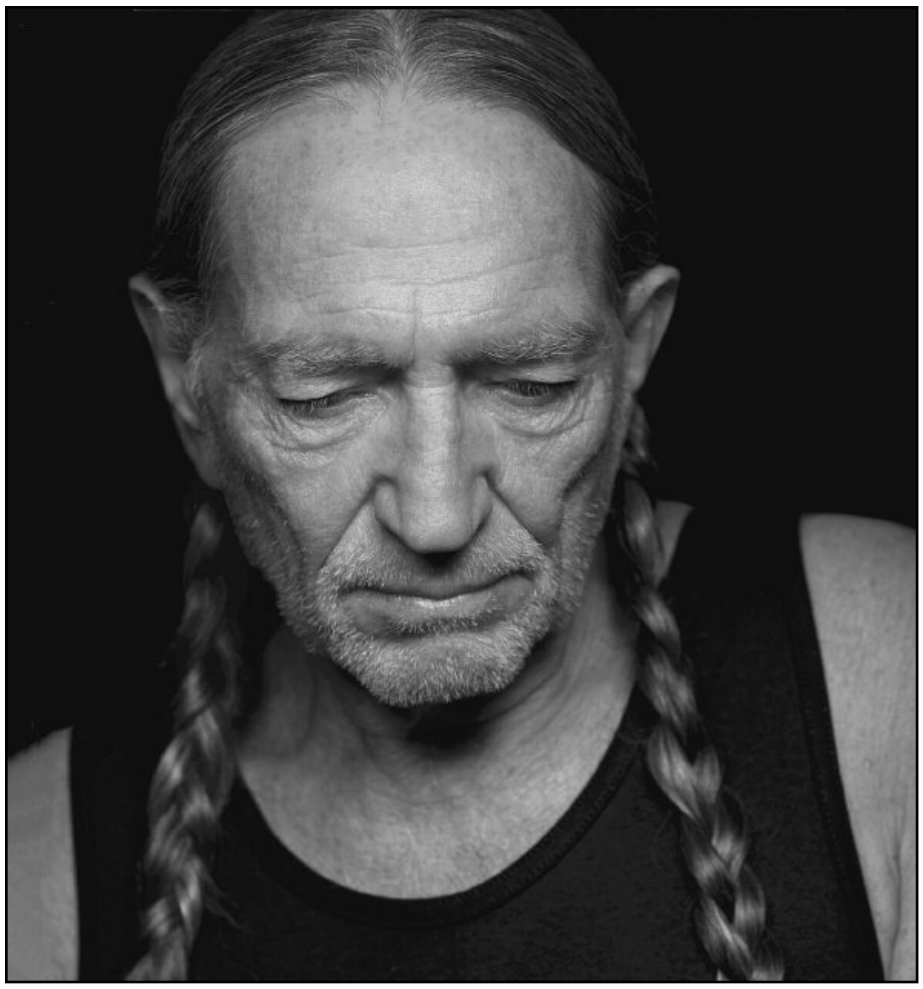
For decades Nelson has been a certified road dog, taking his music to stages around the world for hundreds of dates each year when he couldn't bring the audience to one of his huge, famous Fourth of July Texas picnics or Farm Aid benefits.

Patoski quotes Texas songwriter and political activist Kinky Friedman calling Willie a "hillbilly Dalai Lama", while another pretty fair country singer-songwriter, Kris Kristofferson concurs, arguing that "being around Willie is like being around Buddha. He gives off these positive attitudes," adding "He's got almost an Asian calm about him. I don't think things are going to bowl him over. It probably comes from all those years of scrambling and laughing at it."

Bumper stickers around Austin, Texas capture a similar spirit, reading *Matthew, Mark, Luke and Willie.*

"A lot of people make money off of fear and negativity and any way they can feed it to you is to their benefit in a lot of ways," Nelson tells Patoski. "You can't avoid it completely, you have to be open enough that shit doesn't stick on you, it goes through, because you are gonna be hit and bombarded all the time with negativity. It's kind of like martial arts when you go through a target instead of hitting a target. You just let things go through without trying to stop them or block them."

Willie has had his troubles with the business end of the music business, particularly the IRS and their infamous raid on Nelson's Willie World, Nelson's sprawling, Texas hill country property including condos, golf course, fishing camp, tennis courts, swimming pools and sauna, and 5400 square foot log cabin aerie, as well as nearby Luck Headquarters with movie set western town. The IRS tried to confiscate all of his



Willie Nelson

worldly belongings for back taxes, and Patoski's description of Nelson's financial problems and his creative methods of pulling himself out of millions of dollars of debt including the recording *IRS Tapes: Who'll Buy My Memories* is one of the book's highlights.

Another highpoint is the description of the musician's numerous relationships, especially a series of passionate marriages.

"Marriage had been a constant throughout his adult life," Patoski writes. "As difficult as it had been staying married, he appreciated the institution, no matter how much he strayed. Like with reincarnation, he was determined to get marriage right. His first marriage, to Martha, provided all the conflict and friction he needed to inspire him to write great songs. Where finances and ambition denied Lana, Susie and Billy a home life that was stable and nurturing, his second marriage, to Shirley, made him want to give his kids from his first marriage a better living situation than the one they'd had. Third wife, Connie was a stunning, steadying presence by his side throughout his meteoric ascent while she went the extra mile to bring up their daughters Paula Carlene and Amy as normally as possible. And his fourth marriage, to Annie, gave him the opportunity to raise sons Lukas Autry and Jacob Micah under close to ideal conditions."

That fourth marriage lasted the longest, Annie's environmental beliefs inspiring BioWillie, a branded bio-diesel that runs his three tour buses and dovetails nicely with Nelson's embrace of family farming, organic food and opposition to monopoly agribusiness…not to mention his well-publicized, occasionally-busted affair with natural flora like marijuana and other psychedelics.

A big screen Hollywood career, inter-generational veneration, and political clout in his home state and around the world, and a home life that includes the offspring and even boyfriends and new husbands of ex-wives, Willie's current life is a sprawling, epic adventure that Patoski sums up near the end of the biography.

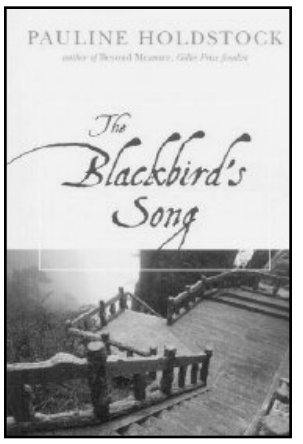
"But for all the ways he's been able to spread whatever wealth and knowledge he'd gained through Farm Aid, through BioWillie, through singing gospel and celebrating the secular, through being one of the few on earth to resolve the eternal contradiction of embracing the sacred and the profane with equal joy, at the end of the day it was about the music."

This book will send you back to the music. Right now, I'm going to go put on *Red Headed Stranger*. I recommend you put on your favourite Willie Nelson recording, and I highly recommend Joe Nick Patoski's book.

Joseph Blake is PRRB's music correspondent extraordinaire.

The Blackbird's Song

Andrea McKenzie Raine



The Blackbird's Song
Pauline Holdstock
Cormorant Books
2005, 220 pages
$21.95

The Blackbird's Song is a story about the challenges of faith. The reader is introduced to a group of three Christian missionaries who are chosen and sent to China to 'spread the word' by holy instruction.

The story is told through the eyes of one of the missionaries, Emily, who watches as her companions, one being her husband, William, struggle along with her in China's harsh and unpredictable environment. The group also has the obstacle of not starting off strong and united, as a woman, Martha, exhibits extremist behaviour in the group and rails against the intent of the group for adaptation and survival in the strange country. Their struggles deepen as horrible mishaps befall them, and Emily begins to lose her sense of faith. A division begins to take place within the group, as conflicting ideals either real or perceived are brought to the surface, which in turn bring about internal conflicts and suppression of true feelings.

The language is poetic. For instance, "Tsechow was spread below them like a wasp's nest broken open in the sun." Holdstock also uses strong, descriptive images to evoke the emotions in the characters and the impact of their new environment. As well, the frequent use of short, fragment sentences echoes the abruptness and urgency of changing scenery, quick action, and sharp, violent thoughts.

The undercurrents carry the tense vibe of changing ideas, while there are increasing overtones of religious strife. Emily is steadily drifting from the group, into herself and questioning her faith and reasons for being there, while Martha is drifting away further into the dangers of the country and her own madness. Emily becomes disillusioned with the idea of God, and feels abandoned. There are also children included in the journey, those of Emily and her husband, who are suffering alongside the adults through the elements and trials of the failing mission.

Pauline Holdstock

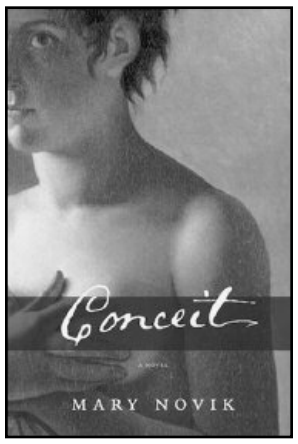
There is a division of purpose in the group that emerges, displayed in the notions of Christian beliefs, religious extremism, and paganism threatening their united ability to infiltrate the society and assist the Chinese people. Still, there is a silence in the group, as the members don't wish to communicate these changing dynamics. The mission is falling apart, as the each of the members begin to succumb, in their own way, to the unrelenting landscape and people. New demons arise to test the foreigners, and the group begins to collapse within itself as a result of mind-trickery, obsession, fear and suspicion.

The foreigners face an upward battle, and a constant threat of death, in a land that doesn't want them. Eventually, their stead-fast and narrow views about fortune, faith and god become inverted in the culture they were once trying to save.

Andrea Mckenzie Raine's first book* A Mother's String *was published in 2005.

Through a Glass Darkly

Linda Rogers



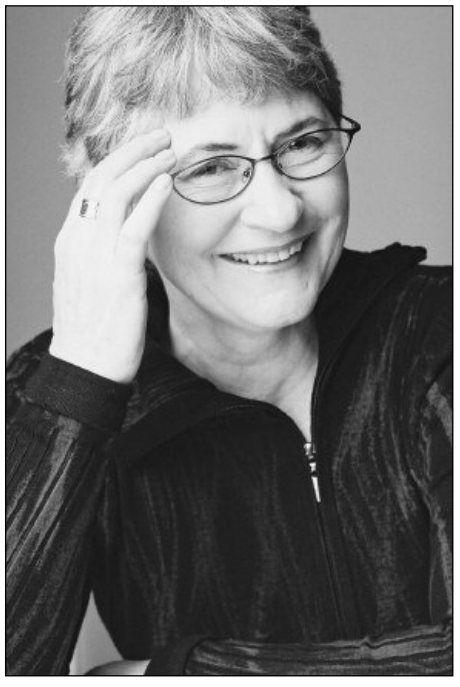
Conceit
Mary Novik
Anchor Canada
2007, 400 pages
$21.00

The title Mary Novik has chosen for her fictional biography of John Donne's too clever daughter Pegge is an ideal conceit. If books are windows, this one, layers of transparency, fits the metaphor perfectly in its frame. In the dark mirrors of the metaphysical poet and Dean of St. Paul's, his deceased wife Ann, the victim of too many conceits, and their daughter, the precocious child narrator, Novik reflects on the life and times of a great man and the effect such men have on their wives and children.

Donne and his family are coloured by their context, under and over painting in which the characters are shadows in the tallow lit rooms of a labyrinthian city. Like Thomas Hardy who made rural Dorset his most human and memorable character, Novik shapes Restoration London into a woman with many sexual alleys. Parts of her reek of cheap perfume, sewage and death; her breath as rotten as the faery queene's teeth. Others are as fresh as a garden after rain. Novik has created an historical pastiche that is as real as anything written at the time. Like a nurselog rotting in the rainforest, the city feeds her ant population pestilence and hope, the plague of smallpox and the succour of religion.

Novik has not only immersed herself in primary and secondary research, she has entered the mind of a febrile girl who has been triply orphaned, by the intense and exclusive love of her mother and father for one another, by the early death of her mother, and by her gender. As a younger daughter in a large family bereft of a mother protector in the presence of a devouring male ego, there is no room for her great intelligence to flourish and there is no proper channel for her love.

Like many young girls who are seduced by unscrupulous men or lured into the sex trade, Pegge is vulnerable in her loneliness and longing. Lacking the stability of real love, she will love inappropriately. Focusing the intense carnal waft from her parents' boudoir, she obsesses on her older sister's rejected suitor, Izaak Walton. Her fishing trip with him is a stunning piece of erotic writing.


Mary Novik

Novik, who grew up in a large family, well understands the competitive dynamic of sisters, brothers and parents. The Donne's are real people, credible as empirical entities and in their psychological development. Sisters were sisters in the Seventeenth Century as they are now and Pegge knew both the comfort and cruelty of girls. Even given the childhood mortality rates, Pegge's sisters were callous. One sentence is given to the death of a sister and, in reference to Pegge's bout with smallpox, her widowed sister only expresses joy at her recovery because she won't have to wear mourning for another year.

Scarred by the pox and small in size Pegge, struggles to be seen and heard in a household of singularly self-absorbed people. Donne, child seducer and suggested necromancer, is an intense narcissist. Fascinated by the romantic possibilities of his own death after his young wife expires in childbirth, he ignores his children and stokes the bonfires of his vanity, scaring his children with their diminishing options and posing for his sarcophagus. This is the real man of God, just a man after all, or a giant baby "whom grief made speechless like an infant," as written on Ann's tomb.

> When will you speak in a loud voice, God, bidding me to take up my bed and walk? I must not drift off now. A man must be alert, not lax, at the moment of death. How many have evacuated their bowels? Become, against their will, aroused?

Sex and death vocalize in the Dean's adjacent nether orifices. The book is a riot of sensation. Novik puts down her brushstrokes like an impressionist painter, each colour contrasting and complementing the one beside it. When light passes through the cracks there is redemption, as every great poets knows. Novik is herself a poet and this book, rich in texture, proves the axiom that, fiction is truer than truth.

Character is the engine of this scrupulously realized fantasy. Its narrative speaks in the involuntary progress of birth, copulation and death. As Donne extends the drama of his uncomfortable widowhood, we long for the poet to make good his promise to die and release the children from his tyranny. "Intense" is best compressed. Would he have died when he promised and the book ended one hundred pages sooner; but as God is our editor, so be it.

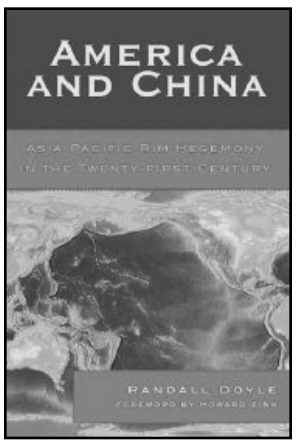
***Linda Rogers, a poet and novelist, writes a monthly arts column for* Focus Magazine.**

America and China:
Asia-Pacific Rim Hegemony in the Twenty-First Century

Reg Little

Specifically, the ultimate endgame for Australia would be a regional crisis that forced them to chose, definitively, which direction their future lies — America or Asia…

What awaits the land called "Oz" at the end of the yellow brick road? It is a crucial question, a soul-shattering question that the vast majority of Australians wish to avoid and never be forced to answer. Simply put, will the unfolding and unpredicted events of the twenty-first century allow or deter such a fate for Australia? Stay tuned.



America and China: Asia-Pacific Rim Hegemony in the Twenty-First Century.
Randall Doyle
Lexington Books, 2007

While these final paragraphs focus on Australia, they capture the tone and substance of Randall Doyle's, *America and China: Asia-Pacific Rim Hegemony in the Twenty-First Century*.

One might question the fairness of giving such a book for review to a past Australian diplomat still somewhat at odds with establishment orthodoxies, and who is more likely in tune with Eamonn Fingleton's *In the Jaws of the Dragon: America's Fate in the Coming Era of Chinese Hegemony*. For example, while many of Fingleton's viewpoints are open to criticism, there is little doubt that these great issues have already long been decided in the manner suggested by his title. The late 2008 onset of global financial crisis simply represents a late act in the unfolding drama.

How is it that Randall Doyle can address many questions that will be central in shaping the future of global power relations while only skirting around this reality? His book is a wide-ranging and painstaking review of English language perspectives on key political relationships and dynamics that will shape the evolving global order. But it is cast in the politically correct language and perceptions that the United States has long demanded from its friends and allies, at great cost to itself and to those same friends and allies.

Consequently, a country like Japan — with Australia learning some tricks — has long been practiced in meeting American expectations, even as it evaluated the unmistakable signs of a major, evolving shift of power to China that has been rapidly compromising American authority. As a consequence, on 5 May 2008, on the sidelines of an Asian Development Bank meeting in Madrid, Japan joined with China, Korea and the ten ASEAN members to put $80 billion in a fund to protect its members from any repeat of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. The amount, of course, is less significant than the symbolism. It is just one portent of America's loss of the financial power that has been fundamental and essential to its global and regional influence.

President Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao at the APEC summit in Sydney, Australia in 2007. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

Of course, Australia was left out of the Madrid group, highlighting its marginal role in Confucian Asia and giving pertinence to Doyle's final paragraphs quoted above. Even Australia's new Mandarin speaking Prime Minister showcases his Christianity while avoiding any hint of interest in, or knowledge of, Confucian and Daoist traditions of thought and spirituality. He seems totally oblivious to and disinterested in this profound wisdom that has demonstrated the capacity to work through global marketplaces to reconstruct the past two hundred years of Anglo-American 'universal values'.

It is in this context that one can identify the value of Doyle's book. It encapsulates and embodies a way of looking at the world that has characterised Anglo-American order at the very moment when that order seems to be confronting a terminal crisis. Doyle shows a strong disposition to want to grapple with the issues but, like so many others, appears constrained by entrenched, yet false academic and political certainties.

Randall Doyle

In this fashion, Doyle highlights the price paid by Anglo-American academic and political authorities for marginalizing any serious interest in the qualities of East Asian civilization. This type of intellectual apartheid has blinded the West to the strategies that have been the foundation of East Asian economic ascendency and that form a natural cultural bond between Japan and China, regardless of recent history and apparent antipathy.

Like so many others, Doyle appears unaware of the supremely successful Japanese deployment of an ancient Chinese strategy of conquest through service after defeat and occupation by America in 1945. The fact that Communist China could access the same strategy more than thirty years later to complete the hollowing out of the American economy also escapes serious attention. Instead, Doyle rehearses the obligatory consideration of politically correct stereotypes under chapter headings like "*Zhongguo*: The Wild Card in East Asia", "America: The Eagle in Transition" and "Australia: Serving Two Masters in Asia-Pacific".

At the same time, Randall Doyle is somewhat more realistic than Australia's Mandarin speaking Prime Minister who can talk of the need for an increase in defence spending to address the region's expanding military capacity. Doyle correctly highlights the serious limits imposed by Australia's miniscule population of 20 million in an economically booming Asian region of over 3 billion. But neither Prime Minister nor Doyle have addressed the vulnerability of superior American military technology, on which Australian defence strategy is largely based, to funding limitations at a time when the American economy must confront its own failings.

Doyle addresses many comparable dilemmas facing Americans and Australians in the region, but he has yet to recognise that the imminent demise of Anglo-American financial and institutional authority poses challenges of a character that few Anglo-Americans have contemplated. As if in final confirmation, the outgoing Bush administration's urgent global financial summit extended invitations to a "Group of 20", including India, China, Russia, and Brazil. The "hegemony" of the Group of 7 Euro-American states who have long ruled the world economic roost is over.

New challenges are on the horizon. For instance, India is the sole BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) nation that uses English widely, however, English offers little insight into the psyche of elite Brahmins or Indians of other castes. Even less does it capture the Russian soul, the Brazilian spirit or the Chinese Dao. Yet the emergence of the BRIC nations as a group highlights the manner in which international relations are shifting and the sense in which even the notion of an Asia-Pacific Rim is almost an anachronism, the legacy of a time when a concept was needed to encapsulate American reach and influence in Asia.

Since the financial developments of October 2008, admittedly some time after Doyle completed his book, it should have become clear that Australia's endgame is not choosing between China and America. Rather, it is determining how to survive and prosper in an economically dynamic region of over 3 billion Asian people, who seem likely to continue to display strategic arts that are poorly understood in an English speaking world still focused on notions like hegemony.

A former Australian High Commissioner, Reg Little is the author of A Confucian-Daoist Millennium (2006), and co-author of* The Confucian Renaissance *(1989) and* The Tyranny of Fortune: Australia's Asian Destiny *(1997). He writes from Brisbane.

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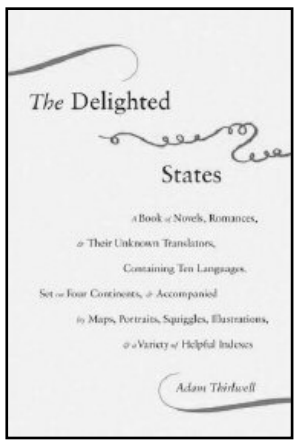
Naming and Necessity

Richard Wirick



The Delighted States
Adam Thirlwell
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008,
592 pages, $33.00.

Back in the days before deconstruction and its silly tyrannies, books of literary criticism tended to be highly structured, fortified citadels. They were like those very, very expensive watches you see advertised in magazines for the wealthy—their interior mechanics seamlessly humming, their exteriors unassailable, the whole package offered on a take-it-if-you-can-handle-it basis. I.A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* [the English grad student's dreaded 'Anat-Crit'] brooked no bend or stretch: straight-backed as Prussian soldiers, these books gave all the orders, asked all the questions, and then slowly, didactically answered them.

Imagine instead a single, coherent critical study as breezy and casual as open house, with other people wandering the rooms, speaking other languages, the broker a B- level translator (slightly) misinforming buyers about the rooms' functions, so that everyone leaves with a different view of the dwelling's configuration. But everybody wants the place. This describes both Adam Thirlwell's book and its central thesis, which is that (slight) mistranslations are the key to the novel's evolving majesties.

Thirlwell looks about twelve years old on the flyleaf, so English burlesque he exactly resembles the Oliver Twist that Fagin sent up the dumbwaiters to burgle Marlybone houses in the 60s movie. But he is supposed to have graduated from Oxford and have one novel, *Politics*, under his belt. His misshapen, utterly comfortable book rests upon two axioms. The first is that precise literary denotation is infinitely important, because of that original language's "uncanny specificity." (The reason you cannot "speak" a language until you are "thinking in it.") The second axiom is that novels not only survive, but flourish and are sometimes improved, by the well-intentioned errors that naturally result from Axiom #1.

I like contradiction as much as the next fellow, but was very skeptical from the opening pages. Thirlwell harmonizes a native word's "uncanny specificity" and its amazing ease of migration not with any coherent theory, presumably because he imagines this to be the work of more dignified but less delightful academic critics. Rather, he "reasons by example," as Edward Levi said all good (at least juridical) judges must. His specimens (he worships Nabokov and his Lepidoptera) are breathless, acrobatic digressions, adopting as their historical template Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: "If all is digression, then there can be no digression; all is to the point."

As an example, the author shows that while all the associations of Gogol's *Overcoat* hero's name, Akaky Akakievich, can only resonate in Russian, its basic stuttering sound and similarity to universal slang for shit can travel into a new tongue. This primes the reader to drop his expectations of living with a character who can make anything decent out of a decent sort of living. At other times, Thirlwell seems to abandon his "uncanny specificity" concept altogether with deconstructionist notions that details aren't as important when there is an obvious subtext. Flaubert's agonies in his letters to George Sand about Louise Colet—all that *mot juste* stuff—is really just subterfuge for the fact he doesn't want to marry the girl.

But at moments his examples hit you with the force of a revelation, like the great shifts of a new movement in a symphony. In translating Kafka's name 'Josef K' into Polish, one gets 'Jurek K.' The gray anonymity of the name is retained, but the new, beautifully ironic notion of "justice" for one trying (through the entire book) to find out the charges against him is a wonderful expansion, a "deepening by the slightest shift or error" as a result of the new language's inability to take the original's equivalent. Thirlwell's commentaries on Diderot are ingenious, and fine expositions on the mechanics (3 centuries early) of modernism:

> Diderot's *This Is Not A Story* is not quite literally true; it is a game with ideas of fiction and truth. It is true in other ways. At the beginning, Diderot announces that he is going to make up a surrogate reader within the story, who can play the part of the reader outside the story. This reader, in Diderot's head, turns out to be a cantankerous, recalcitrant man whose theory is that all stories say the same thing—that both man and woman are immoral animals. . . . The essence of Diderot's story that isn't a story is to agree with this cantankerous statement, and then make it irrelevant.

But Thirlwell also misses things, sometimes big things, in his readings. While 'Josef K' is—as just stated—trying to find out what particulars are on his criminal bill, he also spends a lot of time denying charges he never wishes to have any knowledge of. This exhibits something deeper, more psychologically idiosyncratic than the situation that confronts him, and is likely anchored in notions of shame and individual diminishment associated with the German *recht* or *Reich* (state or kingdom/prosecuting authority).

While the author's style is sometimes too haphazard, too meandering and diffuse, it is in keeping with his own deft aphorisms on style itself: "A style is a *quality* of vision; There is no need for a style to have a single style." And truest of all—"A style is as much a quirk of emotion, or of theological belief, as it is a quirk of language."

Armed with all this anti-structural structure, Thirlwell himself takes on the queasy, quantum exercise of a difficult, unexplored translation. When you turn the book over you see a different cover: Nabokov's short story "Mademoiselle O," rendered into English by one Adam Thirlwell. [The translator sets no small task for himself, as "O" later became the fifth chapter of *Speak, Memory*, one of the greatest memoirs, in any language, written in the last century.]


Adam Thirlwell

The critic's exercise goes some distance in proving his point. Thirlwell's version swings and echoes like a (somewhat broken) bell in the steep-staired tower of Volodya's crescending tale. And though Nabokov's English version brings across indispensable richness, Thirlwell's is more than adequate; it possesses its own vibrant, thriving life. (The translation is not from the Russian but from the French, in which Nabokov wrote many of his Berlin-era 'exile' stories.)

One of the problems of *The Delighted States* may be that it unwittingly bites off on what it purports to dispel, that for all its "digression-as-truth" mantra it may adopt what Frye, Richards and others seemed unable to shake off: literary criticism as positivistic, measurable, something akin to a hard science.

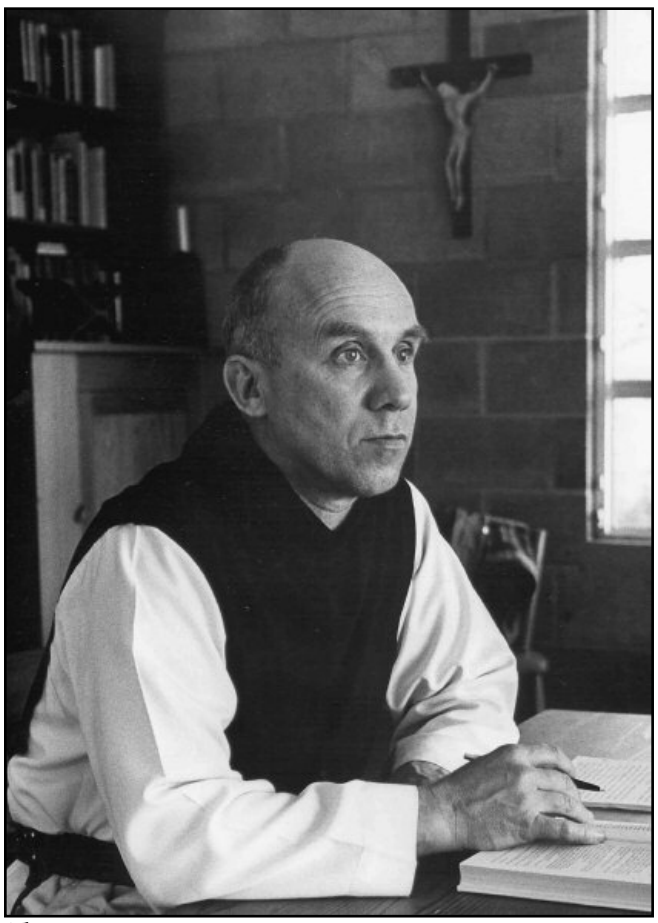
One gets around these problems by doing Thirlwell one better and embracing Ezra Pound's notion of translation giving the widest of latitudes, of being not a rendering but its own stand-alone work, retaining only the barest skeleton of the original. Still, word-for-word correspondence is a good departure point for even this broader view. As they said of Picasso, only the craftsman capable of rendering the real figure gets to go and play Mr. Potato Head with it. My Russian tutor, a Khazankan native speaker and my daughter's *au pair*, was giving me solid Bs until I made the same error that sank Jimmy Carter's Polish translator at the height of Carter's already doomed presidency. I translated something that should have been akin to "We welcome you to our home" into something akin to "I express the warmth I feel in anally copulating with your father." Translation, as Virgil knew, can form whole nations, and bloopers will never bring them down. Language is forgiving, but *en face* equivalence is the soundest of springboards. Accuracy isn't necessarily unimaginative.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel* One Hundred Siberian Postcards *(Telegram Books). He practices law in Los Angeles.

Pivoting Toward Peace:
The Engaged Poetics of Thomas Merton and Denise Levertov

Susan McCaslin

In what ways is poetry transformative; how and to what extent can it pivot us toward peace? Both Denise Levertov (1923-1997) and Thomas Merton (1915-1968) grappled with these questions in their art and lives. I embraced these writers as an undergraduate in the late sixties, first reading Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* (first published in1948), his bestselling spiritual autobiography, and then Levertov's *The Sorrow Dance* (1967), packed with poems of outrage against the Vietnam War. On their respective journeys, neither poet abandoned the longing for an integral vision in which contemplation and action are unified. Both gifted us with a legacy of poetry that includes overtly political poems, as well as more subtle ones that enact peace by offering glimpses of a world in which self and other are so deeply intertwined that war makes no sense. In many of their most contemplative poems, the poem itself becomes an incarnation of the longing for justice and peace, a microcosm of ecological balance between the inner and outer worlds. Another way of putting it is that the poem, poised between the interiority of the poet and the turmoil of the outer world, creates an alternative order, a place of high energy discharge that can bring about both individual and social transformation. A third way of saying it is that poetry matters.



Thomas Merton

Though Merton found his religious vocation in monasticism early in life, and Levertov found her way to an ecumenical Catholic Christianity in the last decade of hers, they share striking commonalities. Levertov was born in England, and Merton in France, but both eventually became Americans. Both were prolific in prose and poetry and drawn to the political poets of Latin America, though the influences on Merton's writing were more European and Levertov's more American. In addition, they eventually shared the same publisher in James Laughlin at New Directions.

Since the 1950's, Levertov had been associated with the Black Mountain school of poetics, American poets of the avant-garde that included Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, and Robert Duncan, all grounded in the free verse movement inspired by William Carlos Williams. Her early neo-Romanticism evolved into a poetry and poetics of political and social engagement by the time she published her collection of essays, *The Poet in the World* (1960). Merton, who originally sought escape from the world by entering a Trappist monastery in Kentucky in 1941, gradually moved beyond his early renunciation of society and began to integrate the political into a more holistic vision.

Both writers were enriched by their culturally eclectic heritages. Levertov's father was a Hasidic Russian Jew who converted to Christianity and became an Anglican priest, and her mother a Welsh woman, steeped in Celtic lore. Merton's parents were artists who roved from place to place during his childhood. Both poets were liminal souls, people with an outsider's sense of living at the margins. Levertov writes of herself:

> Among Jews a Goy, among Gentiles a Jew,…among school children a strange exception whom they did not know whether to envy or mistrust—all of those anomalies predicated my later experience.[1]

Merton, whose father was from New Zealand and his mother from the United States, lost both parents when young. In his twenties in 1938, he sought stability in monasticism, but remained intellectually expansive, as is evident in his far-ranging correspondence and self-revelatory journals. Levertov shifted from an early focus on mythopoetic interiority to poems of more public concern. Like Merton, she came to argue in the 60's that poets especially, as guardians of language, must take responsibility for the ethical impact of their words in the public sphere. In fact, her break with her mentor, poet Robert Duncan, was due largely to his resistance to the emerging political element in her work. Both Merton and Levertov, then, stood as witnesses to injustice, speaking out publicly, whether through Merton's Cold War letters in underground newsletters, or Levertov's involvement in rallies and protests against the Vietnam War, nuclear testing in New Mexico, and more recently, the first Gulf War in Iraq. "Picket and pray" became her motto in her later years.

In addition, both artists explored throughout their lives a mystical-contemplative spirituality. Merton's dramatic conversion to Catholic Christianity occurred in his late twenties, and his faith passed through many metamorphoses, while Levertov's non-dogmatic Christian orientation emerged gradually and flowered much later in life. In her last essays, Levertov begins to speak of her journey as a pilgrimage, for she carved a longer trajectory than Merton toward Catholicism in its most universal sense. In 1991, she writes,

> But more and more, what I have sought as a *reading writer*, is a poetry that, while it does not attempt to ignore or deny the ocean of crisis in which we swim, is itself "on Pilgrimage,"… in search of significance underneath and beyond the succession of temporal events: a poetry which attests to [a] deep spiritual longing.[2]

In fact, while writing the poem, "On the Feast of St. Thomas Didymus" (the doubting saint), she discovered she had moved unconsciously from observer to worshipper, for she states, "The experience of writing the poem—that long swim through waters of unknown depth—had been also a conversion process…."[3]

Given their shared commitments and milieu, it seems inevitable that the lives of two such poets would intersect. Merton was reading Levertov in 1961, when he wrote his friend, Latin American poet Ernesto Cardenal:

> There is a very fine new poet, Denise Levertov. I forget whether you translated some of her work or not. She is splendid, one of the most promising.[4]

In 1967, Levertov sent a letter to Merton asking for his support in a Vietnam War protest, and he responded positively.

Merton and Levertov's crucial meeting occurred on December 10, 1967, where she joined him and Kentucky poet Wendell Berry at Merton's monastery at Gethsemani, Kentucky for informal discussion. After her first and only visit, he wrote in his journal:

> September 10, 1967. Second Sunday of Advent. Rainy. Denise Levertov was here with Wendell Berry…They came up to the hermitage and spent the afternoon. I like Denise very much. A good warm person. She left a good poem ("Tenebrae") and we talked a little about Sister Norbert in San Francisco who is in trouble about protesting against the war.[5]

Merton's premature death in Bangkok exactly one year later must have shocked Levertov, cutting short a friendship that would surely have developed further. It is certain from her poems and writings that Merton remained a continuing influence, and was a seminal factor in her movement toward Christianity. Her poem "On a Theme by Thomas Merton" reflects her ongoing respect for his work.[6] And her remarks as late as 1984 suggest his continuing impact:

> I see nothing detrimental to my own poetry in the fact that I participate in the Eucharist or that I read Julian of Norwich, Bonhoeffer, or Thomas Merton without skepticism. I am ecumenical to a degree no doubt scandalous to the more orthodox….[I]f I discover spiritual fellowship and an active commitment to my political values I take it where I find it.[7]

Again, as late as 1990, she invokes Merton as a model and inspiration for her growing faith:

> If…a Thomas Merton…could believe, who was I to squirm and fret, as if I required more refined mental nourishment than theirs?[8]

Before Levertov embraced the Christian mystical tradition and a spiritual practice of her own, she struggled with the question of whether or not a poetry of peace is even possible in times of violence. In her essay "Poetry and Peace" at a conference at Stanford on the theme of "Women, War and Peace (1989)," Levertov was confronted with a question from the audience proposing that poets should bring images of peace to the world.[9] Her continuing rumination over this question led to the following poem:

Making Peace

A voice from the dark called out,
"The poets must give us
imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only
the absence of war."

But peace, like a poem,
is not there ahead of itself,
can't be imagined before it is made,
can't be known except
in the words of its making,
grammar of justice,
syntax of mutual aid…

A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
questioned our needs, allowed
long pauses. . . .

A cadence of peace might balance its weight
on that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,
an energy field more intense than war,
a mighty pulse then,
stanza by stanza into the world,
each act of living
one of its words, each word
a vibration of light—facets
of the forming crystal.[10]

Denise Levertov

Peace is "not there ahead of itself" because for Levertov it must be forged in the alembic of our lives. True peace is not a quietist state but one that emerges from inner silence that leads to action, and discovers its form in the world. And if a poet writes words that call for transformation, the poet herself must be willing to get involved and put herself, not just her work, on the line. She writes:

> When words penetrate deep into us they change the chemistry of the soul, of the imagination. We have no right to do that to people if we don't share the consequences.[11]

Poets who forge what Levertov called "engaged" poems and enter the arena of activism, however, must also be careful, according to Levertov, not to fall into the didactic. She was aware of how taking on a public voice can often lead poets into polemic and propaganda:

> Good poets write bad political poems only if they let themselves write deliberate, opinionated, rhetoric, misusing their art as propaganda. The poet does not *use* poetry, but is at the service of poetry. To *use* it is to *misuse* it. A poet driven to speak to himself, to maintain a dialogue with himself, concerning politics, can expect to write as well upon that theme as upon any other. He can not separate it from everything else in his life. But it is not whether or not good "political" poems are a possibility that is in question. What is in question is the role of the poet as observer or as participant in the life of his time.[12]

In answer to the question of whether political poetry can be truly poetic she writes in "Poetry, Prophecy, Survival" (early 1980's):

> A poetry of anguish, a poetry of anger, of rage, a poetry that, from literal or deeply imagined experience, depicts and denounces perennial injustice and cruelty in their current forms, and in our peculiar time warns of the unprecedented perils that confront us, can be truly a high poetry, as well wrought as any other.[13]

Her response is that poetry that rages against injustice is a "high poetry" if it is highly evocative, well crafted, and emerges from the life experience of the artist. Levertov also remarks on why poetry, as opposed to ordinary discursive prose, is particularly effective as a catalyst for peace in her essay "Paradox and Equilibrium" (1988):

> We humans cannot absorb the bitter truths of our own history, the revelation of our destructive potential, *except* through the mediation of art (the manifestation of our other, our constructive, potential). Presented raw, the facts are rejected: perhaps not by the intellect, which accommodates them as statistics, but by the emotions—which hold the key to conscience and resolve.[14]

Here she argues that poetry can be, in fact, more effective than prose because it emerges from the depths of the soul, transforming raw emotions through the fires of the creative imagination.

Both Merton and Levertov craft poems within the prophetic tradition that resist injustice, many of which are commentaries on particular historical events. Such poems draw on the devices of irony, satire, and parody often associated with the Hebraic prophetic voice of rage and denunciation. Levertov's poem "An Interim" is a call for imaginative attention, empathy with the suffering of others. That which is witnessed compels moral response:

But we need
the few who could bear no more,
who would try anything,
who would take the chance
that their deaths among the uncountable
masses of dead might be real to those who
don't dare imagine death.
Might burn through the veil that blinds
those who do not imagine the burned bodies
of other people's children.[15]

She associates this stance with that of the prophets of ancient Israel:

> And this brings one to a very important factor which is shared by poets and prophets: prophetic utterance, like poetic utterance, transforms experience and moves the received to new attitudes….We also need direct images in our art that will waken, warn, stir their hearers to action; images that will both appall and empower.[16]

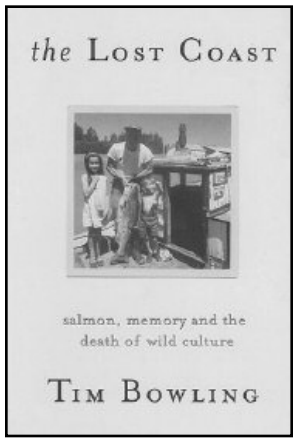
Merton's powerful poem "Chant to Be Used in Processions around a Site with Furnaces" (from *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, 1963) is an example of a political poem that both "appall[s] and empower[s]" in Levertov's sense. It uses corrosive irony, startling juxtapositions, understatement, and a flat, dehumanized tone, to lay open the inner workings of the bureaucratic mind and its complicity with systemic evil:

How we made them sleep and purified them
How we perfectly cleaned up the people and worked a big heater

(*continued on page 30)*

When I Was Young and Easy, Under the Salmon Falls

Hilary Turner



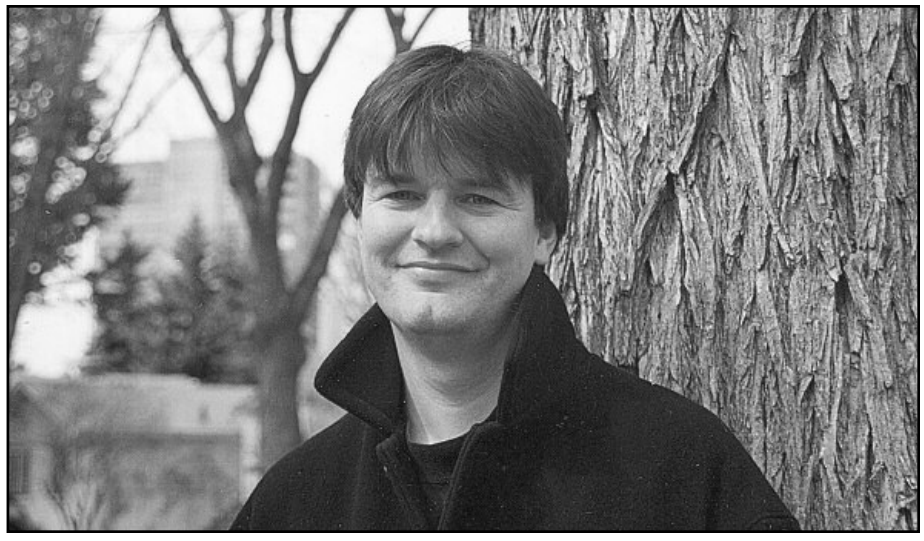
The Lost Coast: Salmon, Memory, and the Death of Wild Culture
Tim Bowling
Nightwood,
255 pp., $29.95

Part memoir, part obituary, and part tirade, Tim Bowling's *The Lost Coast* provides painful reading and reflection for anyone with more than a passing interest in the prolonged death-throes of the British Columbia salmon fisheries, particularly the operations that clustered at the mouth of the Fraser River. Bowling is the son of a career gill-netter and has been a poet by trade—with several highly esteemed volumes to his credit—but the salmon are in his blood, mind, and spirit, and he sees acutely just how foundational they have been, not merely to the economy, but also to the culture of this part of the world. Almost unique among migrating animals, the salmon instinctually returns years later to the precise location of its birth. This a form of spiritual power, as the Coast Salish well understood; in Bowling's hands it is also a resonating symbol of the interconnectedness of all natural things, and of the intelligent propensity of the non-human world to create self-regulating cycles with minimal waste of energy and life.

We humans are not so well-adapted. What ought to have been a sustainable symbiosis between the schools of returning salmon and the human communities scattered along the Pacific northwest became instead a long drawn-out massacre of the former by the latter. Bowling traces the sad history of the fishing industry from its beginnings in the mid-19th century to its unmistakable dénouement in the early 1970s, the years of his own boyhood. He describes in detail the daily life (circa 1897) of the all-but-enslaved Chinese workers in the canning factories, as well as that of the aboriginal women who toiled as "slimers," their knives flailing wildly but accurately when a big catch has come in. When the canneries can't keep up with the haul, whole boat loads of spoiled fish are dumped back in the river, and "a pulpy, stinking, red and silvery froth lines the river bank for miles. Hundreds of thousands of rotting carcasses, millions of pounds of looping, festering offal…" (142). It is a horrifying image of unrestrained capitalism, blind to the future. That future is of course our present, and Bowling makes clear the relentless causal chain of human greed as it descends, more or less unmitigated, through the decades.

Coincidentally, during the week when I was reading this book, I also had occasion to re-examine John Locke's theory of private property, arguably the intellectual bedrock of civil society in the West. Locke argued in 1690 that the act of mixing one's labour with nature conferred the right of ownership—on a field, on an orchard, on a slain deer, on whatever natural bounty "man" chose to claim as his own. In other words, the simple acts of tilling, planting, cultivating, hunting (and by extension, fishing) confer upon the doer sole entitlement to the fruits of that labour. Locke's argument had previously struck me as no more than a convenient justification for the European expropriation of the Americas from their indigenous peoples—lock, stock, and barrel. With Bowling in mind, however, I noticed this time that Locke builds in an important caveat. No one may legitimately claim for his own more than he or his household are able to consume. It is not within the definition of rights to fence off vast tracts of land, to slaughter a whole herd, or to leave the products of nature to spoil on the ground. To do so unjustly depletes the common stock, an action which Locke roundly condemns: "if the fruits rotted, or the venison putrefied, before he could spend it; he offended against the common law of nature, and was liable to be punished; he invaded his neighbour's share, for he had no right, farther than his use called for any of them" (*Two Treatises on Government*).

Locke would surely have approved of the methods of Bowling's father, an unassuming, taciturn man who prefers to fish the "Prairie Drift"—a section of the Fraser not known for its abundant runs. In years when the salmon runs are thin, the Bowlings tighten their belts. One wonders whether Locke could even have conceived of the mentality of the heavy-footed Tom Ladner (1836-1922) who clumps through Bowling's narrative, dealing death and environmental devastation wherever he appears. In 1878, he founded the Delta Canning Company, an enterprise which eventually operated nine canneries, five of them on the Fraser River. Bowling portrays Ladner as a consummate capitalist, a calculating, compromising, intelligent, successful man who still unaccountably missed the link between the contagion he had authorized to be dumped into the river and the typhoid fever of which his first wife and several of his children (not to mention many nameless others) eventually died. Ladner, in Bowling's account, is neither tragic hero nor caricature. Rather, he plays the role of antagonist—an opposite in every way—to the supple and intelligent salmon. Unfortunately, he is closely connected with business, bureaucracy, and power, and they are not.


Tim Bowling

Business and bureaucracy surge arrogantly on, in Bowling's view, in the farmed-salmon industry. Perhaps the most excruciating part of this book is Bowling's account of the flagrant disregard this commercial enterprise has for its effects upon what little remains of the wild salmon. He quotes a fishing lodge operator named Chris Bennett on the susceptibility of farmed salmon to sea lice: "Anybody who isn't moved by the grotesque image of those baby salmon being eaten alive by these sea lice—their little eyes popping out because the lice have eaten right through their heads….well, that person probably can't be moved" (67). Bowling is genuinely grieved—even anguished—to contemplate what remains of his own lived heritage for his children and grandchildren.

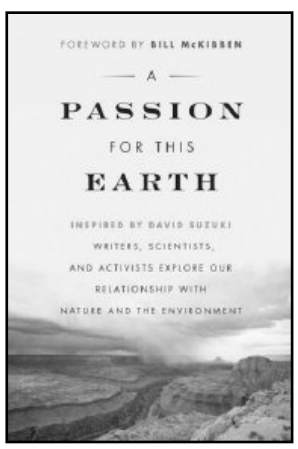
The more pastoral sections of *The Lost Coast* recall in detail the experiences of a childhood in the late 60s and early 70s—an era which seems all the more precious for containing the seeds of its own destruction. When he is not out on the boat with his father, young Tim is left mostly alone to enjoy the orchards, the dikes, the empty lots and houses of Ladner-before-the-developers. Bowling inhales the very spirit of the Fraser delta, and at age five or six, dreads the advent of compulsory schooling, having learned in his bones as much about the economy, the sociology, and the poetry of the Pacific Northwest as can be acquired in a lifetime of study. He has put much of that knowledge into *The Lost Coast*, a small and symbolic act of conservation in the face of seemingly irreparable damage.

Hilary Turner teaches English at the University of the Fraser Valley.

A Passion For This Earth

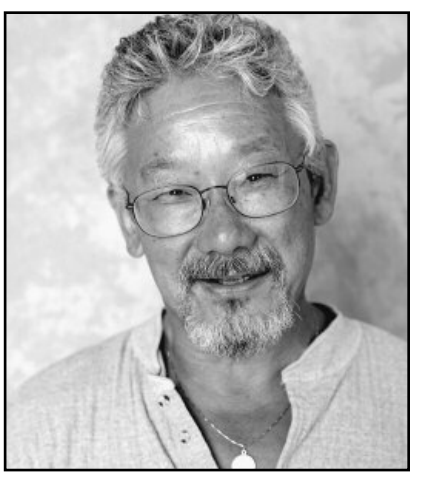
Chelsea Thornton

David Suzuki says that, "the way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are our biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity – then we treat each one with greater respect. This is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective". In *A Passion for this Earth*, a collection of essays inspired by Suzuki, we are invited to view the world through the perspective of 22 different scientists, writers, and activists, including Thomas Berger, Sharon Butala, Dr. Helen Caldicott, and Ronald Wright.



A Passion For This Earth
Michelle Benjamin, ed.
Greystone Books and
David Suzuki
Foundation, 2008.
$21.00

This tribute reminds the reader why we first fell in love with nature, sounds the call for nature's protection, steels our will to save it, and holds up David Suzuki as an example of how to do so. It is divided into four parts: "Falling in Love with the Wild", "Rise up and Reclaim", "Uncompromising Dedication", and "Travels with David Suzuki." Balancing warnings about our world's precarious situation with a perpetually hopeful outlook on the possibilities of protecting it, each author communicates his or her version of nature, revealing a myriad of ways of to value it, benefit from it, and care for it. Some writers, such as Rick Bass sound the alarm bell, forcefully declaring that the Earth is in danger, speaking for the oceans, for the valleys of Montana, for the prairies in Manitoba, and the rainforests in Costa Rica. Others, including Wayne Grady and Ross Gelbspan, debunk the myths surrounding environmental conservation. They insist that action is needed, that technology or some future miracle cannot be depended on to solve our problems now, and that our problems *are* absolutely solvable, as long as we develop realistic, definite and dedicated policies to solve them. They insist that we are not caught in an "it's us or them" struggle, and that a balance can be struck between human needs and the needs of the rest of the world. Through the voices of these writers, we are inspired to raise our own voices, to speak out against the forces that endanger the earth they love so much, to teach it in the classroom and in the press. We learn, through stories about the development of Suzuki's own environmental awareness, how we might come to understand, like he does, that "we are all caught in the same net, other living things and ourselves, everyone", that the net is of our own making, and that we can free the world from its steadily constricting grasp.


David Suzuki

At times dark and desperate, at others hopeful, *A Passion for this Earth* is an effective plea for our world. This collection is a mix of the formal, the political, the scientific, the casual, and the intensely personal, rendered cohesive by a shared, uncompromising love of earth. This wide variety of voices ensures that anyone, no matter their background, can find an essay that speaks to directly to them. It captures Suzuki's eloquence and dedication, and more importantly, successfully communicates his passion and the passion of the writers to the reader.

Chelsea Thornton has studied at McGill University and University of the Fraser Valley. She writes from Mission.

ON THE ROAD IN JAPAN (*continued from page 7*)

Leigh Norrie photoraphed two weeks into his six month bicycle tour of Japan

Century. "Every morning, early, the pilgrims stream through the town, setting out on their pilgrimage past the Tibetan-looking temples and the Los Angeles-looking parking lots."

In 1993, Richie traveled the Noto Peninsula, the remote "key of Japan". He visits a lacquer-work shop in the mountain village of Yanagida and listens to the words of an old master of a dying art: "'Soon there won't be anything but robots. No more lacquer, of course. Robots can't make lacquer….They're all around—young robots. They don't read anything but comic books and they perm their hair and they can't think. Robots already—"

Of different generations, different nationalities (Richie's an American, Norrie's Welsh) and taking different means of travel, both veteran Donald Richie and rookie Leigh Norrie offer comprehensive looks at the East, through Western eyes. Whether you're an armchair or active traveler, both of these well-written, useful and insightful new books are recommended.

***A frequent contributor to PRRB, Hillel Wright writes from Kawasaki, Japan. His* Bordertown *and* Rotary Sushi.**

WATMOUGH (*continued from page 5*)

was occupying in her life".

Geraldine's best friend is the seventyish Deborah, in age nearer to Morag, though she too is nothing like her. As Geraldine's trusted and highly-valued adviser, Deborah is a retired professional, enjoying life while fully independent in thought and action.

David Watmough

And it is to her that Geraldine rather succinctly explains what seems to be everyone else's problem: "The trouble is, Debby, that the rest of the world has NOT come to terms with leaving it. In spite of a lot of jabber about death being as natural as birth people either don't believe in death for a minute other than as a dire misfortune – or they don't think about it all!"

But it would be a mistake to suppose that Watmough's novel is overly preoccupied with death. As Geraldine says, it is a natural phenomenon that – certainly at her age – one should never try to ignore. Probably in the same way that after preparing a great dinner the chef should take care that he leaves the kitchen clean and orderly. One doesn't always succeed and occasionally he is called away in the middle of all the preparations, but it's important that a grand effort is made in that direction.

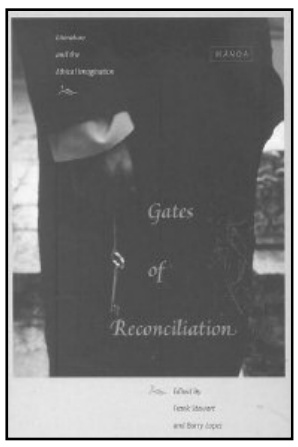
Don't know if David Watmough would put it that way, but that's the message I got from this well-written book by the old master of fiction.

***A frequent contributor to* PRRB*, Jan Drabek is a retired ambassador and has twice served as president of the Federation of B.C. Writers. His most recent work is* His Doubtful Excellency.**

Shaping the Land of Reconciliation

Sanja Garic-Komnenic

The victim reaching for the hand of the offender symbolizes the central theme of *Mānoa*'s current collection of stories, essays, and poems, *Gates of Reconciliation.* The traumatic past, collective and individual, the focal point of the works in this anthology, has started changing its shape, and has become less amorphous and dreamlike, and, perhaps, more bearable. The passivity and numbness of the victims of violence is replaced by an active contemplation of "the matter from another shore," while, at the same time, each speaker contemplates a unique path to reconciliation.



Gates of Reconciliation: Literature and the Ethical Imagination
Frank Stewart & Barry Lopez, eds.
University of Hawaii Press, 2008. 180 pp.
US $20.00

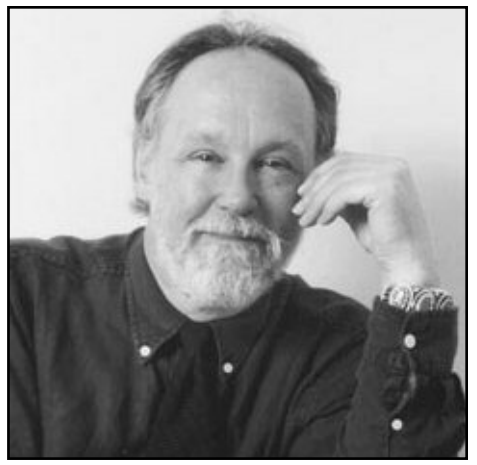
For Barry Lopez, without the passive observer, depoliticized and "lack[ing] resolve," violence would not be possible. When on a tour of Auschwitz, the observer, unable to rationally take in all the horror, is left, not unlike the victim, helpless and unable to shake off the spell of evil. Reconciliation requires courage, the courage "to offer a real hand."

Margaret Atwood questions the healing power of poetry and its noble task to lend a voice to the victim. Can poetry be a real path to reconciliation through compassion? Can the poet take the hand of the victim and make the impossible possible?

Santiago Roncaglioglio, on the other hand, is skeptical of the involvement of the observer. If both sides justify death as a means to achieve their goals, which side is the right side?

Compassion for both the invaders and the invaded of the past, in Lydia Peelle's "Stellwagen Bank" is possible when the author brings in the present. What future can we promise to our children? The answer was the same for a Wampanoag Indian woman who lived in the world "destroyed by [the] invaders from the land across the waters" as it was for a mother who had brought her children to the new land, and as it is now for a mother who raises her children in the wasted world of today. The answer is hope.

For the victim, the path to reconciliation is the path to self-healing. The protagonist of Jorge Edwards' "In Memoriam" returns to Chile after almost twenty years and confronts his past. The rift between him and his ex-lover, who is on the other side, is widened when the two recall their past experiences. However, reconciliation happens when the traumatic collective history is put aside, and their own shared memories are relived in the couple of hours that they spend together. They are simply two people who recognized each other "from another shore," happy to be among the living.


Barry Lopez

In Hwang Sun-won's "Cranes," individual memories also bring reconciliation. The pursuer and the pursued cease to be enemies when a scene from their shared past is being evoked.

Reconciliation with the self as the abuser as well as the victim is also possible through compassion. However, compassion for the self as the victim is not enough. Compassion for the abuser in one is self-healing.

One also might decide to stop being a victim by shaking off the sadness of the victim. In Taha Muhammad Ali's poem "The Falcon," the speaker decides to forego his sadness, enormous, for it is not only his, precious, for it is made up of all of his memories.

The time of reconciliation might be far. Perhaps, as in Davide Sapienza's "As If 1918 Never Happened," a start could be one " reconciled afternoon" in a German castle near Bonzano, in the still divided Europe. One can try to shape "The Land of Imagination" by looking at the past simply as "people trying to share an experience on the same ground." For now, we can try to shape that Land's future real contours, as the father in Aharon Shabtai's beautiful poem "Lotem Abdel Shafi" imagines an Arab groom for his daughter Lotem:

The Arab groom from Gaza, too, will extend to my daughter a dress
On which is embroidered the Land redeemed from Apartheid's curse –
Our Land as a whole, belonging equally to all of its offspring,
And then he'll lift the veil from her face, and say to her:
"And now I take you to be my wife, Lotem Abdel Shafi."

Sanja Garic-Komnenic is a frequent contributor to PRRB. She teaches at the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

Persepolis

Nadine Lucas

Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel of growing up in Iran grabs you by the throat and doesn't let go. The memoir has more recently been adapted into a feature length animated motion picture. Satrapi tells the story of her life from age six to early adulthood, commencing with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, the Islamic revolution that followed, the war with Iraq and Satrapi's subsequent European exile from her home and family. Despite the harrowing subject matter this story radiates warmth throughout and the author digs out offbeat humor whenever she can.

The Complete Persepolis
Marjane Satrapi
Pantheon, 2007
352 pp. $29.95

Satrapi achieves the delicate balancing act of being both intimate, as an autobiography should be and panoramic in scope in dealing with the ways peoples' lives can irrevocably change when governments subvert their beliefs. Childhood and adolescence are fraught with universal desires that have little to do with government decrees. Throughout her book Marjane remains resolutely human. She is anything but a rote comic book heroine. She is not always wise, she is often off track and this makes her all the more recognizable. This is what makes Persepolis such an infectious read and it is no surprise the book has already proven popular with adolescent girls throughout the world.

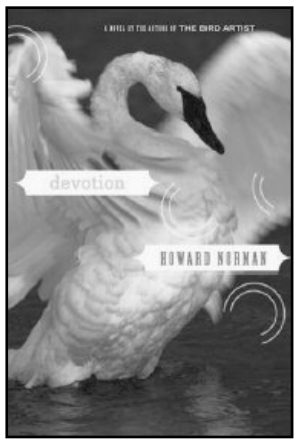

Marjane Satrapi

The images in both the film and graphic novel are rendered in black and white punctuated with various shades of grey. They are stark, elegant and consistently involving. There are cheeky pop culture references throughout both book and film. In the film's score there are cheeky off-key renditions of "Eye of the Tiger" and the theme from Rocky. Young Marjane loves Bruce Lee, Nikes and Iron Maiden. Through her childhood and difficult adolescence, she grapples with horrors that few Westerners could ever comprehend. As much of the novel is told from a child's partly comprehending point of view, reactions to such strictures as the veil are often visceral and this proves an effective means of showing what went wrong in those years. It also compellingly conveys how a child's sense of injustice can

(*continued on page 26)*

Swan Love

Linda Rogers



Devotion
Howard Norman,
Mariner Books,
208 pages, 2007
$13.95 US

When we lived on a sheep farm in the wilds of Vancouver Island, we had a goose that regularly pecked at one of the French windows in our living room. That goose had been widowed, and, believing that his reflection was his departed mate, was kissing and kissing her. The sound, more like hail than rain, was heartbreaking.

Howard Norman's cryptic novel, *Devotion*, is about a man who, having carelessly mishandled the first act of his marriage is spending the intermission in the company of swans, who mate for life. Swanherd or swinehound, it doesn't matter, David is in purgatory with a herd of mythological creatures who may determine the outcome of his marriage to Maggie, the wounded daughter of William, who once betrayed her mother.

In the Book of Isaiah, the son tastes sour grapes eaten by the father; and so it remains in the human story.

David, a photographer, is caring for his antagonistic father in law, who has fallen into the path of a London taxi after finding the photographer at a chaste meeting in his hotel room with an old flame who has failed to break through his matrimonial vows. Allowing David no time to explain the presence of his former lover, William, the outraged (swan) patriarch, shattered the "fugue state" of his daughter's conjugal devotion and injured himself.

This could be comic stuff in view of weightier matters, something Norman exploits beautifully when a distraught David actually invites the swans to invade the house he and William are caretaking while Maggie secretly gestates in Halifax. However, the writer knows and wants us to know the serious premise of his novel: devotion and the sanctity of the family are essential to his belief system and to the survival of any species.

Howard Norman

Like the swans, David is, for the meantime, trapped in silence. He will not speak because he will not be believed. Passion ramps in this musical *rubato* as Maggie drifts past his window in the various stages of pregnancy, which he photographs through his "amorous window" an image he has borrowed from a Japanese writer.

That window is the shape changer in this novel. It is his camera lens, the windows through which he observes his wife visiting her father, and the window through which he sees his old lover in London.

This book will have a happy outcome. It must. We feel the urgency on every page. David's quiet devotion and dedication to his own integrity will fly, just as birds with clipped wings will persevere. That is their instinct.

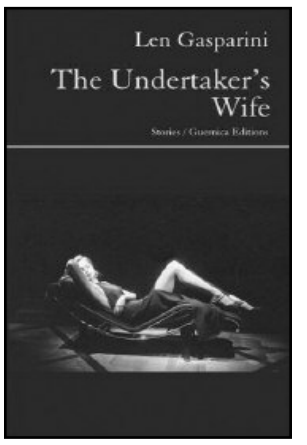
Norman is a Canadian writer on every printed page but his passport. An American Jew, his instinct has called him north to the mythology of our First Nations and the belief system that allows the seamless transposition of human and animal spirits. Just like the composer Glenn Gould, he hears God in the sound of snow. His spare writing echoes oral traditions and the writing of expatriates like Hemingway, who also refined his style in Canada, where French literary tradition frames a lean but intense narrative.

The swans are a perfect metaphor, their savagery circumscribed by instinctive bonding to one another and to the flock. Uxorious warriors, swans have apposite natures. They are fiercely domestic, loving and adversarial. Seen through the amorous window of David's second eye, they demonstrate what he feels but cannot or will not say because, although innocent, he may have fought phantom desire when he saw his

(*continued on page 46)*

The Undertaker's Wife

Al Maclachlan



The Undertaker's Wife
Len Gasparini
Guernica Editions
200 pages, 2007

Len Gasparini's short story collection titled by one of the stories therein, *The Undertaker's Wife,* feels like memories of his past, altered maybe to disguise the real people he is writing about.

There is nothing wrong with this. Hemingway did it, as undoubtedly did Ambrose Bierce, Damon Runyan, Dorothy Parker and other great short story writers. But somehow they turned their experiences into traditional stories with a dramatic narrative arc. Many of Gasparini's seem to be snapshots of his past, or tales his friends have told him. But who cares? the tales are intriguing and he writes about the past as it was back in the 1960s and 70s, when many of them take place.

Film people call these true-to-life stories, 'slice-of-life,' and many of those gathered here fall into that category. The themes are what are important. And I readily identify with some of them having gone to high school in Ontario during the sixties, where things were much as they were the decade earlier where Gasparini's stories begin. [The Sixties we hear about now didn't actually start until 1967, whereas the Fifties started in 1953 or so.]

It'd be interesting to see a feminist review of these stories, few of which treat women in a post-modernist manner. However, I like the fact that Gasparini is telling these stories in a non-revisionist way, in the vernacular of the day, a language that, by the way, is disappearing. The stories are mostly character driven, and the people almost always down-to-earth. A couple of the shorter ones fall flat, but the remainder were worth spending a few evenings entering Gasparinilland.

Len Gasparini

Personally, I wish there were more short story collections, because they are perfect for this busy world of multi-tasking (not that I know much about that), and the very thing for reading before the call of dreams lay us down to rest. But short stories are not that easy to write oddly enough, and publishers in general seem averse to publishing them these days.

The Grass is Greener takes us tobacco picking in Chatham, Ontario back about 40 years ago. According to many I've talked to, tobacco picking is just about the damn worst of the picking jobs possible, and attracts an itinerant bunch, though Gasparini doesn't dwell on that much. Larry's story concerns a girl he met there. Tina, he tells us, was more "attracted to me than vice versa." And later he has her say, "I think your notion of romance is a bit juvenile."

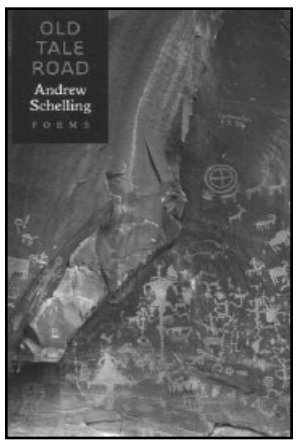
It's actually a rather tragic little story, certainly from Tina's point of view; but Larry is such a carefree character, who uses her so blatantly, that he is also a tragic figure. The theme of 'greener grass' explains Larry's wanderlust, but perhaps there is regret too, as it is doubtful he will ever settle down.

One of the ones set in the 21st century, *A Day in June* is a day in the life of a sixty-one-year-old in downtown Toronto. His name is Ellery, and he rants at everything around him, from the warning on the package that cigarettes "can prevent you from having an erection", to the "rap robots" he encounters on the streets, to computer technology as "a way of organizing the universe so that people didn't have to experience it." This last harangue reminded me very much of my grandfather's disgust at

(*continued on page 23)*

Old Tale Road

Paul Falardeau



Old Tale Road
Andrew Schelling
Empty Bowl, 2008.
105 pp., $ 15.00

What inevitably comes to mind when reading *Old Tale Road*, especially for anyone reading Andrew Schelling for the first time, is the resemblance to Gary Snyder and his work. It's all there, from the ecological perspective to the influence of Native American tradition, with both matched by a strong Buddhist influence. There are the places in this book. like California and Japan. which are haunted by Snyder. Even the various styles embraced by Schelling are some which have been widely used by Snyder and other Beat generation poets. This isn't to say that Schelling is an imitator. It would be more effective to say that like Gary Thorp, Tim McNulty or Jim Dodge, he is a student of that school and luckily for the reader of Schelling's work, he has learned well. Happily, he also brings a unique personal flavour to his work which makes it worth reading and rereading.

The first noticeable detail is the title he has chosen. *Old Tale Road* conjures up images of dusty old trails that could speak volumes about the people who have travelled on them. Schelling is a writer who is trying to speak for the roads and places he has seen. It's not hard to imagine that these stories are old, perhaps previously carried on only in oral tradition; many derive from ancient art forms and folk tales. There is something more though. Something new. For people who are from B.C.'s Fraser Valley, like myself, the title *Old Tale Road* bears an uncanny resemblance to another road, Old Yale Road, which meanders through many of our communities, forming a backbone for our modern infrastructure and a source of much of our history. There are many old tales on that road and it is now are part of a modern world, where new tales are being made every day. Schelling does the same thing with this, taking the old and making it new in a readable way. This is not entirely surprising considering Schelling's history as an important translator of old poetries.

There are many styles represented in this new collection. The most prevalent is *Haibun*, a mixture of concise Haiku and prose writing. There are also traditional poems and some shorter works which seem influenced by Asian poetry as well. For example in the poem "Calligraphy":

> *The sun nearly puts me to sleep*
> *dreamily I gaze at the beaver pond*
> *and listen to the swish*
> *of your brush*

Andrew Schelling

Haiku and Haibun aside, there are also other Japanese influences, such as the aforementioned Buddhist tones in the moving poem "Death of a Zen Master, dedicated to Kobun Otokawa Roshi who died in 2002. It's a stand out in the collection. There is also a *Noh* play about an old spirit who confronts a traveller on the road in California. Schelling clearly has a good grasp on how a *Noh* play should look, sound and feel. He even includes a cast list and interlude parts. The overall product feels authentic to *Noh* tradition.

But the most compelling thing in the book is Schelling's effective blending of American, Native, and Japanese cultures and stories. Fans of Snyder or Rexroth will be pleased, so will fans of Japanese poetry who will find this take a suitable American adaptation of that style. Finally, since Schelling has set out to tell old stories that have come from the land, it is likely that anyone who appreciates history and ecology will find something they can relate to in this work that succeeds in telling us stories that the land wishes it could.

Paul Falardeau studies English and Biology. He lives in Aldergrove, B.C., writes on music and culture for The Cascade, and is a programmer and DJ for CIVL radio.

TRIO

Linda Rogers

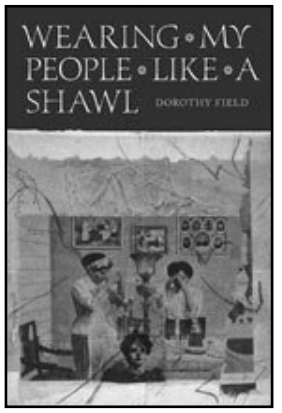
Who doesn't remember the *Trio* album, the three glorious voices of Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt blending in angelic feminine harmonies? The music transported us. That is one of the objectives of great music and great poetry. We rapture up. In the past, when we read books by Jose Saramago and Martin Amis with some detachment, doomsday prophecies were hardly more than literary conceits, because we had options. Now the threatened phenomenal world is too much with us, and the choices are fight or flight.

It is interesting to note that wings appear frequently in the poems of Kelly Parsons and Barbara Colebrook Peace. Inviting angels to lie in the snow, as earlier Canadian poets did with eventually irritating frequency, is no longer enough. The angels seem to be somewhere else. It would appear these poets are invoking the miracle of dreams because flight is their last option.

A Duet for Wings and Earth
Barbara Colebrook Peace, Sono Nis Press, 2008, $14.95

Going forward is difficult and perilous in these troubled times. Robert Priest's new book of poetry, *Reading the Bible Backward,* suggests we might learn from history, approaching it in the manner of ancient literatures, from the back to the front.

Dorothy Field, the third in this trio of poets from Sono Nis Press, does just that, reclaiming the Jewish history she was denied by the principles of assimilation. She is writing her way back to understanding her own identity in a world of mixed messages. Sometimes the poetry slips into prose as she encounters the memories, pleasant and painful, that define who she is.



Wearing My People Like a Shawl
Dorothy Field, Sono Nis Press, 2008,$14.95

> When I was a child, Kildare lived in an upper cabinet of our kitchen, in the row of white cardboard cylinders filled with maple sugar, boiled down from Kildare maples, so hard we could never beak the sugar out, a line of untouched cartons like memorial stones.

Memorial stones are a footpath to a present the three poets in this trio of beautifully produced books can't fully comprehend. Their Christian-Judaic ethical systems have broken down in the culture of greed, and they take refuge in the language of faith.

Kelly Parsons, who sees miracles in empirical experiences, asks simply for birds. The fact that many species are extinct or on the verge of extinction lend a special potency to her work. Perhaps her beautifully crafted poems will beckon the grace we need to survive ourselves.

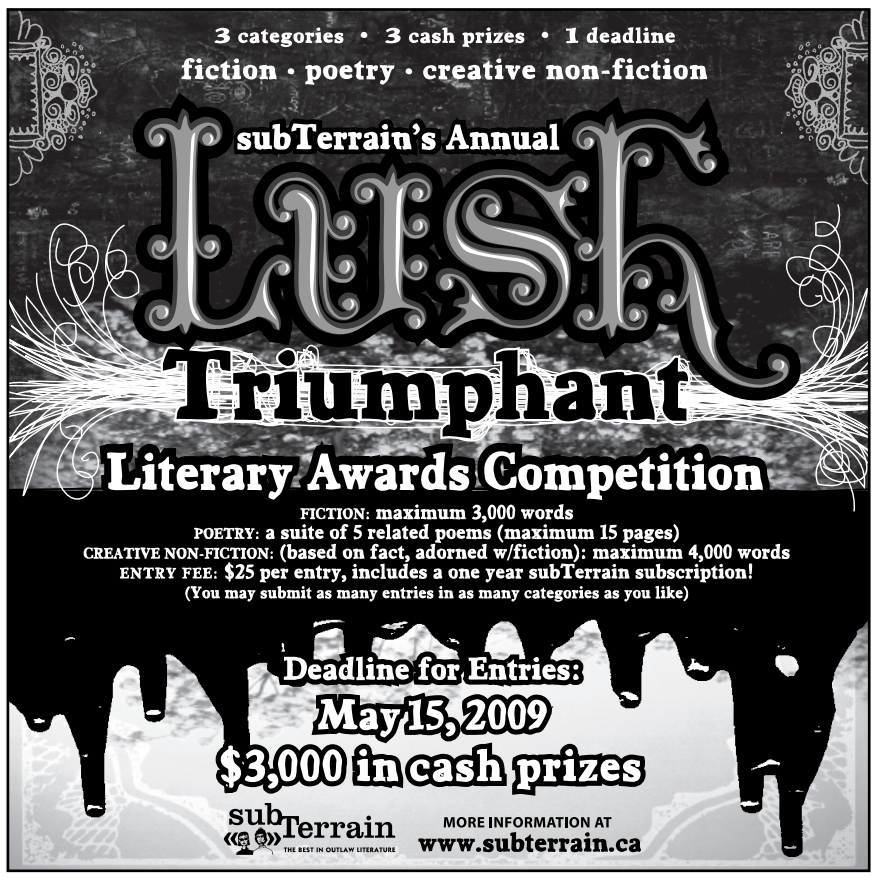
I Will Ask for Birds,
Kelly Parsons
Sono Nis Press, 2008
$14.95

> It's over now, perhaps forever
> and I'm back trimming hedges
> grounded in schematics once more.
> Ambition caged in my chest, shallow
> hummingbird breaths - oddly comforting.
> I'd do it all again for less.

Barbara Colebrook Peace found her epigraph in the Book of Isaiah, still a temple of accessible homilies, "from the wings of the earth we heard songs." Music informs her poems with the gentle resonance of belief. Her archetype is Mary, the mother of God. She is the one who carries the burden of mothering the future, just as she gave birth to the Messiah who led the chosen people in a social political movement that became a religion two millennia ago. People, being what they are, flawed imitations of heaven and earth, continue to need the words for redemption.

> It was always like that, and the song
> I've been singing all my life
> Is a song about stretching
>
> To enlarge my idea of you. What
> were the words, now, how did it go.

Linda Rogers is working on a collection of poetry called "A Piece of Trembling."



"THE ESCAPOLOGIST" BY STEPHEN PRICE

Yvonne Blomer

This is the first in a new series in the PRRB on reading poems by Canadian and International poets.

from "The Escapologist" by Stephen Price:

XIV

Key: Ehrich.
Houdini.
He knew himself wholly
in that other. Ropetrod or strangled stage
right, rumpled in trunk tricks, flushed, tousled,
allowing magic's antic, contrary, quarrelsome
right to brag and strut and bolster men
awake to strangeness and the bloodclock in
their skulls. Coalbox. Bolt-Ladder. Paper Crate.
Wed-Tire Chain-Grip. Each weird escape a kind
of anger felt at being held hard down
as if such letting-go or slackening
might drain him of his self: the struggle less
a slaking of the fists than of the mind.
His life raised and raised again as metaphor;
his words laid out the tackled thunk and buckle
of chests, of leather-wrought thickened holdings hoarding
thicker words like: never less himself
that in the language of old locks, closings,
the given. Life a kind of end-stopped line,
measured in the breath and bloodbeat of it;
he turned from all of that. Escapes each night
stank of musty centuries magic:
the stiff, leathern satchel his flesh became.

Latch: He held his life in his teeth like a key.
Freedom meant restraint, finding one's place:
a warm rope fed and bellied him at the first,
a cold rope will lower his casket at the last.

Harry Houdini in 1899

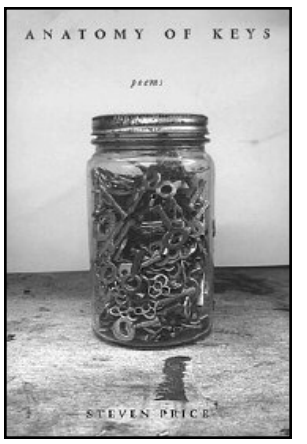
Anatomy of Keys, published to great acclaim in 2006 by Brick Book, is a collection of poetry that has been contemplated and refined by its author. Poems reflect the time Price has taken to study, research and write this long biographical poem. This is a collection where research involves meditation; a research of close scrutiny of language and careful near-ecstatic use of sound and metaphor. This collection is a love affair with language, with the possibilities inherent in lock and key.

Steven Price was born and raised in Colwood , B.C. His family owns and runs Price's Alarms the oldest locksmith company in Canada. And what better roots from which poems on Houdini flourish, where key and lock takes on the strengths and weaknesses of characters in this collection.

Stephen Price

In this poem in particular the Key and Latch are speaking the lines. They are the perspective from which Houdini is explored. In the first part titled "Key" it is Houdini who is the key to himself. Price suggests that in magic, or under lock and key, Houdini was clearer to himself than out in the world. Under the guise of magician, he could cloak himself in something he could understand. Through being locked up, Houdini escapes from himself, "Escapes each night/ stank of musty centuries magic:/ the stiff lather satchel his flesh became." Here the body is the metaphor for the magic; it is the repertoire or the sack in which the tricks are carried.

But the tricks also, the act of being locked up, Price suggests, was an act that created a sense of freedom. In "Each weird escape a kind/ of anger felt at being held hard down". So he creates this imagined locking up to free himself from the 'real' or the holding that living produces, "the struggle less/ a staking of the fists than of the mind."



Anatomy of Keys
Stephen Price
Brick Books
144 pages, 2006
$18.00

This is a kind of list poem. Lines are highly enjambed causing images to run into each other as if jangling on a key ring. They are sharp active words, with syncopated rhythms such as: ropetrod, tousled, antic, trunk tricks. Few lines in the "Key" section are endstopped while every line in "Latch" is. It is not, after all the key that is the trap, it is the lock and in that lies the pun of being "latched on" as Houdini is hooked to the fame and ability to "bolster men".

The final four lines suggest that though his life was in his hands, Houdini did not have control of things. The rope, the key and latch are his medium, but in the end he will be locked in a box and lowered to the ground.

Yvonne Blomer's first book,* a broken mirror, fallen leaf *was short listed for The Gerald Lampert Memorial Award in 2007. Most recently her poems were short listed for the 2007 CBC Literary Awards. Yvonne teaches poetry and memoir in Victoria, B.C.

GASPARINI (*continued from page 20*)

modern life in the 1960s. But Grandpa was talking about the 'world going to hell in a hand basket', while Ellery is just a plain old Luddite who detests 'mouse potatoes' and just about everything else post-computer.

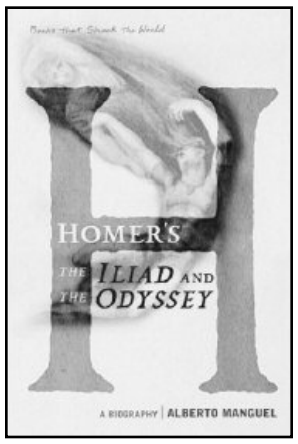
While most of these stories are set in Canada, my favourite ones are in other lands. *Stranded* is what often happened to gringos in Mexico. Driving with the wind in a Volkswagen van with a destination of either Tampico or Monterrey, Virgil, Owen and Lee's indecision results in their becoming lost. Furthermore they have heard stories of banditos in the area. But it is not the banditos they have to worry about when they get stopped by the *federales*. It reminded me a lot of when some friends and I were sipping Sangrias outside a taverna in Vera Cruz, and an American named Cecil walked into town with only his underwear left to hide his embarrassed manhood.

Gasparini is also a published poet, and his prose is tight and provocative. Few of these are happy stories. They are tales of outsiders, who go their own way, with their own moral, or amoral standards. They jolt you because these characters are often callous, and do things that are not often talked about outside of saloons or rowdy taverns, when men tell tall tales and swap bullshit. But these stories are deeper than that, they dig into the human condition and leave a lasting impression of lives led sometimes rather hopelessly, but almost always impulsively.

Al MacLachlan is the author of the novel* After the Funeral. *He lives in North Vancouver, BC.

The Life in Homer's Corpus

Jordan Zinovich



Homer's the Iliad and the Odyssey: A Biography,
Alberto Manguel
(Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007. $22.95)

During an extended stay on Chios in the late '70s, I happened upon the shrine of the Homeridae. The site is glorious, a stone floor with views of the Turkish coast situated above a small bay on the eastern side of the island. There the sun beats down and the fragrances of citrus, thyme, rosemary, and the rolling sea all swirl together. An instant brought me to a deep, profound, sensuous awareness of Homer's vitality. For someone as bookish as I am, it was a defining experience.

Homer enriched my life as no other "author" has: returning me to university to learn ancient Greek, and conjuring me a wife, a Homerist who teaches at the City University of New York. During the 30 years since my encounter on Chios, I've read widely on the subject of the Homeric corpus, so it was with delight that I discovered Alberto Manguel's *Homer's the Iliad and the Odyssey: A Biography* at a friend's home this summer. And it is with caution, and respect for the difficult task Manguel set himself, that I undertake this review.

The "biography" of a canonical text is not, as Manguel rightly notes, a "biography of the man who wrote it." In the case of the Homeric works this is especially true, since it's by no means certain that a single author wrote either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, nor who such an "author" might have been. So it's appropriate that Manguel sets out instead to develop a kind of chronological survey of Homer's greatest readers, "a history of the *reception* of the books."

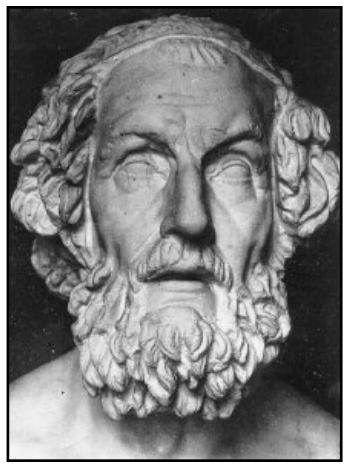
He begins, as is proper, by addressing the obscure origins of the texts, mentioning enough reputable scholarship in his notes on the chapters 2, 3, and 4 ? including works by J. M. Foley, Gilbert Murray, Gregory Nagy, Milman Parry and Albert Lord, and Froma Zeitlin ? to lend authority to his presentation. Nevertheless, the vagaries of his notions of the early development of the texts jarred my critical faculties.


Alberto Manguel

Diminishing the oral tradition in favor of the possibility that 7th century BCE Ionian merchants provided papyrus to an active community of "literary" writers (implying a similarly active community of "literate readers"), as Manguel does, minimizes the biographical significance of the "childhood of the texts." Even if there was a practice of keeping some kind of written record as early as the 7th century, it is unlikely to have been writing as we know it, and the Homer we know (whomever s/he/they may have been) certainly appeared at the end of a long oral tradition. Furthermore, to suggest that the 24-book structure of the poems we have is a result of the length of the papyrus scrolls our Homer used is absurd ? particularly since Manguel's comments on the editorial work of scholars at the Library of Alexandria (on page 46) show he knows better.

To obscure the importance of the oral tradition and its attendant sensorium is to minimize the affective components of performance. During a conversation at Hunter College, I once asked Derek Walcott about the Caribbean drum rhythms that I thought I detected in his epic *Omeros*. (I'd just returned from Guinea, West Africa, where I'd been studying drumming and the Sunjata epic ? there the oral tradition is alive and singing.) Instead of answering me directly, later that evening Walcott contextualized and read a series of poems as his response. My point here is that even our greatest living poets tend to fall back on performance to enhance their poesy.

Manguel is at his best and most entertaining when he offers literary interpretations of Robert Fagles excellent translations, which are his preferred versions, and when he surveys the historical readings. His account of the texts' peregrinations through the great minds of western culture is fascinating. He tackles the elevation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to canonical status, from bible to idea to template to symbol, with verve and erudition. Quirky positions receive sympathetic consideration ? the notion of Homer as a woman being perhaps the most notable one. The examination of Michael Woods' treatment of Homer as a historical source is satisfying, though Manguel makes no reference to either Joachim Latacz's important recent work or the recent recovery of the Treasure of Priam. The Homeric transfusions that vitalized Virgil, Dante, Goethe, Pound, Cavafy, and others, and the modern revivifications by Joyce, Kazantzakis, and Walcott all get insightful attention.


A bust of Homer

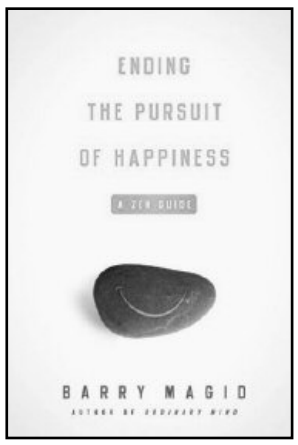
Despite my eccentric and pedantic criticisms, general readers will find *Homer's the Iliad and the Odyssey: A Biography* worth reading. There's life in old Homer yet, an enduringly potent life that Alberto Manguel obviously appreciates.

Jordan Zinovich is a senior editor with the Autonomedia Collective, one of North America's most notable underground publishing houses.

Ending the Pursuit of Happiness: A Zen Guide

Leila Kulpas

Barry Magid's *Ending the Pursuit of Happiness: a Zen Guide*, arrives at a time when mindfulness, the enhanced awareness and sense of wellbeing fostered especially by Buddhist mindfulness meditation, is a hot topic. News reports suggest that more people in the west than ever before are meditating. This June in Vancouver, the *BC Medical Journal* provided a list of books on mindfulness "for the busy physician," and UCLA psychiatrist Daniel J. Siegel lectured on *The Mindful Brain* to a full house, with latecomers lining up for hours for standing room.



Ending the Pursuit of Happiness: A Zen Guide
Barry Magid
Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2008, 181 pages, $16.95.

Siegel alluded to research demonstrating changes correlated with enhanced mental functioning in the brains of meditators. And he paid tribute to practitioners like Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School; because the usual meditation techniques don't work for many of those in need of psychotherapy, people like Kabit-Zinn have spent decades perfecting short-term, client-friendly techniques to produce a mental state akin to the mindfulness which results from extended periods of meditation, for use as adjuncts to psychotherapy. A literature search yielded some five-hundred articles on this kind of mindfulness, which has been found to reduce the relapse rate in depression and improve functioning in those with the severe personality disorder known as Borderline. It also appears promising in the treatment of eating disorders and drug addiction, as well as the alleviation of pain.

Unfortunately, many patients abandon the practice after treatment ends, but Magid's clear, no-nonsense exploration of the concepts, benefits, philosophy and traps of Ordinary Mind Zen will doubtless appeal to those ex-patients who continue to meditate, long-term meditators, and scholars of Buddhism. Precise information about the philosophy, as Buddhism is considered, is usually buried in poor translations of ancient texts, or embroidered with New Age fantasies.


Barry Magid

The more I familiarized myself with Magid's book, the more intriguing and beautiful it seemed. I liked his "very Zen" iconoclastic stance and the work's structure—a series of paradoxes like koans, the deliberately puzzling statements with which teachers counter students' questions, instead of providing pat answers, to foster further intellectual enquiry.

For instance, the author wickedly suggests that students change the Mahayana Buddhist vow, "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all," to, "Sentient beings are numberless, to hell with them." Elsewhere he suggests ways of alleviating suffering more effectively—he isn't advocating selfishness. Like the "estrangement" techniques Brecht used keep theatre audiences fully "awake," his aim appears to be to shock readers into focusing their attention.

Having been a psychoanalyst in New York for over thirty years, Magid is surely familiar with suffering, but he follows Heinz Kohut—once thought radical—instead of Freud. And his Ordinary Mind Zen was developed by his teacher, Charlotte Joko Beck, after her own teacher was accused of sexual exploitation and alcohol abuse. According to Magid, traditional US Zen was very "macho"—insisting, also, for instance, on the conventional cross-legged posture even when it caused severe pain—suffering being seen as essential to learning.

And meditators also can fall into many traps. For instance, although as one might expect, to Magid transcendence is a reality, as a goal it can become "flypaper"—as one teacher called it in response to a student's question. The belief in "the damaged self in need of repair" is another trap, and an illusion since Buddhism believes the self to be merely phenomena in flux. Some meditators believe they've achieved thought-free concentration, although in reality they're "spacing out." Meditation is not an escape, Magid reminds us; instead, it facilitates the experiencing of bodily sensation, as well as its tolerance or enjoyment. Other meditators feign an "all-accepting" attitude, even ignoring injustice—in the face of which Magid clearly advocates action.

He repeatedly quotes from the Heart Sutra, to the effect that there is "no path, no wisdom, and no gain." The idea is that we already have everything we need—except the awareness of this. And simply labeling our thoughts—the major practice in Buddhist mindfulness meditation, including Ordinary Mind Zen, creates a profound acceptance of and surrender to life.

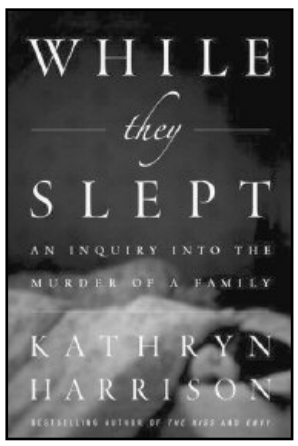
And Magid isn't against happiness—true to the title of the book, he's just against it as an object of desire. Happiness, he says, is like the flowering of a plant; in humans, it comes from mental health and virtue—as well as our bodies.

Leila Kulpas is a Vancouver psychiatrist, psychotherapist and writer who has studied and practiced Buddhist meditation.

Coming Through Slaughter

Richard Wirick

When the American child abuse prevention and foster care system succeeds, it can seem to work miracles of rare device. But when it fails it fails unutterably. Its charges do not simply fall through cracks, but descend into chasms and emerge as dangerous changelings. The most recent scandals involved bloated pay-per-kid schemes in New Jersey where parents allowed some of their brood to nearly starve. And in tightening the tap of Russian immigration, Putin not long ago cited the fact that of eleven post-Soviet orphans dying under suspicious circumstances, some had filtered, through neglect or misplaced good intentions, into the foster care circle of musical chairs that occupies an odd central position in American child welfare policy.



While They Slept
An Inquiry into the Murder of a Family
Kathryn Harrison
Random House
275 pages, $28.00

Kathryn Harrison is a writer who draws a lot of eye-rolling. Not least among the reasons is her memoir *The Kiss*, which chronicled incest with her father commencing in her twentieth year and concluding when he departed to re-establish his fundamentalist congregation somewhere in the Bible Belt. In tackling an intra-family murder growing out of prolonged child abuse in rural Oregon, Harrison quite consciously intends to inherit the mantle of the Truman Capote of *In Cold Blood* and the Norman Mailer of *The Executioner's Song*. But she doesn't have the former's hyper-objective detective eye, and does not even approach the "true life voices" ventriloquism that made the latter a completely unique masterpiece. If anything, she brings to mind the Texas memoirist and novelist Beverly Lowry, whose genre-bending *Crossing Over* re-created the killings that made Carla Faye Tucker America's first woman (and, by the way, first born-again Christian) to walk to the gurney at Huntsville Compound.

In April of 1984, Billy Gilley took a baseball bat and went downstairs to his parents' room, smashing the skull of both his mother and father and awakening his two sisters, Jody and Becky. After comforting Becky and warning her not to enter the room, he used the same bat to open holes in her skull so large that brain matter and bone chips extruded, causing her to die hours later in an ER wing slippery with gore.


Kathryn Harrison. Photo by Joyce Ravid

Billy's ostensive goal and ultimate defense was that he was spiriting Jody away from their father's horrific molestations, and was himself ending years of uncontroverted, savage beatings and verbal abuse. He was convicted and sentenced to life without parole at 19, and has spent a quarter century in various prisons, now inhabiting the Snake River Detention Facility near the Idaho border, where Harrison goes for their queasy, laconic, sometimes sexually-charged interviews.

But these facts of the crime—three dead, a history of belt whippings by a sociopathic father—are the stepping off point for what dissolves into confusing, contradictory motives by Billy, Jody, and the relatives who adopted the only surviving sibling. Immediately after the incident, sixteen-year-old Jody claimed that though father and son went at one another with hot tongs, Billy Senior's sexual overtures to her were largely verbal and almost certainly unconsummated. Prosecutors assuage what they see as Harrison's misplaced sympathies for Billy, detailing his degree of premeditation, the meticulous way in which he carried out repeatedly avowed threats.

Psychiatric experts concur that Billy had an incestuous fixation on Jody; he put her in the car immediately after the murders and got as far as the nearest roadblock. During his incarceration, Jody did not respond to his letters, and in extensive interviews before trial he was unable to explain his own early tendency to fall asleep in the back seat of the family car with his own open hand on Jody's crotch.

Astoundingly, with great dexterity, Harrison leaves the reader sufficient sympathy for Billy to be cast as something other than a one-dimensional killing machine. He went to social services early and complained of his and his sister's abuse. The caseworker betrayed their confidence and reported the reports back to the parents, which resulted in the father adding the passive, enabling mother to his targets. Some commentators tell Harrison that Billy is the classical parricide in a society whose social services net often leaves the most urgent cries unheard. Murder is chosen as the only way to escape atrocities society won't recognize or measure, let alone remedy, and the perpetrator chooses the only available method to live with dignity, to restore their autonomy, to "re-process" the shards of personality blasted apart by the drawers of first blood.

Much of Harrison's fascinating work was done for her already by Jody Gilley, who went on to graduate from Georgetown with a thesis describing the events from the perspective of the brother she testified against, and whose guilt she sometimes paradoxically assumes. This closeness formed in early childhood either ripened into an exploratory, cerebral, reciprocal incest fantasy, or into a rage at the parents that rose to the point of merging her and Billy's personalities, or both:

> Identifying the murders as the event that "triggered" her re-birth, Jody [in her thesis] could voice a fear that they representated a consummation between her and her brother: a bloody consummation of hatred rather than of love, but a generative force nonetheless. To own her new life, she had to own the act that gave it to her, taking her place not just beside her brother—that wasn't enough—but *inside* her brother, slipping for a moment into his silhouette, trying on his history, his burdens, his fears. Or maybe it had been her violence, an emotion she'd entrusted to him.
>
> For Jody, so invested in control, the idea of exploring the most disastrous outcome of con- trolled rage must have been—I was going to say horrible, but perhaps it was irresistible—necessary. A way to both own and disown what she felt. A way to explore on the page what she couldn't allow into her life. Hidden behind the mask of Billy, in defense of his murders and her anger, Jody could reveal her anxiety about being judged herself, and express compassion for her brother, as she hadn't been able to do in the courtroom.

So this tale, wobbly and at times stretching its conceits, becomes a saga of brothers and sisters as much as parents and sons, a sort of reverse-Electra myth. You may or may not buy Harrison's subtext that Billy may have gotten a raw deal (at least in sentencing) by being tried before the development of the "abuse defense." But *While They Slept* shows at least how family homicides are rife with false transparencies, hiding deep shadow plays of anger, revenge, and redemption.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel* One Hundred Siberian Postcards *(Telegram Books). He practices law in Los Angeles.

PERSEPOLIS (*continued from page 19*)

evolve into an adult sensibility.

Reading *Persepolis*, one is made aware of the many Iranians who don't embrace the restrictions they are made to live under, particularly the women. Yet the book never tries to be an Iranian history lesson, the author is more concerned with how people try to live ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances. Satrapi's strong family ties are conveyed warmly. She is close to her secular leftist parents who campaign ceaselessly for change and find their relatives tortured and imprisoned. She is even closer to her witty and pragmatic grandmother.

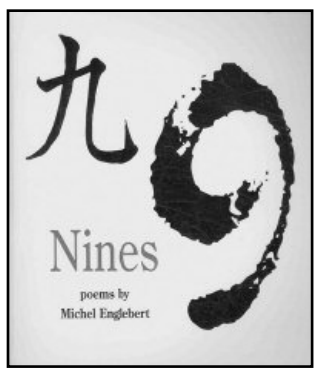
Persepolis should bridge the gap between those who read graphic novels and those who do not. It is also a resonant, universal coming of age tale with a heroine who is smart, loveable, deliciously funny and full of gumption. In the face of geopolitical upheaval Persepolis is unfailingly, robustly alive. This is a sturdily poetic novel, full of difficult questions and uneasy answers. Persepolis renders in black and white a world that never is…

Nadine Lucas is a writer and filmmaker. She lives in Victoria BC and is writing a book based on comic book heroes.

Nines

Paul Falardeau

Posthumously published works can often be subpar, ruining our understanding of what may have been an author's otherwise fruitful career. It's no surprise though that nostalgia and legend are often used to sell work rather than quality. Thankfully, this doesn't plague Michel Englebert's posthumous release *Nines.* Born in the Congo of Belgian family, Englebert was a longtime sojourner in the Far East who taught in Japan and died in Gwangju, South Korea on December 28, 2004 at the age of 52. This selection is a tasteful sampling of Englebert's previously unpublished work. A collection edited by Hillel Wright and Taylor Mignon, it suitably defines his style and nuances as a poet.



Nines
Michel Englebert
Tokyo: Printed Matter, 2008. 62 pp., $ 10.00

The book opens with an introduction, preface, and foreword, each written by one of the writer's friends. These brief essays help to describe for us the kind of person Englebert was in the eyes of his peers, and perhaps more importantly for someone who is about to delve into his poetry, what to expect from the material ahead.

The book's title is derived from the fact that the collection is divided into sections that each house nine poems which riff on a specific topic, be that coffee, boxing, or the blues. Each poem has nine lines and is broken into three tercets. Clearly, numerical possibilities were a fascination for Englebert and this collection doesn't fail to represent that. In his foreword, John Gribble speaks on this poetic form: "At first the temptation is to see them as blues. But they are not…Look at their length. They are sonnets, masked."

However, there is no rhyming involved here. Englebert doesn't make a song so much as he jams, poetically that is. He takes a topic, some sudden inspiration, and riffs on it. In this way he mirrors the craft of writing haiku—what Allen Ginsberg called "aesthetic mindfulness". For example in the poem "Decaf", Englebert uses the beverage as a starting point but soon tackles deeper things:

> *You want it all, and you want it both ways, the garden without the snake. It just isn't the same if you are not bit, it goes down different, your life, all the stimulants out of it.*

Englebert's true gift, that should give these poems their lasting appeal, is not flowery language or dramatic stories. His poems are stories of everyday life, of emotions everyone has faced, things that anyone can relate to. Not only does he find inspiration in dancing, the blues, coffee, and film, but the revelations he brings hit home in a way that sticks in the back of our mind. Englebert talks about universals, which makes his poems comfortable, yet they are surprising in their unforeseen and unlooked for beauty. The reverse happens too: he talks about deeper meanings and lost values, yet finds them in the components of everyday life. For example in "All I Want You to Do", inspired by Big Willie Dixon's song "That's All I Want Baby", Englebert writes about his perfect woman:

> *I want a woman who drives other women crazy. Maybe it's because she's too pretty, maybe because she can take a joke, or maybe she means what she says about money, dancing, and making love. She isn't afraid to risk*
>
> *her credit buying me a case of French champagne and not afraid to help me drink it, or let me do the driving. But she can be dangerous: sometimes, if the mood takes her, she finds the words to nail me to*
>
> *my broken promises. And I delight in making it up to her, cooking her steak and eggs, booking a table near the band. Cold heart, consider how Comfortable it can be for a man and woman who have nothing to prove.*

Not only does Englebert muse on his inspiration, wandering away from what started the poem, but in doing so he sums up the subject, perhaps not in words, but in the emotion of the poem. Inspired by the blues, the feeling is not unlike an old blues tune. Englebert hurts with experience, aching from past mistakes, yearning for a perfect love that will probably never be and knowing that he's probably the only one to blame. That doesn't stop him from trying.

In the end, *Nines* functions well as a summation of a critically underrated poet or as one last treasure for his long-time fans. It's a collection worth owning for any fan of Englebert, of poetry, or of the human condition.

Paul Falardeau studies English and Biology. He lives in Aldergrove, B.C., writes on music and culture for The Cascade, and is a programmer and DJ for CIVL radio.

Once a Murderer

Ray de Kroon

Once a Murderer
Zoë Landale
Wolsak and Wynn Publishers: 2008.
95 pages. $17.00

As a reader passionate about poetry, much of what arrives these days leaves me feeling like a sockeye flopping in the Sahara sand dunes. But after reading Zoë Landale's *Once a Murderer,* I felt as if I had been placed back in the waters of Barkley Sound where I belong. Landale's poetry is refreshing and straightforward and her collection offers ample narrative for the reader to understand what the poems are trying to say.

Her book is divided into three sections, the first two containing poems and the last a series of odd listings that made me a little nervous when I first thumbed through them. Most of the poems are more than capable of standing alone but Landale's work really reads best as one long narrative or poem sequence. The voice is relatively consistent, that of a married woman in love with an also married police officer. She accompanies this officer while he is on duty and she sees him periodically at court and over coffee.

Within the poems Landale creates a connection between crime and forbidden love that she weaves together with her verse. Here, a hand on the shoulder or a gentle caress can have an impact as great as a knife thrust into the heart. Although one might expect otherwise after reading the first few pages, the book ultimately offers a story of unrequited love. Desire is met with resistance, and as the officer tells her in perhaps one of the most hurtful moments in the book, "I never met a woman yet / worth half my pension." The previously mentioned lists that make up the final section are funny and even sardonic and include "ways to say goodbye," "ways to get the truth," "how to kill a cop," etc. Perhaps they are the most effective way to give closure to this love affair, just as officers might tell off colour jokes to deal emotionally with the gruesome realities of crime.

The majority of Landale's poems are divided into two (and sometimes even three) columns. The left-hand column contains the main narrative line and the right-hand column comments (often ironically and subversively) on the other. This technique is effective in poems such as "Once a Murderer" and "Steelhead Fishing." In other pieces, the right-hand column can distract from the main narrative. At times, I found myself reading the left-hand column while ignoring the other. I would then go back and read what I had skipped on the right. Even during a second reading, and the book certainly warrants it, I continued in this way. I felt I was getting more from some of the pieces by doing so despite the fact that I was undoubtedly missing connections and juxtapositions that the author had intended. Still, Landale's split narrative technique allows her to make those connections and that would not be possible with a more traditional format. It would be remarkable, I'm sure, to hear her work read aloud with different corresponding and overlapping voices.


Zoë Landale

Landale's poetry contains imagery and metaphor as breathtaking as the landscape of the West Coast it draws so heavily upon. Here is poetry as vivid and startling as the places where BC's coastal mountains tumble into the sea. In "Steelhead Fishing," the persona describes the detective watching her as a "controlled burn eyeing / first growth timber." In "Pink Lilies," she says she "wants a man who can touch her like a colour." In "Evergreens Remind Her," she describes marriage as:

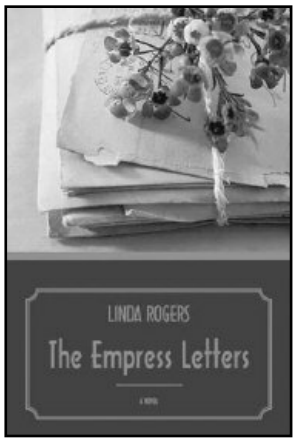
> *…a boat*
> *where you are both the keel*
> *and wind, red paint on the hull*
> *and the creaming liquid buoyancy beneath.*
> *They both are borne up by long-*
> *term love.*

Here is poetry we can feel and smell, like the scent of fragrance during an embrace or a knife piercing muscle and bone. It is no surprise this collection won first prize for poetry in the CBC Literary Competition. Pick up this book and, without feeling like a fish out of water, you can begin to care about the lives of those inside.

Ray de Kroon writes from Abbotsford, B.C. He studies English Literature at the University of the Fraser Valley and is currently pursuing a career in teaching.

The Empress Letters

Andrea McKenzie Raine



The Empress Letters
Linda Rogers
Cormorant Books
2007, 270 pages
$22.95

Linda Rogers' novel, *The Empress Letters*, is a tale abstractly woven into the historical setting of Victoria, BC during the early 20th century. The story is told through current, intimate letters written by the mother and narrator, Poppy, to her daughter who is lost in China. The word 'lost' holds multiple meanings, and sets a tone or an understanding for what is occurring in the narrator's mind. There are many lost or buried pieces. With the assistance of her travelling companion, Tony, Poppy is on a quest to reclaim her daughter as well as her own truths. The unfiltered letters reveal a strange and hard truth about the unfolding events of the mother's life. They are also an attempt to explain a family history and rekindle a strained relationship, which has not been reconciled.

The narrator's experiences of growing into adolescence are somewhat shielded in a proverbial snow-globe of luxury, which is inevitably shattered by the larger, grittier world as she witnesses the human reality of the Chinese slaves "Coolies", the emergence of World War I, the facades of social hierarchy, and her own confusing desires of coming into womanhood. Her perspective is quickly moved from the smaller scope of her privileged existence to a larger, more philosophical, political and sexually-charged coming of age. Sexual boundaries are crossed, as well as geographical and imaginary ones, which are often skewed by the narrator's younger, innocent recollections while trying to associate worlds.

Linda Rogers

Poppy uses art, particularly painting, to define her world through the mentorship of the historical Emily Carr's free-thinking ideas and committed lifestyle. The historical figures, such as Emily Carr and the Chinese slaves, 'paint the scenery' for both social and political events in a turbulent era. For instance, the novel delves into the mysterious underground world of Chinatown during the turn of the century. There is a lesson of place and identity, ritual rhythms, and being safe with your own kind.

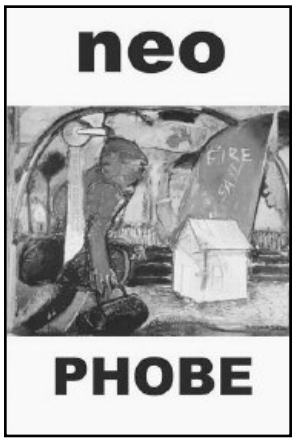
There is also constancy in fighting for independence, which resonates through the narrator and her childhood companions. At the same time, they are each in desperate need of support, affection and stability. Poppy revisits her important rites of passage, as she literally journeys across the Pacific Ocean on a cruise ship, The Empress of Asia, to rescue her daughter from the strange, mystical holds of China.

Throughout the letters, there are currents of disruptive change, which are personal, historical or both. The ground shifts underneath like the San Andreas Fault, as Poppy rides the moving earth and adapts to new surroundings in her childhood home, or learns to accept what will not change such as the cruel effects of her distant relationship with her own mother.

Andrea Mckenzie Raine's first book* A Mother's String *was published in 2005.

Cliquing on all Cylinders

Jordan Zinovich



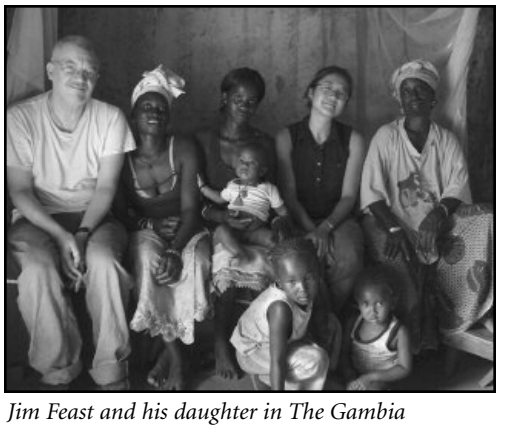
neo phobe, Jim Feast and Ron Kolm
(New York: Unbearable Books, 2006; distributed by Autonomedia. US$12.00)

One of the paradoxical aspects of life in New York City lies in its microcosmic communitarianism. To maintain a kind of sanity, The City's artists (poets, writers, actors, musicians, and sexual athletes, in particular) form social cliques that often become scenes. When you're active here, the enormities of population and territorial scale first collapse into an intense focus on lively venues in sympathetic neighborhoods, and then explode along friendly fault lines and charged cleavage planes.

Jim Feast and Ron Kolm are true veterans of an endlessly morphing underground writing scene which, in the '90s, spawned the group known as The Unbearables (originally The Unbearable Beatniks of Life). At its biggest bang, The Unbearables claimed Hakim Bey, Ann Charters (biographer of Jack Kerouac), Samuel R. Delany, Chris Kraus (of semiotext(e)), Tuli Kupferberg (co-founder of The Fugs), Harry Mathews (of ULIPO), Judy Nylon (inspirer of Brian Eno), bart plantenga (historian of yodeling), John Strausbaugh (then with the *New York Press*), Lynne Tillman, Janine Pommy Vega and many many others among its members. Feast and Kolm were founding members, and *neo phobe*, the novel they concocted together as an exquisite corpse and published under the Unbearable Books imprint, is a classic *roman à clef*.

The plot centers on a luckless band of semi-proletarians called the Neo Phobes struggling in a vaguely nonspecific future for literary recognition. Individually egocentric yet strangely loyal to one another, the troupe sets out to solve a mystery — a murderous serial rapist is stalking Gotham — and then to write a best-seller based on their uniquely inept combinatorial brand of sleuthing. By the end of the story no one is any better off than they were at the beginning, but hijinx, maimings, and nervous breakdowns have ensued and they've had one Hell of a ride.

Part of my delight in reading *neo phobe* lies in the joyfully two-fisted talents that Feast and Kolm bring to the writing. I've tracked Kolm's work since 1983, when he ran with the Between C & D crowd (which included Kathy Acker, Bruce Benderson, Dennis Cooper, Gary Indiana, Darius James, Tama Janowitz, Patrick McGrath, Catherine Texier, and Lynne Tillman). His tiny *Public Illuminations* parodies enchanted me and his steely, grit-based styling in *neo phobe* nails both the character portraits and the ambience.



Jim Feast and his daughter in The Gambia

Feast, for his part, slaps the ironical gifts of a true satirist on the page. Among cognoscenti, he is notorious and widely admired for restlessly clever interventions. Chez Rollo, the Unbearables' long-running peripatetic reading venue, emerged from his fertile imagination. More recently, to my astonishment, he coaxed an alternative life-style guru for whom he was ghost writing into letting him interweave his own exotic chapters into the best-selling health and fitness texts they produced. His cavorting sense of literary exuberance infests every page of *neo phobe*.

By employing the exquisite corpse game as their overarching structure, Feast and Kolm elegantly illustrate the Neo Phobes' group writing style. First one, then the other contributes a chapter, with the resultant chaotic subtextual amalgam of philosophy, fundamentalist parody, and allusion emerging from multiple voices and narrative lines to lend a deeply artistic verisimilitude to the novel. Set pieces and story hooks abound, offset by characters of such emotional fragility that they have a *Pale Fire* glow

(*continued on page 32*)

I was the commander I made improvements and installed a guar
anteed system taking account of human weakness I purified
and I remained decent

How I commanded

I made cleaning appointments and then I made the travelers sleep
and after that I made soap…[17]

Merton's poem is chilling because of its use of an Adolph Eichmann war criminal persona, the language of mechanization and abstraction, passive voice, and euphemism ("sleep" for "die"). The speaker's self-absorption (repeated use of "I") and delusional thinking ("I did my rightful duty as commanded") plunges the reader into a clinical hell. The poem reminds us how easily we can become dehumanized if we give ourselves over to a system that would dehumanize others. Yet the poem simultaneously empowers us to maintain an inner vigilance against such a moral descent. Interestingly enough, Levertov too, a few years earlier, wrote a poem called "During the Eichmann Trial" (from *The Jacob's Ladder,* 1961), which uses the figure of Eichmann to speak to the potential in each of us for betrayal of our common humanity: "He stands isolate in a bulletproof/ witness-stand of glass, / a cage, where we may view/ ourselves, an apparition…."[18]

Demonstrating another strategy, Levertov's "Witnessing from Afar the New Escalation of Savage Power," offers a poetic-political experience of the effects of the first Gulf War. The poem depicts devastation in one woman's life due to a bombing raid that compels engagement with her suffering. Its well-wrought lines shock the reader, yet avoid mere rant:

There was a crash and throb
of harsh sound audible
always, but distant.
She believed
she had it in her
to fend for herself and hold
despair at bay.
Now when she came to the ridge and saw
the world's raw gash
reopened, the whole world
a valley of steaming blood,
her small wisdom
guttered in the uprush;
rubbledust, meatpulse—
darkness and the blast
levelled her….[19]

We are told that the elderly woman had "tended a small altar, / kept a candle shielded there," but could not ward off through her simple faith things brought about by human powers of destruction. The stunning image of the "world's raw gash" reminds us that "the whole world" is affected by the "leveling" that crushes the spirit in us all.

Denise Levertov, photo taken by Elsa Dorfman

Such poems open new ways of witnessing, imagining others' pain. Seeing deeply can lead to empathy or compassion, compassion to transformed ways of being in the world and, hopefully, action. If this is so, then Merton and Levertov's explicitly political poems need to be revived, chanted, and even used in our liturgies. Their engaged political poems disturb us, while the more contemplative poems gently pivot us toward peace by pointing to another way of being in the world that, if enacted in many, could lead to social transformation.

Both Merton and Levertov composed more subtle peace poems by drawing from the natural world to enact a shift in perception. Their legacy meets our need for a poetry of praise through a contemplative vision of the world. In *Contemplation in a World of Action*, Merton writes:

> The contemplative life should liberate and purify the imagination which passively absorbs all kinds of things without our realizing it; liberate and purify it from the influence of so much violence done by the bombardment of social images.[20]

Poetry can counter the bombardments of the culture, its abuses of language, its steady onslaught of advertising and propaganda that turns us into thoughtless consumers and makes us complicit in the machinery of war. Poetry is a contemplative act that evokes contemplative states in its hearers and readers. As Levertov insists, the more celebratory sort of peace poem offers a counterbalance to the poems of outrage:

> But we need also the poetry of praise, of love for the world, the vision of the potential for good even in our species which has so messed up the rest of creation, so fouled its own nest. If we lose the sense of contrast, of the opposites to all the grime and gore, the torture, the banality of the computerized apocalypse, we lose the reason for trying to work for redemptive change…To sing awe—to breathe out praise and celebration—is as fundamental an impulse as to lament.[21]

In the end, these two poles of the prophetic and the celebratory must both be present in an authentic poetics of peace. Some poems emphasize the outrage and others the praise, while some encompass the two within a single poem.

The peace poetry of Levertov and Merton is in the end a poetry of ecological awareness in the largest sense. In one way, all poetry that raises consciousness past dualistic, either/or, them-us thinking is peace poetry. Such poetry is inherently ecological because it emerges from an experience of interconnectedness with the world that keeps us from seeing our fellow humans or the natural world as "other." It grounds us in the cosmos and in community. True peace poetry leads to a de-centering of ego and an encounter with a more authentic and expansive self. Poetry is essential because it gives us more than notions, speaking to the heart. Peace poems can redirect us to lived experience where faith and doubt are held in a field of mystery.

In her last years when she lived near Seattle, Levertov spoke of Northwestern poetry of wilderness that "gives rise to a more conscious attentiveness to the nonhuman and to a more or less conscious desire to immerse the self in that larger whole."[22] She found herself drawn to poems which "approach spiritual longing and spiritual experience in a way that is more direct, since it is frankly about the quest for or the encounter with God."[23]

Two astonishingly beautiful ecological/spiritual peace poems are Merton's "Night-Flowering Cactus" and Levertov's "To Live in the Mercy of God." Both express identification with the flood of beauty and love that is the divine Oneness manifesting in and through both us and the natural world. Both poets recognize the complex mystery of nature, how it be an expression of clashing powers striving for survival, as well as a unified ground of Being. In their most mystical nature poems, they focus perception on this spiritual dimension of nature. In Merton's poem, spirit manifests from a point of nothingness within a cactus that blooms only one night each year:

I know my time, which is obscure, silent and brief
For I am present without warning one night only….

When I come I lift my sudden Eucharist
Out of the earth's unfathomable joy
Clean and total I obey the world's body
I am intricate and whole, not art but wrought passion
Excellent deep pleasure of essential waters
Holiness of form and mineral mirth:

I am the extreme purity of virginal thirst….

(*continued on page 31)*

…. He who sees my purity
Dares not speak of it.
When I open once for all my impeccable bell
No one questions my silence:
The all-knowing bird of night flies out of my mouth.

Have you seen it? Then though my mirth has quickly ended
You live forever in its echo:
You will never be the same again.[24]

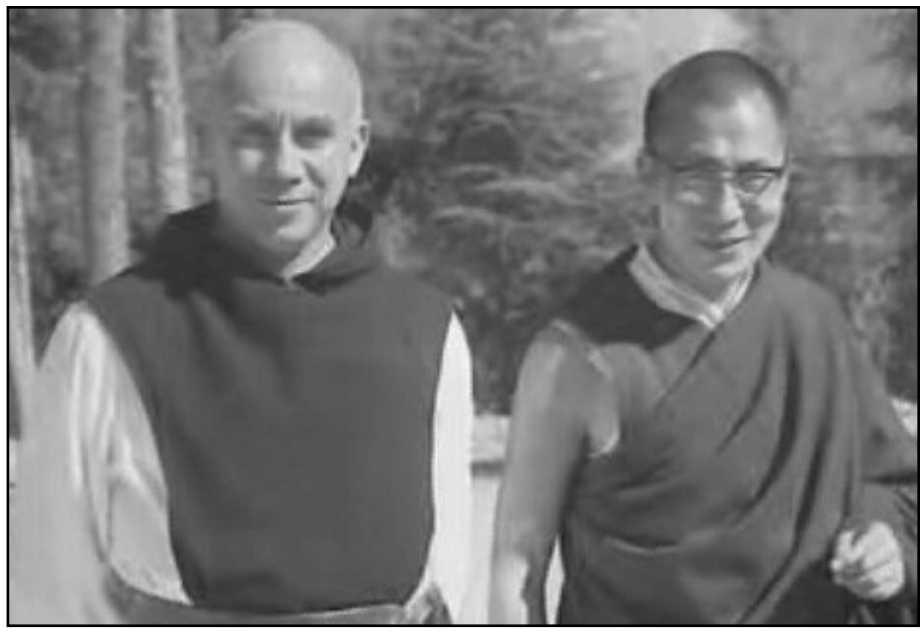
This is one of Merton's most deeply mystical poems, for it voices both the inner gnosis of the mortal, individual poet as well as the divine feminine presence and principle immanent in the world, Sophia or Holy Wisdom. The night-flowering cactus emerges from the virgin point of nothingness within the holy ground of being and utters her beauty from the depths, "clean and total." To identify even for an instant with this momentous grace is to participate in a timeless unity where there is no more war within the self. The listener is not merely accosted by purity, but invited to be "the extreme purity of virginal thirst" which is longing for union with the Absolute. The sacramental emphasis on nature as "Eucharist" suggests that the human soul and the natural world, when perceived from this awareness, are a theophany or manifestation of the divine. Like Rilke's famous poem, "Archaic Torso of Apollo," which ends, "You must change your life," the conclusion of Merton's poem calls forth in the reader a transformation that is at once moral, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual.

In Levertov's "To Live in the Mercy of God," a waterfall pouring through a west coast rain forest becomes a metaphor for the Divine Mercy:

To live in the mercy of God.

To feel vibrate the enraptured
waterfall flinging itself
unabating down and down
to clenched fists of rock.
Swiftness of plunge,
hour after year after century,
O or Ah
uninterrupted, voice
many-stranded.
To breathe
spray. The smoke of it.
Arcs
of steelwhite foam, glissades
of fugitive jade barely perceptible. Such passion—
rage or joy?
Thus, not mild, not temperate,
God's love for the world. Vast
flood of mercy
flung on resistance.[25]

This late poem establishes the Eros of the divine as it woos its recalcitrant human creation. The issue in both poems is whether we choose to open ourselves or resist the flow. Whether speaking out against injustice or opening silently to grace, the contemplative poems of Merton and Levertov can move us toward peace. Indeed, the simultaneous opening to the Spirit and resistance to injustice are twin aspects of a single motion.



Thomas Merton with the Dalai Lama

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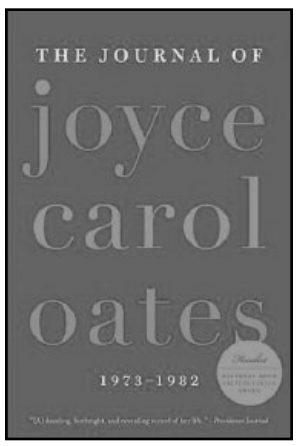
Devil in My Beehive

Richard Wirick



Journal 1973-82
Joyce Carol Oates
HarperCollins Canada
ECCO (U.S.)
435 pages

"The novelist is an empiricist, an observer of facts . . . . objective and subjective 'reality' . . . he must guard against the demonic idea of imagining that he possesses or even can possess ultimate truth. In this way he is like a scientist, an ideal scientist. Humble, striving for what he does not yet know, wanting to discover it, not to impose a pre-imagined dogma on reality. The novel as discovery. Fiction as constant discovery, revelation. The person who completes a novel is not the person who began it. . . . When one believes he has the truth, he is no longer an artist. When we finish a great work we should realize that we *know* less than we did before we began, in a sense; we are bewildered, confused, disturbed, filled with questions . . . unsettled by mystery."

So reads J.C. Oates's journal entry of March 1975, after she had sent off the Byronic, devil-drenched manuscript of *Son of the Morning*. The personality lying behind her prodigious creations—logorrhea, some have called it—is on amazing display in the first volume of her journals, running from dismal mid-decade to mid-decade as she wove together her *Bellefleur* romances. And if that personality is nothing more than the roving Monad-eye she flashed at me once from under her synaptic, squiggly perm—describing how a poem should "never, ever be larger than a postage stamp," though a rectangular one, stood on its end—then it is more accessible than most, more robustly and fearlessly displayed here than in any contemporary writer's diary since John Cheever's.

From someone who attacked probing biographers' "pathographies" and who said she "could not create an admirable character" (at a reading for *Broke Down Heart*), Oates's journals reveal surprisingly normal and disciplined work habits: placid mornings at the Selectric and name-dropper, dream dinner parties at her Princeton and Ontario homes. [The black and white snapshots of these are alone worth the price of the book.] So how did the vapors get into the McKeesport "burb girl" and Berlind Distinguished Professor? How did she get so good at knowing how maniacs "think", how it felt to stand with her high school girlfriends on boulders in the Detroit River while boys they wanted to date shot cans off their heads with 22s?

Reading, for one. She breakfasts on obsessive Russians ("tragic, or just *a realistic,* view of life?"); opium-addled French Symbolists; Romanian murderers who strangle their landladies like Roskolnikov and then really *do* hide the money under a flat rock. Secondly, it sounds like she made the pycholanalysis rounds in those days, though I may be pathographizing:

> As in [my] *Wonderland* Jesse's earlier memories are closer to him, more definitely imbedded *(sic)* than anything experienced as an adult . . . so this must be true of all of us . . . The earliest sights . . . . rooms, playgrounds and backyards and the houses of relatives . . . fix themselves in the brain far more powerfully than anything afterward . . . [and] . . . we deceive ourselves if we believe otherwise . . .

Or these indecisive, shape-shifting double visions of herself, questioning even the writer's authenticity and sincerity:

> "Happiness" and its variants—contentment, well-being, optimism—are exasperating when they are pushed down our throats. When I read an interview with myself—which, I confess—I find hard to do—for good reason—I'm annoyed at the statements I make as I'd be annoyed at a stranger making them: who cares about normality, about things going right or well, about "Joyce Carol Oates" enjoying her writing? I should say that I find it torture and don't know why I do it.

Ontologies of identity lie under these surfaces like shredding shark's teeth—her novellas aren't by accident called things like *I Am No One You Know* and *Where* Is *Here?* ("Who Am 'I'" or "Who Is The 'I'" is the irradiating subtext of these 'day books.')

Ultimately and not surprisingly, it is biography and friendships that furnish her most vivid and dangerous material. Many major writers spot character sources in their fellow craftsmen, but nobody vivisects them like the Jeffrey Dahmer-obsessed Oates. There are Alfred Kazin's facial tics bubbling up like tar out of the "deepest loneliness," and "probable resentment of those who are not as unhappy as he." (Beautiful.) There is John Updike's "gentle, sly, immensely attractive modesty," his disbelief of and "slight guilt over his early and easy success." Anne Sexton amazes the diarist with her "final, feverish, death-directed work," compendious and ferocious, but "self-pitying, self-contemptuous, self-despising." Ditto John Berryman: "His alchoholism and general misery were, he said, 'the price you pay for an overdeveloped sensibility,' but I always believed him to be *underdeveloped,* with a very weak sense of others' existences . . . he seemed already dead—an inert, clayey substance, so chilling . . . ."

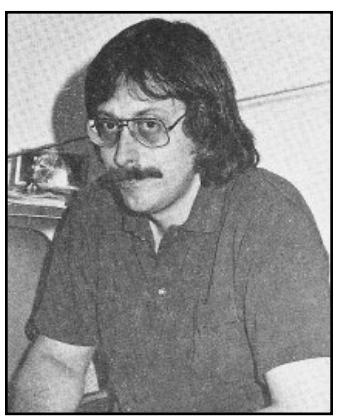

Joyce Carol Oates

So while souls prove frivolous, deceptive, rotten or dauntingly saintly, Oates's respite becomes the natural world. It remains a vast, impersonal, spark-lit galaxy kaleidescopically settling and resettling itself: "Sleet storm, blizzard, bits of ice thrown against the windows, crackling tinkling noises, small explosions," and a Jersey countryside filled with "Blue juncots, cardinals and sparrows in the berry bushes . . . vast Siberian lakes, snow so thick the river invisible." For Oates, like for her beloved Lawrence, the "wilde wood" pours out its mystical rhythms to leapers and lepers alike, freeing the author from the world of people and from the institution's mandarin confines. One forgets, before going back through these pages, that for all the vermin in Oates's festering logs there is a surface of sweet bark, sweet leaves—the world becoming its own bright book of life.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel* One Hundred Siberian Postcards *(Telegram Books). He practices law in Los Angeles.

NEOPHOBE (*continued from page 29*)

about them — loveable in spite of themselves.

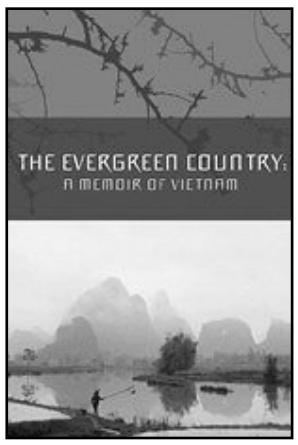

Ron Kolm

Neo phobe is a unique book that will, I hope, find its place alongside more overtly historical treatments like Brandon Stosuy's *Up Is Up, But So Is Down: New York's Downtown Literary Scene, 1974–1992* (NY: NYU Press, 2006) and Steve Clay and Rodney Phillips's*A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960–1980* (NY: NYPL/Granary Books, 1998). By and unashamedly for the underground, *neo phobe* takes a long affectionately unvarnished look at the chaos and confusions of current literary life in The City. "Fitzgerald and Kerouac are gone," Feast and Kolm suggest, "we live with their remains." Here are all our aspirations, on display for you. Don't ya think it's strange: what life puts writers through?

Jordan Zinovich is a senior editor with the Autonomedia Collective, one of North America's most notable underground publishing houses.

The Evergreen Country:
A memoir of Vietnam

Yvonne Blomer



The Evergreen Country: A Memoir of Vietnam
Thuong Vuong-Riddick
Regina: Hagios Press, 2007

In this historical memoir, Vuong-Riddick weaves personal/family story into the historical and cultural context of Vietnam from the early 1900s up to present times. Though much of Vietnam's history is so well known it is almost clichéd, this life story allows for understanding that goes beyond news clippings and Hollywood movies.

These layers go back to the 19th Century when her grandparents and great-grandparents fled to Vietnam from mainland China. The narrative of this comprehensive memoir is told chronologically, with parallels continually drawn between the struggles of Vietnam and the struggles of Vuong-Riddick's friends and family.

In Hanoi her family lives on Dragon's Jaw Street. "The Dragon stands as the primary mythological animal in Vietnam…The French didn't want to hear such fanciful names as Dragon's Jaw Street, so they called it instead *Doudard de Lagree* to commemorate a captain from the time of Napoleon III who died on a scientific mission on the Mekong".

Cultural details are woven into the narrative. Things that strike the reader as utterly profound are stated very matter-of-factly, "The tailor, as master of the house, was the only one allowed to eat every fruit in season." These details show a depth of understanding as well as a delight at the rich intricacies of culture. They are important to travellers for insight, but they also remind readers that this is an ancient culture with far more history than French occupation, WWII and the Vietnam War.

Through research, journal entries and memory Vuong-Riddick ties world history, Vietnamese history and culture to her family. Each changing moment, from fleeing Hanoi after Dien Bien Phu and the division of Vietnam, to more personal struggles of wanting to be educated and independent against the pressures of marriage are mirrored against the countries changes and losses.


Thuong Vuong-Riddick

The difficulty of so expansive a memoir comes in deciding what to include and what to leave out. Cluttered with characters, each with their own story, the narrative gets bogged down. The thread that pulls the reader along is the history of Vietnam and Vuong-Riddick's own life and ambitions, and her place in these larger histories.

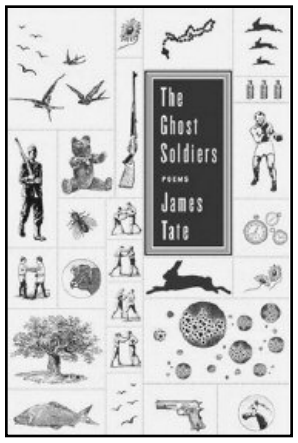
The language is straight forward, and leaps from French names, to English to Vietnamese, though the naming of places in their English translation seemed self-conscious. In fact, the most complicated aspect of language in Vietnam seems to be the naming of things; complicated by French, Vietnamese, and many forms of Chinese. This may not be a weakness in the memoir, rather a fact of the country.

The rare feature of this memoir is that it is a first-hand account from a middle-class, Chinese-Vietnamese woman's experience. The narrative is chronological and follows the world and Vietnam's struggles, alongside the family's; it is far-reaching and because it is, sometimes confusion overcomes clarity and rich detail. That said, it is an important first-hand account of a young woman's struggles within a country's long history.

Yvonne Blomer's first book,* a broken mirror, fallen leaf *was short listed for The Gerald Lampert Memorial Award in 2007. Most recently her poems were short listed for the 2007 CBC Literary Awards. Yvonne teaches poetry and memoir in Victoria, B.C.

Juxtapositions

Richard Wirick



The Ghost Soldiers
James Tate
HarperCollins Canada,
ECCO (U.S.)
215 pages, $24.95

Is there an American poet more unique and immune to classification than James Tate? He began with searching lyrics like 'So this is the dark street/Where only an angel lives/ I never saw anything like it,' and moved through less formal, personal structures to the diffuse prose poems of the last few books. The narrative itself—squirrelly as it always is—is the driving force in these pieces. But not only is the narrator unreliable, he sometimes seems to have, say, no molecular structure. As Charles Simic says of these vignettes: "A poem out of nothing . . . .is Tate's genius . . . just about anything can happen next in this kind of poetry and that is its attraction." In *Ghost Soldiers*, Tate's newest and largest group, he may have finally moved the form up onto the high, open ground of greatness.

Part of what Tate does on this ground, and hence his singularity, is to solo-face and plant by himself the Surrealist flag in American verse. (Others have preceded and followed, but, as we shall see, brought their own treatments to the "waking dreamscape".) From 1916 to the period between the wars, Surrealism moved from the plastic arts into literature with a vengeance. From Breton's Paris to Latin America's Vallejo (and even in stodgy England), poetry especially embraced Surrealism's unsettling objects, human grotesques, and menacing features of nature. Not so in America. Man Ray was from Brooklyn, but no Man Ray—nothing at all like him—showed up in the New World's poetic landscape.

Maybe this was because America had its own kind of Modernism and was already overloaded with experimentation. There was Eliot's "senses of meaning" as opposed to meaning itself; Faulkner's ornate but dreamless associational segues; Pound's montages of divergent histories and languages; and Stevens' atmospherics of pure, sometimes senseless sound (or sense from pure sound). Who needed a Tristan Tzara or a Mayakovsky in America's homespun, already bustling hothouse?

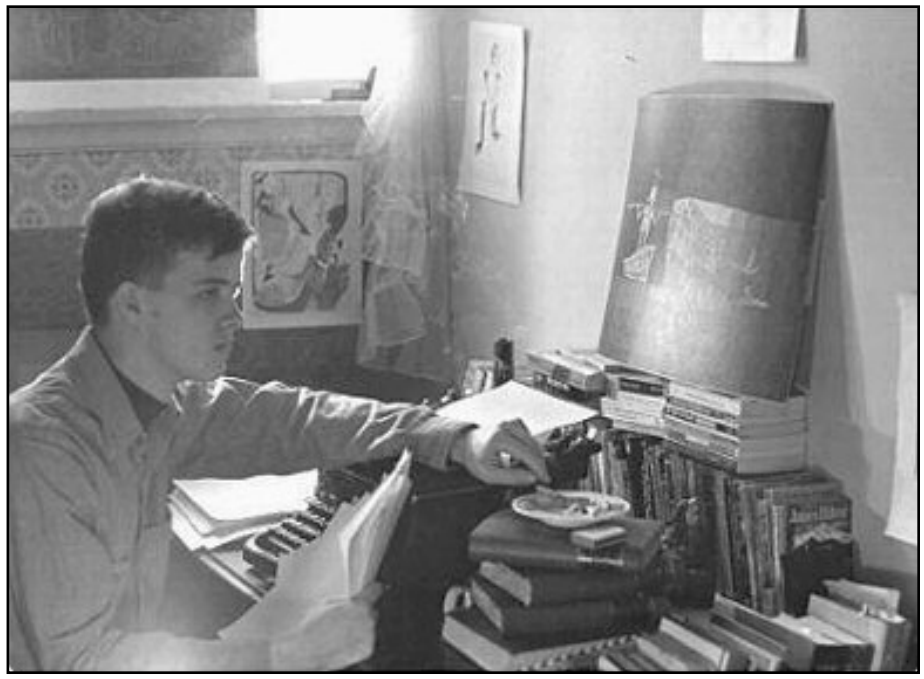
After World War II, and in the midst of the academics like Lowell, Berryman and Bishop, I count three Surrealists tiptoeing out onto the domestic stage. The Canadian Mark Strand and Serbian-born Charles Simic threw up a host of Surrealist props, but all buffed them with a polished sheen, the odd and unsettling ambered over with formalist shellacks. (In fact, Tate's first collection, *The Lost Pilot*, awarded the 1965 Yale Younger Poets Prize when he was still at the Iowa Writers Workshop [!], fits squarely into this 'formalist Surrealism'.)

But then Tate, who wasn't just American-born but was from the heart of the heart of the country—Kansas City—let loose with a whole new stage full of squeaky, squawking, shrieking horns, just like the ones he heard for nights on end as a high school student in the KC bars. Charlie Parker and Bix Bierderbecke showed him how improvisation in prose poetry could be structured like a sax chorus—note clusters multiplying from one another in uncertain directions, the form and the form alone becoming the body, the vestment of composition.

This method stood Tate in good stead through the 70s and 80s in collections like *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* and *Riven Doggeries*. A narrator, often no more than a solipsistic, self-contained eye, would sit abashed as creatures, concepts, and flea market thing-a-ma-jigs floated like Thanksgiving parade balloons into his field of attention. They were burlesque comic "types;" compressions of high mimetic and low-brow phrases ("Frivolous Blind Death Child"); characters who were usually collectors of abuse and subsequent resentments; and pure ciphers—animal-vegetable-mineral mixtures who talked back, took a few steps, then turned into something else.

In subsequent collections (*Worshipful Collection of Fletchers*) these "small movies" (as one critic called them) became monochromatic and repetitive. Narrators and observations seemed much too interchangeable. If you'd read one poem you hadn't read them all, but you could skip the next three or four. This doesn't make for energized poetry, even cutting some slack to prose poetry.

And as with some Surrealism and all highly stylized, "clever" forms, these pieces drew far too much attention to their outward features, leading to suspicions there was little below the dazzling surface water. Like Borges' *Ficciones*, Tate's "dreams of a robot dancing bee," however lovely, however delicate, seemed highly cerebral and gamey,



James Tate

emotionally vacant, empty-hearted. The interplay between observer and observed was that of two constructs, reciprocal machines. It was hard for themes to develop in such poetry: yearning, searching and finding were substituted by laughter at such endeavors. This hyper-irony was summed up in one of his brilliant, heartless lines I used as an epigraph for a book of my own: "Of course it's a tragic story; that's why it's so funny."

Not so with *Ghost Soldiers*. And Simic, however observant, is wrong if using the foregoing "out of nothing/anti-poetry" quote to describe this new collection. For all the undirected meanderings, for all the chattering, squiggly spins of the radio dial, rich and topical themes emerge out of these hundred-plus pieces. Two arise in particular abundance. First, the relation of parents to children. Second is what could be seen as at least one of this bond's destroyers: wars and their aftermath. In 'Father's Day,' the narrator watches the ladder of bonding opportunities—hard work, but graspable with determination—slip finally out of his hands forever:

> My daughter has lived overseas for a number of years now. She married into royalty, and they won't let her communicate with any of her family of friends. She lives on birdseed and a few sips of water. She dreams of me constantly. Her husband, the Prince, whips her when he catches her dreaming. Fierce guard dogs won't let her out of their sight. I hired a detective, but he was killed while trying to rescue her. I have written hundreds of letters to the State department. They have written back saying they are aware of the situation. I never saw her dance. I was always away at some convention. I never saw her sing. I was always working late. I called her my Princess, to make up for my shortcomings, but she never forgave me. Birdseed was her middle name.

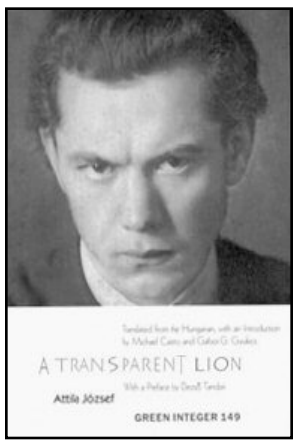
The war poems are the masterpieces here. Too widely spaced to be a 'cycle,' they throb and beam their tropes of senseless loss off one another. Parades of the dead march by like figures in a Bosch canvas, leaving the speaker to pass through their chilly wakes and putrid, standing air. Dialogues are filled with ambiguities of security and protection, what counts as a "mission" and how it would be "accomplished":

> There were some bald men in a field pushing a huge ball, but the ball wasn't moving. . . . A woman walked by and stopped beside me. "What are those men doing down there?" she said. "It's a warrior thing," I said. "They're working out some technical problems. They're protecting us from evil, but the plan is still in the stages of development." "Does that big ball represent evil" she said. "It's either evil or good. They're still trying to work that one out," I said. "Some men live on such an exalted plane, it's a won-

(*continued on page 46*)

A Piper in Hell

Jordan Zinovich



A Transparent Lion: Selected Poems
Attila József
(translated from the Hungarian by Michael Castro and Gábor Gyukics)
(Los Angeles: Green Integer Books, 2006. US$12.95)

For most of us, language renders Hungarian poetry inaccessible. In recent years two translation teams have worked to remedy that situation, both concentrating their early efforts on living poets. In 1996, George Gömöri and George Szirtes published the first anthology, *The Colonnade of Teeth* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe), which was followed five years later by Michael Castro and Gábor Gyukics's *Swimming in the Ground* (St. Louis: Neshui Publishing, 2001). Nevertheless, even here in New York City where the stream of readers never stops, it remains as rare to hear a performance of contemporary Hungarian poetry as it is to hear, say, a Turkish one. And, with the notable exception of Attila József, the poets of Hungary's more distant past remain tantalizingly out of reach.

József, whose lyrics have been compared to those of Petrarch, Baudelaire, Majakovsky, Rilke, and Whitman, is an overlooked giant of 20th century poetry. At a reading in Brooklyn, Castro mentioned discovering that *every* person he stopped on the streets of Budapest was able to recite at least a few lines of József's poetry. József's birthday, April 11, is celebrated annually in Hungary as National Poetry Day. So it is appropriate that Castro and Gyukics have turned their recent attention to his work. Quoting Ted Hughes in his introduction, Castro notes:

> Every part of his nature seems to cooperate in each poem. But the truly arresting thing is the last-ditch urgency under which this cooperation happens. It is both genuinely desperate and irresistibly appealing . . . Bleak options, eternal perspectives, cleanly confronted.

József's emotional and psychological complexity, his personal fate and artistic achievements, are inextricably bound together. In 1908, when he was three, his father abandoned the family. Two years later József and his younger sister Etel found themselves wards of the state in the peasant community of Öcsöd. In a curriculum vitae composed in 1937 (as translated by Thomas Kabdebo and Michael Beevor)[1], József writes:

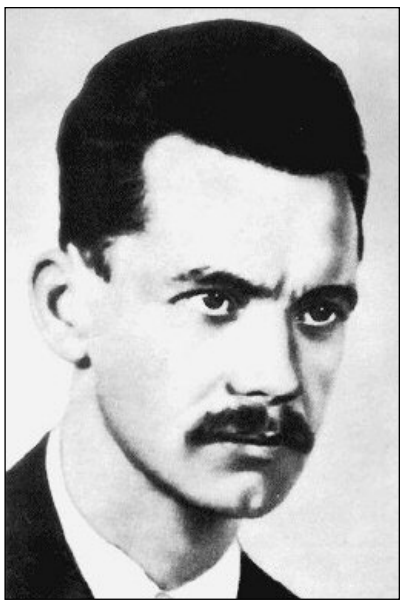
> I lived here [in Öcsöd] until I was seven. I had already begun to work, as poor village children generally do. I watched over swine. . . . [Later] I found interesting tales of Attila the king . . . not merely because I too was named Attila, but also because my foster parents in Öcsöd [had] called me Steve [Pista]. After deliberating with the neighbors they had concluded, within earshot of me, that there was no such name as Attila. That really took me aback. I felt as if they had called my very existence into question.

Stripped of his personal identity, he was returned to his mother and sisters in 1912 — not until he discovered the Attila (the Hun) stories in 1914, when he was nine, was he able to begin recuperating his sense of self. Living life on the edge of starvation, the family spent the war years together. But in 1919, József's mother died of cancer. Until his elder sister's new husband arranged to continue his schooling later that year, József was again faced with the prospect of life in a lonely hostile world.

Those early personal crises, yoked to a formidable intellect and a paradoxically hopeful sense of beauty, dragged him towards self expression. His first poetry collection, *Beggar of Beauty*, appeared in 1922, when he was 17, unleashing a powerful voice. There is lyric purity in the depth of his experience, perspective, and innovative imagery. In "It's a Nice, Summer Evening" he muses on comfort:

> . . .
> before you, behind you, all over — you see —
> . . .
> men
> . . .
> climbing on men ladders
> . . . .
> One can hear the soft rotation of the wrists
> of pickpockets
> and the chomping of a peasant from a bit further off,
> who, at this very moment,
> is skinning a large chunk out of his neighbor's land.
> . . .
> I sit on my welcoming doorstep
> in silence.
>
> It's a nice, summer evening.[2]

Though *Beggar of Beauty* was hailed by Hungary's most accomplished poets as the debut of a unique voice, the state mistook József's raw emotional honesty for political dissidence. In 1924, the fascist-leaning Horty regime sentenced him to eight months in prison for the anti-nationalist, anti-Christian blasphemy that it perceived at the heart of his poem "Rebellious Christ." He was pardoned, but the malevolence of the prosecution seems to have aroused both his fierce sense of injustice and an awareness of how truly powerful his words could be.


Attila József

The trial and subsequent pardon brought him national attention. In September of 1924, he entered the University of Szeged to study Hungarian, French, and philosophy. He prepared a new collection of poetry, *It Isn't Me Who Shouts*, which appeared in January of 1925, and in March 1925 he published one of his greatest poems in the small magazine *Szeged*. "With a Pure Heart" responded to the ambivalent fatalism of "Rebellious Christ" by advocating active resistance to injustice.

> Got no father, no mother,
> no god, no homeland,
> no cradle, no shroud,
> no kiss, no lover.
>
> Last three days I haven't eaten
> neither a lot, nor a morsel,
> my twenty years is power,
> I am looking for a buyer.
>
> If no one wants it,
> the devil will take it,
> with a pure heart I will plunder,
> if need be I will murder.
>
> I'll be caught, I'll be gallowed,
> with blessed earth I'll be covered,
> & death spreading grass will grow,
> on my oh, so beautiful heart.

It is the first time his poetry voices the self-aware and radicalized "I." "With a Pure Heart" caught the attention of the dean of the University of Szeged, who forced József to leave the university, another blow to his self esteem. Although he'd attempted suicide more than once since his crisis in Öcsöd, between 1922 and 1925 József wrote nearly half his total lifetime output. Now Hungary herself seemed to be forcing him away, driving him out into a larger world. In early October of 1925, he left

Budapest for Vienna, where he enrolled in the University of Vienna.

Written in 1936, a year before his death, the poem "Enlighten" seems to gaze back at this difficult period of transition:

> Enlighten your children:
> the gangsters are all human; . . .
>
> And console them, if it's a consolation
> for children, that that's the truth. . . .
>
> And if a child opens his mouth,
> gazes up at you, or weeps,
> do not trust him, . . .
> he grows nails and teeth.

In Vienna, Arthur Koestler and György Lukács befriended József. He read the classical works of Marxism and anarchism. And he met the publisher Andor Németh, who would become his greatest literary advocate and friend. In September 1926, he moved on to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. In Paris he became a member of the Anarchist-Communist Union. He also focused on and absorbed the poetry of François Villon, another voice for the radicalized "I." Paris welcomed József and, perhaps as a result of a friendship with László Moholy-Nagy, in 1927 he was featured on the cover of the first and only issue of the newly founded periodical *Esprit Nouveau*, along with the poetic innovators Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara, F. T Marinetti, and Kurt Schwitters.

In Budapest in 1925, József's poem "My Land I Bear," began and ended:

> I'm Hungarian, but European.
> Paris, love me, my land I bear,
> My beautiful land, which awaits your kisses,
> because here no one kisses her.
>
> . . .
>
> If just one time she would realize her dreams,
> singing clearly with slim towers—
> Paris, love me, my land I bear,
> and I'll carry your kisses to her.

And Paris did kiss him. He had left Budapest an intuitive lyricist and, in August 1927, he returned possessed of a clear poetic theory. At its heart, his new theory united surrealism's aspiration to direct expression (and its flare for the fantastic) to a notion of "Pure Poetry."

Attila Jósef

The origins of the theory of "Pure Poetry" lie in Edgar Allen Poe's essay "The Poetic Principle," which had been translated, assimilated, and promoted by Charles Baudelaire.[3] Baudelaire's "La Poésie pure" was a poetry that depended for its effect on rhythms, imagery, and the tonal values of the words. In his usage, "Pure" was equivalent to "absolute" (on the analogy of absolute music), and meant without instructional intent or moral purpose. József borrowed the force of that attitude, uniting it to a notion of intuition freed from all conceptual comparison. According to him, poetry didn't reflect "reality." Instead, it generated an independent spiritual modality that allowed the poet to transform direct apprehension of unique experience into immediate expression.

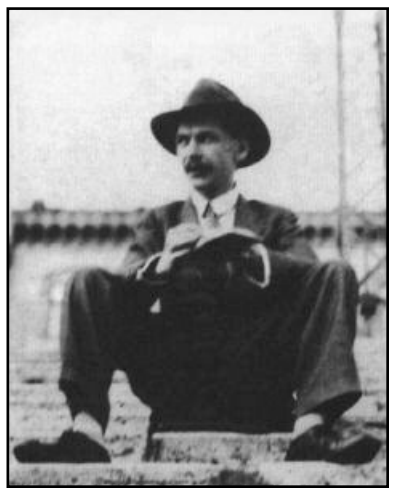
Linguistic rhythms and tonalities are not, of course, poetic qualities that can easily be translated, as Castro and Gyukics are careful to point out. But the immediacy and intensity of the imagery in their translations of József's later work is undeniable, as is a sense that as he works, he engages an otherworldly intuitive faculty.

His experiences in France had filled him with energy. In Budapest he immediately began working on *Got No Father, No Mother*, which would appear in 1929. And he turned to Hungarian folk traditions for ideas and inspiration ? adopting one folk stanza as a guiding maxim:

> He who wants to be a piper,
> Must descend the depths of hell.
> There he must attempt to master
> The fiendish craft of piping well.[4]

The stanza seems almost to have served to confirm that there was value in all the years he had lived at the brink of starvation and isolation. Yet it also signaled a shift away from his early hopefulness toward a narrowing sense of life's possibilities, as if he now believed that pain and trials were the inevitable purifying conditions of a poetic life. The signature poem of this folkloric period may be "The Seventh One," which demonstrates all the qualities of folkloric influence:

> Once you set foot on this earth,
> Your mother gives you seven births!
> Once in a blazing house afire,
> once in an icy flood's cold mire,
> once inside a loony bin,
> once amidst waving wheat so thin,
> once in a cloister's hollow eye,
> once among pigs in the sty.
> All six cry, it's not enough, son,
> Be yourself the seventh one!



Attila Jósef

Though he would have four intimate relationships during the last ten years of his life, none of them endured, and eventually József's increasing sense of alienation began to unbalance him. Nevertheless, during this period he produced five collections: *Got No Father, No Mother* (1929), *Ruin the Capital, Do Not Cry* (1931), *Bear Dance* (1931), *The Outskirts of Night* (1932), and *It Hurts Deeply* (1937). Initially, he continued writing from the ideological and theoretical positions he'd refined in Paris, but soon the best of his work was plumbing the depths of personal lyric. Two poems in particular, "Ode" (1933?) and "Consciousness" (1934), strike me (and many others) as masterworks. "Ode" is a love poem, and I read "Consciousness" as a meditation on life. Like two sides of the same coin, together they voice the last vestiges of his tattered hopefulness.

> (Ode)
>
> I'm sitting here on a shimmering precipice.
> The light breeze
> of the young summer, like the warmth
> of a cherished supper, flies.
>
> I make my heart get used to the silence.
> It's not that hard—
> . . .
>
> . . .
> I love you the way mortals love to live,
> until they die.
>
> (Consciousness)
>
> I did see happiness once, it was tender,
> blonde and must have weighed four-hundred pounds.
> Its curly smile tottered
> on the rigorous grass of the farm yard.
> It plunked down in a soft, lukewarm puddle;
> it winked, grunted in my direction.
> I still see how waveringly the light
> fumbled among its ringlets.

József began regular psychotherapy in 1933. Yet despite his increasing psychological fragility he could still gaze fearlessly at the choices he'd made and recognize their importance. Without regret or sentimentality, "You Know, There Is no Forgiveness" (1937) compares his present condition to the one he advocated in "With a Pure Heart."

(*continued on page 39)*

Summing Up That Force of Goodness

Gregory Dunne

A wonderful new selected edition of Cid Corman's poetry and poetry translations, *The Next One Thousand Years*, has recently been brought out by Longhouse Press. The edition has benefited from the editorial work of Cid Corman's long-time friend, the poet, Bob Arnold. It has also benefited from the editorial work of Ce Rosenow who initially approached Bob Arnold, the executor of Corman's estate, about the possibility of putting together a selected. Without the shaping and deeply informed influence of these editors, we would not have this marvelously varied and thematically rich and coherent volume we have before us today. This selection brings together both previously published and unpublished Corman poems and translations. Both long-time readers of Corman's work as well as first-time readers will draw sustenance and delight from this volume.

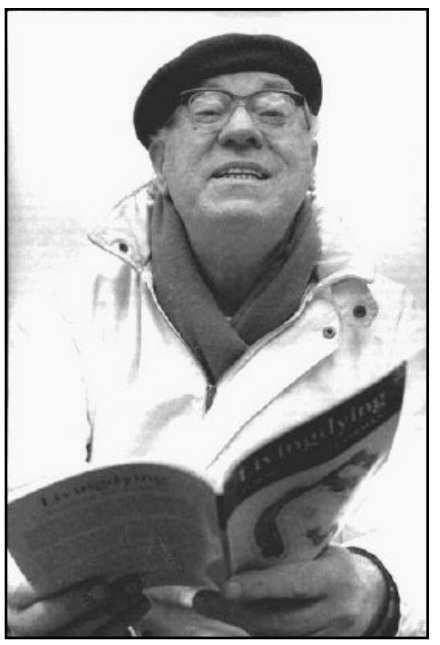
The Next One Thousand Years, The Selected Poems of Cid Corman
Longhouse Press, 2008
206 pages. $16.95 U.S.

The American poet Cid Corman passed away in Kyoto, Japan on March, 2004 where he had lived for nearly fifty years. He was 79 years old. This selected edition is the first selection to appear since his death. Corman was a prolific poet and a prolific translator. During his lifetime, he produced nearly two hundred books. He was, quite simply, "one of the great poets of the modern era," as Bob Arnold asserts in the his insightful and moving essay at the back of the book: *The Man Who Always Was.*

This volume is well-made and attractive. This is no mass produced paper back. It feels good in the hands. There is weight and heft to it. It is not too heavy nor too light. At 206 pages, it feels right. The book's cover is graced with a beautiful color photograph of a mountain stairway leading up through a forest in Japan. The paper used in the construction of the book is thick and creamy. It feels good to the touch. Each poem is given ample space on the page to breath. There is no cramming of poems into the pages. Each poem is allotted a page – no matter how brief the poem. I mention all of this by way of acknowledging the attention to detail that the editors have paid to every aspect of the book's construction. It is not just that the poems and translations have been carefully selected, but that the book itself has also been carefully and beautifully made. This attention to detail honors Corman's own attention to detail in all things touching upon the poetic. Corman was, first and foremost, an artist, but he was an artist who had reverence for craftsmanship. He oversaw the production of many of his limited edition print books. And in this way, he produced many beautiful volumes. His magnus opus, *of*, printed and bound in Kyoto with cover art by his friend, the renowned artist Sam Francis, is perhaps one of he more outstanding examples of this kind of achievement. As a long time friend and publisher of Corman's, Bob Arnold knows at a very close and intimately level what constitutes a well-made book in Corman's eyes. Bob Arnold and Longhouse Press have delivered that book. Make no mistake, this volume has been put together with loving care by editors who are deeply knowledgeable of Corman's poetry.


Cid Corman

The book is not merely an object of physical beauty, it is a book that contains a world of rich, compassionate, and beautiful poetry. The task the editors had in attempting to distill a vast amount of poetry into a relatively slim collection must have been daunting. Corman was, as noted, a prolific poet and translator. His magnum opus, for example, *of*, is comprised of five volumes. Each volume is 750 pages in length. To date, three volumes have been published. Volume four and volume five have yet to be published. In addition to his own work, Corman has translated work from many languages, cultures, and time periods. He has, for example, translated from ancient Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Chinese, and Japanese. He has also translated from nineteenth and twentieth century French, Spanish, Italian, German, and other European and non-European languages. How could the editors effectively cull from this vast body of work and produce something like a representative sampling of Corman's work, a selected? Bob Arnold gets to this concern in his essay at the back of the book when he writes: "I'd like to think we are not making as much a representative selection here, but a philosophical one practicing the less is more and at the same time presenting the highest quality of Cid's poetry summing up that force of goodness." Even with all that is left out, this book includes a stunning collection of new and old Corman poetry as well as translations, both new and old, from poets such as Basho, Tu Fu, Li Po, Ryokan, Issa, Rilke, Ungaretti, Montale, Char, Hosai, Holan, Celan, Sengai, Santoka, Denis, Shiki, Cohen, and the list goes on. Amazingly, despite these many diverse sources, the book reads as being all of a piece. Corman's life and his affections when lovingly and intelligently discerned through the shaping hands of his poet friends the editors Bob Arnold and Ce Rosenow becomes a coherent whole – a poetic world that is everywhere teeming with vitality.


Cid Corman

One way in which that "force of goodness" Bob Arnold speaks of is felt is in the way that the selection is made to read very much like a Corman edited book, and in particular the way in which this book reads like Corman's magnum opus *of*. One of the most distinguishing features of the first volume of *of* is the manner in which Corman incorporates translations alongside of his own poetry to create a sweeping sense of poetry through time and human history. With this gesture, Corman says poetry is central to human life and we are "of" this stuff. He brings translated ancient poetry up out of the past and places it beside his own. In the opening pages of his five-volume book *of*, Corman lays out quite explicitly what his intentions are in assembling such a book and in titling it *of*:

> for those who find themselves here
> and sounding the words care to be
>
> this is a book of a life as exacting as any
> other, not in chronological order, but
> through as for all time: a small proportion of
> what has occurred to me and to which the work
> unseen is complementary
>
> the title reflects a precisely physical metaphysics:
> the *meta* the indissoluble unfathomable fact: the
> genitive case: to which we are all beholden and
> within which we remain hopelessly particular
>
> and to the extent that a poetry can, these poems
> articulate it - which humbly (meaning - aware
> of there being no choice) reveals transparently,
> whatever else may be felt, I trust (trust implying
> you), wonder, gratitude, pain, and love.

"This is a book of a life," Corman asserts, but read on and we get "but / through as for all time:" We need to take Corman at his word here "for all" and "time." And understand and appreciate how Corman understands his life, as well as his work, as being both a part of something else and at the same time "hopelessly particular:" In speaking of the title of the book, *of*, he remarks in the following way: "The title reflects

a precisely physical metaphysics: / the *meta* the indissoluble unfathomable fact: the genitive case: to which we are all beholden and within which we remain hopelessly particular." Going on, Corman tells us that to the extent a poetry can, "these poems articulate" this indissoluble unfathomable fact of our being both a part and separate. To my understanding then, this selection of poetry, *The Next One Thousand Years*, reads in such a way as to honor precisely what Corman is laying down above, and to the degree it does achieve this, the selection is at once true and grounded in Corman's poetics while branching out from it, providing us with this further articulation, this further elaboration – a new text.

Bob Arnold said he wanted to present "the highest quality of Cid's poetry summing up that force of goodness." Goodness, of course, is a relative term, and there are many ways to understand and take the term. I would propose that one way in which "goodness" can be felt in Corman's work and in particularly in this selection is found in the generosity of spirit we find within the poetry. Here is a poetry that moves beyond difference in culture, time, language and much else to assert a connection between us all – between the human and the non-human, between the past and future, between the living and the dead. Corman's poetic world embraces that connection in a most loving and compassionate way. And as one encounters poem after poem, there is a "summing" (summoning?) of that goodness. I believe that this selection brings that aspect of Corman's work forward to us and for that we should be grateful. I would like to quote several pages below in order to give a sense of how this selected volume is working. I have selected four poems below. They come from pages 23, 24, 25 and 26 respectively. One poem to a page. The reader will note that Corman's own poems are woven right in between his translations of other poets. Three poets are represented here and yet what a brotherhood they evidence – despite Corman's own separation in time and place – in culture and language – how similar is the song of poetry they sing? As a poet, Corman understands poetry tells us we are family. The other poets are the Japanese poets Issa (1763-1827) and Ryokan (1758- 1831):

> The father
> cuts the wood –
> the child's truck
> stands waiting
>
> *Corman*
>
> *
>
> The snow is melting
> The village is brimming with
> All at once children.
>
> *Issa*
>
> *
>
> Father and son
> at night on a slope
> resting against hay
>
> gazed upon by stars
> finding the needle
> breath of their breath.
>
> *Corman*
>
> *
>
> Children in groups with
> their hands in one another's
> in the fields of spring
> in gathering tender greens
> happy as happy can be.
>
> *Ryokan*

In sum, this is a wonderful condensed volume of some of Cid Corman's best poetry and best work in translation that has been brought across and shaped into an integrated cohesive whole by editors who have long and deep relationship with the writer. In this sense, it is at once an authoritative selected as much as it is a judicious one. It honors Corman in being true to what at core informed his poetic world. It celebrates Corman and his work and makes his work readily accessible in one volume. It is hoped that many new readers will find their way into the large and vital world of Corman's poetry through this volume – a slim volume and yet a comprehensively complete volume in so far as it succeeds in giving the reader a felt sense of the overall "goodness" of Corman's work. The book's cover shows us a beautiful mountain stairway leading up into a verdant Cedar forest – a fitting image of invitation for those readers wishing to enter a poetic world that is much like a forest in what its speaks of the past and of the future – in it what it offers

To our lives, to our breathing, to our breath:

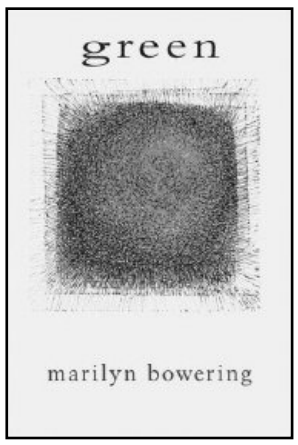
> **The Rite**
>
> To say sky
> as one says
> water. To
>
> pour it in-
> to a cup
> and hold it
>
> at the lips
> and drink. Of
> it. And at
>
> sundown to
> drink it a-
> gain as wine.

This title and other Cid Corman books are available at the following address: http://www.longhousepoetry.com/corman.html

Gregory Dunne is a scholar living in Japan. He was a friend of Cid Corman's. Two parts of a memoir of Cid Corman by Dunne appeared in issues 3 and 4 of the PRRB.

GREEN

Hannah Main-van der Kamp



Green
Marilyn Bowering
Exile editions, 2007,
Pb 98 pp. $19.95

What can a reviewer who engages this poetry say? The poems must not be torn into words. The colour of grief is green? Was Garcia Lorca really a Sufi and did Hafiz have *duende?* Is the process of grief linear or spiral? How is there comfort in death?

Like the Sufi poets, Marilyn Bowering asks a lot of questions. She opens with an epigraph from Lorca and ends with a contemplation of some lines from Hafiz. In between she blends both these apparently contradictory poetic/spiritual states. Lorca of the crimson daggers, Hafiz of the doves.

The two are related historically. Through three centuries of Moorish culture, Andalusian writers inherited some of the intonations and non-linear evocations of the Muslim mystics.

Lorca's "Moon in the courtyard of the dead" has transmuted to West Coast icons; the sea, the birds. Bowering evokes the Eros of Lorca's "*quiero*" but not the rough edges of his gypsy poems. The Andalusian fascination with death is contrasted with green, the sacred colour of Islam, stark opposite of the greyness usually associated with death in secular materialist cultures like our own.

The loose couplets, rarely referring to each other but yet related, is a form that can convey these contradictions; "a resurrection of the dead speech of symbols". When the juxtapositions are honored there is "a collision of wakefulness".

Sadness and ashes, mourning and memories appear on almost every page of GREEN. Yet the poems are neither morbid nor depressing. What keeps them so light? For one, the collection is not autobiographical though a personal story is glimpsed. The "You" could be a deceased parent, an absent lover or the Mystical Divine presence.


Marilyn Bowering

And yet, grief keeps returning. The secular dogma that grief has easily identified and predictable stages is negated in these poems. The poet picks up mourning again and again, returns, shifts, explores another aspect. Death does not ease or rather; the process of grief does not. This is not the same as obsession with death though Bowering asks herself if it is an obsession.

"Everything that lives is holy/ Isn't that the intuition seen or unseen?"

Two gorgeous poems close the book; one in memory of Bowering's father and the last, a tribute to PK Page. Too delicate to be called a summation, they revisit all the shades of "the burden of love and sadness". Page's graphic rose with a thousand needle barbs adorns the cover. Another one of the subtleties that can never be fully fathomed.

The book feels unfinished, as is fitting. Loss and longing never come to an end; they transmute.

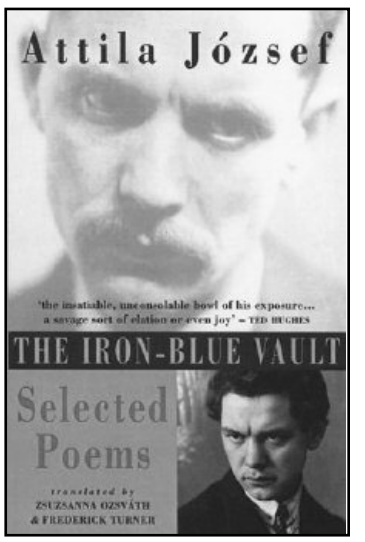
***Columnist, book reviewer, teacher and poet, Hannah Main-van der Kamp has lived in Victoria since 1972. Her most recent title is* According to Loon Bay.**

ATTILA JÓZSEF (*continued from page 36*)

You know, there is no forgiveness,
though it's futile, all this madness.
Be what you'd be: a man.
Grass will grow in your footsteps.

And the last stanza of the last poem that Castro and Gyukics present, "Nothing," prefigures József's suicide with astonishing immediacy.

I have no luggage.
I've forgotten something — I wish I could remember.
One: nothing.
Two: nothing.
Three: nothing.
It's just as strange as this railway station,
that there is nothing at all.



The Iron-Blue Vault: Selected Poems, by Attila József, Bloodaxe Books, 2000

Most accounts of József's death have him "throwing himself" under, or "stumbling" beneath, a moving train. Personally, I find them unconvincing. Though he was distraught at what he considered the failure of his last collection, *It Hurts Deeply*, and his failed relationships amplified that pain, he was too focused, too intensely observant, too completely a poet for his death not to have extended the poetry of his life. His death could not have been a hysterical one. There had to be poetic symbolism within it.

At times during my own writing life emotional, reality and the creative process have bled together. Of all the accounts I found Arthur Koestler's rings truest to me:

> Here is how Attila József died according to [eyewitness] description[s]: For some time he stood, somewhat distant from the station, lost in thought next to the train. When finally it started to move, he kneeled next to the tracks on the railway bed, bent forward, as if he were bending down to a stream, and placed his hand on the track, as if he had wanted to wet it. The wheel cut off his hand and part of the braking mechanism shattered his head. He was insane, perhaps he really thought the tracks were a stream. In any case we must believe that it was with a clean conscience that he lay himself down. (Translator not identified)[4]

Reading it, I stand with József beside the gleaming steel tracks. The moving train draws me forward. I bend. Mesmerized, sensing reality, I stretch out my writing hand . . .

From the more than 600 poems that József published, Castro and Gyukics have chosen 51 extraordinary examples. Though some of their translations in *Swimming in the Ground* seemed awkward and unsuccessful, *A Transparent Lion* shows no such weakness. The language and imagery are muscular, the rhymes deft, and the overall structure of the collection tracks József's life story. Only gifted linguists who are also accomplished poets can translate great lyric poetry. (W. S. Merwin's translations of Pablo Neruda have always served me as a benchmark.) With *A Transparent Lion*, Castro and Gyukics prove they are up to the task.

In Budapest, late one summer night in 2005, I stood on the Buda side of the Danube, dumbstruck by the strange beauty of the patterned tile rooftops glowing in Pest. *A Transparent Lion* strikes just as deeply.

Notes:
1. See, www.mathstat.dal.ca/~lukacs/ja/poems2/jozsef-eng.htm.
2. All quotes of József's work are from *A Transparent Lion.*
3. See Alex Preminger (ed.), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990): 682–83.
4. Google, Attila_Jozsef_Tableau.pdf.
5. Ibid.

Jordan Zinovich is a senior editor with the Autonomedia Collective, one of North America's most notable underground publishing houses.

Uncle Ted and Me

Lu Bianco

The wood is dead in my hands. Dry, bucked up, broken bones, skin sliding off. Alder, crap for burning. Ted doesn't know it'll be Wasps nest in a month.

"KEEP YOUR FACE STRAIGHT!" He growls from his deck. He thinks he's being funny but he always comes off serious to me.

It's a nice deck. Early in the morning he likes to pour himself a cup of coffee and go sit out there with his binoculars and VHF radio and listen to the traffic on the water. That's what he calls 'breakfast'. From up there you look down on the rail-yard in front of the sugar refinery and the giant red cranes on the docks. Beyond the docks you can see the tide ripping through the straight, under the Lion's Gate bridge. That's why they need the big tugs to guide the cruise-ships and barges and ocean liners, keep them straight.

Ted's a longshoreman, the last of three generations. He's retired now. 40 years of keep'n a straight face in the hull of an ocean liner made him a serious guy. He has no inflection in his voice. When he talks, he growls. His face looks like a heavy bag with the stuffing knocked out of it over years of beats.

"You're family so I love ya. But I don't have to like ya", he says as if it explained something. Maybe he thinks he's saying "I love you". But to me, all I hear is "I don't like you". That isn't funny. Six-two, red hair, hands of a bare-knuckle fighter, 68 years old and makes me feel little.

I'm not little but I live in his shadow. Actually I live in a van behind his garage, which technically is only in his shadow for about 6 hours a day in December but you get the idea. I was named after Uncle Ted; his middle name, Louie. My middle name is Louie too: Joe-louie. The Joe part is a whole other story. We're different Ted an me but sometimes I think we look at the world in a similar way.

The Port of Vancouver, with the red cranes on the waterfront

See, Ted's dining room has a wall full of survival books next to a wall full of soft jazz CD's and a stereo. That's something. 40 years of packing ships heading out to open Pacific storms and rogue waves.

"I've seen a ship come in with the whole deck wiped clean, crew missing, containers crumpled like pop cans, antenna and lights knocked off the pilot's tower. A tower stands a hundred feet out of the water, loaded. That's a rogue wave. They come out of nowhere… Never thought they existed. Now they know better."

I seen Ted stack flats of beer tins in the back of his truck like it might get hit by a rogue wave. He's six feet and two inches of tension. Ready for anything, the world at his door, not going to give an inch. He was raised that way.

Nona was named America because she was the first born in the new world. First born, carried the hopes of the family. She was eighteen when she first got arrested. Her parents were running a "social club" out of the living room during the prohibition. She was the one who could speak English and they had a basement full of wine. She once said that in those times Christmas was when her mother brought an apron full of kindling to her kitchen door. She survived polio in her leg, married an abusive alcoholic named Joe and had three boys he taught how to fight. That's my Nona.

She loved me. I'm pretty sure she liked me too. She was always feeding me almonds, a glass of wine, money. When she died she left me some money. I bought a camper van, moved to the city. She always wanted me to have a big car. Her affection might have been part of the problem. Three generations of Longshoreman in our family, nothing to like about any of them. Hard men.

I'm not hard. I'm 30, bus glasses in a nightclub, live in a van with a dead battery in my Uncle's backyard. Ted won't let me use his laundry room because he thinks it's freeloading. That's a hard man.

"You know it wasn't so bad growing up. It made us tougher than you guys. I remember my first day of Junior high, the principle threatening your dad that he'd hang before he graduated. We were Italians though, they didn't look at us like we were human back then."

I don't know anything about being Italian except for Bosa's on Victoria, Rupert as far as St Judes or playing bocce at New Brighton Park under the wheat pools. I was raised in the mountains away from all this. I played in a creek where the salmon run with Brody, Clint and Barry. I knew my uncles and aunts from weddings and funerals and we didn't go often. From what I gather, Italians like to wear black and leather and gold and grab each other by the back of the neck and talk about their wine. I can't drink red wine, I think I'm allergic.

I can stack a wood pile though, reminds me of home. My hands are pink and dry and they throb. Hard living is in the hands. This girl I was seeing said she liked my hands because they were soft. She wasn't too bright. She had a deep voice for a girl too. I hope I get some lunch for this.

Ted started on the docks when you could buy five, 12-ounce glasses of beer for a dollar in the Marr, down Victoria and Powell. They'd tuck a couple of cases in the trunk for the afternoon shift or if the weather was bad. "We drank a lot in those days," he says, "but we were young, we weren't drunk. It'd sweat through, quick you see cause it was hard work. When I started we were hand-bombing ships from around the world. No pallets, no containers, just our hands and a hook for sacks. Imagine that, loading and unloading an ocean liner by hand; sacks of grain, potash, flour, sulfur, yards of lumber, tones of filthy, wet hides. We packed steel hulls 60 feet deep, hundreds of feet long. I'd have a stomach like a brick wall after working the Liberty from Montreal hand-stowing 10,000 ton of Campbell Soup for a week. I could break a man's neck just by squeezing it and that's with my left hand."

Now, Ted could barely hold a cup of coffee with his left hand. Drives me crazy playing cards with him because his hands, that and his stories. His hands are swollen and stuck, can't deal worth a damn. We play 'Wheat board', which is supposed to be a fast game but is more talking than anything else cause of the hands. "I learned this game from my Nono…I know he was a grain-liner. Alberta wheat pools. Three generations. It's your turn. What do you got?" He doesn't like me cutting him off and gives me the look. I've heard all his stories though and they're getting fewer and shorter, disappearing. I can remember most of them better than he can.

People used to listen to him, hard men too. Now his buddies are disappearing and there's nothing left. They were drunks in and out of rehab. They died from cancer, liver or heart failure, accidents, suicide, some O.D. One of his buddies shot his 18 year-old girlfriend in the face. She survived but Ted doesn't hear from him anymore.

"You know Louie," he says, "I'd write a book about all the crazy shit I've seen down on the docks but nobody would believe me. It's too crazy." He likes to say that. When I ask him specific things about the docks he likes to say that.

When we're sitting up there I try to follow the red cranes loading the ocean liners. "That one's done." He points it out. He listens to that radio like they might to call him in, holding on tight as a throw line. "It used to take a week or two to turn a ship around. Now they can do it in 8 hours." A plume of smoke blossoms from its stacks. Ships crowd the bay waiting to be released. There is a 24 hour line-up of trucks waiting to drop containers. I can see Uncle Ted driving around down there pick'n up his old beer tins and stacking them tight in his pick-up. Stuck in traffic. .

He worked a long time. He's got that. He made a lot of money and a good pension, married a nice lady who grows radicchio and tomatoes in the backyard and jars salsa and spaghetti sauce in August. He's got a nice house, with a nice deck and a nice view of 40 years of his life. I got nothing like that.

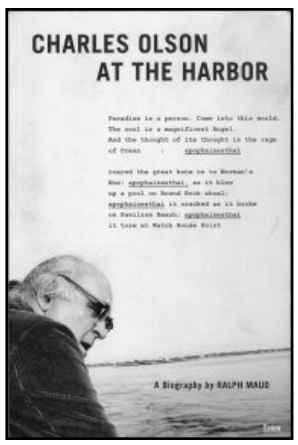
From up on that deck the mountains are blue walls, dwarfing the cranes and ships and bridges. North of this city that's all there is, blue mountains. If you walked out there you'd walk right off the map: no roads, no backyards, no laundry room, nothing. The best of us had nothing. Maybe that's what I'm waiting for.

Lu Bianco is a Vancouver writer.

Charles Olson at the Harbor

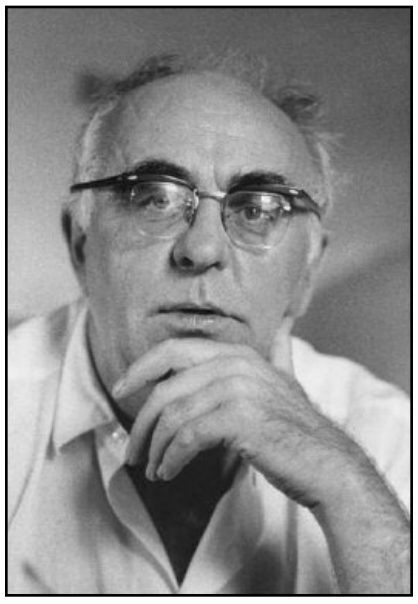
Peter Grant

As Ralph Maud recounts in *Charles Olson at the Harbor* (see excerpt in sidebar), Olson asked him to "be his scholar" — basically, an invited observer — at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference



Charles Olson at the Harbour
Ralph Maud
(talonbooks 2008)

It was Maud's destiny to become Olson's scholar in truth. As distinct from a critic — "one skilled in judging the merits of literary or artistic works" — a scholar is "a learned or erudite person, esp. one who has profound knowledge of a particular subject" *(Random House Unabridged Dictionary)*. Where the critical essay is "an evaluative reconnaissance into some nearby territory," scholarship "implies a longer-term settlement in that territory—as well as an obsessive interest in it." (Stephen Collis, "Archival Tactics and the Poet-Scholar," *Poets' Prose II*, nd.) Obsessive interest would define Ralph Maud's scholarship, and it would define Charles Olson, too. The poet was himself a scholar, having spent 14 years studying Herman Melville's actual library, books full of marginal scribbling, and everything else about Melville, and whaling, and America, before writing his first book, *Call Me Ishmael* (1947). Olson's advice to Ed Dorn in 1955: *"[D]ig one thing or place or man* until you yourself know more abt that than is possible to any other man. It doesn't matter whether it's Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson or Iowa. But *exhaust* it. Saturate it. Beat it./And then U KNOW everything else very fast: one saturation job (it might take 14 years). And you're in, forever…" Maud's Charles Olson "saturation job" has occupied him longer by a stretch. It started with transcriptions of Olson taped speaking and has progressed through seven books on Olson: the definitive *Charles Olson's Reading* (reconstructing the writer by minute inspection of his library, as Olson did for Melville), three books of Olson's letters, the anthology *A Charles Olson Reader* (reviewed in PRRB), a critical essay on The Kingfishers and this latest volume. Maud also puts out the journal *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society,* which has published chunks of Olson. (Disclosure: I put together an internet anthology of the journal, charlesolson.ca.)


Charles Olson in 1965, by Elsa Dorfman

Olson had a devoted and capable scholar in George F. Butterick, his student at SUNY Buffalo who after the poet's death in 1970 became the curator of his papers at the University of Connecticut. Butterick shepherded into print the complete *Maximus Poems*, the *Collected Poems* and a supplementary collection, a collection of plays, eight of 10 published volumes of the Olson-Creeley correspondence, a collection of lectures and interviews and 10 issues of *Olson*, a journal of secondary works at the UConn archive, including Butterick's catalog of Olson's large library of much-marked books. Butterick published his own Ph.D. thesis as the annotative 800-page *Guide to the Maximus Poems* (U California Press 1978). At the time of Butterick's death at 45 in 1988, huge troves of Olson's writing remained unpublished at Storrs, Connecticut, the University of Texas, Austin and in other libraries. They remain largely so today — enough, Maud thinks, to satisfy many a Ph.D. candidate. But Olson scholarship has become a rearguard operation to correct misinformation and get straight the oft-twisted facts about Olson's life and work.

Consider the lectures and interviews that Butterick published in 1977 with the strange title *Muthologos*. (It's the proper root of "myth," Greek for "words in the mouth," Olson explained in a 1968 lecture published as *Poetry and Truth*, and, with reference to Herodotus, "he who can tell the story right" — bearing on Olson's own calling as "mythologist.") Maud contributed three transcriptions to *Muthologos*: "On

(*continued on page 45)*

BE MY SCHOLAR

An Excerpt from *Charles Olson at the Harbor*,
by Ralph Maud (talonbooks 2008), pp. 206-7

A couple of times in the spring of 1965 I found Olson in the café across from the main gates of the State University of New York at Buffalo, and asked him a few direct questions about the earlier Maximus poems, such as, "How can you draw a map in spelt?" (I.77). "Who is the 'grey-eyed one' who makes 'a man's chest shine'?" (I.21), "Who is Helen Stein?" (I.18). Obvious things once you knew the answers. But Butterick's *Guide to the Maximus Poems* hadn't yet come out. After the second session, Olson leaned across the booth table, his eyes round in his glasses, and said, "How would you like to be my scholar?" Each participant at the coming Berkeley Poetry Conference had been given a free pass to hand out to his or her "scholar." I accepted the title and turned up in Berkeley in July.

The position of "scholar" was, as it turned out for the next forty-some years, no sinecure. In my first semester at Simon Fraser University that fall I used the 1960 Totem/Corinth edition of *The Maximus Poems* as a required text, and then the New Directions *Selected Writings* regularly after it came out the following year. In fact, I taught Olson at least one semester every year from 1965 to 1994. I mention this for only one reason: to substantiate my authority for saying what I said earlier when I insisted that young people take to Olson's work. And I think I know why. Because he is an optimist. He believes in something, something that poetry can effect in the real world. His subject is

> how to dance
> sitting down

— how to dance with pen in hand. Methodology.

> Eyes
> & polis,
> fishermen
> & poets
> or in every human head I've known is
> busy
> both
> the attention, and
> the care

"Every human head" — my students thought about it and said, "That's me. I must get busy." It's what we mean by "inspirational," a word that has been debased but can be used of Olson in its best original meaning.

I do not think it is the role of the critic to prove that a poet is inspirational. I assert it and ask you to believe me and to gain your own experience of it, if you have not already. What a critic has a right to do is the other job: to prove that the poet is not a dead log in the water and, if someone says he is, prove them wrong. This corrective work is what I have been about in this volume.

Maybe, after all, in the suitably limited space of a brief epilogue, I should make a try at the other, impossible job, to convince you of Olson's readiness and responsiveness as he stands at the harbor — by which we mean "at the ready" and, more than that, "at command." Let's play it this way: that he is the Man of Good Voyage whom we see as we look back from the harbor mouth, and he is holding us, holding us to the promise that we be the best we can imagine we should be.

> the demand
> will arouse
> some of these men and women

Revs of the Morrow: New Poems by Ed Sanders

Jim Feast

Revs of the Morrow: New Poems
Ed Sanders
(New York: Libellum, 2008)

It would be hard to think of a worse way of beginning a review than by talking about the reviewer's (not the subject's) faults. Yet, such I must do in discussing Ed Sanders' new volume of poetry, *Revs of the Morrow*. In discussing this book in *Big Bridge*, I made cursory mention of a curious fact about the collection. I left it at that. In retrospect, I see how necessary an examination of that fact is for understanding Sander's achievement.

Let's get to the fact, which takes a little explaining. In the long poem "Poseidon's Mane," the centerpiece of *Revs*, Sanders describes a visit to Charles Olson. While Sanders was friends with Ginsberg, Corso, Snyder and many other Beat figures, he felt especially akin to Olson, I think because both he and the older writer were concerned with "investigatory poetics," that is, verse that looked into and elucidated history. (Of course, Ginsberg also composed poetry of this category, in such pieces as those that centered on the CIA's importing of drugs from Southeast Asia, but such work was hardly one of his major modes.)

"Mane" duly praises Olson, who acts in a lovingly cantankerous manner. Now, we come to the fact. While unstinting in his positive comments on Olson here and in other places, the most superficial comparison between Sanders' epic poem *America* and that of the master, Olson's *Maximus,* shows that in everything that matters Sanders decisively breaks with Olson's practice. Not that one has to emulate the object of one's praise, but still this does give pause.

It may seem all this, interesting or not, is quite extrinsic to an evaluation of *Revs*. "Extrinsic," that is, unless in "Poseidon's Mane" Sanders reveals *for the first time* why he has constructed his investigative verse in a way so at variance with that of Olson.

1.Olson's Practice As a Reaction to Pound's

Some background. Sanders and Olson in their long poems write what might be called discursive epics. These works are not narrative (á la *The Iliad*) but rather (in the manner of *The Wasteland*) use a collage form to make a comment on history. For instance, in *The Cantos,* another such poem, Pound diagnoses why the present is so degenerate, drawing allusions from multiple sources. Olson's aim is similar, to see why America took the wrong track, but he breaks with Pound (who established the dominant style) in three decisive ways.

Like *Finnegan's Wake, The Cantos* moved toward a globalized discourse, taking in a vast trove of languages and customs. Olson, by contrast, limits his history to one point, Gloucester, Massachusetts. The town is small, yet, by studying records of the first European inhabitants and tracing forward the place's meandering life, he is able to reveal as much about history as Pound with his much wider grip.

Secondly, since Olson is dealing with one town, his own, he can personalize *Maximus* in a way Pound, the drifter, seldom does with his materials. Olson, for instance, picks up items from the town's small talk. "Shea … had stolen a crew's pay // 30 or 40 years before // The story // you could never get straight" (91). In-mixing the current day's conversation at the cafÈ with accounts of the doings of Miles Standish and other colonists, Olson establishes that (in a sense) *history is only dated gossip*, which is no trivial point, but underlies his highly democratic thesis that the people are the wellsprings of history.

And while Pound's purpose is to elucidate a time when humans lived more whole-souledly, such a depiction is of little practical value except as a spiritual guide. Olson, in distinction, solves (at least in one dimension) the root problem. The situation, he explains, is this:

… O my people, where shall you find it, how, where, where shall you listen
when all is become billboards, when, all, even silence, is spray-gunned? (2)

Ed Sanders with Allen Ginsberg, photo Elsa Dorfman

Mass media and standardization are draining people's ability to remember their own history, yet by immersing itself in this past Gloucester can see the degree to which it has contributed to its own degradation. Then, it will be possible, even yet, to avert the approaching disaster, of having the city become a degraded appendage of larger conglomerations, "o tansy city, root city // let them not make you // as the nation is" (11).

2.Sanders' Practice As a Reaction to Olson's

While Sanders takes Olson as a mentor, in practice, when it comes to writing his discursive epic, he goes back to Pound.

America isn't limited to a history of a single place, not even the continental U.S., but contains the competing timelines of such major events as that of the Russian, Cuban and Chinese revolutions. The canvas is closer to the one painted by the world-roving Pound than to Olson's miniature.

Moreover, Sanders' self, though still in the poem, comes in exceedingly small doses. For instance, in Volume 2, he recalls his childhood, apropos World War II, "I remember making // a mock flamethrower // that spring in Missouri // and crouching among the lilac bushes // & the row's of my mother's tulips" (91)

To a degree, he does share Olson's purpose in that both are intent in presenting American history from the bottom up. Olson focuses, for example, on the fishermen's fight with ship owners, while Sanders stresses the struggle of workers to create a more equitable, honest life, as epitomized by the I.W.W. — "*Arise arise on the shores of America // Wobblies Wooblies*" (*America* I, 57). Both look downward to find the pith and worth of society.

Both, too, wonder what went wrong. Olson makes preliminary findings, but they are inconclusive. Sanders, by contrast, though he researches as much, no probably more, than Olson, is working with a view of history that is already fixed. *America* is not, like *Maximus*, based on primary documents, but is simply the fleshing out of the discoveries made by Zinn, Chomsky, Kolko, DiFazio and other Left historians. Here, too, he resembles Pound, whose *Cantos*, were spun out of already fixed ideas on the pristine beauty of society before it was debased by usury.

Overall, then, Olson and Sanders display a well-nigh ontological difference in approach.

3. "Poseidon's Mane"

So, Sanders turned his back on Olson, a perhaps surprising course, until, that is, *Revs of the Morrow* appeared and laid bear Sanders' (poetic) thinking on this point.

As mentioned, "Poseidon's Mane" in *Revs* describes Sanders' visit, accompanied by his friend Weaver, to the Gloucester bard. The kind host, Olson brings out a pill bottle of LSD. Sanders states, "I took about 8 // Weaver as I recall had 12 // & Olson … 12 or so" (45). When Olson is driving them where they are staying, the hallucinations kick in.

Then I glanced to the front seat
and Olson had turned into Poseidon!
literally! the Horse from the Sea!
with kelp in his mane (45)

Later, safely home, Sanders leaves his friends chatting and wanders off, is picked up by police, and, hours later, gets back to find "Olson and Weaver were still talking! // it seemed they had not moved an inch // during my adventure" (49). In order to come down from what is still a rough acid ride, Sanders continues, "I called Miriam // at our pad on Avenue A // and once again, she helped me to land // from another trip into the universal mosaic" (49-50).

So, what's the problem here? Once Olson is on a talking, drugging jag, like most people, he is oblivious to the actions of others. Though Sanders says, "I felt a great surge of confidence // that my mentor, the O, was driving," this trust is immediately undercut by Olson's metamorphosis (45). Poseidon might be trusted piloting a speedboat, but a car on dry land? Nor does Olson wonder or care when Sanders disappears for hours.

I read Olson's inattentiveness as symbolic of a general estrangement. *Maximus* is addressed to all Gloucester, yet the poet admits, "It is not the many but the few who care // who keep alive what you set out to do" (18). *Maximus*, brilliant as it is, with its disjointed, at times confusing, weaving together of unidentified fragments, is a coterie production. It opens its beauties only to an audience educated in the refinements of literary Modernism.

Ed Sanders performing with The Plastic People of the Universe

4.The Different Situation of Younger and Older Beats

The argument may seem a bit strained at this point. Let's come at it another way. Most of the Beat poets were plain spoken. As libertarians (such as Corso or Burroughs) or out-and-out activists, (such as DiPrima, Snyder, Jones and Ginsberg), they were not writing simply to move but to instruct the audience. Their reader-friendly verse provided a good model for Sanders.

(Let me add a further thought since, in my opinion, the Beats have been consistently misinterpreted. Two books give us a clue to the basis of their literary direction. In *Go*, Holmes, another key Beat writer, states people of his cohort came of age just as World War II ended, so they never fully participated in the patriotic effort. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, a sociological examination of the marked and growing lack of communal activities in the U.S., looks back to this same war as the one moment in national life when a shared sense of purpose and immersion in group action characterized everyday life. So, I would argue *it is the just-missed opportunity for this moment of society-wide solidarity that is the subtext of major Beat writing.* It's possible, then, to read the episodes of male bonding in their depictions as surrogate recreations of military life, and to see their quest for immediacy as an imaginary substitute for combat experience.)

Still, as much as their reader-friendly style might have been a model for Sanders, they didn't write epic poems. The younger Beats, such as Sanders and Waldman, when they set out to write their epics, had to find other models. Moreover, less touched by memories of the glory and national unity of WWII, they were more politically concerned with, by the 1990s when they started their epics, the fact of the right wing riding in triumph for 20 years. The discursive epic is born of these circumstances, aiming at reassessing an historical period (as in Waldman's *Iovis*) or taking a practical course to supply deficiencies in the readership. This last tall order is Sanders' in *America*.

As I show in detail in *Big Bridge*, in his four-volume novel *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, Sanders describes the successes and eventual defeat of American New Left Bohemians who started in the late 1950s seeking a freer, more democratic society. In his diagnosis, Sanders finds one of the reasons for these activists' downfall is their lack of grounding in U.S. radical history, which means they have trouble connecting with populations outside their own fringe. *America* acts to redress this imbalance by providing an informative history of U.S. progressivism and its opposition.

But when it came to seeking a model as to how organize his work, the most immediately accessible model, *Maximus*, proved unsuitable. In its stead, Sanders chose a reinvigorated, popularized (but not dumbed-down) version of *The Cantos*.

So, my contention is that "Poseidon's Mane" is an interpretive allegory in the form of a touching personal anecdote. In the end, it is not so much Olson who lets Sanders down by not helping the hero over his LSD hump, but Olson's *Maximus* that does not prove flexible enough to accommodate the needs of the present.

5.Sanders' Interpretive and Substitutive Allegories

I call this an *interpretive allegory* to distinguish it from another favorite Sanders' device, the *substitutive allegory*. In the first type, as in "Mane," a true-life story yields to an alternative interpretation. In an interpretative allegory, by contrast, in such poems as "Jefferson, Hamilton, Kennedy, Cheney" in *Revs*, an event *and* its shadow interpretation are re-centered by being contrasted to a similar (but hidden or forgotten) event.

Let me illustrate. The aforementioned "Jefferson …" follows a poem about 9/11. By the time of Sanders' "Jefferson," which is dated 7-1-06, readers know the official story about the Twin Towers. Sanders also mentions a popular conspiracy theory. "Some are convinced // that they "let it happen" (26). This is the standard alternative reading: The establishment turned a blind eye to the hijackers so as to stir a patriotic mood in reaction to the attack.

Rather than weighing in on this, Sanders brings up the scheme of an earlier administration. "The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff … sent a proposal to JFK to set up Operations Northwoods // to develop a Cuban terror campaign // in the Miami area … in order to rouse the U.S. populace to an ire-fire of anger" (26).

The purpose here is to take a surface reality and a widely held alternative interpretation, which itself is a simple reversal (a cabal of Arab terrorists versus a cabal of White House conspirators) and face them with a focal point of radical history, which, once displayed, dispels the phony story/inside story dyad in favor of a truth that shows the larger patterns in history. In toto, *Revs*, like *America*, finds that a spirited presentation of lesser known history can help the reader contextualize the fibbing that makes up official discourse.

Yet *Revs* is not quite like *America*, due to its autumnal tone.

In the first poem, "To the Revolutionaries Not Yet Born," Sanders prepares to hand on the torch, noting that the struggle for a society where, for example, "there is genuine protection of the environment" will stretch for years, "Think 100 years ahead" (11). It is up to the next generation to "Declare it! Name it! Work it!" (ibid.). Before tracing the autumnal impulse further, let us dwell for a bit on this last declaration.

Let me make the hardly controversial assumption that these opening calls match practices advocated elsewhere in Sanders' writings. But what about the difference between "declare" and "name"? I think "declare" means to come out openly for the socialist/anarchist renewal of society. Only by starting off with this initial decision can a person move forward with a broadened ability to understand and act.

Sanders with Janice Joplin in 1968

Understanding, the ability to "name it," comes from following through on a reading of history by delving into the texts and cultures of struggle. And this leads to "work it," life on the line, political intervention, the type Sanders chronicles in the poem in *Thirsting for Peace in a Raging Century*, where he recounts his and other peace workers' attempt to abort the launching of a nuclear submarine, and his subsequent weeks in jail.

The poems in *Revs* can be classified according to which of these trial impulses they support. As to *declaring it*, note the poem "Share-Flower," which runs in full:

> The U.S. Military Southern Command
> Won't be able
> To stop
> Share-Flower (24)

In this piece, the poet states with calm, unassertive purity that confidence in oneself, the movement and the background community can be bound in one faith in a way that will work wonders.

Naming it, which involves both elaboration on lost or little known lives and the historical undress of widely disseminated propaganda, appears in such works as "For Emma Goldman." This poem doesn't present the anarchist's whole life, but her last years when, hounded from country to country, she continues to pour her heart into radical causes, without diluting her clear-sightedness ("Emma went to Russia // but broke with Stalin") or humor (13). Another fine specimen of Sanders' honoring important forbears appears in "Ode to Rachel Carson." Carson, who beat the tocsin to warn against pollution, was caught in the "irony of researching a book // tracking the relationship // of pesticides & disease // while she herself fell prey [cancer]" (16). In creating these historical cameos, Sanders combines an eye for the main contours of an individual life with a straight-forward but impassioned use of language.

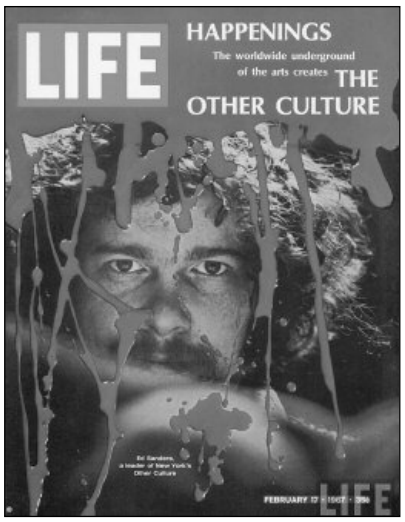
As to the third element of Sanders' program, "work it," I believe, he is leaving public action to his younger and heartier comrades – indeed his modesty in this regard recalls a comment by Peter Werbe in a book review in *Fifth Estate*, which runs, "We need elders in a movement, but no more than emerging youth. … Today's

SANDERS (*continued from page 43*)

activists… are doing a generally good job. I [an elder] have a few things to share but I wait until I'm asked before offering an opinion" (277). Still, as to illustrating the action component, he presents "Ginsberg in India," which, unexpectedly, doesn't talk of Ginsberg's poetry or career, but when the bard devoted time to aiding a political refugee he found dying on the streets of Benares.

But let's return to the autumnal tone, which occurs forcibly in the closing poem. "Rothschild's Fiddle," based on a Chekov story. This piece, at first sight, seems out of keeping with the overall tendencies that light the book.

In the poem, Yakov supplements his wages as a coffin maker (!) by playing in a Jewish orchestra, although he himself is anti-Semitic. He's an unrepentant scoundrel, who doesn't regret his unsympathetic treatment of his wife till she's dying, and will not alter his feeling toward Jews, though it causes him to lose his musician job. It's almost at his own finish, after, "his life was almost done," that he begins to relent (66). His last wish, told to his priest, is "Give the fiddle to [fellow orchestra member] Rothschild," who also has heard Yakov play his final tune, a dirge (68).



Sanders on the cover of Life in 1967

A melancholy tale, but also a hopeful one, in that, for all Sanders' merited and well-targeted condemnation of politically conservative leaders, here he concedes that even a man with the blackest heart can reverse directions and give something to the next generation, albeit, it only be a melody with which to celebrate his death.

Of course, Sanders' gift with this book is much grander, another jewel in a bracelet of gems, his many poems of historical reflection and untiring (lyrical) militancy.

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Jim Feast wrote the novel* Neo Phobe *(Autonomedia) with Ron Kolm, and is a member of the underground collective of noir humorists, beer mystics, anarchists, neophobes and passionate debunkers called the Unbearables. He lives in New York.

OLSON (*continued from page 41*)

History" (a panel discussion at the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference), "Reading at Berkeley" (1965) and the 1968 *Paris Review* Interview. Anyone who's transcribed recorded interviews knows how tedious and repetitive the work can be. The motive for the Berkeley and *Paris Review* transcriptions was to correct the published record. In both cases seriously garbled transcriptions had found their way into print. They made Olson sound incoherent. To Ralph Maud, everything Olson wrote and said makes eminent sense. In *Harbor* Maud relates how he missed the Berkeley reading, notwithstanding his appointment as Olson's "scholar." (His absence was "for family reasons.") He heard the tape a year later. When Zoe Brown's problematic transcription appeared, published by Oyez Press in 1966, Maud relates, "I saw my duty clearly." He bought a copy of the tape and began annotating the published version, enlisting his English students at Simon Fraser University to "help decipher some of the cruxes." Olson read Maud's transcript and objected only to the plethora of "er's" included in the name of accuracy. Maud printed an annotated, thoroughly indexed version of his transcription for use in his English 414 class. Olson loved the index. By the time "Reading at Berkeley" appeared in *Muthologos*, the "er's" were gone. (Butterick concurred with Olson.) Against the opinions of Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley and others that the reading was a rambling, incoherent disaster for Olson, Maud depicts him "functioning remarkably as a public poet, a poet thinking on his feet, and being absolutely delightful." Maud discharged his duty with true scholarly enthusiasm: "I have never had as much sustained pleasure from any other occupation to compare with the many hours, hundreds of hours, I have spent listening to the Berkeley Reading tapes, alone and with students, and preparing the transcription."

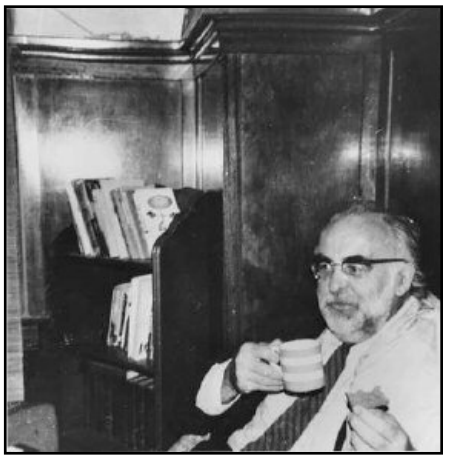
During this period, publication of critical Olsonia registered a dramatic upswing. In *Charles Olson: The Critical Reception 1941-1983 A Bibliogaphic Guide* by William McPheron (Garland Publishing 1986), 46 citations appear for 1969, the last year of Olson's life. For 1970, there were 89, and an average 80+ for the succeeding 13 years. Substantial critical works appeared by Sherman Paul, Robert von Halbert, Paul Christiansen, Don Byrd and Thomas Merrill. There was the Olson issue of *boundary 2*, "a journal of postmodern literature," co-edited by Robert Kroetsch. While Olson's devoted followers spread the word, Marjorie Perloff and other mainstream academic critics tried to whittle him down.

Enter Tom Clark, an established poet and writerly biographer of Damon Runyan, Jack Kerouac, Ted Berrigan and others. He wrote *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life,* the only full-length biography yet published. The seven-year project and its 400-page product, published in 1991, with a 2nd edition in 2000, was no "reconnaissance in nearby territory" — more like "longer-term settlement in that territory." Clark was inundated with support during the research and writing. Jack Clarke, colleague at SUNY Buffalo of Olson and Maud, wrote more than 80 letters during the time (1985-91) Clark was writing the book (this is related in *Minutes* #49). Ralph Maud offered Clark access to his chronological collection of Olson documents but was ignored.

Charles Olson barechested, at writing table. Photograph by Jonathan Williams, Black Mountain College.

When *Allegory* appeared, the Olsonites' enthusiasm gave way to puzzlement, then loud disagreement. "[B]etter to have been ignored," Maud writes, "than to have been used in the way some of Clark's interviewees were… using parts of their recollections that they would not expect to find featured except within a context of admiration for Olson." Jack Clarke wrote a lengthy rebuttal of the book's misinterpretations and mistakes (*intent* 2:4 and 3:1, 1991). Maud started *Minutes* in 1993 and immediately began correcting the record by publishing terse annotations of *Allegory*. He sent them to Clark and got not a word back. "I can only conclude that my criticisms are unanswerable" (this is in *Minutes* #43). Those writings form the spine of *Charles Olson at the Harbor*. Maud calls it "a castle of perseverance against the spread of Clark's misinformation." Anyone who reads *Allegory* must — must — read *Harbor*. On the other hand, *Harbor* is not a stand-alone biography, notwithstanding the cover identifies it as such. Inside, Maud calls it a "reactive biography." Anyone hoping to find a coherent account of Olson's life will be disappointed. It's like coming into a room in the middle of an argument. It assumes familiarity with Olson's life and work.

Clark took note of the criticism in the preface to the 2nd edition of *Allegory* — and dismissed it: "[N]one has convinced me that this attempt to relate [Olson's] life story is at significant variance with truth." As if to verify his version of Olson, the 2nd edition includes a preface by Robert Creeley that Clark was at pains to point out Ed Dorn would have written, but he died. There: the stamp of authenticity from those closest to Olson, at least in the Black Mountain interval. Creeley makes only passing mention of Clark's work in taking the measure of Olson.



Olson in Vancouver in 1963

Back of Clark's portrayal of Olson as a tormented neurotic there was a certain quantum of noise generated by Olson's critical and popular notoriety. In a 1991 *Los Angeles Times* review of the Clark biography, for example, the late Thomas M. Disch, author of *The Brave Little Toaster,* wrote that Olson was "a pioneer in the dismantling of the college core curriculum and its replacement by a kind of autodidacticism that differed little from autointoxication. He was, in short, the high priest of high times." And on a 2006 Amazon.com website "review" of *Allegory* we learn that Olson "wrought … very real personal destruction … on everyone around him." He was "a petty, misogynistic, brute of a man that sacrificed many people to the great altar of ideas."

What does an actual scholar make of all this wild surmise?

Sometimes it's a minor matter of supplying a fact missing from Clark's purview because not yet published or come to light — a letter, say. Very often it is just details Clark got wrong — there are many, and Maud corrects them. His distinctive skill is in choosing the pertinent and persuasive fact from a vast array.

More serious is the charge that Clark consciously falsified the record. Clark, for example, asserts that Olson thought of time "not as a straight line … but as a looping rubber band that never lost its elasticity." Maud comments: "This loopy image, I believe, is Clark's; it's not in quotes. I don't think Olson ever talked about a 'rubber band.'" What Charles Olson did and did not say or write or think — does anyone know this terrain as thoroughly as Ralph Maud?

The veracity of much of the detail in *Allegory* cannot actually be determined, due to a scholarly flaw: "[Clark's] endnotes only reference quoted words. When he narrates entirely in his own voice without quoting or merely paraphrasing, no endnotes are there to identify his authority or which text is being summarized. This means there are whole sections not capable of being scrutinized which might well have been challengeable if they had been footnoted."

Clark's biography also falsifies by ignoring contrary evidence from the documents he cites. To make the point that Olson dreaded the loss of his powers and the approach of death, Clark quotes a line beginning "… in loneliness & in such pain…" from the *Maximus* poem "I'm going to hate to leave this Earthly Paradise." Maud presents the poem — "the greatest poem (I think)" of Olson's late period — in its true context, showing us "Charles Olson at the harbor, focused and attentive, looking out and listening, the ecstasy arising naturally from the accuracy of the particulars of the sights and sounds." He concludes that "Clark libels Olson by quoting only those lines that make him seem a sad, weakened Titan."

At the level of generalization, of summing up the man and the poet, Maud calls Clark's account of Olson "necrologic." He insists that Clark got Olson dead wrong. The picture *Allegory* paints is a neurotic with serious oedipal conflicts, morbid self-doubts, obsessed with sex, obsessed with death, a weak and manipulative individual. Not that Clark anywhere sums up Olson thusly. But Maud demonstrates conclusively, I think, that this is Clark's intention. Partly, he suggests, it's the result of Clark's overdependence on Olson's private journals, in which he stewed and fretted, it's true, about sex and father and death.

Where Clark does try to sum up Olson is in the one place he permits himself the humanity of a personal feeling, in relating (in the preface to the 2nd edition) how he met Olson in England in 1966 when he was "blessed with on opportunity to spend an evening 'babysitting' the imposing, vulnerable, endlessly charming, delightfully curious traveling poet" at Ed Dorn's home, and how Olson talked until morning. He refers to Olson's "magisterial amplitude," his "grandeur of intent and multiplicity of interest" — and that's as close to a summing up as he gets. The rest is — I have to agree — chip, chip, chip.

Among many qualities Maud's scholarship brings to light in this volume, one I found most interesting was Olson's capacity for rethinking his poems. In the epilogue to *Harbor*, Maud summons the *Paris Review* tapes to show how Olson, asked by Gerald Malanga to read "Maximus, to himself" — probably his most anthologised

(*continued on page 46)*

OLSON (*continued from page 45*)

poem — "instead of performing the poem as a well-behaved poet would do, Olson took it almost line by line and shook it to see what value was left when the falsities fell out." All of which Malanga — or the *Paris Review*'s poetry editor, Tom Clark? — excised. Maud returns to the original version to pick up Olson reading and commenting:

I have made dialogues
(That's true.)
I have discussed ancient texts
(To my pride.)
have thrown what light I could.

Olson interrupts himself again to say, "I think that's a little bit special pleading. It's begging your sympathy …. 'Please …'."

Then, as the most amazing of this amazing thing that he does, Olson starts to rewrite these lines to cut out the pleading.

As mentioned, the complete *Paris Review* interview was published in *Muthologos*. Maud excerpted this same section as an appendix in *A Charles Olson Reader*.

There's more. Always with Olson there's more. That's what this great man has to offer, not only more than we can handle, but more than he can get out at any one time. There is never the sense that 'this wraps it up.'

Here is how Olson puts it in the same interview:

I knew this poem was no good from the moment I wrote it. . . . It's absolutely true. Hear me. If you don't hear this, I haven't got anything at all.

There is a disorder about *Charles Olson at the Harbor*. The master would approve. What's that fragment of verse doing on the cover? — ". . . Come into this world. . ." — from the poem "Maximus, at the Harbor," with that difficult Greek word, apophainesthai, repeated every few lines — and hardly explained in the book? In Butterick's *Guide to the Maximus Poems* the word is glossed as meaning "that which shows forth." It was used by Henry Corbin in a 1957 essay "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism." In the *Paris Review* interview, Olson criticizes this poem in the same vein as "Maximus, to himself" — calls it "a sucker poem." Maud approves the state of disorder Olson is inviting us into. Maud calls it "the state of being buffeted by the wave that presents itself *(apophainesthai)* at the harbor mouth."

Peter Grant is an historian and poet who lives in Victoria, BC.

SWAN LOVE (*continued from page 20*)

old love through a taxi window.

Like a true comedian, Norman leads us through the annals of grief to the erotic comedy of reconciliation. David cannot fly to Maggie but he *remembers* flying and that is good enough to carry them both to redemption in the second act as we sit in the dark, waiting.

Linda Rogers' novel,* The Third Day Book, *a sequel to* The Empress Letters, *will appear next spring.

JUXTAPOSITIONS (*continued from page 34*)

> der anything ever gets done, " she said. "I meant that as a compliment of course.'
>
> ('Special Operations')

It doesn't get any more Pure Tate than this. The herd ends up following whatever the half-assed philosopher kings *say* they are doing; if anything remains to be understood, it is all outside of the little peoples' ken, as only the wise men can judge their own actions. The freedom-fearing woman, like a serf out of Chekhov ("What is it about us that fears liberty?"), catches and checks her own incipient skepticism brilliantly, sadly: "I meant that as a compliment, of course." They are stick people but their language—fleetingly glimpsed—gives them the fullness of crushed spirits, Nietschean sheep, Republican wives.

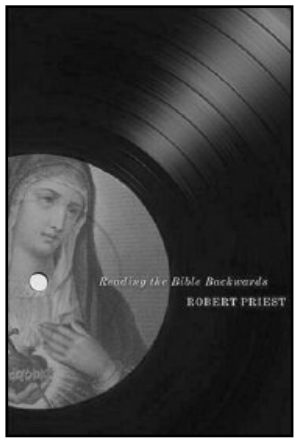
Samuel Johnson (or was it Eliot?) criticized Chaucer for lacking a "high seriousness," and Tate has been a magnet for similar charges. But while keeping all of his zaniness and verve, Tate has really written in *Ghost Soldiers* a book of subtle, softly echoing anti-war poetry. "Sure it's a tragic story; that's why it's so funny." But still it is tragic, first and foremost. The farces of the world don't make the world a farce; it still cries out to be made better.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel* One Hundred Siberian Postcards *(Telegram Books). He practices law in Los Angeles.

Reading the Bible Backwards

Linda Rogers

Ever since I met the "brainless voyageur" in one of Robert Priest's early poems, I have been enchanted by his picaresque journey through the byzantine garden of Canadian verse. The troubadour never stops moving. In this instance, he is reading backwards, going to the source as it were, to the well of information and music that informs the contemporary poet, playwright and songwriter. His river flows both ways.



> here in backwards land
> the sun comes up at night
> the blues play us
> but only at the other end
> of the trumpet

Reading the Bible Backwards
Robert Priest
ECW Press, 2008

Priest is one of those philosopher fools of the transition generation once known as "love children." Now the boomers, those who survived sex, drugs and rock and roll, are our wise men and women. In an era that values sound bites and fast food, there is an even greater need for our "songs of experience."

He quotes Kierkegaard, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

One of the People's Poets, those who, in the wisdom of the jury should have been the Governor General's Award recipient in any given year, Priest is at once the poet *and* the people. His poems listen as often as they speak, as he turns answers back into questions. "Poetry wants to be in people's minds and lives. It wants to be an active ingredient in the culture," he wrote in the People's Poetry chapter in the Al Purdy book being released by Hidden Brook Press this spring.

Like a crow or a child learning language, Priest mimics what he hears. Many of the poems in this collection are word play. The child lives in the man with perfect pitch. Song and poetry are different responses to the same impetus. Somehow he is able to transpose from one key to another without losing meaning or persuasive intonation. Because he is a transparent filter, what we hear appears to be true, frontwards and backwards, as it stands apart from the ego so apparent in many poets.

Robert Priest at the Calgary Spoken Word Festival 2006

Sometimes his poems are toys to be played with and sometimes tender love songs:

> The soul cannot deny
> The wind
> How can I deny
> My love

Much of the poetry, going back through the wrongs turns and dead ends of civilization, especially the ancient war game of Go played by organized religion, is interrogative. Failure leads to questioning. The "good news" is that there are always alternate responses. That is the one in the many that he seeks. There are no answers. Truth is a mutable entity.

The joy of Robert Priest is that he is open to revision of himself and everything around him, including the past. As a folk singer, he understands lyrics without provenance that simply evolve with the singing. There is music in everything. He revels in the song that writes itself, sonnet and pissonit. Graffitti is sacred utterance, as are the Songs of Solomon and those of Robert Priest in love with his wife.

The Bible with its many gospels and the book of life tell him, in the words of Irving Layton, "Whatever else, poetry is freedom."

Linda Rogers is a poet and admirer of Robert Priest

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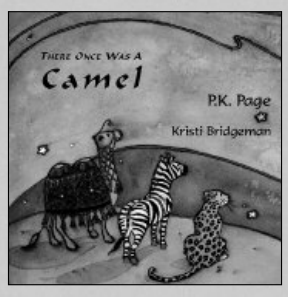

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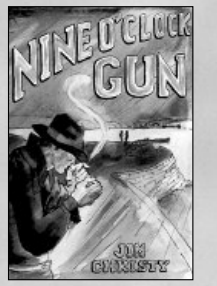

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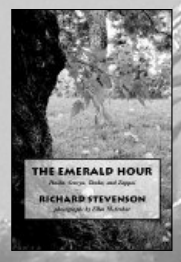

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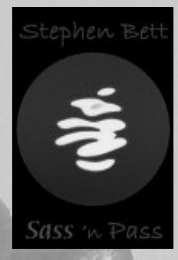

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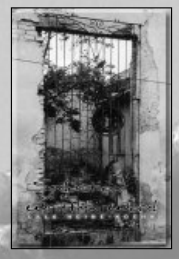

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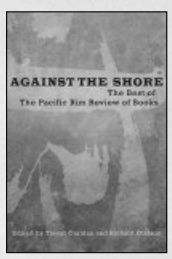

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