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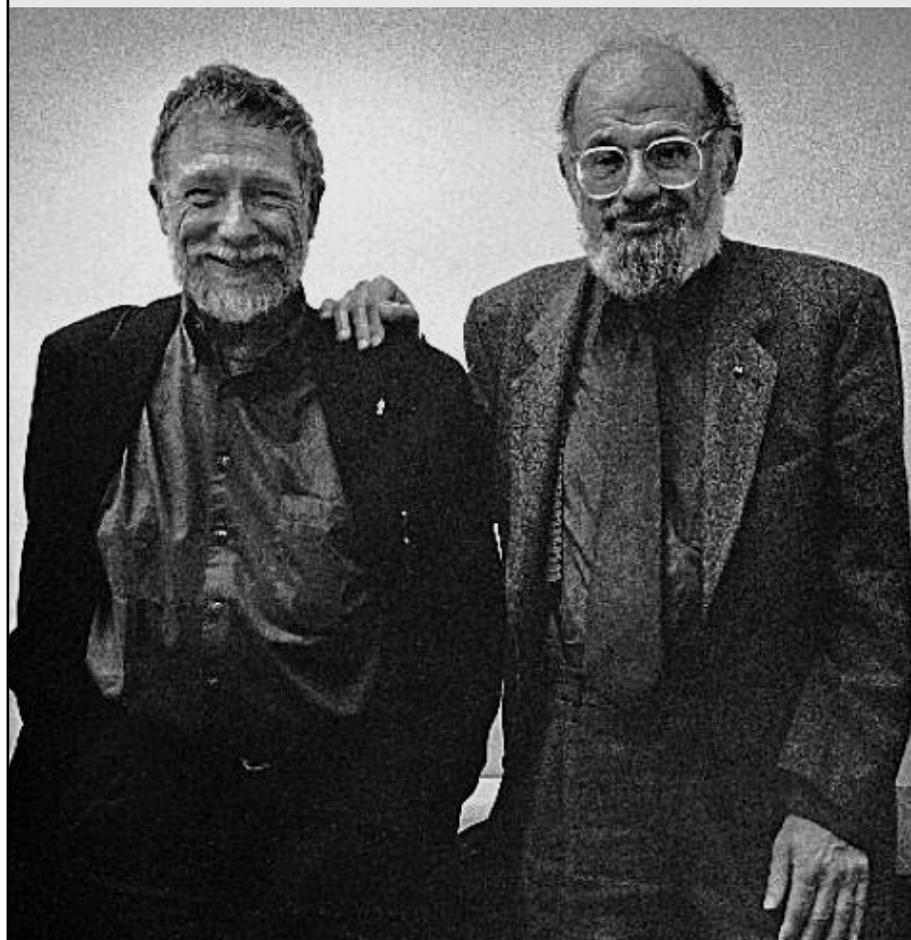
POETS & LETTERS FOR A GOLDEN SUMMER

**PRIVATE LETTERS
FROM TED HUGHES, SYLVIA PLATH
ROBERT LOWELL, ELIZABETH BISHOP
BY RICHARD WIRICK**



Endless summer: Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop, Brazil, 1962

**JOSEPH BLAKE REVIEWS
THE SELECTED LETTERS OF
GARY SNYDER & ALLEN GINSBERG**



Old friends: Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder

**50 YEARS OF W.D. SNODGRASS
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**COOL KIDS BOOKS:
P.K. PAGE, BOB DYLAN
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**DON BAKER ON
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**PLUS: THOM GUNN, RICHARD KOSTELANETZ
TIM LANDER, COLIN BROWNE,
PHAM THI HOAI, PELMAN, CARROLL**

PRRB

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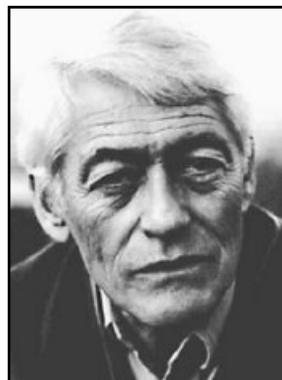
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This issue of the
Pacific Rim Review of Books
is dedicated to the memory of
Robin Blaser (1925-2009).
Author, poet, editor, essayist,
teacher and a key figure in poetry
in both the U.S. and Canada.
He will be missed.



The Holy Forest:
Collected Poems of
Robin Blaser.
University of
California Press.



*The Fire: Collected
Essays of Robin
Blaser.*
University of
California Press.

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'STAMPS ARE THE FLAGS OF MY SMALL COUNTRY': POETS WRITING LETTERS

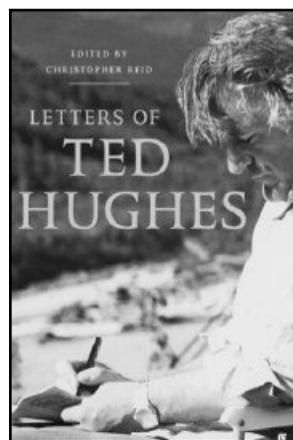
Richard Wirick

Poets operate in the most elevated literary language, words that are, as Ezra Pound said, 'charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.' At a slightly lower register are prose artists, less intense than versifiers but still seeking maximum valence from each phoneme, every unit of punctuation. At the lowest level, the deep sea divers of literature, are the letter-writers: self-conscious but more relaxed; studied yet supple and limber; espousing awareness but less harried by the punitive superego of style.

It so happens that poets are our best literary correspondents: better producers of missives than they are of memoirs or essays or criticism. The greatest example, of course, was John Keats, a man who not only produced a body of brilliant verse by the time of his death at twenty-four, but also letters that created canon-changing concepts like 'Negative Capability' and 'cold pastoral.' Like Chekhov's stories, these letters struck deep in the hearts of readers, and produced there a profound, ineffable alteration. People have been waiting for another Keats since his death in the early nineteenth century, and may well have to wait forever. There was Dr. Johnson, a splendid letter-writer but not really a poet. There was Coleridge, closer to Keats in genre but with a longer life span, and so slightly less deserving of our amazement.

"Letters," Janet Malcolm has written, "are the great fixative of experience. Time erodes feeling. Time creates indifference. Letters prove to us that we once cared." Letter writing is also, to state the obvious, becoming a lost art in the age of e-mail, of everything Electronic. Hemingway famously said it was gratifying to write letters because 'it is fun to get letters back.' (Brad Leithauser wrote a great poem out of this quote alone.) When I wished to write for a certain publication, I proposed it to the editor in an old-fashioned paper letter. Sure enough, she wrote back, a little bewildered but delightfully grateful at the anachronism. And we were off to the races, or at least to the inkwell.

2.



The Letters of Ted Hughes
Ed. Christopher Reid
Faber and Faber
756 pages, \$55.00 Cdn.

People my age began college in the Sylvia Plath Era (early 70s), and her widower Ted Hughes was almost daily burned at the stake by well-meaning but single minded feminist critics. What remained lost to so many was his being the closest thing to a contemporary English poetic genius, second only to the younger Seamus Heaney and the still-living Larkin and Auden. He was clearly the greatest nature poet in the language since Lawrence. His hawk series is the gold standard of bestiary verse cycles, and he unashamedly explored that richest and most mystical terrain of animal consciousness.

What is amazing in Hughes is how much of his primal, blood-moon, psychically violent poetic treatments receive their first blueprints in missives to fellow artists and friends. Christopher Reid has taken 2500 pages worth of letters, stretching through five of Hughes's seven lived decades, and pared them mercifully down to about 750. *The Letters of Ted Hughes*. Like Robert Graves, to whom some of the originals may have been addressed, Hughes was drawn to highly complex symbolic struc-



Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop on a beach in Brazil in 1962

tures. Where the gyre system of Yeats was crafted from unearthly, intersecting abstractions, Hughes got his pastiche of shamanism and the group unconscious from the foul rag and bone shop of the British countryside.

This comes across in the letters he wasn't forced to write, but felt obliged to, to the Queen Mother when he was serving as Poet Laureate. Hughes draws soaring, Blakean diagrams on the etymology of the Queen Mum's name, with foxes and owls and meandering limbs of diagrammed sentences one can only imagine her nodding over after her legendarily copious bedtime gin and tonics. And much like a shaman, Hughes saw the poet as a healer, a bearer of medicinal powers that found tap-roots in ancestral magic and undiluted beauty rather than must-infested deities.

The letters well chronicle the war of imaginative systems Hughes maintained with critics and fellow symbol hunters and gatherers. After his virtually unreadable book on Shakespeare's mimetic structures, Hughes answered pans of his tome with observations that 'King Lear was the Llud who was Bran,' and 'Apollo, Asclepius and Bran were Crow Gods.' Of course, he signed himself onto whatever lineage this was with declarations that 'My hawk is the sleeping, deathless spirit of Arthur/Edgar/Gwyn/Horus—the sacrificed a reborn self of the great god Ra.' Sensing our need for reassurance with these references and correspondences, he concludes 'I don't just jot these things down, you know.' Fine, but we still don't get most of the allusions without annotation, something we are not used to in his kind of especially accessible 'earth poetry.'

There is enough mention of Plath and his subsequent wife, Assia Wevill [her 'thickened mongol-tent of hair'] to keep the gossipers happy. (Upon learning that Wevill also put her head in an oven and brought their toddler with her, an undergraduate friend of mine titled a freshman composition 'Ted Hughes: Bad Luck With Girls.') Hughes states that Plath biographies are 'a perpetual smoldering in the cellar for us; there's always one or two smoking away.' But guarded as he was with his (their) children, shielding them from critical buzzards feasting on 'the cornucopia of her dead body,' his best treatment of their union is not found here but rather in the masterful, late-released poem cycle called, ironically, *Birthday Letters*.

The gems here are notes on poetic technique and academic stress relief dashed off to fellow artists: discussions of scansion with Robert Lowell, of the religious impulse with the diehard, crankily atheistic Larkin, and the simple peace of fishing and 'lake-wandering' with younger, later friends like the novelist Graham Swift. These letters, as much as his poems, are filled with what replenished his muse-well: the stench and texture of animals and their unknowable, strangely imagined homes; the ululation of bird-crowded, piping orchestral forests; the sensation of teetering in a boat barely big enough to contain his giant frame, the line for his next idea laying slack on the lee water, waiting to stiffen with a strike.

3.

Sometimes the imagined, hypostasized recipient of a letter may bear little resemblance to the actual person who opens it. And sometimes correspondents have the power to change the exchangers of letters into something much closer to what their mutual readers wish them to be. *Words In Air: The Collected Letters of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (FSG, 2008, 875 pages), shows how much one can like the idea of someone better than the someone themselves, and how the fantasies built up by distance make for ravishing letters but greatly disappointing eventual meetings.

Each of these poets had numerous literary friends and spouses, but the closest to



Robert Lowell

each were architects and novelists, leaving them with one another to bounce off ideas and supply suggested revisions. Accordingly, they were ferociously drawn to one another, and their exchange never faltered in three decades. All this survived mutual alcoholism, moral recriminations, and public scandals involving the major literary figures of our age. More than anything, each emerged from violently haphazard childhoods and needed, quite desperately, to be taken care of. They were one another's epistolary saviors, one thinks, largely because they never had to confront the glaring, painful mirror of frequent encounter. Yet their constant, mutual introduction was like a perpetual parting, and in that way a kind of unreal, infatuated affection. 'Love and death are made of the same stuff,' Jeanette Winterson has written: '[T]he moment of finding that you love someone is like the moment of knowing you will never see them again; its clarity is dazzling, and it alters everything—not just everything that will come after, but everything that has gone before.'

Again, letters gave each of these poets discursive freedom from poetry's formalism. Bishop lived in Brazil and could speak English with few others on a daily basis: 'Oh dear—now I don't want to stop talking,' she says at the beginning of one letter,

'so I'll write two—or 200—more sentences on this page.' Lowell was often recovering from a manic swing or depressive breakdown, unsteady on his poetic feet and needing unscrutinized prose to exercise himself back into rarefied language.

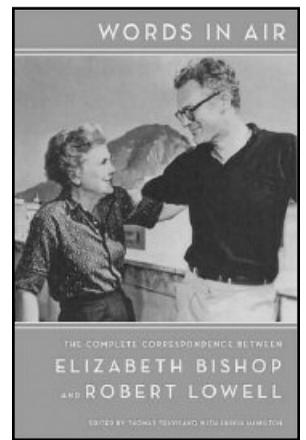
The exchanges are almost constantly humorous and entertaining. This is partly because their authors are conscious of the special role of letters in literary life. Bishop offered a course at Radcliffe in 1971 on 'Personal Correspondence, Famous and Infamous,' and wrote to Lowell the year before that '[A] very good course could be given on poets and their letters—starting away back. There are so many good ones—Pope, Byron, Keats of course, Hopkins, Crane, Stevens, Marianne [Moore].'

Many of Lowell's longer letters are hilarious comedy-of-manners send-ups of illustrious contemporaries and skewered, crank ancestors. There were Bishop's grim Nova Scotian parents, who gave her up, and their equally strange extended family and neighbors who took her in. Lowell was the quintessential American literary blue-blood, unafraid of presenting his famous aunts and uncles as an abundant aviary, unfit not only for the practical world but also for their own self-created, eccentric atmospheres. He was a lost child among constantly aging yet seemingly pastless people. Living relics rolled their wheelchairs through the halls of Beacon Hill houses, weaving him into their underworld of shades, calling him by the names of the dead.

As one would expect, the finest portraits are of literary contemporaries, or—even better—revered demi-gods finally befriended and presented as emperors with no clothes. Lowell stays in the London flat of a former professor who he had deified, the magisterial William Empson of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

Each room is as dirty and messy as Auden's New York apartment. Strange household: Etta Empson, six feet tall, still quite beautiful, five or six young men, all sort of failures at least financially, Hetta's lover, a horrible young

(continued on page 15)



Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell

Ed. Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton
FSG Adult
928 pages, \$56.00 Cdn.

Culture Matters

WHITHER GOETH CULTURE? (CULTURE WITHERS)

Richard Olafson

St Paul's, Minnesota, where my grandfather first arrived early in the last century from Iceland, is today a mecca of cultural activity. If poetry has a Jerusalem it is St. Paul's. I remember speaking to Scott Walker, the founder of Greywolf Press, several years ago at a book fair in Seattle. He had just moved from Port Townsend to St. Paul's. Scott founded Greywolf in Port Townsend when Sam Hamill loaned him an old Chandler-Price printing press and let him use his garage/workshop out back. It was there he set by hand, taking almost a year to do so, Tess Gallagher's first book of poetry. From that beginning in the early eighties, Greywolf has grown to be one of the most exemplary literary publishers in the world, mostly recently noted for the publication of Elizabeth Alexander's *Inauguration Poem*. Scott told me that his reason for moving to St. Paul's from the idyllic setting of Port Townsend, was to allow the press to grow by accessing three levels of government assistance for Greywolf's publishing effort: municipal, state and federal. It is through generous subsidies to the arts that St Paul's has thrived as a cultural capital, both economically and as a livable city. It must be that Icelandic common sense.

St. Paul's is home to three major publishers, all of whom are my personal favourites: Coffee House Press, Milkweed, and Greywolf. It is also the home of the Literary Loft, one of the largest literary centres in America, but that is another story. All these presses receive support from various levels of government. However, the government support available to publishers in America stresses cultural value above all. Publishers receiving support must be non-profit organizations publishing poetry, experimental fiction, criticism and international literature in translation – anything

that might not be produced by a large mainstream publisher. It would make no sense for the National Endowment for the Arts to subsidize Doubleday. But it does support the kind of books that Coffee House Press or Copper Canyon publish. These arts grants are based on clear priorities of cultural values, rather than a business-related subsidies of a commercial venture. These cultural priorities have created a thriving literary culture in several American communities.

As many of you may know, Melanie Rutledge has completed her stint as Head of Writing and Publishing at the Canada Council and has moved on to her next job, closer to the present Harper government. She has accepted a position as publishing consultant with the Everson Group, a consulting firm based in Ottawa. Jim Everson began his career as a personal advisor to Brian Mulroney during his tenure as Prime Minister. Everson is now a major consulting firm to the Harper government, with an extensive portfolio extending into virtually every area of Canadian life, such as agriculture, fishing, medicare, and so on. Melanie Rutledge now works in a much more political position, with no pretense of arm's length affiliation. When Rutledge became Head of Writing and Publishing, one of her first acts was to deny Caitlin Press a grant on the flimsiest of technical pretexts. This robbed Northern British Columbia of a primary publisher and left a vacuum there that has yet to be filled. The jury was instructed as to a technical word count on a book of First Nations photographs, bringing Caitlin's eligibility into question. Although the wordage was above the required 10,000 words, the explanatory descriptions of the photographs were ruled inadmissible. This was a staff-driven decision, contrary to the spirit of the arm's length founding principles of the Canada Council. Cynthia Wilson, the proprietor of Caitlin, passed away shortly after this decision. Broken Jaw Press, another poetry press, was the next to go.

In 2006, Ekstasis Editions was awarded a grant by the Canada Council jury and received a letter to that effect. However, the Block Grant Officer held the grant and demanded Audited financial statements. Many would not realize what, in fact, an audit entails. An audit is a very expensive, onerous and time-consuming procedure, that is both very difficult and a waste of time for a small poetry press. It is a huge waste of resources and makes little sense in the advancement of culture. However, Ekstasis did agree to do it at the cost of about \$15,000. The accountant chosen was one of the

(continued on page 21)

THE SELECTED LETTERS OF ALLEN GINSBERG & GARY SNYDER

Joseph Blake

Bill Morgan was Allen Ginsberg's archivist and bibliographer for two decades before the poet's death in 1997. Morgan has written many books about the Beat Generation including *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg*. In this recently published collection of letters, he has produced a book that sheds light upon a great friendship between two of the world's most important poets.

Beginning in 1956 and continuing through 1995, the two friends exchanged more than 850 letters. In a note that he wrote for the page preceding the chronologically arranged letters, Snyder writes, "A lot of the time we were just working out the details, trail routes, land-management plans—and that's what the "real work" is. His apartment on the lower East Side, my hand-built house at the end of a long dirt road in the far far west, were our hermitages, base-camps, and testing grounds. It was all just dust in the wind, but also, the changes were real."

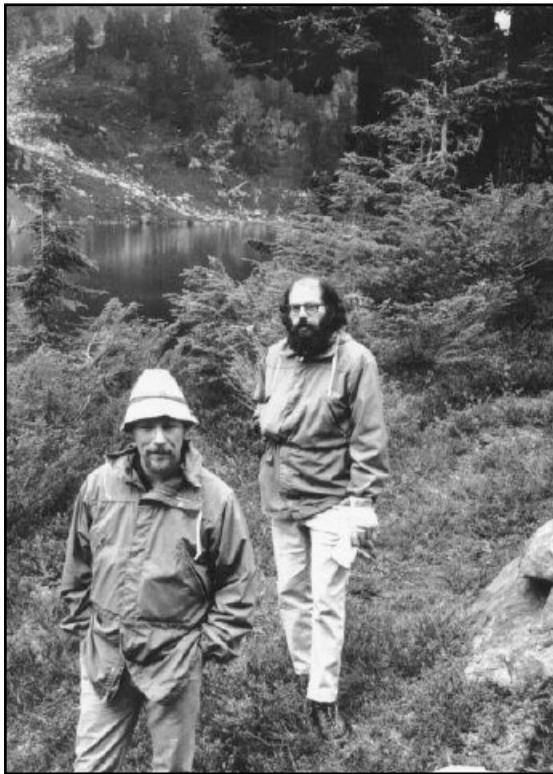
The changes that these four decades of correspondence represent mark our lives. Snyder and Ginsberg have been visionary world leaders in environmental thought, spiritual thought, political thought, and most importantly, poetry. The correspondence between these two friends, from their first meeting in the Berkeley hills and their first west coast readings to the last years of their long friendship, provides both a poet's eye on history and an intimate, tender portrait of two literary heroes.

"Living in different parts of the world as we did for most of the later years," Snyder writes in the book's introductory note, "we stayed in touch the old way, with letters. Allen was remarkable for his transgressive sanity. I swung between extremes of Buddhist scholar and hermit nerdiness and tanker-seaman craziness at bars and parties. I sense reading these letters again, that our mutual respect continued to grow."

When Ginsberg came out to the Bay Area in the mid-50's and helped inspire the Beat poetic explosion, Snyder was getting ready to hop a freighter for Japan and Zen study. He introduced Ginsberg to Buddhism and the back country. They were both central to the gathering of the tribes at the first Human Be-In at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, where Ginsberg told me that he once studied the giant Buddha statue to learn how to sit meditation. After travels around Asia together, they bought communal land in California's Sierra Mountains in the late-60's, but Ginsberg seldom visited.

Many of Snyder's letters describe the evolving communal lifestyle, imploring Ginsberg to come to San Juan Ridge. Both poets' letters portray lives lived on a shoestring. It's amazing to read accounts of their economic arrangements. They both eventually make good money for their writing, reading and teaching, but it comes late in life. Despite living on nothing for years, the poets traveled widely, read even more widely, and wrote about recent discoveries and the lives of common friends. As much as I love and respect Ginsberg and Snyder, I found the number of letters trying to organize meetings during and between their travels wearing. I longed for more assertive editing from Morgan.

The last era of letter writing that these decades of correspondence represent (alas) was a very different time



Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, Summer 1965, 8 day backpack climbing in wilderness area of Northern Cascades, Glacier Peak, Washington State, Snyder back from a near-decade in Kyoto studying & practicing Zazen. From www.allenginsberg.org

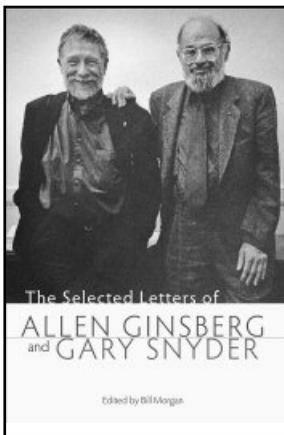
from our email/cheap long distance phone message present. Letters passed each other in the mail. Letters followed only days later explaining snail mail-induced confusion. The latest poems, magazine clippings, and enthusiasms for newly discovered authors and books share envelopes with legal issues, relationship problems, and health complaints. It's fascinating, often inspiring, and occasionally heartbreaking.

Snyder's letters are concise, reflective, businesslike, often insightful, sometimes surprising. His 1962 report on mescaline trip/Buddhist rumination is one of the book's highpoints. In one of the collection's longest letters Snyder concludes that "mescaline is a real consciousness expander, and shows one the CONTENT of consciousness, but it doesn't (as I say, for me anyhow) show the GROUND of consciousness, the content-less stuff of mind, self, which I know you CAN get a good sight of through Zen meditation. (I haven't found mescaline able to throw the least glimmer of light on koan.)"

A year later, Ginsberg writes Snyder in Kyoto from the U.S. "You must have given me some kind of permanent blessing because I seem to have come down into my body (belly) ever since Japan and been wandering around in a happy rapture ever since. The sensation of eternity of my Blake visions turns out to be actualized through the feelings of this body present—but feelings—mainly the result of naturalization of belly breathing. I don't sit and meditate much tho..."

The image of Ginsberg that emerges from his letters is the same giving, open-hearted, sweet searcher I met at Naropa. He was a great teacher who enthused about the writing of Kerouac, Dylan, Burroughs, William Carlos Williams, and those passions are in evidence in these letters too. Ginsberg, in particular, led a frenetic life with lots of complications, familial and otherwise, and Snyder's letters describe three of his marriages, children, subsistence hunting and gathering, and duties as an academic and community leader on the local and state level. Despite their busy, productive lives, both men found time to write each other often and with deep feeling. Reading the letters in this book might inspire you to live life more fully and possibly to write your friends. There's lots of inspiration here.

Joseph Blake is PRRB's music correspondent extraordinaire.



The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder
Ed. Bill Morgan.
Counterpoint Press, 321 pages, \$28 U.S.

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A DOWN-TO-EARTH GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

Eric Spalding



In the News: The Practice of Media Relations in Canada.
William Wray Carney
University of Alberta Press. 292 p. \$26.95

There is an art to communicating with the media and *In the News* by William Wray Carney provides some of the keys to that art. This book, now in its second edition, considers the media from the perspective of a PR practitioner (or, in the author's words, a "communications practitioner" or simply "communicator"). It fills a need for a Canadian primer on effective media relations. The book is divided into three parts. Part One provides a general introduction to the media in Canada. Part Two focuses on how best to communicate with these media. Part Three offers a brief overview of current and future issues surrounding the media.

Some of the content in the five chapters of Part One will seem elementary to a reader with a background in communications. For example, one passage outlines the differences between hard news, soft news and opinion. Chapter 5 lists and briefly comments on the different media available in Canada under such headings as "Radio", "Television" and "Internet". This chapter may be useful for the neophyte, but the more advanced reader may wish for a more critical treatment of Canadian media.

The ten chapters of Part Two are more instructive. They cover such essentials of media relations as how to choose media appropriate to one's objective, how best to approach these media, how to give an interview and how to assess one's impact on the media. I had the feeling upon reading this section that it was much closer to the author's heart than Part One. Carney opens Part Two with an illuminating anecdote based on his work as a communications consultant for the Edmonton Board of Health (1988-1993). In a few pages, he describes his role in improving this institution's



Victoria's A-channel anchor Hudson Mack

relations with the media. Occasionally in subsequent chapters, Carney will refer again to this experience and others, adding a personal touch to the book.

In this regard, I felt that Part Two was comparable to a chat with an individual who has through trial and error acquired a high level of expertise in dealing with the media. Indeed, in this section, Carney offers a much straightforward advice in a conversational tone. Although in the introduction Carney promises to balance practice with

theory, it's definitely the practical side that predominates. The author occasionally refers to outside sources, including most prominently *The Canadian Reporter* by Catherine McKercher and Carman Cumming, but it's experience backed by common sense that predominates.

Part Three, comprised of two chapters, is new to the second edition. This section in my view compensates for the fact that the revisions to the previous two sections are not as thorough as they could have been. In one striking example of an unrevised passage, Carney makes the assumption that newspaper readership is still high. He writes:

Research indicates that newspapers, not television, are the public's main source of routine news. In one American survey (1994), adults indicated that 70 per cent read a newspaper regularly, while only 35 per cent viewed a television newscast regularly (29 per cent watch sometimes). This trend is even more tilted towards newspapers than an earlier study, which concluded that an "equal proportion of the population [is] reading newspapers and watching television news on a typical evening."

In an era when newspapers are cutting staff and even closing their doors, Carney's assessment appears unrealistic. In fairness to the author, few other passages are so out of date. Moreover, the first of the two new chapters makes up for this oversight, as it

deals with current media issues, including the decline of print journalism and the growing importance of online news. The second new chapter incorporates some theory. It addresses Marshall McLuhan's phrase "The medium is the message" and Noam Chomsky's argument that the powers that be have co-opted the mainstream media in North America. This chapter, however, is only five pages long and covers these ideas rather succinctly.

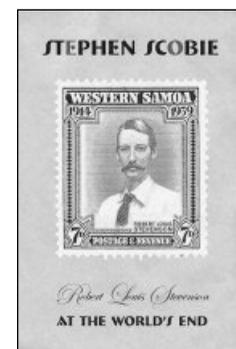


National CTV news anchor Lloyd Robertson

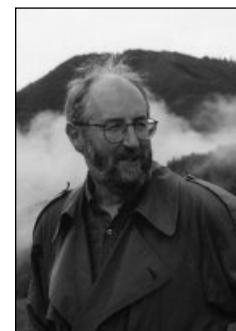
In the News is written in a direct, unadorned style. There are few typographical errors, although a notable one is the unconventional spelling of "lead" as "lede" throughout the book, as in: "Key to the newspaper story is the lede, or first sentence. Writing a strong lede is a much-valued art in journalism: it encapsulates the story, sets the theme and draws the reader in". The text is generally broken up into small sections with subheadings in bold font.

Carney offers some sensible advice for the communications practitioner, especially in Part Two. I don't think that too many readers will be able to sit down and absorb it all in a day or two. In terms of its utility as a course text especially, I would recommend assigning this book in a first- or second-year PR course. Students can then read the chapters at the rate of one or two per week, with simulation and role-playing exercises reinforcing the lessons learned. They could then keep *In the News* as a useful reference, to be consulted when the need arises.

Eric Spalding writes from British Columbia's Fraser Valley where he teaches Communications and Media Studies



ISBN 978-1-897430-32-3
Poetry
88 Pages
\$19.95
6 x 9



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RLS: At the World's End

poetry by Stephen Scobie

In *RLS: At the World's End*, award-winning Canadian poet Stephen Scobie charts an imagined course through Robert Louis Stevenson's writings and travels. Stevenson is known for such classic works as *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* — but also for the romantic tale of his tragically short life, from his childhood in Scotland to his death in the South Seas. Scobie, himself a Scot living abroad, presents an extended dialogue between his own, contemporary voice and a poetic image of RLS: forever seeking a treasure island, forever longing to return home, living and dying at the world's end.

Stephen Scobie is a Canadian poet, critic, and scholar. Born in Carnoustie, Scotland, Scobie relocated to Canada in 1965. He earned a PhD from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver after which he taught at the University of Alberta and at the University of Victoria, from which he recently retired. Scobie is a founding editor of Longspoon Press, an elected member of the Royal Society of Canada, and the recipient of the 1980 Governor General's Award for *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* (1980) and the 1986 Prix Gabrielle Roy for Canadian Criticism.

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COOL KIDS' BOOKS

FEATURING BOB DYLAN AND WYNTON MARSALIS

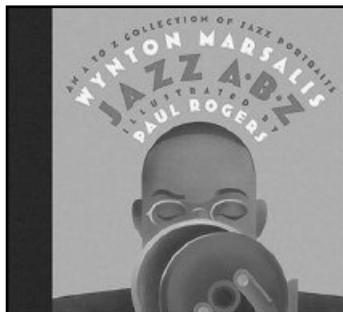
Joseph Blake

Over the last couple of years, illustrator Paul Rogers has teamed-up with two of contemporary music's masters, Bob Dylan and Wynton Marsalis, on a pair of children's books that will educate and delight old fans and young readers alike. The recently published *Forever Young* provides playful, spare drawings illustrating the lyrics to Dylan's equally guileless, anthem-like song from 1974's *Planet Waves*. In 2005's collaboration with Wynton Marsalis, Rogers produced a highly stylized book of A to Z jazz images from Armstrong to Diz.

Jazz A-B-Z matches Rogers' insightful portraits with a unique biographical sketch in a different poetic form by Marsalis. From haiku to limerick to Beat poem and beyond, it's an amazingly sophisticated work that celebrates jazz on so many levels that it will inspire readers of all ages. Many of Rogers' images have the simple, but symbol-enriched power of great poster art. He uses shades of blue, purple, green and black to heighten the drama of his portrait of Miles Davis, an image further enhanced by Marsalis' word play where words of five letters each line up in two columns under the starting consonants of M and D. For the illustrator's fiery image of John Coltrane, Marsalis produces a list poem that describes the great saxophonist's life like one of his explosive solos torn from a series of fleeting, powerful musical statements. Rogers' cartoon-like image of a rotund Fats Waller inspires Marsalis to use an alliteration-fueled prose poem to further capture the playful essence of Waller's keyboard magic. Every page is rich with jazz history and the stories of the musicians who made the music's 100 year evolution possible.

At the back of the book, Phil Schaap's concise biographical descriptions of the featured artists and notes on the poetic forms that Marsalis uses add even more depth to this amazing, beautiful project.

By comparison, *Forever Young* is an understated effort, probably directed at younger readers. Despite the naïve, folk art-like quality of this book's illustrations, the images are spiced with subtle visual references to Dylan's career and music. Rogers offers a collection of illustrator's notes at the back of the book, mentioning "a list of some of the hidden things you may not have seen the first time you looked at this



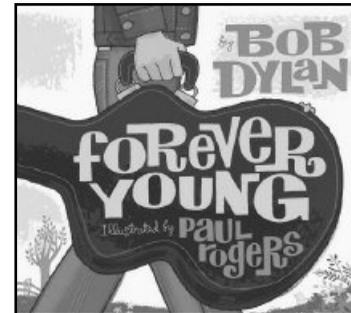
Jazz A-B-Z
Wynton Marsalis
Illustrated by Paul Rogers
(Candlewick Press)
\$34.99 Cdn

book. It doesn't include everything," Rogers continues. "That would spoil the fun of discovering them for yourself. So get some Dylan albums (*My son Nate recommends Blonde on Blonde*, 1966), sit down, listen to the lyrics, look at the book, and see what you can find."

Beat poets Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs are among the young crowd in Washington Square Park inspired by Dylan's lyric "May you always be courageous/Stand upright and be strong." Records by Woody Guthrie and Ricky Nelson are stacked in front of the living room hi-fi where a youngster with a guitar sings for his parents on a page featuring Dylan's "May your wishes all come true." Guthrie is also referenced on the title page which also makes visual footnotes to Gerde's Folk City and Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man*. My favourite pages illustrate "May you have a strong foundation/when the winds of changes shift" with visual references to a Stop the War march featuring Martin Luther King, Joan Baez, Hank Williams, Albert Einstein, Edie Sedgwick, John Lennon, Thelonious Monk, Peter Blake, Paul McCartney, Ben Shahn, George Harrison, DA Pennebaker and Ringo Starr.

Young kids love to read their favourite books over and over again, so Rogers' images provide endless fun for Dylan fans and young readers ready to transcend "Where's Waldo?" visual games on the page. I'm a huge Dylan fan, but *Forever Young's* charm and poetry escaped me until this children's book collaboration. It's sweet, mischievous, ultimately inspiring fun.

Joseph Blake is PRRB's music correspondent extraordinaire.



Forever Young
Bob Dylan
Illustrated by Paul Rogers
(Antennum)
\$21 Cdn.



Wynton Marsalis

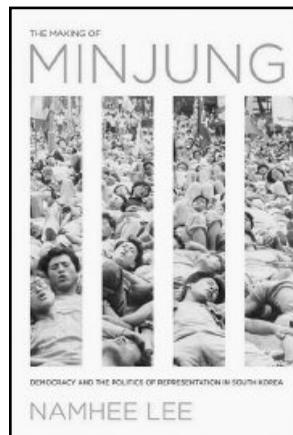


Bob Dylan

FROM MINJUNG TO CITIZEN

A SAGA OF MODERN SOUTH KOREA

Don Baker



The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea
 Namhee Lee
 Cornell University Press, 349 pages

If you drop by your local book store and check out the shelves featuring books on Asia, odds are you will find a lot more books about China and Japan than about Korea. One reason Korea has not attracted as much attention as its neighbours have is that Korea doesn't appear at first glance to offer as much dramatic material for writers to work with as Japan and China have. Korea did not have centuries of samurai battles. Nor did Korea experience such violent internal upheavals as the Taiping Rebellion or the Cultural Revolution.

Namhee Lee has set out to change the perception of Korean history as relatively boring. In *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, she tells the dramatic story of how Korea went from a dictatorship to a democracy over the course of three decades.

Moreover, she argues that successful march to democracy began with an overwhelming sense of failure. Forty years ago, Korea's intellectuals suffered from what she calls a "crisis of historical subjectivity." They felt that their country was a failure because it had failed to liberate itself from Japanese rule, and had instead relied on the Americans and the Russians to do that for them in 1945. Moreover, it seemed to those dejected intellectuals

that, though Korea had nominally regained its "independence," not only had it failed to regain the political unity it had enjoyed for almost 1,300 years, South Korea had abandoned its own heritage for the imported culture of the US and Japan and had also abandoned economic self-sufficiency for domination by American and Japanese capital.

Traditionally, in Korea, intellectuals are responsible for the fate of the nation. Therefore, those intellectuals, including students at the top universities in Seoul, began searching for a way to help their fellow Koreans regain control of their own destiny. According to Lee, they did so by creating what she calls a "counterpublic sphere" to counteract the hegemonic discourse of cultural and economic dependency promoted by a series of dictatorial governments in Seoul, even though they knew that by doing so they risked arrest, imprisonment, torture and, in a few cases, capital punishment.

The first step in that move to put the fate of Korea back in Korean hands was to exalt the "minjung." Minjung is a difficult term to define, since it meant different things to different people. In the hands of these intellectual activists, it meant the true Korean people, those workers, farmers, and other members of the oppressed masses who maintained a genuine Korean subjectivity though they were suffering at the hands of rulers who governed at the behest of foreign powers.

The minjung movement led at first to the reproduction on urban campuses of traditional village forms of entertainment such as masked dance skits critical of ruling elites. It then led to students leaving university to work alongside workers in factories in order to help those workers awaken to their own subjectivity as masters of the nation. That from campus-to-factory movement accelerated after the Kwangju Uprising of May, 1980, in which young working-class men, rather than students, led the armed resistance to the military coup that put General Chun Doo Hwan in power. Embarrassed by their failure to assume their accustomed leading role, some students



Namhee Lee

and other intellectuals turned to what for a while they believed was a better model of an autonomous Korean government, North Korea. That "North Korea boom" did not last very long. Instead, starting in 1987, South Korea began to democratize.

In her concluding chapter, Lee shows how the minjung movement dissolved after it achieved its primary goal of replacing a dictatorial government with a democratic one. Instead of minjung, intellectuals now talk about citizens, and many former minjung activists are now politicians and bureaucrats in the offices once occupied by their oppressors. Though there is no more minjung movement in Korea today, the minjung movement has won. How it won, despite some wrong turns it took along the way (North Korea as a guide?), is the subject of this fascinating book. No one who reads it will ever again think that modern Korean political history is boring.

Don Baker is Director of the Centre for Korean Research and teaches at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Accelerated Paces: Travels Across Borders and Other Imaginary Boundaries (Essays/Memoir)

by Jim Oaten



Set somewhere between here and the heat-death of the universe, Jim Oaten's debut collection serves up random samples of literal and literary truth scooped up at top speed.

Whether dodging down back alleys in Beirut, wheeling past God and traffic in Mombasa, Kenya, slipping around the edges of Alzheimer's disease, the Gulf War, or the eternity of CNN, these short stories and pieces ignore borders as they jaunt through external trips and internal voyages.

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ANVIL PRESS



Suicide Psalms

poetry by Mari-Lou Rowley

A collection of poetry that is both hymn and visceral scream—of loss, despair, hope, and ultimately redemption.

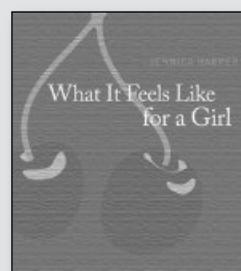
"This is Rowley at her heart stammering, howling, apocalyptic, playful, musical best." —DI BRANDT

"Rowley's *Suicide Psalms* are deft, double-edged, 'kill sites bedded with violets,' songs of violent beauty." —SYLVIA LEGRIS

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∞ CANLIT WITH AN URBAN TWIST ∞



What It Feels Like for a Girl

poetry by Jennica Harper

"Smart, brave, hard-edged, and a little frightening ... Jennica Harper offers a compassionate glimpse into the turbulent lives of teenaged girls. May this book find its way to school libraries. May it find itself in the hands of every young person who ever wondered *What it Feels Like for a Girl*." —ELIZABETH BACHINSKY

ISBN: 1-895636-96-5 | \$15 | AVAILABLE NOW!

DECODING THE HUMAN BODY-FIELD: THE NEW SCIENCE OF INFORMATION AS MEDICINE

Reg Little

Decoding the Human Body-Field: The New Science of Information as Medicine is the path-breaking product of several decades of exploration and discovery, first by the Australian Peter Fraser and later supported by the American Harry Massey. It outlines a new discipline for proactively enhancing human health and well-being, focused on quantum energy fields and inspired by both traditional Chinese medicine and homeopathic practices.

In the process, it identifies, investigates and explains many aspects of human life that have not previously been subject to the intrusion of Western scientific curiosity

Like other workers in neglected contemporary frontiers of medicine and science, Fraser and Massey are in the process of realising the prediction of Qian Xuesen, the American educated 'father of Chinese space technology'. In a February 1986 symposium sponsored by the newly formed China Qigong Science Association, Qian declared that 'many facts show that an intensive scientific study of *qigong* will lead to a full development of man's mental as well as physical abilities'.

Using language and concepts from quantum physics and information theory, Fraser and Massey give Western scientific legitimacy, authority and accessibility to their Nutri-Energetics System (NES). Amongst much else, they offer alternative understandings of *qi* flows along acupuncture meridians, where the Chinese have been several millennia ahead of the West in their understanding of life processes.

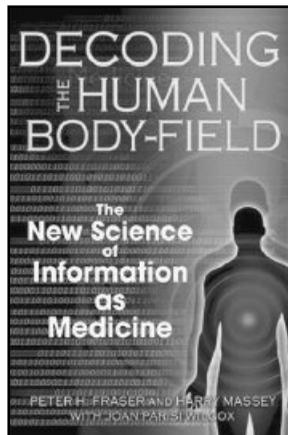
Indeed, works like this can prompt reflection on the fact that the troubles confronting American financial authority and military strategy have parallels in the troubles confronting American practices in medicine, food and agriculture. While one may be drawn into considering other areas of human wisdom that might be enhanced by a reduction in the reach of American 'exceptionalism', the authors highlight the benefits and insights that can be derived from the marriage of Eastern and Western thought and energy.

Fraser began the research that has led to NES in 1982. Fraser's background in Traditional Chinese medicine, which led to him founding the acupuncture degree at a Melbourne University, came to be complemented by Massey's computer and information skills, which proved critical in overcoming inevitable problems and setbacks and in producing a practical means of diagnosing and treating people. NES as it is presented in the book is informed by meticulous work mapping energy and information flows over several decades and the exhausting reconciliation of conceptual frameworks.

After most of the first quarter of the book, titled The Nature of the Body, details in user-friendly language the scientific and conceptual character of the human body field in the context of quantum physics, the next quarter, titled The Birth of Nutri-Energetics Systems, recounts the personal stories of Fraser and Massey as they travelled from severe personal ill-health (chronic fatigue syndrome) to their new understanding of Nutri-Energetics.

The second half of the book, titled The NES Model of the Human Body-Field, outlines five levels of energetic and informational organization, structured from the more general to the more specific. It is introduced with the following statement:

Although aspects of the general configuration of the body-field — the external



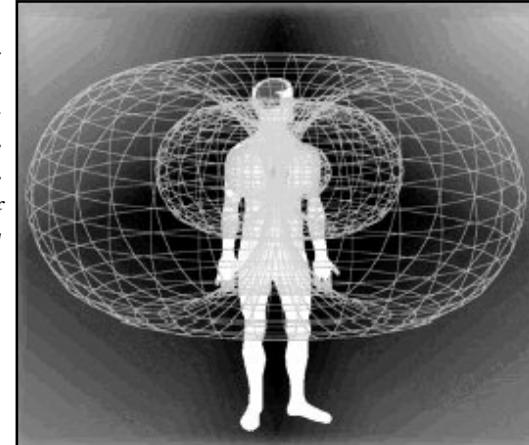
Decoding the Human Body-Field: The New Science of Information as Medicine

Peter H Fraser and Harry Massey, with Joan Parisi Wilcox
Inner Tradition
416 pages, \$21.50

aura, charkras, meridians, and acupuncture points — have been described by others, Peter's work represents the first truly comprehensive systems-level mapping of the structures and mechanism of the human body-field and their relation to biochemistry and physiology.

It then states that:

The human body-field is an intelligent, self-organising, self-correcting, self-maintaining energetic and informational structure that functions at the level of quantum energy dynamics and quantum holography. Your body-field and physical body are interdependent: one cannot exist without the other.



Energy Fields of the Body.

Breaking down the five levels of organization, it moves from 3 *Big Field* axes of vertical, equatorial and magnetic poles, to 16 *Energetic Drivers* reflecting the energies of body organs like cells, nerves, heart, lungs, stomach, muscles, skin, liver and kidney, to 12 *Energy Integrators* that are not dissimilar to acupuncture meridians, to 15 *Energetic Terrains* that are body environments that can host pathogens, and finally to 15 *Energetic Stars* that are sub-systems that govern metabolic energy and information usage in the body and that can be associated with notions like radiation, memory, nerves, autoimmunity, circulation, enzymes, chill and heavy metal.

Fraser and Massey remind in their Conclusion that they provide an overview of an 'emerging paradigm in biology and medicine' which seeks to 'validate the reality that we are more than matter, we are beings of energy and information'.

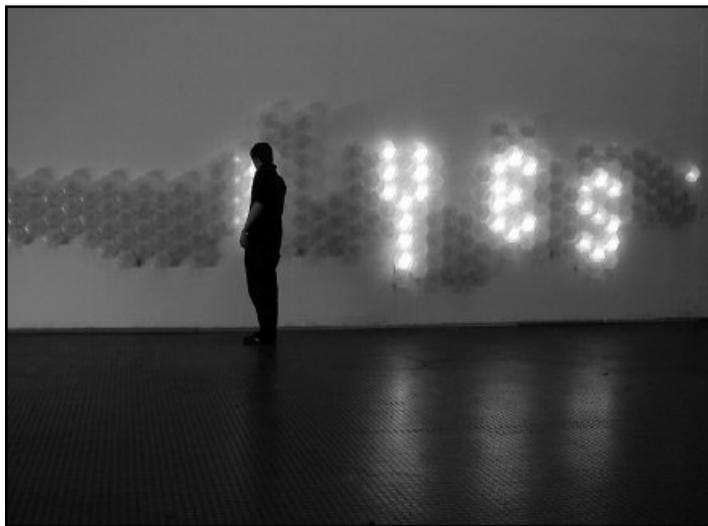
As someone long interested in the cultivation of *qi* to preserve and enhance my health, I found it easy to follow the book's exploration of the human body-field. It was also easy to track down a practitioner, undergo a diagnosis and be put on a regime of infoceuticals, a homeopathic-like treatment that uses water enhanced with traces of information designed to correct the inevitable damages incurred in the course of contemporary life. The diagnosis used a computer mouse-like instrument for ten seconds or so to come up with a complex reading of my body-field and its frailties. Four such sessions, about a month apart, with follow-up daily use of prescribed infoceuticals are recommended.

My reading of this book gained extra value from having just completed Mantak Chia's *Wisdom Chi Kung*. Unusually for one of Chia's works, I was initially left a little perplexed by this book. Then *Decoding the Human Body-Field* encouraged me to

reflect on contrasting Eastern and Western ways of exploring and explaining the body-field.

This left me wondering whether the East's disciplined cultivation of intuitive mastery of the body's *qi*, or information flows, might not still retain some qualities that escape the infoceuticals developed by Fraser and Massey. I expect that these contrasting, if parallel approaches, will continue to inform and enrich one another.

Reg Little is a former Australian diplomat and longtime Sinologist. He writes from Brisbane, Qld.



Say Yes to the Body.

THE REALITY OVERLOAD: THE MODERN WORLD'S ASSAULT ON THE IMAGINAL REALM

Allan Graubard

By end September 2008 the US economy is in free fall. Premiere investment banks collapse and mortgage giants undergo de facto, if ambiguous, nationalization. It is the most serious such crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with international consequence. Commentary, analyses and critiques proliferate, as they must. Obviously something is terribly wrong; obviously, it was the fault of the sub-prime mortgage fiasco, the derivatives market, CEO salaries and golden parachutes, veiled hedge fund maneuvers, deregulation, the gullibility of common folk, and so on.

Several weeks into this crisis I am still waiting for something else: recognition that the emperor's new clothes no longer matter. For it is not at all significant that we see the charade – that was clear long ago – but that it has hit us where we least can bear it. This massive theft, based on illusory transactions all too complex to track, also returns a more lasting impression: We have lost our capacity to envision anything else other than a system that, in its totalizing vengeance, sustains us, for all practical purposes, in *its* image.

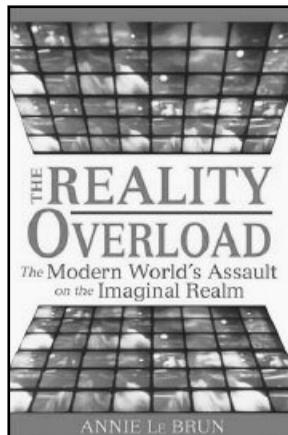
Quite clearly we have we accepted our lot as inviolable, and history a measure of that inviolability. Not only that, we celebrate it whenever we can; however clenched our jaws might be when doing so, at least today. Or more simply, we endure it.

Can the same can be said of intellectuals whose work against this goliath has failed us, whether in theory or practice? I think so. From the economic to the cultural to the individual, the realities of the domination we face seem ever more predictable. How is it that the invasion of life by digital technology has accomplished so much in such short a time, with such ease? And why is it we are not more free and less concerned with our gaining losses?

This is the subject of Annie Le Brun's *The Reality Overload: The Modern World's Assault Against the Imaginal Realm* — a curious title but one which points toward the target Le Brun spots.

Her chapters, of course, mark the path taken. I note several from the book's three parts: The Network Prison, Light Pollution, The Word as False Witness; Poetic Outrageousness, A New Order of Promiscuity, The Rationality of Inconsistency; Corporeal Illiteracy and Genetically Modified Learning, Concrete Dematerialization, Cultural and Biological Sterilization. I should not forgo her critique of identity and gender politics as one pole in an overarching mechanism of interpretation whose need for power in the academy and beyond is not so different from what has animated our newly scorned wealth traders who have brought us to this pitfall moment in our wayward lurching forward.

Annie Le Brun, a presence in European letters these last several decades, comes to notice as a member of the surrealist group around Andre Breton in the early 1960s. First poet then critic, her books evince a range of interests from collaborations with the artist Toyen (*Annuaire De Lune*) to a study of the Gothic novel (*Les chateaux de*



***The Reality Overload:
The Modern World's
Assault on the Imaginal
Realm***

Annie Le Brun
Translated by Jon E.
Graham
Inner Traditions
International, 220 pp.,
Softcover, \$16.95

la subversion), her devastating critique of neofeminism (*Lachez Tout*), and the introduction to the complete works of the Marquis de Sade, published by Jean-Jacques Pauvert in 1986. This book, *Sade: A Sudden Abyss* — the only previous book of hers in English, published by City Lights — is a major accomplishment that clears away from our encounter with Sade the obfuscations transmitted by her predecessors: de Beauvoir, Blanchot, Bataille, Foucault and Klossowski.

But it is as a poet that Annie Le Brun offers us perhaps what we lack most of all: a sensibility grown transparent through an understanding of negation as by an exaltation of the imagination; the imagination of the body. And it is this sensibility that she brings to *The Reality Overload*.

One by one her arrows strike home. What of language, she asks, “that strange



Annie Le Brun

treasure we make our own only by sharing, [which] we are [now] in the process of losing” and which “reality remodels...as it pleases.” Why, in response, have we allowed our ability to feel to erode so drastically that we call “poignant” what we once asked more of, especially in terms of virtual provocations all too cleanly packaged, from dating games to controlled urban spaces — which so many of our cities haven't fallen prey to. What characterizes knowledge when information smothers our capacity to synthesize? How can we accept as inevitable the technocratic absorption of the “other” whether by design or default? Where has the power of analogy gone, this ability that enable us to locate and clarify essential similarities between seemingly alien realms in flashes of inspiration from, or through an intuition enriched by, sustained engagement? What of postmodernism which, to this reviewer, revealed its Janus-face in the former-Yugoslavia as a principled means toward the rationalization of genocide during the 1990s? What do we fear from ruins; those we live in, those we corral and those we make, a by-product of war? How did it come about that eroticism and sexuality can part company so easily, even as we search for the moment, rare as it is, that unites them in two beings known or not known to each other? Or have we acceded here as well to a perfectible diminishing of perspective on what comes next?

I could go on but it is best that I end this very brief review of a significant voice within the poetic and critical realms, and leave you to *The Reality Overload* and whatever else might interest you from Annie Le Brun's expanding oeuvre, including her selected poems finally published by Gallimard in 2004. For she, along with some few others, have made it their life's work to search and find and search again “for traces of life that have not been tamed” with the verve to understand what that implies precisely.

Allan Graubard is a poet, playwright and critic. His most recent play, Woman Bomb/Sade, played in New York in 2008. In 2009 his book Fragments from Nomad Days & Other Poems & Tales will be published by Ekstasis Editions.

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NOT FOR SPECIALISTS: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

Mike Doyle

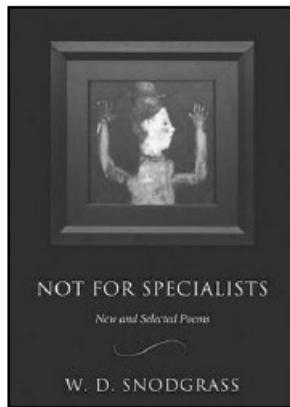
Author of *Not for Specialists: New and Selected Poems*, W D Snodgrass died recently aged eighty-three. He used occasionally to make jokes about his surname, on the assumption that it was 'unpoetical', which of course it was if one had romantic ideas about names. Names do matter, as I have found for myself. Many writers from the beginning of their careers choose pen-names, though this apparently did not occur to Snodgrass, nor to me.

I remember, some fifty years ago, the pleasure of reading his first collection, *Heart's Needle* (1959), which won a Pulitzer prize and perhaps contributes to Snodgrass sometimes being dubbed "the father of confessional poetry"; indeed in that mode he may have preceded his teacher Robert Lowell. A self-deprecatory poem in that first collection, "These Trees Stand...", has the ironic refrain: "Snodgrass is walking through the universe". Its final stanza confesses: "Your name's absurd, miraculous as sperm/ And as decisive". Snodgrass opens *Not for Specialists*, a book presumably published to mark his eightieth birthday, with this same poem. Culled from earlier titles, some very small, the new book ends with a substantial body of uncollected work.

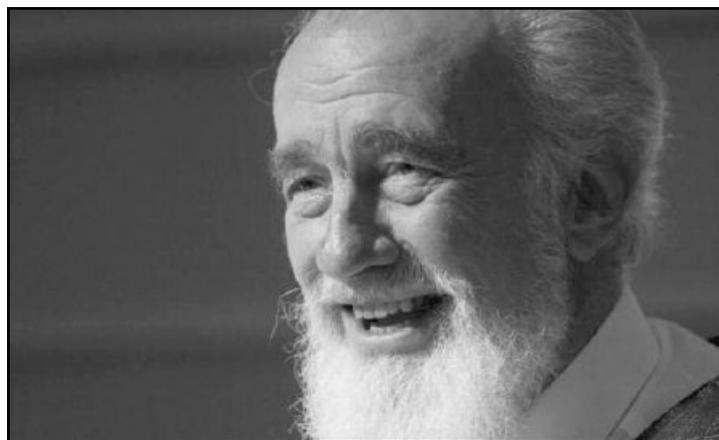
The title sequence, "Heart's Needle" is an elegy for the virtual loss, by divorce from her mother, of his small daughter, Cynthia, born apparently during the Korean war. In an epigraph taken from the Middle-Irish romance, *The Madness of Suibhne*, a messenger tells Suibhne that various members of his family are dead. Part of this grievous recital goes: "'Your daughter is dead,' said the boy. 'And an only daughter is the needle of the heart,' said Suibhne". This sequence gave Snodgrass instant literary fame, for the intensity of its grief and its elegance of formal presentation. It should be said that Snodgrass was a more measured and reticent confessionalist than his contemporaries, Plath, Sexton, Berryman and Lowell. Indeed, notwithstanding his confessionalism, Snodgrass throughout his career as poet was a successful formalist almost the calibre of, say, Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht and Amy Clampitt. Not heeding the Poundian cry to "break the pentameter" or the excellent free verse, open form, and triadic line of William Carlos Williams, Snodgrass chose to cleave to longstanding tradition, so the second and third poems in the *Heart's Needle* selection for *Not for Specialists* are in well-turned iambic pentameter quatrains with alternating abab full rhymes. They lack the elegance and intellectual penetration of Anthony Hecht, but are worthy if not sparkling. Indeed, 'not sparkling' seems of Snodgrass's temperament, though at times he can be funny ha-ha. Wondering how he came by the title of his last book, I found the answer in a poem I used to teach, "April Inventory", fourth poem in this selection, one of his anthology pieces; a poem in ten classical six-line stanzas, rhymed ababcc and in tetrameters. The last two stanzas go:

*While scholars speak authority
And wear their ulcers on their sleeves,
My eyes in spectacles shall see
These trees procure and spend their leaves.
There is a value underneath
The gold and silver in my teeth.*

*Though trees turn bare and girls turn wives,
We shall afford our costly seasons;
There is a gentleness survives
That will outspoke and has its reasons.
There is a loveliness exists,
Preserves us, not for specialists.*



*Not for Specialists:
New and Selected
Poems*
WD Snodgrass
BOA Editions, 2006



W.D. Snodgrass (Photo: Erik S. Lesser for the New York Times)

One might meanly deconstruct this and find weaknesses in the framing, but that is not to the purpose. What "not for specialists" intends here is the opposite of the label on Herman Hesse's Magic Theatre in *Steppenwolf*: "Not for Everyone". The "gentleness" and "loveliness" Snodgrass speaks of are potentially part of the common stock, of our inner lives.

Despite occasional slight weaknesses, "Heart's Needle" is a splendid sequence of poems and represented here, as it must be. Its presence alone justifies the book and may bring it to the attention of new, younger readers. Following this, some of the early poems are given their form as if being forced into a Procrustean bed, others, like "Lobsters in the Window" are neatly, satisfyingly achieved, others still are well enough but the sort of thing done long before and with greater feeling by Thomas Hardy. When Snodgrass loosens up and finds a freer form, as in "Van Gogh: 'Starry Night'", he explores interestingly, similarly in "Old Apple Trees", a little later, the longer line and blank verse help to add richness and texture to the poem's substance, but these comments are not meant disparage his formalism, which at its best has its own value and validity. Snodgrass can also be satisfyingly epigrammatic, as in "Viewing the Body".

What tends to lower somewhat the overall 'presence' of Snodgrass's work is a shortage of 'oomph' or, if you prefer, glamour. His villanelle, "Mutability", for example, is a tame outing when placed alongside another villanelle on the same topic, Dylan Thomas', "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night".

When *The Fuehrer Bunker* "cycle of poems" came out in its 1977 instalment, I had mixed feelings about it, and seem to remember its general reception as mixed (though I can't recall the details.) As a highschooler, then a drop out and factory worker (on radar), I spent the whole war in London, which left me with a cluster of vivid memories. By the time of *The Fuehrer Bunker* I'd read Shirer, Bullock, Trevor Roper and others, and did not see what such a "cycle" might do for that huge cycle of events, including what (in the 1960s) came to be named the "Holocaust". Subsequently I've read two complete prose books on the bunker, plus the memorable anonymous diary, *A Woman In Berlin*, written about the first two months of Soviet takeover of the city. This last work alone has far more depth and relevance than anything in *The Fuehrer Bunker*. Of the forty-two pages of "Bunker" here I like the parodistic "Chorus: Old Lady Barkeep". What follows is a series of takes on the situation by various prominent Nazis, such as Goebbels, Bormann, Hitler, Himmler, and Eva Braun, who at the very last moment before cataclysm became Hitler's wife. (Angela Lambert, in *The Lost Life of Eva Braun*, gives an evenhanded, essentially sympathetic portrait of a woman who was a deeply loyal victim.) The first Goebbels meditation seems tame, one would expect a rant, at least at some point. Perhaps Snodgrass studied these characters in depth, but my reading on Bormann, for example, leads me to imagine a quite different kind of person, and so on. Perhaps the idea of the cycle was to diminish them? Perhaps I'm missing the frisson of American humour? For me, the ultimate effect of this cycle is that the subject has not been taken seriously enough.

The section "from Kinder Capers", a congeries of smaller work - 1986-2004, probably would have benefited from inclusion of examples of the paintings by Snodgrass's collaborator, "the painter, DeLoss McGraw", the only example on show being the faux primitif cover portrait, "W D Under Arrest", which hints at an attractive body of painterly work. This section appeals to me as a grouping of occasional poems, including four seasonal sonnets, the especially appealing song qualities of "The Midnight Carnival" poems, some featuring a persona, "W D", a mode I once liked to tinker with. Next, the twenty-seven pages "from Each in His Season" sometimes find a different register. Almost always there is a sense of distance between poet and material (after *Heart's Needle*) which can take different forms, many suggesting an underlying cynicism. Snodgrass is at his liveliest when he is being raunchy and/or funny. As to the "distance", Brad Leithauser made an interesting point in a New York Times article: "...in Snodgrass's universe the reader can feel like an interloper: the poem is speaking directly to somebody else, and only indirectly to the wider world." Leithauser goes on to say that this leads the reader or audience into the role of "eaves-

dropper". It argues a sometimes problematical detachment.

The last section, the final fifty pages of text in *Not for Specialists*, leaves an impression of assured competence and, at times, considerable power. To return to lines quoted in my opening "Snodgrass is walking through the universe". That's it, walking! Apart from his light, "capering" pieces, Snodgrass is a "walking" poet and no bolt of lightning. In these last poems, though, he walks at times to some purpose. The common thing, for a long time now, is shortlined poems, largely without punctuation, to afford the poem rapidity and hold the reader's attention. In such a poem as "The Discreet Advantages of a Reichstag Fire" (something better than a "walking" title) Snodgrass is not afraid of long lines and lingering sentences, and when he uses them it is to some purpose. On a related theme, in somewhat lighter mode, "Talking Heads", on the subject of communication, works well. One poem's theme is "remembering history"; the other, that it is written by the victors. As well to remember both!

One other poem has poignancy mixed with a hard-edged calm. The three-part, 'For the Third Marriage of my First Ex-Wife', takes us right back to 'Heart's Needle' as it begins the third section with reference to, 'Our daughter, still recovering from/ her own divorce', but ends positively, and with a graceful compliment:

*This spin off of our unspent lives
Still joins us (though to others) saying: clamp fast
To what's worth holding. Also, save the best for last.*

Snodgrass then is a "walking" poet with a sense of humour, not least about himself, and a sense of history. This latter sense is embodied in his chosen formalism, sometimes flat, often adroit, occasionally clumsy, at times elegant. Not perhaps a perfect poet then, "for specialists", but one of a kind and a poet of some relevance and consequence.

Mike Doyle has lived in Victoria since 1968. His most recent book is Paper Trombones: notes on poetics, in which he shares his thoughts on poetry, drawn from informal journal notes of the past thirty years.

COYOTE MYSTERIES A SONNET

David Watmough

I've learned how subtly ears must find the nuanced gear.
If not it's likely falsehood they will take away.
I mean that sudden morning chorus that ostensibly sounds a minor key,
So many B Flat chords that to us convey the saddest tears.

I speak specifics and note the time the very birth of Spring.
No lovelorn ones here or hungry baying throats
I listen to a group held in some like yoke,
But be assured this eerie, passionate sound is not remote!

The humbling is my inability to give precision to what floats there.
Is this some canine warning of what will surely come to pass?
The coyote collective announcing future mouths to feed?
Or am I missing puppy voices in this puzzling mournful creed?

But though I long awareness of nature's scent and breath,
I accept these basic barriers which I cannot suppress.

David Watmough has been shaped and nourished by a Cornish background as well as years in London, Paris, New York and San Francisco. All his novels, short stories, plays and poems, however, have been written on Canada's west coast during the past 45 years. A new book of sonnets, Coming Down the Pike, was published by Ekstasis Editions in 2008.

THE DEMON'S SERMON ON MARTIAL ARTS

Lu Bianco

When I picked up *The Demons Sermon on the Martial Arts* I was intrigued. It's a book from the early 1700's written by a Samurai-philosopher under the pen name Issai Chozanshi. These old fighting books like *The Art of War* or *The Book of Five Rings* carry a lot of cache with men raised on Chuck Norris—guys who liked to punch through ends of 2 x 4's in the garage. I notice that in memoirs and motivational seminars, lawyers and businessmen still tote Sun Tzu like they make killer decisions, same thing.

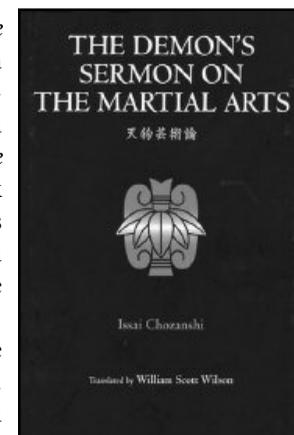
This book falls under the same mythic veil as the other martial arts books from a historical perspective. There is the Orient, traditional paintings, Samurai and the sword. What separates this from the others is that it focuses on the inward path instead of strategies or techniques: Clear your mind, cultivate *chi*, discover your path so you can move through the world with least resistance.

There is much wisdom to meditate on in these pages. There is poetry, contemporary ideas, and at times it makes you pause to digest a line and reflect on how it applies to your life: "The person who does not know himself does not know others." The language is careful and ideas are long crafted. A great rainy Sunday read with hot green tea, when you're reflective.

But some times the sermons are careless and brash: "The common man has not yet cut through the root of confusion of life and death. This always lies concealed and acts as a cover over the spirit." For Chozanshi, a large part of 'man's' inability to achieve self-fulfillment is founded in his fear of death. I don't think this is an appropriate observation anymore. Lines like these make me want to walk back to the 1700's and punch him right in the psyche.

These ideas make me conscious of how philosophies, not just religions, are antiquated vehicles that get handed on and are dangerous. In the words of Chozanshi "the crow that imitates the cormorant is going to drink (a lot of) water." I hope no-one tries to appropriate these principles into a worldview. We are different birds than the Samurai of 18th century Japan. Society has evolved, our life experiences are psychologically more toxic. I've seen Samurai looking for crack on the sidewalks off Main Street. Chozanshi's introverted approach to passing through life with ease is an unsalvageable relic. Still, there are a number of people who want to read this book so I'm going to pass it on.

A former world-ranked Olympic wrestler, Lu Bianco writes from Toronto.



*The Demon's Sermon
on the Martial Arts*
Issai Chozanshi
Trans. William Scott
Wilson. 222 p. \$19.95



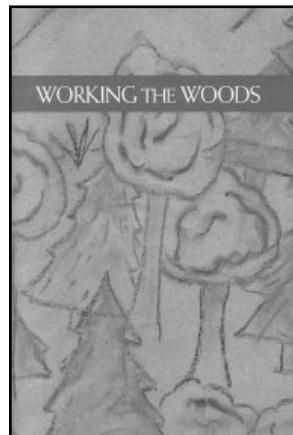
Simply extraordinary!

Rubicon Press, an Edmonton-based publisher producing limited editions of spectacular poetry from around the world, is now looking for submissions for its 2008/09 print season. Guidelines, chapbooks, t-shirts and more can be found online at www.rubiconpress.org.

"DEEP, BROAD AND RICH..."

WORKING VOICES FROM THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Martin Van Woudenberg



Working the Woods, Working the Sea: An Anthology of Northwest Writings
Finn Wilcox & Jerry Gorsline, Eds.
Empty Bowl, 2008.
373 P.

Had the historical timing worked, and she been a writer, the Austrian-born queen of France, Marie Antoinette, could not have been featured in *Working the Woods, Working the Sea*. Her Petit Hameau was a mock farm created in an idyllic setting, complete with farmhouse, dairy, and poultry yard. Here the pampered queen and her attendants dressed themselves in gauze dresses, tied themselves with satin ribbons, and played at milking the cows and tending docile animals. It was her attempt to get in touch with the natural world, but the peasants who begged and sweated a living out of the soil were not fooled; their life was far from idyllic. The editors of this collection could, no doubt, have found similarly-themed writings on the abstract spirituality of nature, man's long connection with it, and deep-rooted desire to rediscover it in a post-modern world. Instead, and thankfully, this collection is filled with the reality of life on the West Coast, from a wide variety of perspectives – all of whom are intimately familiar with sweat.

The anthology is broken down into two main sections, Treeplanting, and Working the Sea. It contains a broad range of poetry, prose, essays, musings and ramblings by well-knowns like Gary Snyder and Mike

O'Connor, as well as many other West Coast writers. It deals with important environmental issues facing this part of the world, including reforestation, salmon restoration, the defence of old-growth forests, and watershed protection. However, the perspectives are so immediate, honest, and raw that to read through this remarkable collection is to feel the grit of the coast between your toes, or the biting cold of the Pacific on your face. It is a reality not many continue to experience, or one that we quickly forget.

Idealizing something is easy, even within our own memories. As one who has sweated to chop down a tree in the cold of fall, or travelled such iconic West Coast destinations as the Bowron Lakes and the West Coast Trail, it's easy to sit by the fire and reminisce about being at peace with nature – the aches and sweat forgotten. It is harder to live it and work it. *Working the Woods, Working the Sea* is perhaps best encapsulated by Richard White's provoking essay that makes up the third short section of the book, "Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?"

Here people do, and are, both. Whether it is working the lines while treeplanting, with a loaded bag that cuts into the shoulder and an uneven surface that threatens to send the labourer down the mountain, or cutting down the great fragrant western red cedar with saw and wedge and hair-trigger nerves ready to run, it is authentic.



Chainsaws in the Cathedral



Logging by the sea

Nature gives, Nature takes, and woe to those who fail to respect her latent power. The collection contains as many failures as it does triumphs, though the persistence through the grind fills it most of all.

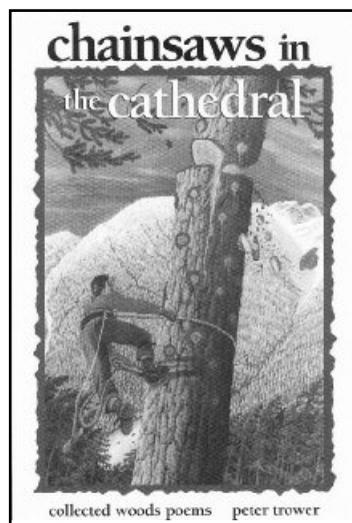
Here the timber examiner loses his partner in the snow, forced to leave him for fear of freezing to death himself. Here a Native family heads with drunken father and pregnant mother to the salmon streams, and returns home hungry. Here also the fishing boats share the water with the ammo ship that does not carry fish within its belly, but bombs for killing other working men and women. Hippies, labourers, and woodsmen rattle in the backs of pickup trucks, hunkering down inside their coats in the early dawn hours and drowsily downing coffee to ward off the cold and the late-night drinking.

Other events are more frantic, such as the re-imagined last thoughts of a logging trucker who loses his brakes on a mountain hill, or the wiper "riding the rope-slung scaffold, dangling in fuel-oil fumes...while he ignored 'Abandon Ship!' and stayed behind and scrubbed." Here too the bridge cutter's saw is ripped from his hands as he is tossed and "swallowed in a twisting chaos that strikes and batters him, breaking bones on the way down." It's an uneasy and precarious existence for the working men and women who both dismantle and rebuild the forest, and those who fight the seas while simultaneously blessing it for the bounty it gives.

In and among this action, noise, and sweat, are the still and quiet voices as well. But these are not detached and distant, but born from the same labour and energy as the rest. In the quiet, after the engines stop and the saws are silenced we find the reflections on a perfect day on the ocean, when "the decks were awash in silver and the scuppers gurgling red, when leaping dolphins led us to silky smooth seas." We find peace and meaning through an Estonian folksong and the serenity communicated by a Buddhist monk after a lifetime on the mountain.

And there are many more in this rewarding collection, mixing into a myriad of voices that seems at first discordant for all their variety, until you settle into their rhythm and hear the harmony that is quintessential West Coast. Not artificial or idyllic, but deep, broad and rich, like the earth and sea that inspired it.

Martin Van Woudenberg is a regular contributor to PRRB. He writes from aldergrove, B.C.



Peter Trower's Chainsaws in the Cathedral collects poems about his years spent working in B.C.'s forests

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOU HARRISON

Richard Kostelanetz

Lou Harrison lived with his life-partner William Colvig in the Aptos hills above Santa Cruz, in a sun-drenched compound that includes a ranch house where they sleep, a trailer where he composes, a woodshed, a stage that doubles as a crash pad, and a small vegetable garden. Born in 1917 in Portland, Oregon, he went to high school in the Bay Area before beginning a distinguished creative career that has so far encompassed not only composing but writing about music, in addition to poetry and painting. Thanks to his rich and various cultural experience, as well as an outspoken temper, he had a lot to say in September 1990. A broadly built, ebullient man with a hearty laugh and a full-bearded healthy resemblance to Orson Welles, Harrison talked mostly over his dining-nook table. He and I share the same birthday, the high Taurean May 14th, which may or may not show in the following conversation; we also share predispositions to both laughter, especially at ourselves, and digressions.

Richard Kostelanetz: What's your poetry about?

Lou Harrison: It divides itself into two: informal Whitmanesque line business or Dickinson or Blake in the early period. The second is when I discovered isosyllabic verse forms. The majority form on the planet through history has always been counting syllables per line. You know of the haiku as one small example. That has been a dominating form unrhymed. So I started doing that.

RK: How?

Lou Harrison: You can invent them, or you can do classic ones. Of the seventeen poems in [W.H.] Auden's last book, ten of them are isosyllabic. For instance, the first poem in his last book, "Thank you, God," is what is called St. Ephrem's verse of seven syllables per line. You can actually chose to create the number of syllables in a line, but you have to stick to the form. It can be done stanzawise or longwise. Alexander Pope did not write iambic pentameter; he wrote decasyllables. You can tell how to pronounce certain words by this means--whether you have an extra syllable or not. So I've done a lot of that, both invented and lifted forms from classic lines.

RK: Do you have favorite countings?

Lou Harrison: I like the Sapphic stanzas, though I can't yet do the actual metrics; but I can do the syllabic outlines of them. I wrote a lot when I was going around the world, because my instruments weren't there and painting is a little hard to do; but you can always write. And I'm just beginning to get that out. And also I've written a lot for composer friends about them. And those are available.

In [my book] *Soundings* a few years ago were a couple of them. In the Cage piece I took his name and put a syllable gap between them too and came out with a line length:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
J O H N C A G E

Because of his square root form, I multiplied that. I told him how I did it--9 x 9 equals 81. His response was, "I'm not yet 81." Leave it to John.

And then last year I noticed in the Advocate [a gay monthly] a little ad for the world's poetry. And a handsome bearded man asks you to send your poem if you have a 21-line one. I happened to have one, so I sent it in. And it got a golden poet award. Then a few months ago I got another letter from the same group that I was to go to Las Vegas, because that poem not only won that for 1989 but for the last four years it won a silver award.

RK: You portray yourself as both a formal poet and an occasional poet.

Lou Harrison: Yes, I have a number of unfinished ones that I want to go to. Right now I'm working on a poem on the work of Claude Lorraine [1600-82], the great painter. For a long time I've been devoted to Claude's work; I still am, the divine Claude. He's the one whose concept of landscaping and painting brought about the whole of

Capability Brown and of eighteenth century landscaping. In the poem I've been working with fourteen-syllable lines, which turns out to be the same length of line as Golding's original translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. It's a long line, very bucolic in quality. I found that either my poems are lyrical and rhapsodic and sexy, or they're bitter diatribes against society.

RK: What is your literary experience? Who have been your favorite writers?

Lou Harrison: When I grew up they were Blake and Whitman and Edward Carpenter.

RK: How'd you discover Carpenter, who to my recollection was no better known then than he is now?

Lou Harrison: The husband of Carol Beals, a dancer for whom I worked, introduced me to Carpenter's writing.

RK: Did you like these three because they were gay?

Lou Harrison: In part, but Blake wasn't. Of course, I loved Whitman's "Calamus." I finally set one section of it. Early on, when I was in the gay movement, I decided that all of us who are gay composers ought to take a section of "Calamus" and make a great big oratorio. That was in the 60s. San Francisco is much earlier than New York.

RK: Did you have any principal teachers who were not musicians?~

Lou Harrison: I studied painting with the Japanese Chiuro Obata when I was quite young, and also a bit of poetry with Robert Duncan, who was younger than I was, in the mid 40s in New York.

RK: Did Duncan teach you anything of use in your music?

Lou Harrison: Not really. As a matter of fact, I brought him down here and recorded the songs he used to sing in his readings. In some of his poems there are little songs. I recorded all those, they are available somewhere. I'm also going to put out some sort of memorial edition. When we were working with Kenneth Rexroth, we made tapes. We played Chinese instruments, and he read his Chinese translations. Carol Tinker [his widow] has agreed that if I can find them we should process it, because it's an important item, his whole concept.

RK: I see Rexroth as a literary analogue to yourself.

Lou Harrison: In what sense?

RK: His Californian culture, his interest in Oriental art for inspiration, his universal literacy, and the eclecticism reflected in his creative work.

Lou Harrison: Maybe so, but I have actually the lyrical impulses of Robert Duncan more than Kenneth.

RK: But remember that Kenneth's very best poems are long lyrics.

Lou Harrison: I just met a man who played the lead in Kenneth's *Beyond the Mountains* with the Living Theatre when I was there in New York. I was so mad for Judith at that point. I didn't realize it until her book [The Diaries of Judith Malina, 1947-1957, 1984] came out, and it was there.

RK: You went for women as well?

Lou Harrison: Oh, yes. Both of Bill and myself have had our experiences--miscarriages and abortions.

RK: You once told me that your fifties were your best years.

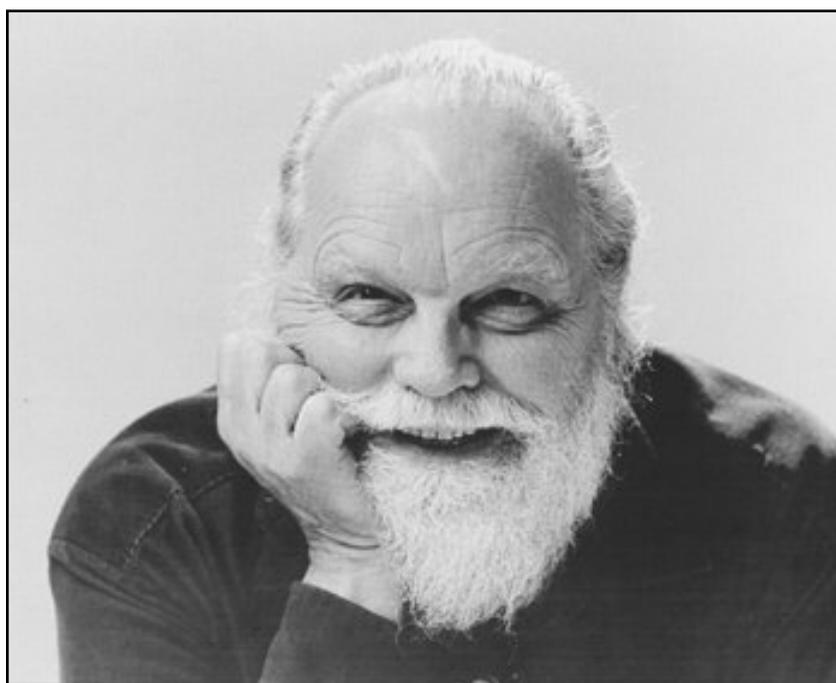
Lou Harrison: When you are forty you think you are going to have another half of your life, and so things go on. But when you are fifty, you are almost sure you're not going to have another half, so you say "to hell with it. I'm going to do it my way." You are beginning to have fun. And you are still full of your powers; you're not getting old all of a sudden. So between 50 and 65 you're at your very best.

RK: Does the epithet "postmodern" mean anything to you?

Lou Harrison: It means rather silly surfaces on buildings that ought to have some depth.

RK: When did you become interested in Esperanto?

Lou Harrison: I was sitting at the Coliseum in Rome on day when I realized that my



Lou Harrison



Lou Harrison

Latin wasn't doing very well with Italian. I was there at a conference in 1954, where Stravinsky handed me a prize I had won. And then I remembered that in my early adolescence I had a girl friend whose father was a professor at Stanford. She had given me a book about Esperanto. So I recollected that, and when I got back I went to a sort of left-wing bookstore in San Francisco, where I also found oodles of Esperanto. I began to learn it and worked with a friend who is a linguist and knew everything about Esperanto. I started to use it; and then when I went to Japan, that was all I used, except in the bank. I've used it around the world. A lot of governments broadcast in it, including our own.

RK: Was it hard to learn?

Lou Harrison: One coast hears Japanese vowels and on the other coast you would call it Italian vowels. The only phoneme that's difficult is the "ch" as in loch, and that's passing out into "k" in the words that use it. And the accent is always penultimate. Grammar can be memorized in a few hours. Vocabulary is anywhere between minimalist and a lot. And it has a literature. There are poets who write in nothing but Esperanto. That's what I like about it. You get the feeling of being part of some big symphonic enterprise, because it's a designed thing made by a man, like you were playing in a piece. And I also like that [L.L.] Zamenoff did not release it publicly until someone wrote fluent verse in it.

RK: You have written in Esperanto yourself?

Lou Harrison: Yes, sure. I've even talked in it and designed [typeface] fonts for it, because it looks funny in a Bodoni, for example, because all the plurals end in "J." It is full of cases too, one letter one sound and also one word one meaning. So naturally there is an underground vocabulary of dirty words too, which get properly published. And there is an academy, where any Esperantist can ask for an opinion linguistically. It's a world academy.

RK: Where is it located?

Lou Harrison: All over. It's a corresponding academy. And publishers are everywhere. One of the finest is in the Canary Islands.

RK: Do you have an Esperanto library in the house?

Lou Harrison: It's been randomized [in the wake of the recent earthquake], but I can get you a few things.

RK: Will it save the world?

Lou Harrison: Nothing can save the world, Richard; we've gone beyond that. I concluded a long time ago that people really don't want to solve anything or even improve it; they just want to mess around. And that's why English is going around the World, because it is the easiest language to mess around in. It has no academy, there is nothing correct, it has a new slang with every generation. It has how many pidgins? Varieties? That's why it's winning. It is the easiest language to mess around in and still be understood. And this is true gradually. People don't want to solve anything; they just want to mess around.

Richard Kostelanetz is a prolific American artist, author and critic. A passionate defender of the avant-garde, he has also been a contributing editor for Liberty magazine since 1987.

LETTERS (continued from page 4)

man, dark cloddish, thirty-ish, soon drunk, incoherent and offensive, William [Empson]. Frank Parker red-faced, drinking gallons, but somehow quite uncorrupted, always soaring off from the conversation with a chortle. And what else? A very sweet son of 18, another, Hetta's, not William's, Harriet's age. Chinese dinners, Mongol dinners. The house had a weird, sordid nobility that made other Englishmen seem like a veneer.

The ambiguities here are classist, generational, cultural, and above all genetic. Balzac couldn't have painted an odder or better detailed family of misfits.

Conversely, Bishop's letters have little sociological content, or even social observation. They are as vivid and colorful as her elaborately mannered but transparent lyrics. She escorts us over the Amazon's steaming tributaries and waterfalls, its mountains glistening with "little floating webs of mist, gold spider-webs, iridescent butterflies . . . big pale blue-silver floppy ones." She has a toucan named Uncle Sam, wields her lover Lota's revolver, and acts as auntie to her neighbors' kids and cats and stone collections. She finds Lota walking in her nightgown out onto their veranda to see the stars "because they had never looked so close before—close and warm—apparently touching our hair." For all her painterly detachment, she honestly portrayed suffering, early on through her lost boy cousin ('First Death In Nova Scotia') and later in outraged letters about the Brazilian junta's murder of street children in Rio's hovel-hilled favelas. And she wanted to be able to better portray privation, concerned about the paucity of the human in her work and admiring Hardy's poems for their being 'about the real relations between men and women.'

Since both saw poetry as the deepest, most serene of moral enterprises, neither pulled punches in reassessing old friends and castigating each other for violations of trust. When Lowell extracted portions of letters from his estranged wife [Elizabeth Hardwick] and spun them into the flawless poems of *The Dolphin*, Bishop was outraged. Dignity and confidentiality, central as they were to the human personality, were in that sense more important than poetry, indeed than any art. She quoted to Lowell Hopkins's notion of the necessity of the literary 'gentleman': 'It isn't being 'gentle' to use personal, tragic, anguished letters in that way—it's cruel.' When Lowell countered that '[N]othing is perversely torn and twisted, nothing's made dishonestly worse or better than it was [by what is written of it],' she stood her ground, saying '[W]e all have irreparable and awful actions on our consciences.' The trick was to keep from repeating them, especially in page after page sent out into the world.

After this, and with less than a decade for each to live, they flamed each others' kindling with Aoleus gusts blown over thousands of miles, all at the mercy of Brazil's mildewed, dilapidated airmail system. They traveled across dangerous continents, in dangerous times, to bask in the warmth of one another's insight. They finished one another's thoughts and first draft stanzas. For each of them, knowledge, wisdom and even hope were not given qualities of mind but rather fragile constructs, capable of disintegration at any time; for this reason alone they couldn't let the letters stop. Lowell loved her posting strings of words on bulletin boards for years until a line of poetry congealed—her essential method of composition. He saw each word as exalted, lucky to be so handled, thrown into the sky like confetti or graduation mortar boards, signifying revision but also completion:

*Have you seen an inchworm crawl on a leaf,
Cling to the very end, revolve in air,
feeling for something to reach to something? Do
you still hang your words in air, ten years
unfinished, glued to your notice board, with gaps
or empties for the unimaginable phrase—
unerring Muse who makes the casual perfect?*

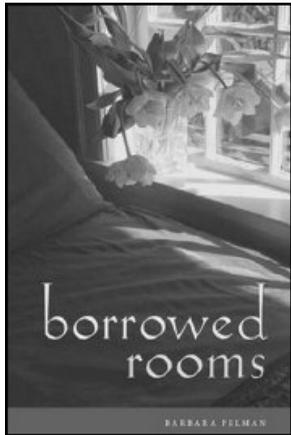
Richard Wirick is the author of the novel One Hundred Siberian Postcards (Telegram Books). He has been published in Paris Review and The Nation. He practices law in Los Angeles.



Elizabeth Bishop

“WALK ON, A FUGUE” BY BARBARA PELMAN

Yvonne Blomer



borrowed rooms
Barbara Pelman
Ronsdale Press
90 pages, 2008
\$15.95

Barbara Pelman is a retired high school English teacher and writer. *Borrowed rooms* is her second book of poetry after *One Stone* published by Ekstasis Editions in 2005. As an English teacher, Pelman has excelled in mastering form poems, especially sonnets and pantoums, in order to teach those forms and inspire her students to write them.

“Walk On” is a fugue, which, in poetry, uses sliding refrains that give the sense of multiple voices. By sliding refrain I mean slight alterations are made to the refrain either through where it falls in a line, or through purposeful changes. Themes are introduced in lines or line-segments that are later repeated and meaning is heightened through the use of repetition. Other fugues worth looking up include “Death Fugue” by Paul Celan and Gwendolyn MacEwan’s “The Children are Laughing”.

The refrains work beautifully in Pelman’s poem to set up the relationship at the beginning and show the shift from dependent child to dependent mother. The repetition of line fragments such as “The first time...”, “embroider in the days” and the word “perilous” height-

ens the meaning of these line fragments.

Through the notions of “embroidered” and “perilous” we go from an infant’s first steps, to a mother’s love and worry for that child, now fully grown and independent. A shift occurs when the link to mother – through breast and sleep are gone - from there, the daughter walks and walks further from her mother:

*the embroidered days of breast
and sleep gone now: she balanced
need in her perilous glance, here
and here, no longer still in a crib
but standing, her own feet
marking the path embroidered
with perilous ledges, a highway*

The daughter walks until the path is a highway and the mother enters her winter years. The last four lines shift from mother-daughter to the mother with her own thoughts taxiing around in her mind, and her love “cribbed and almost silent”. Those last four lines shift the poem entirely from a simple experience to a universal understanding of motherhood and aging.

The ability of the words “taxi”, “embroidered” and “cribbed” to take on such literal and metaphorical power is stunning; the ability of these words to stay in the descriptive moment and rise to a position of symbolic power – no longer a mother’s hand, but a car through winter; no longer an embroidered shirt but the mother embroidering, with her imagination, the grown woman’s days; and finally no longer a child’s crib, but a mother’s cage of love and worry and beyond love, the peril of it, in a mother-daughter world.

Beyond this particular poem, I want to explore the ability of language, of words in a poem, to take on symbolic power and meaning through repetition. Stephen Dobyns in *The Best Words, Best Order* writes, “The more sophisticated we get about language, the less we are moved by its simple expression.” In this statement, he is talking about metaphor and the ideas behind metaphor when language was young. In a young language a simple statement like “Oh moon, I am lonely” carried weight, ver-



Barbara Pelman

“Walk On, a fugue”

by Barbara Pelman, from *borrowed rooms*, Ronsdale Press, 2008

The first time she stood, her own feet
holding her; balance of knee and thigh,
eyes forward, her diaper sliding
perilously down, barefoot,
wearing a shirt I had embroidered in the days
she would lie still in a crib –
the first time she knew she didn’t need me
to taxi her across the room,
eyes forward to where she wanted to go –
the embroidered days of breast
and sleep gone now: she balanced
need in her perilous glance, here
and here, no longer still in a crib
but standing, her own feet
marking the path embroidered
with perilous ledges, a highway
across winter, always forward
in her balance of need and knowing,
and I taxi her around
in my mind, embroider her days
with my perilous love:
cribbed and almost silent.

sus now, in a late language period, that statement no longer quite does it for us. It has become clichéd; we need metaphor to produce the feeling of loneliness with more suggestive finesse than this line is capable. However, I’d like to argue, that in addition to metaphor, poets have repetition and refrain, especially used in the way the fugue allows, the way Pelman does in this poem, to give simple words, without metaphor, though metaphor can also be inherent in the image, symbolic power.

Yvonne Blomer writes, teaches and lives in Victoria, B.C. Her first book, *a broken mirror, fallen leaf* was short listed for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. Yvonne’s poems have won awards and been finalists in the CBC Literary Awards and the Malahat Review Long Poem Prize.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH COLIN BROWNE

Peter Grant

The *Shovel* (Talonbooks, 2007, 189 pp.) is Vancouver writer Colin Browne's second collection of poems in the mold of *Ground Water* (Talonbooks, 2002, 207 pp.) The entire text of the first page:

history

something moving about in the dry arbutus leaves at dawn
something trying to get through the fence

I leafed through the book, trying to make sense of it, until a familiar name startled me into focus. The poem "Over Oleans" begins thus:

As it was related to me by my great aunt Marjorie Acland on Salt Spring Island...

It was a name that transported me to a magic kingdom of my childhood—the splendid Acland's Guest House on Booth Bay, and the English proprietors, Marge and Bevil Acland. Avidly I read the poem, the story of Dick Ritchie, the grandfather of a family friend of Browne's, who was dispatched on an ill-fated mission to Iraq during World War I. The storyteller was not the sweet, kindly Marge Acland dear to memory. The jaw-dropping climax, 145 stanzas later, I will let the reader discover.

Questions multiplied. Where does such a poem, at once so familiar and so outrageous, originate? I resolved to interview the writer. We talked for nearly two hours about poetry and poetics. The following account has been edited from a much longer transcript.

Peter Grant: Where are you from?

Colin Browne: I was born in Victoria, but I've lived all over Canada. My father was in the Navy.

PG: Where are your people from?

Colin Browne: Various mongrel parts of the British Isles.

PG: What is the geography of your being?

Colin Browne: If you look at *Ground Water* and *The Shovel*, the historical family geography is the inside coast of Vancouver Island, as I came to know it, or as I've imagined it. The poem "The Shovel" takes place on the east coast of Vancouver Island, and there's a long sequence in *The Shovel* called "Naughts and Crosses." Each of those little pieces "takes place" on that part of the island, as do sequences in several of the other poems.

The Okanagan is also important. I discovered an affinity—perhaps an ancestral affinity—for the Okanagan through my great-grandfather's ranch near Kaleden. That's what my film *White Lake* is about, in part, the discovery of that very open White Lake grassland landscape that I still write to. That landscape hooks into the Middle East for me.

PG: How important is place?

Colin Browne: Absolutely crucial. Because all that I write takes place in landscapes.

Poetry has become a way to articulate what I actually perceive—to find a way to enter the simultaneity of the world. You'll see in the poems, especially in *The Shovel*, that I'm trying to have many events happening simultaneously. I carry different landscapes around in me, as maybe you do, and those landscapes are nudging me all the time. I don't mind bringing some place near the Dead Sea into something about White Lake. To me they're both in place in the same place—simply because they're in me in that way. Is place actually out there? Or is place what you take in and then make?

I've also been exploring a way that I can sew, into the narratives, many times and many places simultaneously. What that means is being able to identify the temporal and geographical intersections I'm the sum of; intersections, by the way, that continue to accumulate, voluntarily and involuntarily, and which are inseparable from language. "Identifying" is a word that James Reaney used in the late 60s. He called poets "identifiers."

PG: The inside coast of Vancouver Island does not include your home, Vancouver.

Colin Browne: No. I've never written much about Vancouver. I've done a lot of work around the history of Vancouver, but it has not, until recently, been the place of my imagination. A new poem, "Kingfisher Annex," is set in Vancouver and the North Shore.



Colin Browne

PG: You have quite a diverse CV—poet, editor, filmmaker, teacher, film archivist. You compiled a catalogue of film in British Columbia—

Colin Browne: Yes, up to 1941. I still add to that catalogue. People send me details, and I make annotations or notes....

PG: And you enact?

Colin Browne: I sometimes perform...

PG: A performer of masques and things...?

Colin Browne: I haven't done any for a while. Martin Gotfrit and I did a performance piece for music and text, and I hope to do more.

I am writing for composers now...

* * *

PG: When did you become conscious of poetry?

Colin Browne: I think pretty early. I vividly remember nursery rhymes. The first thing I self-published—do you remember a book called *1066 and All That*? Why we had a copy of it will give you a sense of my background, the Britishness...I wrote a parody of it and bound that into a book.

PG: How old were you?

Colin Browne: Probably 12.

PG: Do you remember any of it?

Colin Browne: I wish I did. I wish I had a copy of it, too. We moved too often for my mother to keep things. We often moved three times a year. We'd arrive in a place, there'd be the anguish of moving in and going to school for a while, and whoosh—we'd be gone again. My sister and I would have to find a way to steady ourselves in this gale.

No one in my immediate family read much, or wrote. There were to my knowledge no stories in the family. You were on your own. I don't recall meeting anybody who knew anything about poetry.

I was fortunate, however, when we moved to Victoria, to have had a friend named Terry Burnett. Terry and I, and his brother Ian, became close friends. I moved there in Grade 11. They were in Grade 12. Terry was a visual artist, very skilled, with a wonderful eye. I'd grown up in a haze of print. The two of us would go for long walks together. We walked around with boaters on and pipes in our mouths, and for reasons which had to do with living in Victoria, we took on the personae of old men. Terry would say to me, "Look, look there." I'd look around and see what somebody might call nothing. He'd say, "Look at that shadow," or "Look at the different colours in that piece of wood."

This looking energized me; it was thrilling. It was a great gift Terry gave me. I learned to look and began looking and engaging myself, and that was one of the places where the poetry came from. Starting to look, starting to see, is a way of engaging

words in a different way. The world became sensual, the eye came to life.

PG: Who were your poetic influences?

Colin Browne: The poet who attracted me when I was a kid was Dylan Thomas, because of the great jangle of music. I would read “Fern Hill” over and over, and I took those sonorities in.

In high school I found a recording of Kenneth Patchen reading to jazz. Al Neil was playing on that record —

PG: The legendary Al Neil, Vancouver’s own —

Colin Browne: When I was at Oak Bay High School I took that record out every week. I’d play it all night long. I bought a copy of *Journals of Albion Moonlight*.

Robinson Jeffers touched me early on with his poem “Roan Stallion.” He’d lived in Big Sur, built his own stone house. Critics and readers had turned against him, which attracted me to his work. Why would such a thing happen? What had he written that was so dangerous? I was attracted to the long poems, the epic reach, and fascinated by his retelling of Greek tragedies. I hadn’t known anyone could do that, to set the plays of Aeschylus or Biblical stories on wild, fierce Big Sur coast and in that wild scrubby inland, back around the turn of the 20th century. I responded to Jeffers very strongly. “Poetry,” he said, “is not a civilizer, rather the reverse.” That got to me as a high school student.

* * *

Colin Browne: I was in Victoria for two years, then went to College Militaire Royal de St. Jean, and then to Royal Military College. I didn’t have enough money to go to university. I wanted to learn French, and I wanted to leave home and to live in a different place. I thought I’d meet beatniks in Montreal.

When I got back from military college I had no job, nor did I ever want one again. I’d had it with being places on time. I lived in a little cottage at Mount Newton on the Saanich Peninsula and also started working at the Saturna Island Free School. I became a Gulf Island person for a while. I scratched along to make a living. I did the census in 1971 for Saturna and Pender Islands.

I started a little press called Granny Soot Publications. It was named after a witch in the novel *Mulata* by Miguel Angel Asturias. I published a few little books, and met poets living at that time in Victoria—Dorothy Livesay, P.K Page, Maxine Gadd were there, and, earlier on, Gary Geddes, Robert Sward, Sandy Hutchison—a wonderful poet, who returned to Scotland.

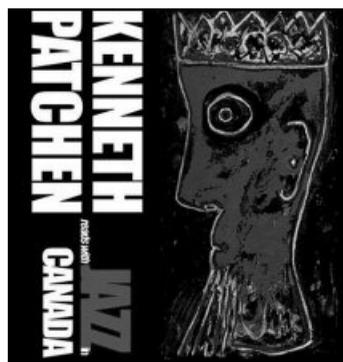
PG: In the anthology *Vancouver Island Poems* (Soft Press, 1973) you’re described as living “in a quandary.” What does that mean?

Colin Browne: As I think about it now, I really had no home. I’d moved a lot, and I was used to moving. To give you a sense of the state of mind I was in, I was reading Malcolm Lowry at the time and wishing more than anything that he was my father. I completely ignored his chaotic life, his obsessiveness, his alcoholism; I just thought he had a wonderful mind. I even wrote Margerie Lowry to tell her that I wished Lowry had been my father, and she wrote back. What was I thinking? I was confused. My mother said, “You were seven years in military college and in the Navy, so I knew it would take seven years to get it out of your system.”

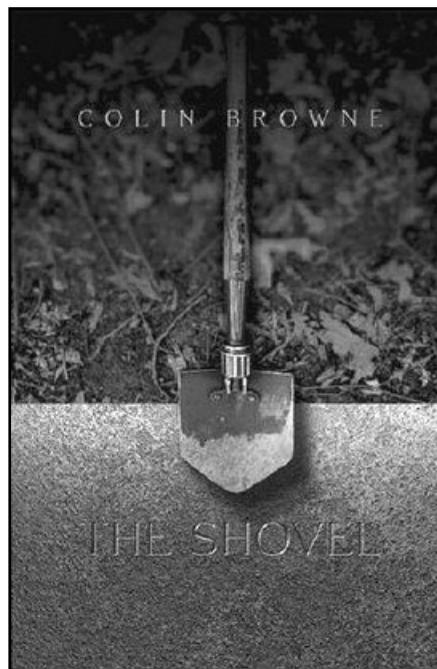
I started working for the Provincial Museum. I had pals who were working there, painting walls and that kind of thing. That’s where I met Karl Spreitz. He was a great mentor—another huge person in my life. He was also a mentor to Eric Metcalfe and Michael Morris and Glenn Lewis. Karl has the Austrian sense of humour, which is to turn everything upside down. That’s the gift he gave to us all.

* * *

Colin Browne: When we moved to Victoria in 1960, my mother took me over to meet Marge Acland, my great aunt, who lived on Salt Spring Island. I’d been taken to



Patchen's Folkways album recorded in Vancouver



Acland’s when I was three and four, and Marge told me how she and I had walked up the road to the mailbox at that time. She used to call me Buttercup.

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s I visited Marge and her husband Bevil as often as I could. She intrigued me. She intrigued everybody. Do you remember how open and curious she was? You could say anything to her. I formed a very strong bond with her. I’d go over and cut the alders out of the ditch and split wood. I became the handyman. That gave me a chance to hang out with her.

She’d tell me stories; for the first time in my life I was exposed to the stories of my family. Those stories are the source of what became the writing out of family mythology and landscape.

I wrote a long poem called “The Marjoriad”—terrible name. It’s based on the story Marge told me about Cowichan Bay the night before Canada declared war on Germany in 1939. It was broadcast on the radio on CBC years ago but has never been published. The incidents have also been worked into a screenplay. I have to do a rewrite.

While I was in St. Jean, my parents often attended the year-end parades and ceremonies, and on one occasion they brought an English boy with them named Colin Ritchie. If I have a brother, it’s Colin. We’re very close. He lives in Alert Bay and owns lots of old buildings.

In 1974, or 1975, Colin came back from England with a photo album, and as I glanced through it I saw photographs of my grandfather and grandmother on a ranch named *Strathyre* near Kamloops. As far as I knew, my grandparents had always lived in Scotland.

I said, “Ritchie, what is this?” He said, “This was the ranch.”

I asked Marge about it, and she said, “We really didn’t visit at that time, but this is what I know....” Then she told me the story of Dick Ritchie getting engaged to Enid Stuckie on that ranch, and his posting to Iraq. It’s the final poem in *The Shovel*.

My grandmother Nora, who was British, and my grandfather Colin—Scottish—met in British Columbia, and they got married here. Nora had a friend in England named Enid who she’d gone to school with. Nora wrote her a letter and said, “Why don’t you come out to Canada?” Enid had an ulterior motive. She fancied a young guy who she’d met on family ski trips in Austria, Dick Ritchie, who at that time was working as a cowboy in Burns Lake. With the declaration of war, Dick took the train down to Kamloops. He came out to the ranch and asked Enid to marry him on Hallowe’en weekend, 1914, and left the next morning for England to sign up. Enid followed later. They got married, moved in together, enjoyed six weeks of married life, and off he went.

My first film was called *Strathyre*. *Strathyre* is about Colin Ritchie and I going to look for that ranch.

* * *

Colin Browne: I had gone as far as I could on my own. I was beginning to feel antsy and, much as I love Karl, I was craving more intensity in my artistic life.

I decided to study with Robin Blaser and George Bowering and Lionel Kearns at SFU, urged on by Peter Quartermain at UBC.

PG: How did you come to Blaser and Bowering?

Colin Browne: I was reading *The Capilano Review*, reading their books. I’d also been coming over to Vancouver with *Strathyre*. The National Film Board was assisting me, and while I was waiting for the bus out to the ferry I’d prowl around in Bill Hoffer’s and Don Stewart’s bookstores.

PG: So you moved to Vancouver and went to Simon Fraser?

Colin Browne: Did my MA there. Studied with Robin and George—it was a wonderful two years. I was directing films for the Film Board while I was doing my MA.

After that, Peter Buitenhuis, head of the English department at SFU, offered me a chance to teach in Cranbrook for a year and a half. From there I met Fred Wah. When Fred and Pauline Butling went to live in Japan for a year, I became the director of the writing program at David Thompson University Centre (DTUC) in Nelson. I lived in Fred and Pauline’s house.

DTUC was housed in the old Notre Dame University. Selkirk College (in Castlegar) and UVic had agreed to provide post-secondary education in the West Kootenay. You could get a four-year degree there by doing two years through Selkirk and two years through UVic. Fred had cooked up a Writing program. UVic would fly writers in to teach. Sean Virgo used to come in every fortnight, and John Newlove was there.

It was a heady experience. DTUC was probably the closest thing in Canada to Black Mountain College. For writers it was immersive. Our students were publishing books and magazines. We had our own journal, *Writing*. There would be 60 people at the lunchtime poetry readings every Wednesday.

PG: Was that the Kootenay School of Writing?

Colin Browne: No. The Kootenay School of Writing was created when the provincial government shut down DTUC in 1984. A group of us came down to Vancouver and set up shop here, defiantly.

PG: Describe the scene in Vancouver after you relocated.

Colin Browne: We had lots of allies—everybody but the provincial government. The Canada Council, because it had been so pleased with our program in Nelson, said, “Tell us what you need. We’ll help you get back on your feet.” We said, “We’re going to create an alternative university. We’ll continue to publish *Writing*, we’ll establish a national and international reading series, we’ll provide post-secondary courses in poetry and poetics, we’ll continue the work we began in Nelson.” There were several younger writers who’d graduated from DTUC who were really key in setting up the school: Jeff Derksen, Athena George, Calvin Wharton and Gary Whitehead come to mind. For these and for other young writers who soon attached themselves to the school, the intensity of the intellectual engagement that followed may perhaps be compared, in terms of engagement anyway, to the early years of the Tish movement in the 1960’s. This expanded to include a profound engagement with the visual arts community, and a powerful interest in the confluence of conceptual art and poetry.

We had an office on Broadway at Oak. Artspeak Gallery started up in the office next door, founded by Cate Rimmer and Keith Higgins. Tom Wayman and I were the older guys.

PG: You found the office space and put it all together.

Colin Browne: It was a collective thing; everybody chipped in to pay for it. We offered courses and we taught them ourselves or hired writers we admired.

PG: You were then the editor of *Writing* magazine.

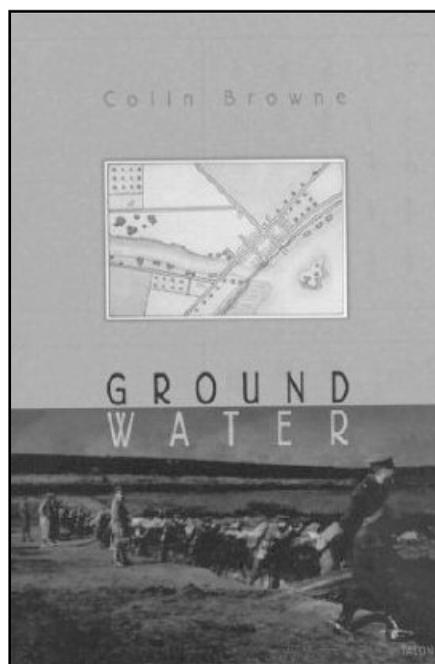
Colin Browne: Any literary editor wants to promote a certain kind of writing. It’s a political act, having a magazine. We were actively soliciting and publishing new writing from Canada, the United States and Great Britain which was associated, to a greater or lesser degree, correctly or incorrectly, with what was called “Language writing.” The idea for the design of the issues of *Writing* I edited was suggested by Steve Osborne. I’m still very pleased with those issues.

Susanna was born in 1987. The money left over from DTUC was disappearing. I was still working at the Film Board, and then I began teaching at SFU.

PG: We’re into the 90s.

Colin Browne: I made a film called *Father and Son*.

PG: While you were teaching film and making film you were also writing, and that



eventuated in *Ground Water*, which was published in 2002.

Colin Browne: That represented ten years of writing, abandoning much more than I included. The poem “Ground Water” was originally written as a collaboration between composer/musician Martin Gotfrit and myself. “Altar” was the text for a film I planned to make using a photograph of the ship’s company of the *H.M.C.S. Mayflower* on the dock in Halifax in 1944. Some of the language is considered hermetic; I know no language that is not. I felt when I wrote *Ground Water* that the text was making visible certain invisible contracts.

* * *

PG: *The Shovel* is a very diverse work.

Colin Browne: To me it is a coherent book, but you’re right, it contains different kinds of writing. The texts all respond to a single, focused inquiry.

PG: The piece “Roland Barthes in the Kootenays” was a kind of tribute to Fred Wah, suggesting the he’s especially meaningful to you.

Colin Browne: Very meaningful to me as a writer and as a friend.

That piece was an impromptu. It was presented as part of a panel called “Faking It.” When Fred Wah and Pauline Butling retired from teaching in Calgary, there was a big conference in their honour.

Everyone had been there for a couple of days by the time I arrived. I’d come in late, and in the morning was due to speak on the panel. I’d been reading a long interview with Roland Barthes and had been making notes.

PG: Is what appears in the book the transcription of an improvised text?

Colin Browne: Yes. I didn’t let on though, and—

PG: —“Fred Wah—He’s an Indian?”—

Colin Browne: Some listeners were convinced that the account was true, and then were upset when they found out otherwise. One person was pretty angry. He said, “You can’t do that.” I said, “There’s a meta-truth to it.”

PG: *The Shovel* is full of little bits and pieces and fragments, and some of them play with words and verge on nonsense.

Colin Browne: Maybe.

PG: Perhaps that’s your musical sensibility at work?

Colin Browne: You mean, “How come?”

PG: I don’t question it at all. I accept it and like it. Blaser talks about the reversal of language into experience. This is an experience. You’re finding things on every page. Sometimes it gets very lyrical and straightforward.

Colin Browne: There are different modes coming through in the book, aren’t there?

PG: Quite a few. Am I right in thinking there’s an element of randomization and fragmentation?—You kind of throw the whole deck of cards up in the air just to see how it will arrange when it comes down?

Colin Browne: There is fragmentation, but not randomization. One must be vigilant when it comes to preemptive patterns of language trying to assert themselves.

PG: A phrase that comes to mind, I don’t know from where, is *an uncoupling from meaning*—

(continued on page 28)

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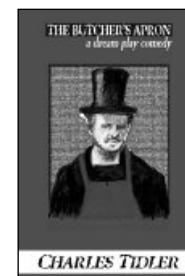
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BOSS CUPID

Richard Wirick

1.

The poet Thom Gunn was one of those British expats who moved to the states with extraordinarily mixed results. He did so in a time when poetry's scope was being restricted, when it was suffering a loss of its mid-Century academic and formal spaciousness and becoming something of pinched forms, if not ambitions, something of diminished reach. He rode this constricting arc with some irony, because once he was fully formed there was no stronger lover of formality, no greater practitioner of formalism. But he tightened, he narrowed down. Some would say he lightened in his gravity. But in this they would be wrong. His parsing and trimming yielded miraculous refractions, richly varied directions. As Auden said at Mt. Auburn Cemetery, honoring in some ways Gunn's opposite, Henry James, he was a "master of nuance and scruple."

Gunn arrived on the scene with *Fighting Terms* (1954) and *A Sense of Movement* (1957), the first published while he was still a student at Cambridge. These verses were formal in their loftiness, their removal from the world, their utilization of forms half a millennium old. When writing the latter collection, Gunn had already moved to California and was studying under Yvor Winters at Stanford. Winters worshipped the Elizabethans, particularly their work in lyrics. As Gunn describes, "I had long liked the Elizabethans; I knew Nashe's few poems well, Raleigh's, and even some of Greville's; Donne had been, after Shakespeare, my chief teacher. So I already shared some of Winters' tastes, and though I liked the ornate and the metaphysical I needed no persuading to also like the plain style." ("On a Drying Hill: Yvor Winters, from *Shelf Life*). What all the Gunn-Winters mentors possessed was *intelligence*, the notion that poetry was not just musical speech but required intellectual penetration, a moralist's critique of human behavior. The captive falcon thus reminds the falconer of the latter's perhaps unrealized servitude:

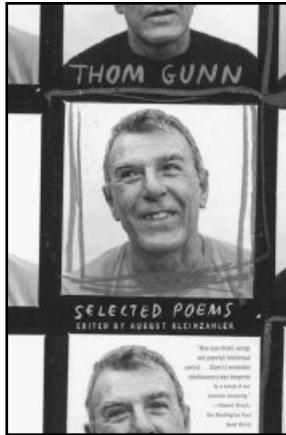
*As formerly, I wheel
I hover and twist,
But only want the feel,
In my possessive thought,
Of catcher and of caught
Upon your wrist.*

*You but half civilize
Taming me in this way.
Through having only eyes
For you I fear to lose,
I lose to keep, and choose
Tamer as prey.*

'Tamer & Hawk', from *Fighting Terms*. The thinness of semantic demarcation between "choose" and "loose" here, echoed in their internal rhyming, nicely conveys the master-slave relationship theme he mined from both Elizabethans and Jacobins (Jonson, et al.). Whether with humans or animals, brutality has its own dreadful music—the bells of shackles and the clink of chains.

By 1961, in *My Sad Captains*, Gunn was reaching beyond the stringencies that caused critics to lump him with Larkin and Hughes. The move to California loosened something up in him. He addressed the change in a letter to Faber & Faber about a decade later:

The first half [of the book] is the culmination of my old style—metrical, rational, but maybe starting to get a little more humane. The second half consists of a taking up of that humaner impulse in a series of syllabic poems . . . which were really only a way of teaching myself to write free verse . . .



Thom Gunn: Selected Poems
Edited by August Kleinzahler
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
102 Pages

In the title poem, we see constraints remaining on the lines, but a fresh, delicate new freedom emerging:

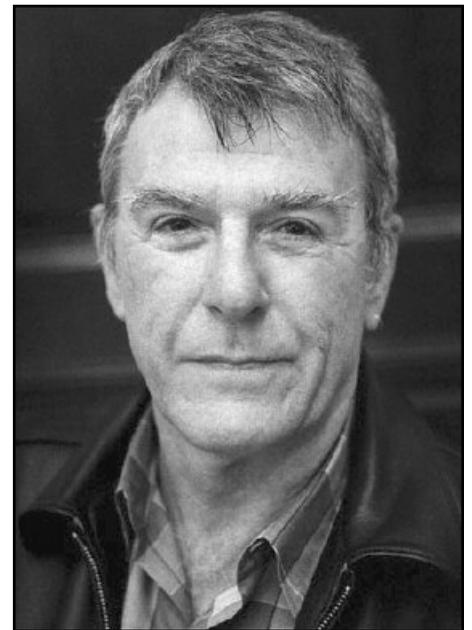
*One by one they appear in
The darkness: a few friends, and
a few with historical
names. How late they start to shine!
but before they fade they stand
perfectly embodied, all*

*the past lapping them like a
cloak of chaos.*

Historical figures he once thought unassailable fall away, as surely and severely as the poetic forms of their ages. They still (both of them) stand "perfectly embodied" and "shining", but no longer the sole, authoritative paradigm. They are just another category in human and poetic taxonomies.

2.

Then came the real break, in 1971, after the Sixties in the Bay Area had washed through Gunn like a cold jolt of morphine. "People make marvelous shifts," Alice Munro wrote in her story "Differently," "but not the changes they imagine." Gunn had come out more openly as a gay man, taken a leave of absence from the Berkeley faculty, had some near-death experiences with hepatitis and some new-life experiences ingesting hallucinogens. What followed was *Moly*, a collection that defies classification and represents his apogee as an influential and quite visible poet, in addition to a merely accomplished one. Drugs had recharged his interest in the Ovidian in nature; reality was process, and all objects were necessarily Protean. *Moly* starts with an unsurpassed Oedipal poem, with the possible exception of Auden's elegy to Freud, which doesn't take any first-person risks. August Kleinzahler rightly judges the piece, "Rights of Passage," as one of "the thrilling moments in twentieth century poetry."



Thom Gunn

*Something is taking place.
Horns bud bright in my hair.
My feet are turning hoof.
And father, see my face
—Skin that was damp and fair
Is barklike and, feel, rough.*

*See Greytop how I shine.
I rear, break loose, I neigh
Snuffing the air, and harden
Toward a completion, mine.
And next I make my way
Adventuring through your garden.*

*My play is earnest now.
I canter to and fro.
My blood, it is like light.
Behind an almond bough,
Horns gaudy with its snow,
I wait live, out of sight.*

*All planned before my birth
For you, Old Man, no other,
Whom your groin's trembling warns.
I stamp upon the earth*

*A message to my mother.
And then I lower my horns.*

Codes of utterance in conflict, the poem is a dazzling merger of free will and fatedness. The deer-boy is liberated by acting out a genetically predetermined disposition. He is *aware* of it all, haughty but apologetic, mother-pleasing but cognizant that he must eventually buck her wishes as well, flashing his antlers on the air. Transformation continues in the second, title poem, which recalls the herb the pigmen knew would throw off Circe's spell and restore Odysseus's crew to human form. Gunn here gives the nod to his new-found psychedelics, but seems also to be honoring any number of transfiguring processes, for "man cannot bear too much reality:"

*I root and root, you think that it is greed,
It is, but I seek the plant I need.*

*Direct me gods, whose changes are all holy,
To where it flickers deep in grass, the moly:*

*Cool flesh of magic in each leaf and shoot,
From milky flower to the black forked root.*

*From this flat dungeon I could rise to skin
And human title, putting pig within.*

*I push my big grey wet snout through the green,
Dreaming the flower I have never seen.*

As Edwin Muir noted, Gunn was "endowed with and plagued by an unusual honesty; his poems are a desperate inquiry, how to live and act in a world perpetually moving."

The critics, especially in Britain, declared his career over with *Moly*. But all that San Fran freedom strengthened the timber of his voice, gave it an urbane, wizened maturity. Granted there is some slackness, traceable to a slack time. One can take or leave "Listening To Jefferson Airplane: Golden Gate Park," a couplet which reads in its entirety: "The music comes and goes in the wind/comes and goes on the brain." But the same lysergics gave him "At The Centre," an LSD description that is as structured a capturing of unstructured experience as "Kubla Khan" or Ginsberg's "Wales Visitation." From a rooftop, peaking on acid, Gunn wonders "What is this steady pouring that/Oh wonder./The blue line bleeds and on the gold one draws./Currents of image widen, braid, and blend/ . . . To one all-river." The brilliant, careful construction of surfaces, the imagistic scene-building are paused, buoyed up and lightened by the sudden "Oh wonder." He registers a new architecture of reality, then stands in amazement at his own creation of it. The mind makes up the world; the turbocharged mind ascends new scales of the marvelous.

Gunn's late career took on more somber subjects: the brittle calcification of Sixties "freedoms," the plague days of the 80s and 90s AIDS pandemic. He succumbed to the disease himself, but not before following the fates of many a comrade in cycles like *The Man With Night Sweats*. The abyss sucks at the realest thing we have, our physical constitution: "I have to change the bed/But catch myself instead/Stamped upright where I am/Hugging my body to me/As if to shield it from/The pains that will go through me/As if hands were enough/To hold an avalanche off." Hands that gave him the writing life now wrap his lover in medicated sheets, empty bedpans, hold off physical attacks of his charges who change [yes, there are bad as well as good transformations], in an instant, from grateful patients to furies of dementia.

The approach of death enabled Gunn to face things like his mother's suicide, an event he had evaded for decades. In "The Gas Poker," he blends the converse worlds he'd always placed so deftly together: creation and extinction, silence and singing, Orpheus's flute as the tool of self-murder:

*One image from the flow
Sticks in the stubborn mind:
A sort of backwards flute.
The poker that she held up
Breathed from the holes aligned
Into her mouth till, filled up
By its music, she was mute.*

This new "Selected" collection has that perfect, jacket pocket-fitting size, little more than a hundred pages. It traces the arc of a career with wisely spaced, representative snapshots. The Kleinzahler intro—who better to summarize the man?—is worth the price of the book alone.

Richard Wirick is the author of the poetic-novel One Hundred Siberian Postcards. He has been published in Paris Review and The Nation. He practices law in Los Angeles.

CULTURE (continued from page 4)

top firms specializing in audits, who worked all summer on the audit. Because of staff holidays the firm was unable to finish the audit according to the time schedule the Canada Council had imposed. When Ekstasis asked for a two-week extension of the stated deadline, the request was ignored and the grant was summarily pulled. This caused enormous financial losses, from which Ekstasis Editions is only beginning to recover. When she pulled the grant, without warning, after over \$70,000 had been spent, based on the grant, Melanie Rutledge, said, "I feel very comfortable with this decision." She could almost be heard dancing a jig in her office.

Of late there has been a general erosion of certain values and ideals which have sustained arts funding in this country for 50 years. Certainly arm's length funding and peer assessment is threatened. This year, for a second time Ekstasis Editions has been denied a grant because "the Ekstasis Editions publishing program does not exhibit the minimum level of required to receive continued funding..." This year Ekstasis has published works by PK Page, Pete Trower, Jim Christy, Lesley Choyce, Stephen Scobie, and several other important books. This is an insult to both Ekstasis and our authors published last year. I do not believe that a jury would say that about these authors or would have reached that decision so direly affecting the very survival of a longstanding literary press without some preliminary coaching from the Block Grant Officer.

Tom Flanagan, a Leo Strauss/Paul Wolfowitz disciple and Stephen Harper's mentor, has said that in order to make changes in government, do so by small incremental steps. A number of small changes in cultural policy have occurred beginning perhaps in reaction to the sponsorship scandal. The bureaucracy also took great pains to please the incoming Stephen Harper government. Several of the changes are small changes in wording and policy, but small policy changes always affect future directions, as the flapping of the wings of a butterfly might cause a hurricane on the other side of the world. These small policy changes include matters such a new emphasis, veering from artistic merit. In some documents the words "aesthetic excellence" have been replaced by "institutional value". In addition, without public discourse an internal document called the "Healthy Organizations Initiative" has been implemented, giving the granting agency's officers the power to overturn jury decisions (and threatening arm's length principles). The placing of greater importance on corporate rather than literary publishing, all reflect the values of the Conservative Party.

Politics is ideological and political priorities are determined by a set of fixed ideas. The major difference between a right wing government and a more liberal government, is that those on the right tend to be more arbitrary, and those of a more liberal persuasion are more flexible. America is currently experiencing a resurgence of hope because of the greater flexibility of the Obama administration, although there are still some rigid ideological frameworks established by the Bush gang. As an Icelander I am both aware of the value of culture, and, after many generations of living above the Arctic Circle, am able to weather many storms. Perhaps, like Scott Walker, I should move to St. Paul's, my grandfather's first home in North America. South of the border, though their arts programs are under constant threat from the conservative element, they understand the value of the supporting non-commercial and non-profit publishing. Melanie Rutledge's agenda was to get rid of a few of the fringe presses, and move the Canada Council in a more corporate direction. A healthy cultural atmosphere exists when ideas are fluid. Culture is both political and ideological. The question is: what kind of world do we want? What kind of culture do we want?

Richard Olafson is the publisher of Ekstasis Editions and the publisher and editor of the Pacific Rim Review of Books.

THE PEARL JACKET: FLASH FICTION FROM CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Erna Picard

Flash Fiction is an old literary form that has been employed by writers around the world since Aesop's time. With a simple, handy-to-work-with editorial size, this two to four page length form that Kawabata called a "palm of the hand" tale, is enjoying a new vogue internationally. In Asia where it has a hoary lineage, it was originally thought of as a story that could be read in the amount of time it takes to smoke a cigarette. The ultra-short story form caught on with newspapers who paid writers by the word, a thrifty form of soliciting copy.

North Americans will likely recognize flash fiction as a staple element of *Reader's Digest* feature writing. Handled well, it's an imaginative, skillful form of storytelling that doesn't tax the reader.

As this substantial collection demonstrates, Chinese authors, readers and publishers appreciate the flash form as well. Translated and edited by Shouhua Qi, who teaches at Western Connecticut State U., these 120 stories offer a provocative, insightful look into contemporary life in China, including 19 entries from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. It's a talented compendium that includes modern titans from the 1920s like Lu Xun and Lao She, as well as diverse contemporary heavy-hitters such as Feng Jikai (*Ten-Inch Golden Lotus*), Chen Rong, Wang Meng, Ya Dafu, and both Ku Ling and Li Ang from Taiwan.

Typically, these are stories that aren't likely to upset anyone. Divided in to seven sections headed Relationships, Family, Portraits, Society, Truth and Art, Existential Moments, and The Strange and Extraordinary, sentimentality and bathos saturate the family and relationship-themed tales and are least likely to excite readers in English. But China's writers are too good and too broad for there not to be solid material in this collection, though with its size some digging is necessary. "Door Forever" by Shao



Shouhua Qi

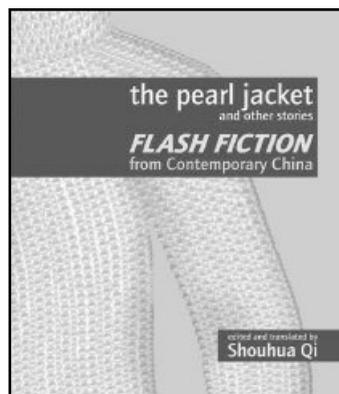
Baojian is a brilliant story of an aging bachelor artist and his unrequited love, and one half expects to see a film made of it along the lines of *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*.

History and administrative tensions are never far from Chinese literature: "A Bridge Pillar" by Yang Xiangsheng straddles the genre of selfless hero somewhere between Lao She's memorable storytelling and good old Uncle Mao's proletarian agit-prop. Li Qixiang's "Black and White" reflects the Chinese government's continual struggle to overcome administrative corruption. Two of the most engaging tales, however, are surely Wu Di's "Mosquito Nets", with its recent depiction of the eternal struggle

for intimacy within a society where the concept of "privacy" as Westerners know it is still challenge; and "Happy Family", a chillingly surreal account of a single working man who retains the services of a rental agency to provide him with periodic visits of "a happy family"—loving wife, three beaming children, a wonderful evening at home together. With China's dramatic urban imbalance between marriageable young men and women, it may not be quite as fantastic an account much longer.

Whether seeking artful entertainments or work reflecting the specifics of getting along in a chop and chance economy, those readers appreciative of a broad canvas of insights from China's current state of letters will find these Flash Fictions the Middle Kingdom well worth a look.

A graduate of Cambridge, Erna Picard writes from Honolulu. She studied and taught in China for eight years.



The Pearl Jacket: Flash Fiction from Contemporary China.

Shouhua Qi, trans. & ed.
Stone Bridge, U.S. \$24.95

THE WORLD, WELL, LOST

Mike Doyle

(On reading a book of poems in translation)

Everything here similitude? Immanence: zero. Nothing 'being'; everything definition by negation. If you are seeking heaven, you might as well be atheist. No god above to open the dead sea to life. No cascade of lifegiving water or nurturing milk.

When looked at askance, all is threadbare, naked, lightless, if at all attunable, thinly chiming in with the 'weariness of the world'. An eye in there somewhere, projecting.

Flesh that was born to die, making other flesh with no better purpose, which yet with a feeble energy will perpetuate itself, in a circle bound in on itself, circling itself, circling without limit and without end, to no other end but itself itself itself. No other end.

In such a world can be no paraclete and, if there were, no shape for it to lick into a new world or new thought, a new frisson or a new anything whatsoever, this is no life.

If being is what you are looking for it simply feels a mantle of weariness, a gesture not even thought of much less accomplished, having no inheritance beyond or other than itself. Whether its source is the posited ocean or something vaguer does not matter.

Matter the very least of it, or all it could possibly be. A tide goes out comes in goes out comes in fetching and carrying undifferentiated guck, uncreated will, setting draggings of such ashore where a shore might be outlined miasmically, were discernment possible. With the energy put to reading, a thousand shifts of the tide in out ad infinitum, what can be said for it?

A simile might be one remove from touch if only one iota made landfall as a smear to the brighter side of similitude. Might even be the start of something...

Mike Doyle has lived in Victoria since 1968. His most recent book is Paper Trombones: notes on poetics, in which he shares his thoughts on poetry, drawn from informal journal notes of the past thirty years.

WHAT SPECIES OF CREATURES ANIMAL RELATIONS FROM THE NEW WORLD

Chelsea Thornton

What *Species of Creatures* promises an investigation into “our complicated relationship with the other creatures that share the planet.” The book provides insight into early European settlers’ reactions to Canada’s bevy of what must have seemed alien creatures, and also portrays the realities of colonial life in the New World. Through her representation of European wonder in the face of these creatures, the author reawakens the modern reader’s own sense of amazement towards the animals. We rediscover this wonder through stories about colonial attempts at domestication, exploitation, and understanding of the seemingly fantastical creatures the settlers discovered.

Kirsch’s extensive research is evident in the over 50 sources she references throughout the text. However, in her eagerness to represent as many first-hand accounts as possible, she often packs the book full of inane details that hold little interest to anyone who is not a historian specializing in the colonial period. Although the accounts of settlers’ attempts to domesticate bears and foxes are fascinating, the account of an upper class woman’s preference for one sleigh over another is not.

The author uses her primary sources not only through the main body of the text, but also as breaks within chapters. Quotations that at first seem randomly sprinkled throughout a chapter are later revealed to emphasize the chapter’s theme. The chapter “*Homo Sapiens Is Wild at Heart*” is studded with examples of human violence: “To obtain the pleasure of seeing the Porcupine fall, we cut down the Tree...pelted it to death, and put it upon the fire to burn off its Darts.” These examples, unrelated to the text surrounding it, at first astounded with their blood-thirstiness. However, when they are read with reference to the chapter title, their purpose, to emphasize human wildness, is revealed. Although subtly underscoring the theme in some chapters, in others no amount of investigation reveals the purpose of the haphazardly placed quotations, and they serve more to confuse than to enlighten, whatever Kirsch’s intention. This creative use of primary material is also used to weave together the diverse subject matter of the book. The book’s epigraph is:

*A living creature
liveth, perceiveth,
moveth it self;
is born, dieth;
is nourished,
and groweth; standeth,
or sitteth, or lyeth,
or goeth.*

Throughout the rest of the book, each chapter is preceded by a line of the epigraph, and loosely relates to the line. So the chapter about the fox fur trade is preceded by “is born, dieth”, while the chapter about hummingbirds, whose flight so mesmerized the settlers, is preceded by “moveth it self”. Often, a subject’s usefulness to



*What Species of
Creatures: Animal
Relations from the New
World*
Sharon Kirsch
New Star Books, 2008
\$19.00



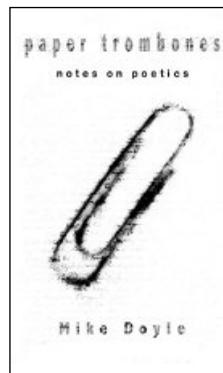
Sharon Kirsch

this device provides the only slim justification for its inclusion in the book.

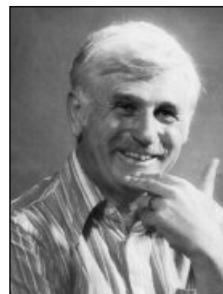
The style of the book echoes the style of the primary sources Kirsch used. The contrast between colonial language and a modern perspective on their occasional foolishness is often deliciously ironic. This irreverent quality is at its best when the author examines her own species: “For purposes of study, this animal has been classified. It goes by the name *Homo sapiens*: *Homo* for man and *sapiens* for wisdom. That the animal named itself may account for the inflation of its attributes.” Used sparingly, Kirsch’s playful tone would likely have kept the subject matter amusing. However, she achieves this tone with an often dry and overly scientific mix of Latin terms, original spellings and occasionally awkward sentence structure, which unfortunately becomes heavy and burdensome when applied to the entire book. This is exacerbated by the fact that her most interesting and compelling subject matter is confined to the early chapters of the book, so that by the final chapters, the reader is left slogging through the detailed account of Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe’s experience of the social life and housekeeping of the New World, related in excessively dry style, with hardly so much as a passing reference to the human-animal relationships the book is supposed to examine.

What Species of Creature would likely be a far more enjoyable book if it was read in pieces, a chapter read here, another there, spread out over the course of a year. Unfortunately, Kirsch’s wit and attention to detail are wasted when the book is read as a whole.

Chelsea Thornton is a student at the University of the Fraser Valley and Northwest College. She writes from Prince Rupert.



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Paper Trombones: Notes on Poetics

a memoir by Mike Doyle

In *Paper Trombones* poet and scholar Mike Doyle shares musings on poetry – his own and others’ – drawn from informal journal notes of the past thirty years. As a poet and academic on three continents, Doyle recalls fascinating encounters with prominent literary figures – from Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath to Basil Bunting, Anne Sexton, Robert Creeley, James Wright, Robert Bly, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, George Woodcock and various Canadian poets. With candid commentary on his wide reading in poetry, philosophy and criticism, Mike Doyle is a personable guide to the currents of contemporary literature. An accessible journey through a personal landscape of poetry, *Paper Trombones* will appeal to those interested in the art of poetry and the dialogue on contemporary literature.

Mike Doyle’s first poetry collection *A Splinter of Glass* (1956) was published in New Zealand; his first Canadian collection is *Earth Meditations* (Coach House, 1971), his latest *Living Ginger* (Ekstasis, 2004). He is recipient of a PEN New Zealand award and a UNESCO Creative Artist’s Fellowship. He has also written a biography of Richard Aldington and critical work on William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, James K. Baxter, and others. He has lived in Victoria since 1968.

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THERE ONCE WAS A CAMEL

Linda Rogers

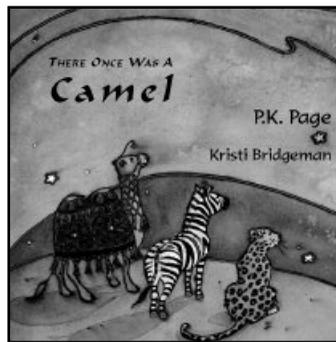
It is Christmas morning and very soon the children in my family are going to open their presents and one will find a copy of *There Once Was a Camel*, a delightful minimalist poem/story by PK Page, whose inner fairy comes out in her children's writing.

This is not a Christmas story, but it could be. Camels did come to Bethlehem to behold the wondrous birth, if we believe the conventional wisdom. They came and they saw, which is what happens in this gentle quest-tale. The camel only has to stretch its neck to see heaven, and heaven is a most beautiful place, where camels have wings and soft clouds on which to lollygag.

Kristi Bridgeman who is one of my most favourite ever former students, is the artist who has taken Page's playful poem and delivered the magic. The illustrator of my six-year-old granddaughter Olive's top choice fairy books, *The Sock Fairy* and *The Knot Fairy*, is a perfect choice for Page, whose previous children's books, although beautiful, don't have quite the same *joie de vivre* as this one, where the animal energy moves off the page and into our hearts.

The cover says it all. It invites the reader to join the journey of three animals, the camel, a zebra and a leopard quivering with longing as they sit on the desert poised and ready to pounce on a star just beyond the horizon (or "the normal limit" in childtalk). That star is the unknown that is the destination of all child questions: "How far is far? Where is the end?" and "What made me?" which have all kinds of possible answers.

My husband calls PK "the jeweler." She crafts so carefully. In this story, the jewels come alive like the sleeping creatures in a fantasy toyshop. Her questions, the



There Once Was a Camel
PK Page, illustrated by
Kristi Bridgeman,
Cherubim Books
2008. \$19.95

essence of poetry, become playthings as she "fools" with rhyme and nonsense and ends up "in heaven, Ho Ho. Up in heaven."

Kristi, who paints against the angst that assaults modern children, ramps up the playful energy that is always present but not always front and centre in Page's adult oeuvre. Delight flows like an underground river beneath her philosophical poetry and Bridgeman feels it. In this story, the poet releases her joy; and the painter is clearly delighted to participate in the coming out party. Bridgeman also has an adult oeuvre. Her child paintings break out from her more constrained mandalas, while retaining the jewel quality of colour in images that stand apart as stained glass through which, in the poet Shelley's words, "Life like a dome of many coloured glass stains the white radiance of eternity."



P.K. Page

The publisher has served this felicitous pairing well, allowing them room to dream in a book sturdy enough to survive hundreds of readings. I have heard rumours that there are to be further collaborations to enrich the imaginary world that sustains human life.

My grandchildren are now at the door. I wonder what they will say when I read this new book to them before they lie down to sleep like the animals dreaming around the campfire at the end of their memorable day.

Linda Rogers, Victoria's Poet Laureate, believes that storytelling is as essential as food and shelter to growing healthy kids.

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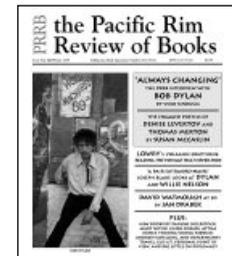
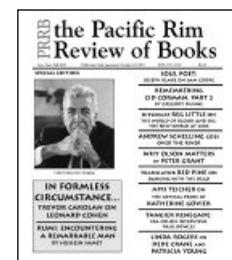
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THE HISTORY OF THE GAELIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION IN CANADA

Trevor Carolan

Support and the Gaels go hand in hand. When the Olympic Games were still but a sparkle in the eye of Zeus, at Ireland's Hill of Tara the Ras Tailteann Games were held in honour of Queen Tailte from 1829 BC to AD 1180. That's a rippin' 3,000 year run, so as Vancouver writer John O'Flynn explains, the Irish got good at organizing these things—normally around a grand fair in which heroic drink had no small part. Unsurprisingly, throughout the Irish diaspora in particular, the current world-wide Celtic renaissance has brought renewed interest in the unique Irish traditions of hurling and Gaelic Football.

With this impressively researched work, John O'Flynn brings to fruition his archival digging within the Irish-Canadian sporting community. Charting the development of Irish sporting associations from Newfoundland to the west coast, from 1796 to the present, en route O'Flynn does more than simply talk sport. Historical migration patterns, relations between the Irish, French and English, ecclesiastical affiliations, sites of famine monuments, and short profiles of scores of local sporting figures make this a volume of cultural history worth leaving on the parlour table for guest browsers.

Much of the actual reporting is of more recent nature, but the Toronto and



The History of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Canada.
John O'Flynn.
Trafford. 202 p.

Montreal Gaelic athletic scenes are well-covered historically. In an aside to hockey enthusiasts, O'Flynn tracks the various recorded Irish, English and Scots development links to ice-hockey—all had 'hurling', 'bandy' or 'shinty' field sports that involved the use of curved sticks, as did the native Mic Macs. Oddly, he reports that as late as 1875, ice hockey in Montreal was still played mostly by Irish Catholics from McGill University and two bilingual colleges where the Irish taught the game to the French. The rest, as they say, is history.

O'Flynn's anecdotal style founded on plenty of oral history. Leading up to a tale about the founding of Vancouver's Sons of Erin Gaelic Football Club, he recounts a clash between Vancouver and Seattle Irish clubs in which the Americans had salted hard-boiled priests among their sides. Old warriors remember the incognito priests playing "tough as nails", "the dirtiest ones" on the field. It's all in good fun and is well worth a look.

Trevor Carolan is the international editor of PRRB.



Hurling: A Gaelic sport.

HAYDEN CARRUTH 1921–2008



from "Prepare"

"Why don't you write me a poem that will prepare me for your death?" you said.

It was a rare day here in our climate, bright and sunny.

I didn't feel like dying that day,

I didn't even want to think about it...

...Experience reduces itself to platitudes always,

Including the one which says that I'll be with you forever in your memories and dreams.

I will. And also in hundreds of keepsakes, such as this scrap of a poem you are reading now.



Hayden Carruth's numerous books of poetry, criticism, and memoir are published by:

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INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Martin Van Woudenberg

Like the man himself, Tim Lander's collection of poetry, *Inappropriate Behaviour*, is a strange mix of contrasts. By the time the collection is read through, one has the immediate need to read through it again. It is something I had to do several times, trying to put together a cohesive picture of the man behind the words. To date, it still eludes me, but perhaps that is precisely what it is supposed to do.

Lander has been a great many things throughout his life. A soldier in the British Army, a teacher and professor, a husband and father, day labourer, and most strikingly a street poet and busker. It is this later existence that makes up the bulk of *Inappropriate Behaviour*, revealing an imposing figure of a man with a heart of love and pity for many of the so-called more fortunate. It is hard to fathom, for a young professional in a warm house, why a person would willingly spend decades on the street, selling poems for a penny in hand-sewn photocopied books, or play a flute for spare change. Unfathomable or not, however, this experience provides a unique opportunity to see the west coast through the eyes of one most of us would hurriedly walk by. Do not make eye contact. Protect your small children. "Mommy, why does that man sleep under the bridge?"

The poet's existence is raw and un-romanticised, yet Lander makes no lament about it, places no blame, and offers no apology for it either. This is what he does. He lives day to day on the goodwill and support of people, and writes some incredible poetry. "But I'll sell you poetry / it's bonafide poetry / ...I admit I have weak verbs / but I got trained / with the best of 'em / and you can understand wot [sic] I say." Despite his modest claims, Lander's verbs are anything but weak. His skill is immediately evident, and his imagery unforgettable. Writing of his experiences in the army, he lays the

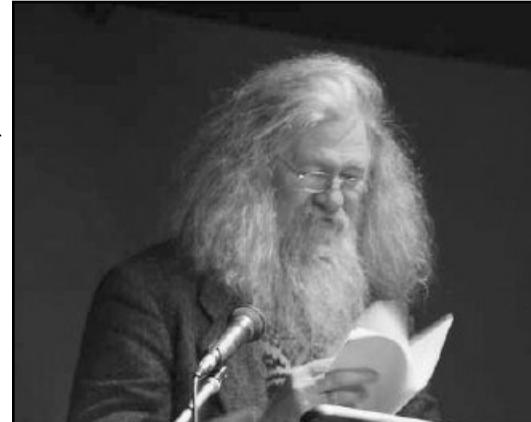


Inappropriate Behaviour
Tim Lander
Broken Jaw Press.
\$ 19.00



viewpoint of an enlisted man bare. "...and I too have been / on Malvern Hills / inducted in the army / in that cold October / of Suez and Hungary / screaming headlines / of the dying thrusts / of imperialism."

The social commentary on such issues as imperialism, capitalism, and many of the other fashionable isms of the day is nothing new. From Elliot's *The Wasteland* to Ginsberg's *Howl*, we have confronted our self-made monsters many times before. Yet Lander's work feels fresh, and he



Tim Lander

possesses a clear ability to make often-saturated issues new again. Perhaps it is his position as a man outside of "ordinary" society that allows him an uncluttered commentary. Perhaps it is simply his forty year career as a poet and the refinement of his craft. Whatever the case may be, the pages fairly vibrate with life.

The bulk of his work in *Inappropriate Behaviour* is concerned with the day-to-day, or sometimes hour-to-hour, existence of a man living on the street. Through his eyes we see both the kindness and the horrible selfishness and vilification of the modern urban professional. Police officers either torment and support, and Lander paints a picture of both with equal fairness. And beyond the people themselves, the poet presents the city as a living creature in itself, one which both shelters and assaults. Through it all, the man follows his own daily routines, stitches his small books of poetry together, eats the remnants of a meal provided by restaurant goers, loses his teeth to some small scavenger, and learns to play the flute for money without them. The picture is equally comic and tragic, and it is Lander's ability to roll with the ups and downs of life that has allowed him to survive on the streets as long as he has – as cliché as that may sound.

His world is far different from most of our own, and his experiences are interesting and varied. That in itself is not enough of a reason to recommend his collection. The fact that his writing is powerful, vivid, and deeply moving, is. This is an exceptional collection, and it should be read.

There is a bit of a tragedy in all of this however. The fact that Lander stitches his own work together, runs it off on a photocopier, and sells it for only a penny, would lead most to believe there is little value here. In a capitalist society, we expect things of value to have a high price tag attached. How many people, who condescendingly took a poem from the bearded street person and left behind some loose change, actually read what he wrote? How might they have been touched, if they had? This formal compilation of a selection of his work stands a better chance of being taken seriously and given the time it deserves. Certainly, it is because of the publication that I had the distinctive pleasure of walking several miles with Tim Lander, through his work. It is an adventure I heartily recommend.

Should you happen upon him on the streets of Nanaimo, do all involved a proper service, and pay far more than a penny for the poem he offers you. It is money well spent. Better yet, buy his book.

Martin Van Woudenberg is a regular contributor to PRRB. He writes from Aldergrove, B.C.

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A GIFT HORSE

Linda Rogers

Lucette, in almost any European language, means light. This novel, which was awarded the 2005 National Dutch Debut Prize, is about repatriation of the heart, how, in the process of refraction and translation, the many struggle and sometimes fail to be one. The poet Shelley, in his finest lines reminded us that, "Life, like a dome of many coloured glass, stains the white radiance of eternity."

The stain that colours every page of this book is the Third Reich.

Lucette, the writer, set out on a quest to understand the maternal branch of her family. That journey took her across Europe and over to Canada, where many refugees of the Holocaust found refuge.

In any dysfunctional relationship both the abuser and the abusee are damaged. There were many Jewish refugees in my class at University Hill School, both from the Holocaust and later from the Hungarian uprising in Budapest. None of these children were German. The Germans had gone elsewhere, to the hinterland where they anticipated the possible rehabilitation of their national romanticism.

My German Canadian writer friends, Harold Rhenisch and Andreas Schroeder, descended from Mennonite dissenters who had chased a Utopian dream to Canada, suffered isolation as children because of the sins of their perceived compatriots. It often felt as if they had no homeland.

Many German refugees were attracted by the Romantic splendour of the BC Interior, the Cariboo, Chicotin and Okanagan regions. This is where Andreas, the narrator of this tale of loss and thirst for redemption, ends up, in Horsefly, a small town where he can hopefully, with the help of his son Wolfgang begin the process of dying with a clear heart.

A gamesman, former groundskeeper of large estates in Germany and good amateur pianist, Andreas has no blood on his hands. He is guilty by association, both with his countrymen, and his wife, an adored singer and protégé of the fuehrer, who gave



Lucette ter Borg

her a Bechstein piano at the beginning of World War 2.

"O Freunde, nicht diese tune," "O friend, not these sounds," the poet Schiller wrote the words for Beethoven's famous "Ode to Joy," perverted for its own purposes by the Third Reich. The tune still plays in Andreas' ears as he visits and revisits his blemished past in his small cabin crowded by the large piano, which arrives in a crate from Berlin. The piano is the elephant in his room.

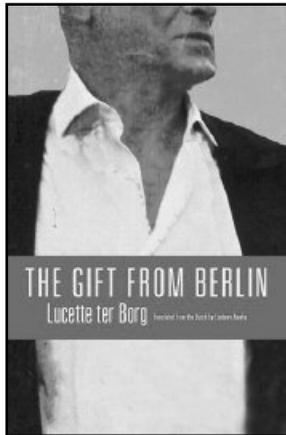
The gift from Germany is a Trojan horse dressed as a piano, its melodic insides polluted by memories of betrayal. *Gift*, I was once reminded, means poison in German.

When we find out that Hitler has had his initials inlaid over the

keyboard so that Elisabeth's singing and playing might be inspired by proximity to the tyrant, we discover the full complexity of Andreas' quest to transcend the heart of darkness.

Elisabeth died of cancer. Cancer had invaded Germany and spread all over Europe.

Can Andreas stop its progress by translating his German Romanticism to the



The Gift From Berlin

Lucette ter Borg translated from the Dutch by Liedewy Hawke
Cormorant Books
2009, 308 pages, \$21.

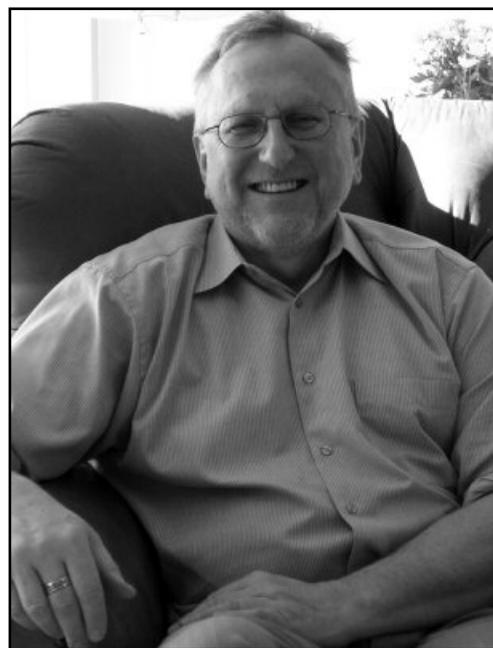
THE PLASTIC HEART

Ray de Kroon

It is difficult to boil down John Carroll's second collection of poetry, *The Plastic Heart*, to any one, essential thing. Memories and childhood impressions haunt many pages, creating a series of ghostly images. A variety of voices, fantastic visions, and surreal situations mingle with past and present to create fragments of understanding that leave a reader unsettled but also keenly aware of his or her own fragile mortality. Perhaps the collection is best described as an unflinching exploration of what it means to be human - an exploration of fear and uncertainty, of pain and suffering, of mystery and perplexity, and of acceptance and elation associated with existence.

The persona in the first poem, "dissecting sparrows to understand their song," recalls a plastic heart his mother brought home for use as an "educational tool." As a child, he remembers hating its strong plastic odour and its "ghoulish reds & blues." Now, he again contemplates these "molds that compose our deaths" and concludes they are but "foul models of what is private & complex." One cannot dissect a sparrow to understand its song, this poem suggests, any more than one can a heart to understand a person. When it comes to death and loss, there are no simple answers.

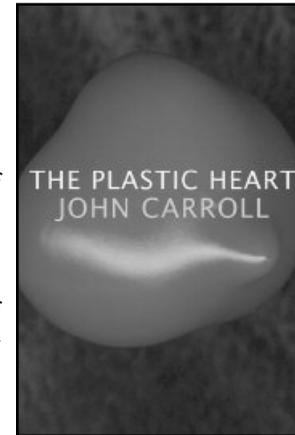
The threat of falling is a recurring metaphor for failure and loss in many of Carroll's pieces. Surreal visions of falling through a kitchen floor in the poem, "my uncle fell through the earth," or off the edge of the world in "end of intelligent life" are implicitly contrasted with bodies tumbling from buildings in "NEWS FLASH!" and "Dali windmill." Falling, either literally or symbolically, is a sinister, ever present threat in this collection. In "Mistral," while two opposing forces or "gods" square off "on a beam," the persona (and the reader) must desperately hang on and try to maintain balance. Here, and in other poems such as "sick in the head" and "on death row," the universe demonstrates an inscrutably casual, Melvillean indifference when it comes to the plight of humanity. In "sick in the head," the heart of the cosmos wears this indifference "like a mask on a manikin." Similarly, in "on death row," the persona no longer bothers talking "to the old man" because he realizes there is "nobody behind the door."



John Carroll

When Carroll is at his most serious, contemplating such deep existential questions, his poems are apt to turn satirical and comic, hovering in some border region between laughter and tears. The series of news headlines that tell a story of a deranged and desperate man committing suicide from a French cathedral in "NEWS FLASH!" sardonically inform us of such important facts as, "gargoyle loses tongue in lover's leap mishap" and "leaper's lover 'loved' leaper." When confronted with death and uncertain existential possibilities, Carroll's poetic voices are tempted to see the universe as an elaborate practical joke. Perhaps these ludicrous headlines are an appropriate response to a world that is, at least in the framework of this poem, absurd.

While external forces determine whether one fails or falls in some of Carroll's pieces, deliberate and even destructive choices also play a role, leading readers to consider the implications surrounding determinism and free will. The actions of the hus-



The Plastic Heart

John Carroll
Ekstasis Editions
2008, 106 p. \$19.95

(continued on page 38)

(continued on page 38)

BROWNE (continued from page 19)

Colin Browne: Or, perhaps, Keats' idea of negative capability. You place yourself where you're outside an irritable, nagging need to make sense of things, and then change position quickly and often. You allow phenomena to reveal themselves without trying to categorize them. This is not to say that a poem does not have an argument; it must. It must also be alive to its present, it must not be illustrative, it must take risks, it must drill fiercely through the ongoing calcification and highjacking of even the most progressive ideas. I like a poem that is always on the edge of escaping itself.

* * *

Colin Browne: There's a lot of rewriting in the long poems. Those three line stanzas—it's a bit like cinching a horse. I have the three lines and once they're "in place" I want to keep the stanzas intact. If I change the words within the stanza, I may still want the same words at the end of the line or the beginning of the next line.

PG: There's nothing arbitrary about it?

Colin Browne: It's a narrative poem, but I come to like where the lines begin and end, I'm very conscious of the words or sounds that conclude the lines, and how they move to the next line down. This may be a game I play, but then whatever I'm going to add or change has got to fit into the stanza. That's where the cinching comes in. It creates a language that is tighter and more sprung. All those prose-like lines are all carefully cinched in.

PG: There's also a collage of different experiences. You mentioned a plane flight to New York. What governs the flow of that of one thing into another? Is there a conscious composition at work there?

Colin Browne: The poem began on a flight to New York. That flight is the present of the poem through which Marge's story, and the memories, thoughts and layers generated by the text began to flow. Olean is a place name I saw on the screen on the seat back in the aircraft—we were flying over a place called Olean. It was identified as an Indian Reservation and that made me think, "Okay, now I know whose home we're flying above." We were close to Chicago, which reminded me of the horses sent overseas in the First World War, and that took me to the composer Elgar writing about horses. Although these unfortunate horses don't really fit in terms of telling Dick Ritchie's story, their presence will resonate later when you realize that the British-Indian expeditionary force was transporting enormous cartloads of feed for the horses, mules and camels transporting the army north toward Baghdad. These horses come in later as resonant fragments.

* * *

Colin Browne: The "shovel" carries the reader through the book. The earth is a grave. Our end is the shovel. The shovel is the humble device which builds and buries, which cuts, which kills...

PG: ... which is the agent of colonialism...

Colin Browne: ...and the digger for water. The shovel is the agent. When I wrote, "The book is a shovel,"—it seemed to me to be correct.

Before literacy, you had to maintain the graves of your ancestors, and, implicitly, their stories, their lineages, their lives. With the development of printing and bookmaking technologies you no longer needed to live near your ancestors' graves; you could travel. You could in, a sense, carry the graves of your ancestors with you. Their memory—their names and stories, their city's and their nation's stories—could be transmitted typographically. Culture—which depends on a profound and continuous relationship with one's ancestors and with one's ancestral territory—became portable. There is a tribe of us wandering the earth with books under our arms, books filled with the graves of our ancestors. In our journeying we've cut ourselves loose from their graves and the practices associated with them. Many of us have pulled ourselves away from that world.

I recently spent two years working on and off with First Nations people on Vancouver Island. I wanted to make a film that exposed the wanton destruction by subdivisions, resorts and golf courses of sacred burial sites. (Eventually the film was shelved.) I was invited to various locations, and was deeply moved to learn a little bit

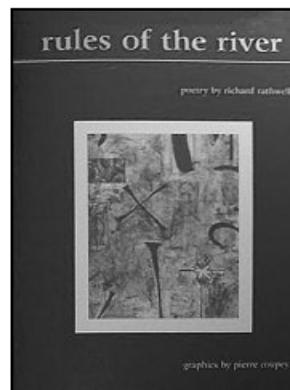
(continued on page 36)



Colin Browne

RULES OF THE RIVER

Paul Falardeau



rules of the river
Richard Rathwell
Graphics by Pierre Coupey
Ed. Jamie Reid
DaDaBaBy, 2007. 20 pp

Ask any computer savvy thirteen-year old, and they probably know the game, they've been playing it for a while now, it's a favourite of Facebook addicts everywhere. The idea revolves around the website babblefish.com, or one of its imitators. Those who have read Douglas Adams' space satire *The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy* will know that a babblefish, or bablefish, as it is called in the story, is an animal which translates any language in the galaxy into the one the listener is most comfortable with. That is exactly what babblefish.com does only there are some differences, first off, you don't have to stick this fish in your ear, like in the famous books, and secondly the website has limitations and while it is good for translating single words, it falls short with grammar and sentence structure. The game is to take a song, passage from a book or poem and translate it into a bunch of different languages then back to English, post it and see who can guess what the (now transformed) lyrics belong to.

Rules of the River takes the poem "The Art", itself translated from "The Beak" and puts it through the ringer on babblefish translating it into several languages, including Japanese, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. The poems are then translated back into English.

The results are interesting, as many words have been replaced with synonyms and sentences have changed altogether. Still, this is more than a time-wasting computer game. There is a evident knowledge exhibited by the translators of the forms used by the poets of these languages and the translations are edited and arranged on the page to suit their new wording.

The translations are often poignant reminders of the subtle differences between cultures and is a interesting look into the art of language. The change of a few words or sentence structure create huge differences in how the poem feels from translation to translation.

Still, as a starting point "The Art" is beautiful and none of the translations fail to carry on the light emitted from the original, merely reflect it and twist it through the mirrors and prisms of language. Fittingly the sentiment of changing visions is reflected in the poems. From the Chinese translation:

*you realize simply that an eye divided makes frontiers overlap,
then fog opens windows to sunset and to the clearing rain
Is this knowledge bent? Like the eye*

The images of Pierre Coupey are added at several points and provide added depth to the series of poems, expanding on ideas of changing horizons. They are loosely pasted onto the pages of the book, which feels like a notebook, with large pages. It gives the impression this a work in a constant state of work and change, which is exactly what these poems need.

Paul Falardeau studies English and Biology at UFV. A programmer and DJ for CIVL radio, he is Arts and Life editor for The Cascade in Abbotsford and lives in Aldergrove.



Richard Rathwell

BETWEEN VIETNAM'S DREAMS AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Frances Cabahug

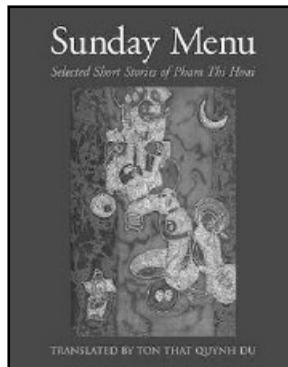
“Pham Thi Hoai’s *Sunday Menu* features the lives of everyday Vietnamese people as they are swept from the past into the modern landscape of the 1990’s, and her stories explore the specific challenges that arise out of the interactions between old and new urbanized spaces. While literary critics have praised Pham’s bold use of language and her perceptive observations of social interactions, her political detractors branded her short stories as an unacceptably pessimistic portrayal of modern Vietnam. As such, Pham’s works are banned in her home country.

The delight in reading *Sunday Menu* comes from Pham’s refusal to paint a pretty picture of the increasing urbanization of Vietnam with its emphasis on progress and modernity. Instead, the ten stories here read like quotidian documents that mediate the tensions between dreams and disillusionment, community and alienation as the characters try to make sense of their place in world that is still oscillating among the ideologies of nationalistic tradition, communism, and the expansion of Western democratic capitalism. Even though the urban setting draws people in such close proximity, their vast outlooks and ideals set them apart; for instance, in the short story “Saigon Tailor,” the urban narrator’s greatest hope lies in a marriage with her diffident boyfriend, contrasting her lot with the headstrong but naive village girls who are studying to become seamstresses. In “Universal Love,” a mother flippantly entertains her men while a young daughter bears the brunt of maturity and memory. Because of the mixture of generations and ideologies, *Sunday Menu* is filled with characters who escape convenient categorization.

Pham’s storytelling resists moral judgments, and Pham does not make distinct preferences between one form of government over the other, nor does she champion tradition over modernity or vice versa. Without falling into excessive moralizing or kitschy sentimentality, the stories portray life as it unfolds with the curious specific conflicts that arise from the intersections of cultures and eras. Pham chooses to situate these tensions not in the public sphere of politics, but in the details of normal lives that make up the various classes of Vietnamese society. “Vision Impaired” is a story of the interactions between an intellectual husband and a blind masseur, who is picked up from the street so that the husband can watch the masseur work on his wife’s body. The class differences play out in this sensual tale, culminating in a tragicomic clash between the high-brow intellectualism of the husband and the roguish street smarts of the masseur. A similar juxtaposition can be found in “A Traditional Short Story,” which features a young man who runs into the urban capital to make a name as a poet, contrasted with the simple and

easy lives of the friends he leaves behind in the rural township.

Because these short stories do not offer an easy solution or an easy division of good and bad, the censors find it easy to condemn these works as pessimistic. But even though *Sunday Menu* does not have a particularly cheerful trajectory, the stories are not necessarily as bleak as Pham’s political detractors make them out to be. Although these stories largely deal with conflict and disappointment, the characters’ determinations largely shine through as they negotiate their way through the changes and persist in finding their own space in an evolving landscape. In the short story “Sunday Menu” which the entire collection is named after, those challenges play out even within the trends of Vietnamese cuisine, as the precocious female protagonist in “Sunday Menu” arbitrates between her grandmother’s preference of turn of the cen-



Sunday Menu: Selected Short Stories
Pham Thi Hoai
Pandanus Books, \$29.95

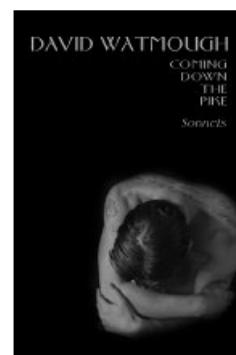


Pham Thi Hoai

tury high-class traditional cuisine and her mother’s shabby, but practical food stall. The character points out how she does not belong to either era, and by refusing to be co-opted by both the past’s Eastern patriotic heritage and the modern unromantic commercialism, the girl carves out a space for her own vision by imagining “a cyclo-driver food stall served on a red lacquered tray which would mark the beginning of a new trend in culinary fashion.” The women in the short stories “Toll of the Sea” and “Second Hand” are also finding control over the narratives of their lives. While there is disillusionment when it comes to being rescued, there is a brave acceptance in facing their disappointments, coupled with a renewed energy to singlehandedly fight against their victimization.

With Pham Thi Hoai’s acerbic wit and unflinching honesty, *Sunday Menu* provides a lucid testament on the challenges of living in an emerging modern Vietnam. Though the stories capture the difficulties of fulfillment under different forms of governments and eras, *Sunday Menu* affirms the affiliations and interconnections between these ideological differences that continue to shape the changing landscape to this day.

Frances Cabahug lives and writes in Vancouver, Canada.



ISBN 978-1-897430-30-9
Poetry
80 Pages
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Coming Down the Pike: Sonnets

David Watmough

Known primarily for fiction, author David Watmough takes a turn at poetry in *Coming Down the Pike*, a volume of elegant sonnets, his 19th published book. Stretching the sonnet form with the flexibility of his “inborn Cornish Rhythms,” Watmough celebrates a rich tapestry of experience in lyric, engaging and remarkably well-crafted poems. Drawn from nature, literature, human foibles and gay culture, Watmough’s sonnets, while loosely related to those of Milton, are humorous, ironic and authentic. With a mastery reminiscent of his friends, the literary giants Auden, Eliot and Dylan Thomas, Watmough sculpts the sonnet form to suit his diverse subjects, polished through rhythm and rhyme to reflect a life in letters.

Naturalized Canadian, David Watmough, 81, has been shaped and nourished by a Cornish background as well as years in London, Paris, New York and San Francisco. All his novels, short stories, plays and poems, however, have been written on Canada’s west coast during the past 45 years. *Geraldine*, his eighteenth book and thirteenth fiction title, was published in 2007 by Ekstasis Editions.

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GODS ATTAINED THE HUMAN REALM

Louise Landes Levi

there's nothing stable in the world; uproar your only music
John Keats

Who dismiss or certainly resist, with fierce sensitivity, authority, am drawn, like a butterfly to light, by Jacqueline Gens' *Primo Pensiero* almost for its authority – or is her seeming maturity itself a form of poetic license? Authority, in the garb of constantly shifting metaphor, smile, rhyme & even reason - Jacqueline's poems are post modern, yet traditional & linguistically they are extremely elegant.

*I beg you to pierce my pride with your katvanga.
In olden times, I would burn, left out on a mountainside at birth,
whipped, subdued, or crushed. But I was rescued
through knowledge of you.*
fr. "Primo Pensiero"

Authoritative emptiness sustains the elocution. It transforms tumors into lost children, masters into loyal friends, and the grime of the underground into the portal of lapis. Emptiness masquerading as eloquence is very attractive. Why, because poetry is non-didactic instruction, a kind of spiritual anarchy. Ancient canons necessarily migrate fr. one culture to the other; our creative potential does not depend on the forms of any one of them.

Jacqueline is well known for her administrative brilliance, her kindness, her years of devotion to such luminaries as Allen Ginsberg, to such beloved lamas as the doctor Trogawa Rimpoche. A long time student of Namkhai Norbu Rimpoche, she chose, having educated & healed herself for years, through the Tantric view & practice, the path of ATI. She walked out, she integrated, she became – a poet. She is creating new forms, inspiring us with her efforts, when most feel their work is done, to begin anew (as founder & co-director of the MFA Program in poetry at New England College). She served on the board for the Shang Shung Institute in Conway. She holds an MAT in Innovative Technology fr. Marlboro College – see her site 'poetrymind' tsetso.blogspot.com.

Primo Pensiero is a must for those who aspire to the writ/ to the Word, eloquent & dense with scholarship, a vocabulary which is a pleasure

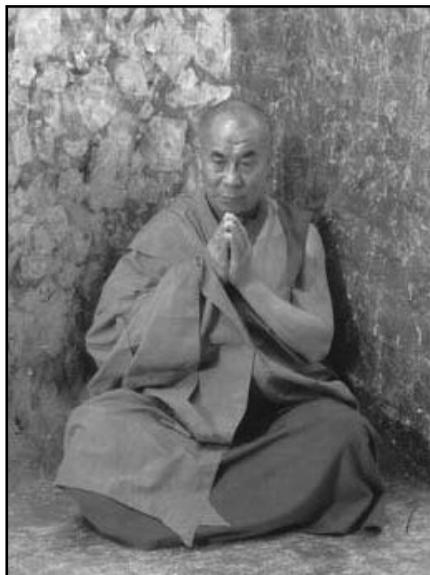
*First, sound; light;
then rays riding waves
of endless becoming,
Your golden vowel
Calls us home.
We want you to stay.
Always one foot in another realm nothing to tempt us with
Except the small map of our world
Calling you back.*
fr. "Uproar's Music - For Choegyal Namkhai Norbu on his birthday"

to this pauper, to this traveler, picking up phrases in a dozen countries 'she (sic.LLL) speaks *Merigaresque*' said the master one night at the Aiuole. I greatly admire the honest New England diction & the erudition one encounters in the poetry of Jacqueline Gens.

The real miracle year after year



Primo Pensiero
Jacqueline Gens
Shivastan Publishing
Cooperative
26 pages
limited edition
chapbook



Gelek Rimpoche

*The leeks grow only in this one place.
Each spring I try to remember
Their irony taste drawn from deep soil humus,
decayed pine, juniper, crushed maple leaves,
Moss, and rotted wood -
Often I forget the wild leeks of Keats Brock Road
I can't remember how we ended up
in this New England Neighborhood
fr. "Wild Leeks"*

The mother ('she's here in the woods now') the greater Mother, the labyrinth, the river of death, the subtle relation between master & disciple – all presented in modern format – Jacqueline & her editor/publisher Shiv Mirabito have outdone themselves with this volume that feels, to the touch, like a flower, like a heavily scented flower, Anthurium, or Cymbidium. The parts of this 'bouquet' fit perfectly together. One feels this even before opening its orange, red & black cover – imprinted, on rice paper, with a line drawing of Machig Labron, commissioned by Gens (in 1994) from Glen Eddy to whom the book is dedicated

*In memory of Glen Roger Eddy (1946-2006)
In dreams, they come with out-stretched
hands, the color of malachite
giving, magnetizing
palms formed by lead and wind,
torrential waters –
As they pass to me the white lotus bud
Grown up from mud,
Its' stainless bloom opens.*
fr. "Dedication"

Then the poems, *Primo Pensiero*, for Gelek Rinpoche, *Visitation*, for Allen, *The Butterfly Lover*, every Dakini's dream of liberation, *Wild Leeks*, *Visiting Tzintzunsan*, for Tsultrim Allione, known for her ground breaking book, *Women Of Wisdom: The place where fire ends, marked in bronze, said gods attained the human realm outside the village of Tzintzunsan.* Subtle metaphors fr. the Western canon 'the slow arrow', 'guardians at the gate' (with reference to a ceremony 20 years after the death of Chogyam Trungpa), subtler still the lesser known metaphors (but no less familiar for scholar Gens) of the oriental world. The *Final Poem* for Allen is a tour de force, evoking the great man, without mention of him, a final mockery for our obsession with fame & glory, at the same time, respecting the ultimate anonymity of the poet & his work 'this is as far as you are allowed to go. I don't have the water rights for your passage' he says in dream to his loyal assistant.

*I stood quietly to your side waiting to assist you
yet not disturb your concentration.
Finished, you handed me a sheaf of papers,
Here, these are for you, for translation
fr. "Visitation"*

Behold Jacqueline, the scholar, the householder, the gardener (Gens amazes with her knowledge of the natural world, the poems suffused with names of plants, minerals, geologic & ecologic phenomena) the teacher, the student, who yet bears within her

(continued on page 37)

TRANSLATING FROM THE SMALLER NATIONS

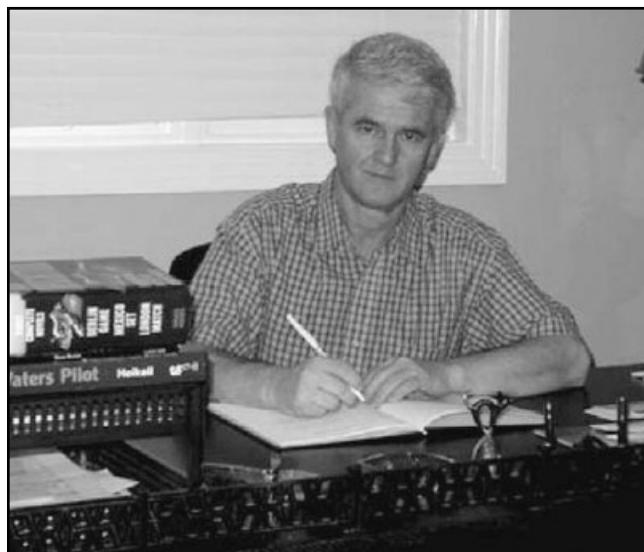
Sanja Garic-Komnenic

Editor's note: While focused on the Pacific Nation, PRRB endeavours to stay abreast of developments from other shores. Because translation does not always receive its due, we invited Bosnian essayist, critic and educator Sanja Garic-Komnenic to comment on the experience of translating from a lesser-known literature for the North American audience.

Canadian and international readers might be familiar with the work of some of the selected Bosnian authors of the younger generation who moved to North America during or after the Bosnian war. The two most prominent voices, those of the poet Semezdin Mehmedinovic and of the novelist Alexandar Hemon, come from Sarajevo and represent the generation who grew up with the tradition of the absurd and the dark humor so typical of Sarajevo. Bosnian poet and novelist Rifet Bahtijaragic, on the other hand, comes from a small town in Bosnia, and brings forth something of the Bosnian fields where horses run unchecked and where the wolves on cold winter nights howl from the mountains and come dangerously close to the villages. His poetry does not have the cynical dimension of the Bosnian urban centers, but brings the smell of "rotting beech trees" and the image of storks "leav[ing] our roofs" at the first sign of war.

Rifet's world is more vulnerable, more exposed to destruction. While in Sarajevo the libraries were burnt first, in small towns people were taken from their beds and shot in front of their homes. The killer in Sarajevo was the shell coming from the hills; in small towns the killer wore the face of the next-door neighbor.

Footprints is a collection of his poems and essays reflecting on the theme of Bosnia's turbulent history and its recent war; however, the anthology reaches far beyond the Bosnian ethnic milieu into Canadian landscapes and the history of the human race and its destiny in the universe. Here, the voice of the poet, lyrical and bewildered, meets the voice of the essayist, rational and inquisitive. Rifet, the poet, paints the realms of the mysterious and unimaginable while the essayist asks for rational explanations. In the three essays, each introducing a new chapter of the collection, the author conducts imaginary interviews with the three prominent contemporary figures: Marshal Tito, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Professor Stephen Hawking. A politician, a spiritual leader and a scientist each reflects on the path humankind could take to better itself.



Rifet Bahtijaragic

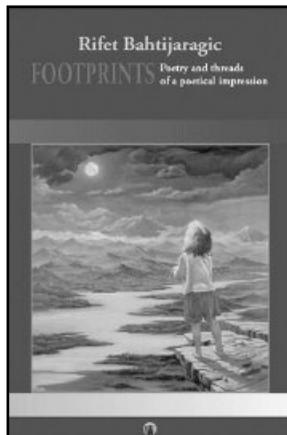
Rifet's very Bosnian themes of the ethnic conflict, the uricide of Sarajevo and the prison camps are "translatable" because of their striking universal dimension. The poet does not contemplate the complexities of the local conflict but is puzzled by the intricacy of human nature. The poet's language, in spite of its colourful regional expressions, lends itself surprisingly well to translation. Rifet's charming, naive puzzlement at the complexity of man and his capacity for evil is both disarming and profound. The Canadian reader can easily relate to the fundamental question the poet raises: how can one man turn against another?

Whether we call the prophet Abraham

or Ibrahim, use Hebrew or Arabic names, we have misunderstood God's voice. God did not want us to turn against each other. Translating from "a small language" into English seems an easy task compared to unraveling this fundamental misunderstanding ongoing for centuries. It was a ram not a human that we were supposed to sacrifice, cries the poet in his poem "Failing to Describe Pain." In this context, the process of assigning meaning to ideas, whether in the same or a different language, becomes frighteningly contemporary. Does God want us to kill the infidel? How then can we comprehend that "God is one"? This inherent ambiguity is so profound that one might lose faith in words themselves.

Rifet, the poet, however, hasn't lost faith in humans in spite of the unspeakable horrors they are capa-

(continued on page 37)

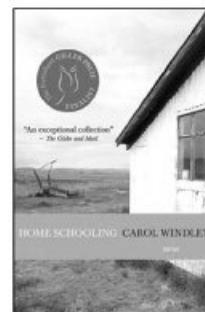


Footprints: Poetry and threads of a poetical impression

Rifet Bahtijaragic
Trafford Publishing
2008.

Trans. from Bosnian by
Sanja Garic-Komnenic,
Dennis Dehlic, Andrew
Grundy. George
Payerle, ed.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT WEST COAST WOMEN AND FICTION?



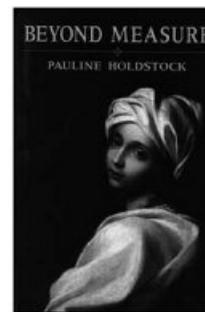
Praise for Giller Prize Finalist Carol Windley

"Home Schooling ... is as delicate as it is intelligent ... nothing short of an exceptional collection of beautiful words and resonant insights." — Carla Lucchetta, *The Globe & Mail*



Praise for Linda Rogers

"Rogers' work is both sensuous and intelligent, and it's impossible to read her without a creeping sense of terror and joy." — Susan Musgrave



Praise for Giller Prize Finalist Pauline Holdstock

"This well-executed novel can sit comfortably on any bookshelf alongside works by writers like A.S. Byatt and Jane Urquhart." — *The Globe & Mail*

Sure. The world needs more Canada. But Canada needs more B.C. writers.



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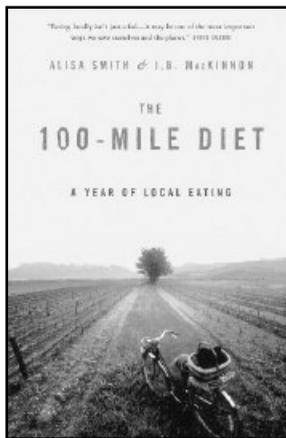
A HUNDRED MILE RETROSPECTIVE

Patrick Carolan

As a trip to your neighborhood supermarket will quickly reveal, the trend towards local eating has become a powerful force in the last few years. Thanks to heightened environmental awareness on the part of the average consumer, even massive chain stores have begun making an effort to offer shoppers organic and locally grown options—though the exact definition of both can be rather flexible—as well as reusable shopping bags to carry them home in. In Toronto, legislation is in the works to make rooftop gardens *mandatory* for residential buildings. In Vancouver, the municipal government has supported the creation of public gardening plots, and citizens are actively defending the city's last remaining farm, located at the University of British Columbia, from being bulldozed in the name of condo sprawl.

The public's interest in the environmental impact of food production is puzzling. In a world of mounting conflict in the Middle East, global recession and melting glaciers it is a rare example of society improving out of its own accord. The work of certain statesmen including David Suzuki and Al Gore aside, this trend has been largely a grassroots effort, depending on the innovation and passion of numerous bold pioneers. There is no question that *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating*, by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon has been a major factor in this phenomenon. Born in a dilapidated cottage in the wilds of Northern British Columbia, the 100-mile diet was an experiment in a seemingly new, though in fact ancient way of eating. As Smith and MacKinnon note, the average North American meal travels anywhere between 1500 to 3000 miles—equivalent to a drive from Denver, Colorado to New York City—before reaching the eater's plate. With the apparent plethora of exotic, out of season products available at any supermarket, the idea of eating only locally produced foods seems somewhat alien. But for millennia humans have consumed only those crops they were able to grow themselves. This statistic and a delicious, locally foraged meal served in their cabin on the edge of the Skeena River inspired Smith and MacKinnon to restore the absent sense of "traceability" removed from their diets by today's modern food industry, and their adventure turned them into "celebrities of the blogosphere."

Several valid criticisms have been leveled against their 100-mile diet, particularly that foods they consumed were not true 100-mile products. In many cases the fer-



The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating.
Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon.
Random House Canada
\$32.95 cloth

tilizers and feed that helped produce them came from far off sources—a fact that Smith and MacKinnon begrudgingly acknowledge. Additionally, the reduction in fossil fuel usage attributable to their local eating was somewhat offset by the net amount of local driving needed to acquire individual products from numerous farms that otherwise would have been shipped in more economical quantities along with other goods, even if over longer distances. Finally, due to the concentration of people in large metropolitan areas, 100% "local farming" would quickly strip the land bare. But perhaps these arguments touch on a greater need to rework our existing food production system from the ground up in order to complement a less environmentally destructive way of life. On a more literary level, its tales of a bygone age of idyllic farmers and simpler times can feel overly sentimental and often lack a cohesive direction. But as engaging as the book is for its message about our responsibility to the planet, it is the human charm, wit and raw emotion displayed by its authors when recounting hardships such as "separating mouse shit from wheat berries with a credit card" or being hit with the long-term-relationship-blues, and the moments of hope and the enlightenment found in the cracking of "the perfect walnut," among other events that will keep a reader hooked.

Though the 100-mile diet itself may be far from perfect, its importance runs much deeper than the mere nuts and bolts of its precepts. It is a symbol of a society taking responsibility for its actions and a source of inspiration for anyone wishing to contribute. Read it. See what all the fuss is about. Personally, after finishing it I found myself eating less meat, riding the bus and car-pooling more often, and experimenting with more and more esoteric recipes in the kitchen. I have been inspired to see the ecological challenges of the world ahead not as an impending crisis, but as an opportunity for innovation. Smith and MacKinnon have seen the end of the world and want to give you a glimpse, because it's "funny how it only seems like a beginning."

Patrick Carolan writes from Vancouver and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Cognitive Psychology from the University of British Columbia where he also studied history and Korean Language.

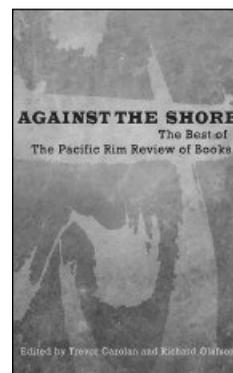


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Trevor Carolan has published 13 books of poetry, fiction, translation, memoir, and anthologies. Active in Pacific Coast watershed issues, aboriginal land claims, and Asia-Pacific human rights campaigns, he now teaches English at University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, B.C.

Richard Olafson is an editor, poet, book designer and publisher. He has published a number of books and chapbooks, and lives in Victoria with his family. He is publisher of *The Pacific Rim Review of Books*.

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SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A BEAVER'S PELT?

Hilary Turner

Poets writing in English have had a long and unlikely love affair with the sonnet. The form probably originated among the French troubadours of the twelfth century, but was appropriated and revised by Italian poets of the early Renaissance. The most illustrious of these, Francesco Petrarca, overlaid on the form's fourteen-line structure and rigid rhyme scheme a rich lexicon of metaphors for the ironies of love. Petrarchan love is a sickness, a wound, an inspiration, a battle, a delight, and an agony; it is both cosmic and private, both life-giving and fatal. Formally and thematically, the sonnet has always entailed a fine balance of opposites.

Not coincidentally, its established combination of brevity, rigor, and paradox makes the sonnet the most difficult of the fixed forms. Because it captures energy within strict convention, the form compels the poet to dance nimbly in chains. For obvious reasons, the transmutation of Italian sensibilities into the syntax and idiom of English poetry was not achieved without strain. In fact, it is arguable that the enthusiastic adoption of the sonnet form in the 1590s by such poets as Wyatt, Surrey, and Sidney, did more to revolutionize English prosody and poetics than it did to transform the sonnet itself.



Margaret Avison

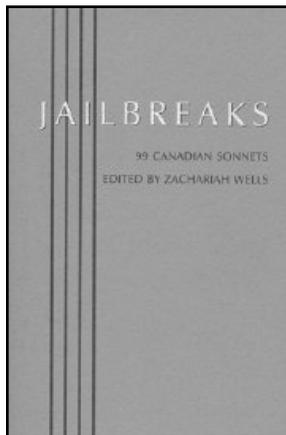
Nevertheless, as Zachariah Wells declares in his Introduction to this small anthology, "a good poet can take liberties—often outrageous ones—with a sonnet's structure, without destroying the sonnet's essence." By choosing the title "Jailbreaks," a figure borrowed from Margaret Avison's "Snow," one of the gems of the volume, Wells draws attention to the irresistible lure of writing against the constraints of form. Such is the essence of inventiveness, and as many examples in this collection testify, Canadian poets have used the sonnet inventively almost from the beginning. Even the traditionalists like Charles G.D. Roberts, Archibald Lampman, and Duncan Campbell Scott are here represented with works that do something new, and specifically Canadian, with the sonnet.



Zachariah Wells

At the other end of the spectrum are poets whose variations on the form are recognizable as such only with careful attention to the nuances of structure. In a self-reflexive use of the sonnet pattern, Dan Coles's twenty-line "Sampling from a Dialogue" describes the way a couple's inability to collaborate on "a new line" brings about the collapse of their relationship. Gerry Gilbert pushes formal constraints in the opposite direction with the thirty-four-word sonnet, "Bannock," while preserving just the faintest whisper of the conventional interlocking rhymes. Ken Babstock then makes the intricate rhyme scheme of the Shakespearean sonnet look like a game, as he delivers the whole in the voice of a hockey player in the penalty box. And there are dozens more well-chosen poems which flirt or quarrel with the sonnet form, even as they keep it alive.

Jailbreaks is not a textbook. Perhaps in an effort to distance himself from the tendency of academics to fossilize things that are still alive, Wells has imposed no discernible order on his ninety-nine selections. The absence of method makes for some terrific juxtapositions: Joshua Trotter appears alongside Molly Peacock, for example, pondering abstractions such as "the way grammar employs the onrush of language," while Peacock stubbornly exam-



Jailbreaks: 99 Canadian Sonnets.
Zachariah Wells, ed.
Biblioasis

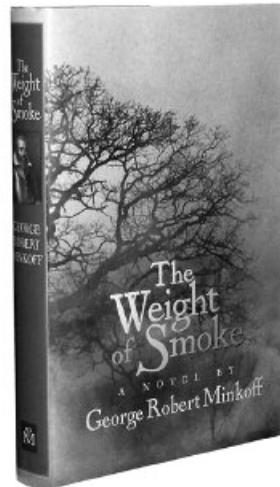
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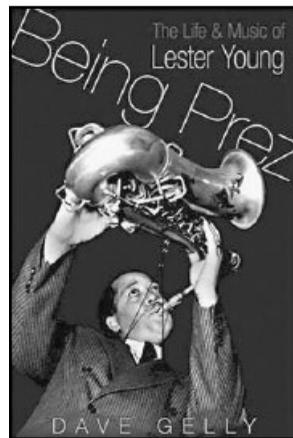
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BEING PREZ & MOVING TO HIGHER GROUND

Joseph Blake



Being Prez: The Life and Music of Lester Young
Dave Gelly. Oxford U.P., 171 pp.

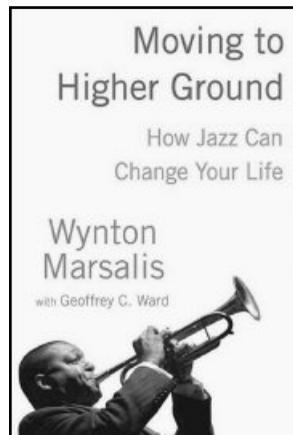
Jazz is about character and characters. Lester Young was a profoundly shy man, a great artist and an enigma, a Zen-like poet and inventor of cool. Wynton Marsalis is a poet, philosopher, and great artist too. Like his younger brother and fellow jazz lion, Delfeayo once told me, “Wynton’s got a lot of heart.”

Marsalis is courageous at his core, and this sixth book (in addition to nine Grammy Awards for jazz and classical recordings and a Pulitzer Prize for his 1997 oratorio on slavery and freedom, *Blood on the Fields*) may be his most important work. It’s a real gift to non-fans as well as the most serious jazz lovers.

Lester Young was born in Mississippi in 1909, but his family home was in Algiers, across the river from New Orleans. His individualism and dignity was never diminished by the virulent racism he faced throughout his life. Young’s motto was to avoid trouble, but it didn’t stop him from living with a white woman in times when that was against the law in many American states. His only musical hero, Frankie Trumbauer was white too. Race has always been negotiable in New Orleans., and Lester

Young was always his own man.

Wynton has deep roots in New Orleans too, and his introductory chapter describes the future trumpet star’s 1970’s visit to Danny Barker’s Fairview Baptist Church Brass Band practicing in an empty lot in New Orleans. Through his Motown-loving, country boy, eight-year old eyes and ears, Marsalis relives that first lesson, Barker breaking down traditional jazz from the bass drum and tuba foundation to trombone slide, trumpet song and clarinet squeal. The vivid memory’s lesson is the message of this book: Mutual respect and trust on the bandstand can alter your out-



Moving to Higher Ground: How Jazz Can Change Your Life
Wynton Marsalis with Geoffrey C. Ward
Random House, 179 pp.

look on the world and enrich every aspect of your life “from individual creativity and personal relationships to the way you conduct business and understanding what it means to be a global citizen in the most modern sense.”

Dave Gelly’s biography of Lester Young passionately and concisely makes the same argument for Prez. Young earned his nickname for his singular tenor sax skill and gentlemanly hipness. Framed by the author’s narrative of Lester’s scarred childhood in the family band, emergence as a jazz star with Basie and territory bands, swing’s pop ascendance, bebop’s birth, and Young’s tragic disintegration, an image of Prez floats to the surface like a smoky ghost rising from the darkroom’s chemical bath.

Gelly’s deep knowledge and love for music sends you back to Young’s recordings, so there’s a gorgeous soundtrack to the writer’s magic too. Gelly can capture Lester sound and stance with words. You can see the physicality of his playing, and you can hear it too, even without the CDs. That said, try finding the Ken Burns *Jazz Collection*, spanning the mid-30’s combos and orchestras, 1940’s solo triumphs and a pair of mid-50’s

gems yanked from the ashes of Young’s last, sad years. Pure blues transcendence. This is a great little book that captures the essence of an elusive jazz giant.

Unlike Lester, Wynton is a healthy, articulate, highly educated man, and he doesn’t hide from the spotlight. Since his teenage breakthrough in Art Blakey’s band, Wynton’s been a force on the international jazz scene. As Artistic Director for Jazz at Lincoln Center, he’s helped keep the soul and spirit of the music alive, while celebrating the history and living historical figures of the great American art form.

“Jazz gives us soulful insights into history and the human condition. The blues, a universal musical form, was born to heal,” Marsalis writes. “Jazz helps you find, or hold on to, the proper balance between your right to have things your way and your responsibility to respect others, while working with them to improvise toward a common goal. Jazz also demonstrates that great art can be for everybody. It’s both down-



Lester Young

home and sophisticated. It deals with elite ideas, but it is not elite. I have written this book because I believe jazz can change your life, as it has changed mine.”

Grab a recording of Lester Young’s 1936 session with Jimmy Rushing and other members of Basie’s Kansas City-bred band. You’ll hear what Gellis describes as “blazing energy and complete assurance”, confidence and poise of a young man fully aware of his powers” and “complete control of them”, “simple and tricky at the same time”, and finally “so plain and lucid as to defy comment or analysis.”

The late saxophone great, Al Cohn fondly remembered, “When I heard him I thought it was the hippest thing I ever heard...It was different from anybody else’s sound...Prez was so light. To me it was effortless, and his harmonic approach was different, and his rhythmic approach too...”

Stan Getz and Dexter Gordon (who played a version of Lester-inspired mannerisms in his starring role in the movie, *Round Midnight*) were teenage followers of Prez too. Lots of great musicians have built upon Young’s unique gifts. These books will help you understand jazz and hopefully help you fall in love with Lester Young (and Wynton) too.

Joseph Blake is PRRB’s music correspondent extraordinaire.



Wynton Marsalis

THE FIREBREATHER

Len Gasparini

One morning, while shaving, I was confronted by my other, my true, self in the bathroom mirror. *Chaos is rejecting all you have learned, chaos is being yourself.* My wife and I had recently divorced.

On a weekend trip to Toronto my friend Dalton and I visited Marcel Horne, also known as *El Diablo*—the Firebreather. Dalton was eager to meet him. Since moving back to my hometown, I hadn't seen Marcel in months. It was late evening when we arrived at his door. He and his girlfriend Lorraine were renting a small one-bedroom bungalow in a drab, treeless cul-de-sac off Eastern Avenue.

Marcel's appearance belied his gentle disposition. He was 35; blond-haired, six-foot-four inches tall, 230 pounds, streetwise, well-traveled, and looked like a bouncer in a clip joint. I had met him over a year ago, at a New Year's Eve party in Toronto. Lorraine was from Vancouver. She was part Cree; long raven hair threaded with gray.

After the handshakes and the hugs, Lorraine opened the bottle of red wine I had brought. Marcel fired up a jade hash pipe. It was passed around. Mellowness came slowly. Lorraine said she was homesick for Vancouver and reminisced about the days of psychedelia, hippie utopianism—an era she seemed to have trouble escaping. Marcel, down on his luck, bemoaned the scarcity of venues for his fire act. Dalton was all exuberance. He plied Marcel with questions about carnival life, freak shows, the arcana of firebreathing. I knew Marcel disliked explaining his fire act. "There are no secrets," he said testily, "like cold flame or coatings in the mouth. Firebreathing's a dangerous art. It involves years of practice, complete physical and mental co-ordination. It's my religion."

I had seen Marcel's fire act only once—at a club in Toronto. He performed it to background music: Jimi Hendrix's "Third Stone from the Sun." I remember that he seemed to slip into a yogic trance of total concentration; then he drank some gasoline from a small brass cup, held a torch to his mouth and blew a flame twenty feet long—"as an offering," he told me later, "to the Cosmic God of Unity."

Dalton was a little in awe of him. I sensed that Marcel found Dalton too wired with nervous energy.

"Leo said you wrote a book about your firebreathing," Dalton said to him.

Marcel nodded. "Leo reviewed it for some newspaper."

"How's the book doing?" I said.

Marcel made a wry face.

"Don't ask," Lorraine said.

"My last royalty check," Marcel said, "was eleven dollars and change."

I shook my head. "The book was banned in his hometown," I said to Dalton.

"Really? Where's that?" he asked Marcel.

"Leamington."

"The Big Tomato," said Dalton.

"Yeah, half the town's a greenhouse," I said.

"Can I buy a copy of your book?" asked Dalton.

Marcel looked at Lorraine. "Do we have any?"

"I think so." She got up from her chair and left the room.

"I used to go swimming at Point Pelee," Dalton said. "That's what I remember about Leamington: Point Pelee and beefsteak tomatoes."

Lorraine returned with a hardcover book in her hand.

"How much is it?" asked Dalton.

"A sawbuck," Marcel said.

Lorraine handed the book to Dalton. He reached into his wallet, plucked out a ten-dollar bill, and gave it to Marcel. His gesture seemed to lighten Marcel's mood.

"*Annals of the Firebreather*," Dalton read the title aloud. "Please inscribe it."

Marcel grabbed a ballpoint pen. "Dalton. D-A-L-T-O-N?"

Dalton nodded.

"My first sale in months," Marcel said. "This calls for a little celebration. Excuse

me a second." He hurried out of the room, and returned just as quickly, holding a cigar box, which he opened in front of us.

Inside a Dutch Masters cigar box were some pieces of soft, dry fungi.

"From the rainforests of Vancouver Island," Marcel said proudly.

Dalton leaned forward to get a better look. "Are those what I think they are?" he said.

"Psilocybin. Magic mushrooms," said Marcel.

"A magic carpet ride," I said.

Dalton's eyes brightened.

Everyone except Lorraine partook of the magic mushrooms.

A short while after we had ingested them, Dalton produced two joints. "From East Detroit," he said, handing one to Marcel, and then lighting the other.

"Drugs are OK," I said, "but I think dreams are the last chance at happiness left for us to experience."

"Isn't life a dream?" Dalton said mock-seriously.

"Not in Colombia," Lorraine said, and glanced at Marcel. "Tell them what happened there."

"Leo's heard that story," Marcel said.

Lorraine looked at Dalton. "Have you, Dalton?"

"No. What happened?"

"Tell him," she urged Marcel.

Marcel took a sip of wine. "I was backpacking in northern Colombia," he said. "I camped overnight on some deserted beach. It was midmorning. I was sitting there barefoot, stripped to the waist, listening to the surf, the gulls, and smoking a joint. It was so peaceful. And then I saw two people in the distance, walking in my direction. I figured they were *turistas*, and thought no more about it. But when I looked again, I saw two short dark men; and they were heading straight toward me. They were both dressed in casual clothes, so I didn't think *police*. I had a good buzz on; but seeing them distracted me. Was I on private property? Were they going to rob me? Sell



me some *basuco*?

"When they got close enough, I called out: '*Buenos dias. Como esta?*' They didn't reply, and they didn't smile. Their manner seemed aggressive, suspicious. Just to play it safe, I buried my spliff in the sand. One of them said something to me in Spanish. '*No hablo espanol*,' I said. 'I don't speak Spanish.' I asked them in very broken Spanish what they wanted, and was there a problem. The smaller of the two demanded to see my passport. That much I understood. His tone wasn't exactly friendly. I stood up. 'What for? Are you the police?' I said. He grunted: '*Si, policia.*' Bullshit, I thought. I asked to see some proof. The other one suddenly shoved me aside and picked up my knapsack. I grabbed his arm and punched him in the jaw. He staggered backwards. His partner pulled out a gun and aimed it at me. He sneered '*Americano*' and some other words. The guy I nailed was holding his jaw and spitting blood. I showed them my Canadian passport. I always carried two passports with me: a Canadian and a Swiss.

"They marched me along the beach to their car. The guy I hit kicked my ankle hard enough to make me limp. I tripped and fell face-down. He gestured to me to eat sand; wouldn't let me get up till I had a mouthful. The smaller one kept shouting and jabbing me in the back with the butt of his gun. I was afraid he might pull the trigger. I was gagging, spitting out grains of sand. They drove to some shit-hole of a town, and they threw me in a shit-hole of a jail."

Marcel paused for a moment, took another sip of wine. "I know about corrupt cops," he said. "In Colombia, ninety percent of the cops were on the take; and most of them were thugs. As authority figures, Colombian cops ranked with bus drivers. The main action there was *soborno*—the bribe. I was locked up in a cell that must've been built for midgets. I'm almost six and a half feet, and I couldn't stand up straight



A Colombian Prison Guard (Getty images)

without bumping my head. To stretch my legs, I had to lie diagonally on a cement floor that smelled of grime and piss. The toilet was a hole in the floor. There were flies, ants, cockroaches. The food was lousy: beans, a fishy broth, stale bread. After two days in that cell, all my joints were sore. I could hardly move my neck. First time in my life I was really scared. I was wishing an earthquake would swallow up the whole town. If I wanted to get out of that shit-hole, I'd have to use my wits. I began bribing one of the guards—a guy my age—who spoke a little English.

"The guard advised me to make restitution to the cop whose jaw I had busted. He told me the cop had to be fed through a straw. As much as I hated apologizing to that scumbag, I acted contrite and sympathetic each time he dropped by the jail to gloat over my misery. He even showed me his wired jaw.

"Anyway, it took exactly eight days, a lot of persuasion, and a few hundred bucks in traveler's checks to secure my release, on condition that I leave Colombia. What really helped, though, was a wallet-size photo I had of my son, Jeremy. He's seven now. I showed the photo to the guard. He had five kids of his own. I kept telling him how much I missed my son, and how much my son was missing his daddy. The guard felt sorry for me.

"By that time, my ankles and feet were swollen. My back, hips, and legs ached. I had a bad cough; I had trench mouth, and diarrhea too. I felt half-dead. I needed a walking stick. With the pesos and little cash I had left, I took a bus to Cartagena. I went to the Canadian Consulate and explained my situation. They saw the piss-poor shape I was in. My passport and visa were double-checked. I was given some money for food and medicine, and put up in a cheap hotel that had bedbugs. Within four days the Consulate gave me an airplane ticket through Miami and Detroit to Toronto. End of story."

For a moment, no one said a word. Dalton was gaping at Marcel in utter amazement. Lorraine, who had nodded off, suddenly awakened. She smiled at us, yawned sleepily, excused herself, and said she was going to bed. "I have to get up early," she said. "I'm waitressing part time." We wished her good night. She gave Marcel a kiss, and left the room.

"When did that nightmare happen?" Dalton asked Marcel.

"Almost two years ago," said Marcel.

"You're lucky to be alive," Dalton said.

"Fate, my friend."

"I'm claustrophobic," said Dalton. "I would've freaked out."

"If I had a dream of hell," I said, "it would be eternally panhandling on the northeast corner of Sherbourne and Queen."

Marcel laughed, then he said: "The best thing about life is that you never know what's going to happen next. I sometimes think we live only because of the instinct to stay alive." He got up and left the room.

Dalton looked at me. "Would you rather know *how* or *when*?" he said.

"What are you talking about?" I said.

"If you had a choice, would you rather know *how* you're going to die or *when* you're going to die?"

I thought for a moment, but I couldn't decide. "Ask someone who's contem-

plating suicide," I said.

He smiled. "Good point."

"What about you?"

"Hey, I'm just an experiment on the part of nature," he said. "All of us are."

"I'll drink to that."

He raised his glass. "To fast times and hard laughs."

"You heard what Marcel said: You never know what's going to happen next."

"That's what made me think about choice," he said. "Does choice require reasons?"

I shrugged. While Dalton pondered his own question, my eyes strayed around the room. It was sparsely furnished, vintage Salvation Army. Being carny people, Marcel and Lorraine traveled light. I noticed some curios here and there. I got up to have a closer look. On top of an old battered trunk was a coiled bullwhip; a hard bracket fungus about ten inches wide, its cap orange-brown and hoof-shaped. On the wall, an eagle feather and an Iroquois false-face mask; and four large formidable-looking animal claws fastened to a thin leather thong. I fingered the claws.

"I'd hate to be on the receiving end of those," said Dalton, just as Marcel entered the room.

"Grizzly bear," said Marcel.

"Those claws could tear off a side of beef," I said.

"Leo has a shark tooth," Dalton said.

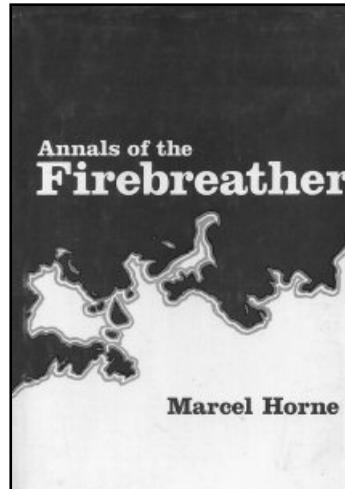
I withdrew the tooth I wore on a gold chain around my neck. "My mojo," I said, and kissed it.

As usual, the effects of the drugs were only briefly sublime: the deep rush, the sweet euphoric consciousness-expanding release from the tension between self and reality. We sat there, each of us seeking his own intuitive enlightenment. Marcel mentioned again that gigs were hard to come by in Toronto. His ex-wife wouldn't let him see their son. He and Lorraine were living on welfare. He said they might get a drive-away and go to California in the fall. I said that I wanted to go to New Orleans. Marcel had been to New Orleans. Marcel had been everywhere. "I move around a lot," he once said, "because staying in one place reminds me that where I belong no longer exists."

"Let's order a pizza," Dalton said.

After that visit I saw Marcel infrequently. He seemed doomed to wander the earth with his Swiss passport and fireproof lungs. He and Lorraine eventually split up. She went back to Vancouver. Dalton's marriage was on the rocks. I was divorced, writing poetry, and sleeping around, ever mindful that all human feelings milk their absolute from the misery of the glands. In August, the year Elvis died, I returned alone to Toronto—the city of dreadful day. A few years passed. Marcel ended up in Florida, breathing fire and working as a short-order cook in the off-season. We corresponded. He had entrusted me with the key to his Toronto post office box. It was the only thing stationary about him.

Len Gasparini is a poet and writer living in Toronto. He has published recently The Undertaker's Wife, a collection of short stories with Guernica. He has a forthcoming book, When a Kiss Becomes a Bite, forthcoming from Ekstasis Editions.



BROWNE (continued from page 28)

about what it means to live among one's ancestors; it occurred to me that the majority of the people in the world share their daily lives with their ancestors. It was a humbling thought.

We travelled one day to one of the gravesites, and as we motored south in a boat from Chemainus my guide pointed to and named every beach and headland along the way. He told me who'd lived there in the not-so-old days, and who was still present. He told me the name of each place, and translated the names for me. He created in my mind a map that has never existed on paper, a vital map of lived lives. This is what I'm trying to do with my poems — to make a map that doesn't yet exist, but is there nevertheless.

This is why I invite so many disparate elements to flow through these poems, to create resonance. To witness, on multiple, intersecting levels. In *The Shovel*, there's a list at the end of "Naughts and Crosses" which catalogues the Royal Navy's means of surveillance of Cowichan villages in the nineteenth century...

PG: ...the list of gunboats...

Colin Browne: ...yes. You might think there were, perhaps, one or two naval ships in the area threatening the Cowichans. Then you add them all up... Does the thought of state terrorism come to mind?

There's a map, but we're not seeing it.

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

GODS (continued from page 30)

heart a treasury of verse, a veritable treasury.

In general, one, who forms part of a series of books, at least in the 'law' of the literary world, cannot write a review for another in the same series.* So once again, I break with tradition & salute my fellow poet & traveler, muse & friend. The wish-fulfilling gem has created a bouquet of verses, which in their brevity seem as light as the heaviest tear shed on the site of pilgrimage. I say, without hesitation, that fr. the 50 or more books, Shiv Mirabito has produced, this one is, for me, one of the most remarkable & he is to be saluted for bringing Primo Pensiero to the attention of the international poetry community. Jacqueline Gens has addressed herself to this community, beyond hesitation, 'beyond doubt'.

Poetry has been suspected (see above) of 'spiritual anarchism'. Jacqueline comforts with her light authority but as we peruse her work, this same authority transforms into blessing, that is, into a vehicle to liberate us fr. the tyranny of our minds, our judgment, our dualistic view.

One can not say that 'transmission' is lost, no, as the master said, 'the wings of the birds of Mt. Meru were clothed in gold'. We carry this transmission; Jacqueline has carried her understanding into verse of shocking richness. Dzog Chen goes beyond bhumi, we do not apprehend the steps, (the 10 bhumis, as in the Mahayana). Behold Jacqueline: single bhumi – 'first thought, best thought' – she has drawn her arrow & she has hit her mark.

'Rely not on Nethartha (indirect meaning/language) but on Nithartha (direct meaning/experience)'. The Buddha

nb. Bhumi (skt): ref. to the 10 steps or bhumi, in the Mahayana Buddhist path, the 'gradual' method of realization, Ati

Yogi, or Dzog chen, being the direct 'single bhumi' instruction.

Louise Landes Levi has published with Shiva Stan, Avenue A & Ninth Street, 2006 & forthcoming *The Deep Diamond, a broadside*, 2009.

TRANSLATING (continued from page 31)

ble of doing. His verses emanate hope for the redemption of man. While carrying the burden of our past, Bosnian or some other, we are still "miraculous creations" he argues, "breaking the chains of the silent past...on the path into the unknown."

The poet's capacity for forgiveness is remarkable. He believes "That even the sons of Satan feel/ They can wash away their repulsive origins/ If they follow God's paths."

The message of faith in human spirit so beautifully contradicts the poet's eyewitness testimony of horrors. The hope that we are not entirely of this world, that the "human is an imagination from some other world" is so profound that it does not need translation.

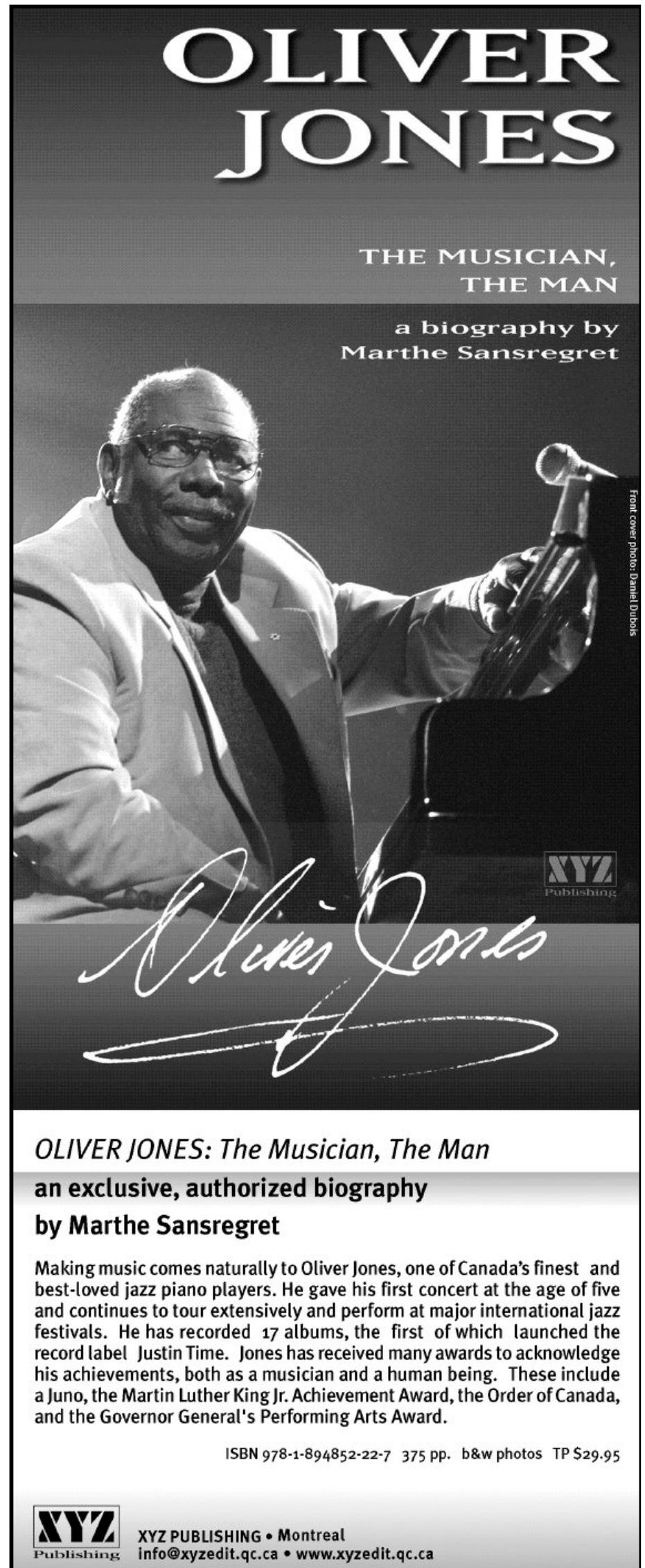
Sanja Garic-Komnenic teaches at the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

JAILBREAKS (continued from page 33)

ines the "dreams, brains, fur, and guts" of a very concrete dead possum—a synecdoche for "what we are." Then there's Irving Layton sharing a two-page spread with E.A. Lacey. Layton is off in Las Vegas playing blackjack with death, while Lacey, in his revision of Frost's "The Gift Outright," stays home to contemplate the Canadian Shield as the source of our puritanical and self-torturing national ethos. These are two sides of the same coin, perhaps.

On the other hand, the collection's methodological randomness is somewhat undercut by the thirty-odd pages of notes on the poems tucked away at the end of the volume. Not that Wells waxes professorial here; on the contrary, his annotations are decidedly jaunty—but they do invite the matching up of artifact and analysis normally associated with interpretation and study. Hesitating somewhere between kaleidoscope and categorization, Wells is evidently prepared to take the mild risk of perplexing the pedantic reader. But that, too, is part of the balancing act. Poetical "reason," as the mercurial Philip Sidney remarked, "wouldst needs fight both with love and sense." Of course: that is the struggle that produces the sonnet.

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



OLIVER JONES

THE MUSICIAN,
THE MAN

a biography by
Marthe Sansregret

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Oliver Jones

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Yolande Villemaire



Yolande Villemaire est née au Québec et remporte en 1980 le Prix des Jeunes écrivains du Journal de Montréal pour son roman *La vie en prose*, qu'on qualifiera d'oeuvre féministe et postmoderne. Poète et romancière, elle publie une dizaine de recueils de poésie dont la rétrospective *D'ambre et d'ombre* en 2000 et dix romans, dont *La déferlante d'Amsterdam* en 2003 et *India, India* à XYZ en 2007. Elle a vécu à New York, à Paris et à Amsterdam, mais aussi en Inde. Sa poésie est traduite en anglais, en espagnol, en italien, en roumain, en néerlandais, en catalan et en islandais. Elle vit à Montréal. Son recueil *Céleste tristesse* a été réédité en 2006 aux Écrits des Forges en coédition avec Le Temps des Cerises en France.



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PLASTIC (continued from page 27)

band in "sparrow bride sonnet," a simple yet poignant poem, raise such questions. He compares his bride to a restless, flitting sparrow, and although their life is initially "pleasant," he later begins "leaving doors & windows open." We can only assume his bride flies away. Is this marriage hopelessly flawed from the beginning because, as he suggests, "flitting was in her nature," or is his deliberate act of tempting her with freedom to blame? Does he release her out of compassion, or for his own selfish reasons?

Despite these unanswered questions, the act of falling can be seductive and erotic, too. The poem, "pornographic dream," connects a plunge into the abyss directly to sexual pleasure:

*falling is a porno-
graphic dream in-
to the abyss the man leaps
with hopes high
goal clear
an orgasm of the soul merging
with the earth . . .*

Perhaps, the poem seems to suggest, falling and loss satisfy some deep-seated need of humanity. Though we may fail, suffer the loss of loved ones, and ultimately die, there is still something soothing, something quintessentially human in the act of trying, of leaping with "hopes high" into the abyss. Do we, in such acts, find solace?

Carroll's poems urge readers to explore these leaps. They propel them to probe the mysterious chambers of the heart, leading them deep into forests of memory and illusion, where bird calls in the distance are strange yet familiar. They impel readers up steep slopes and then abandon them, perched atop precipices where they must wait, breathless, for answers that might never come. If you are willing to take such a journey and risk a plunge into unknown depths, then I urge you to pick up a copy this book. *The Plastic Heart* will not disappoint.

Ray de Kroon writes from Abbotsford, B.C. He studies English Literature at the University of the Fraser Valley.

GIFT HORSE (continued from page 27)

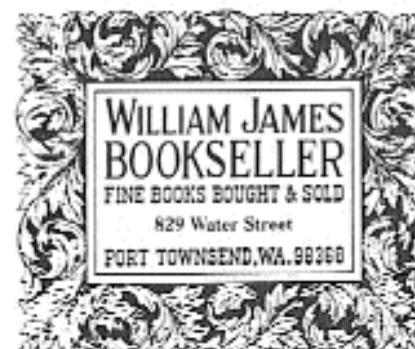
Canadian wilderness? Of course not; he too has a malignancy. Like the fuhrer, he failed his children, abandoning them for Hitler's siren, the woman who sang the music he loved.

Several generations of Germans have now had to repudiate the past, which means their own antecedents. We know, as Andreas begins to plan his ninetieth birthday, that his children in Germany will not likely make the journey to join his awkward celebration. He let them down and they are programmed to repeat the pattern. There is no forgiveness for violation of the family.

We are not sure at the end if Wolfgang has pretended to go pick up his siblings at the bus from Vancouver in denial of the *schadenfreude* they are playing with an old man with selected memories, or if they are really coming.

This is the time of judgment for the man and for the culture that produced such hubris. Can such heinous crimes be transformed? No one is above the laws of nature, not even musicians. Andreas has lost himself, and no one is obligated to find him.

Linda Rogers is Victoria's Poet Laureate. Her new novel, The Third Day Book, sequel to The Empress Letters, and a book of poetry, Muscle Memory are now available in bookstores.



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IN SEARCH OF THE MIRACULOUS: HEALING INTO CONSCIOUSNESS

Apis Teicher

Eliza Mada Dalian's *In Search of the Miraculous: Healing into Consciousness* is an interesting guidebook on the path to personal and spiritual healing and self-fulfillment. Mada Dalian's work is not for everyone, however – the work is best suited to people already familiar (and firm believers) in the concepts of re-incarnation and karmic retribution.

Her book is based on the belief that all healing can be accomplished, be it physical, emotional or spiritual by a steady and conscious acknowledgment of the ego. She explores at depth the power of self-healing and wholeness through the deconstruction of the ego, giving a well thought-out, step-by-step approach to accomplish this.

Some of Mada Dalian's premises are problematic; for instance the belief that experience simply *is*, rather than being positive or negative. Although this is not a new concept for eastern spirituality, and is linked to the surrender of the ego and desires, Mada Dalian's take is troublesome. In her chapter about "Healing the Ego in the Seven Chakras" for instance, when asked: "I had an abusive childhood. In what way was it my own creation or choice?", her response resorts to thoughts of karmic retribution, rather than a genuine search for ways to heal that experience:

If you look deeper into your unconscious, you will see that there was a reason behind the abuse. Somehow, you consciously or unconsciously attracted the experience to further evolution of your consciousness. It is possible that you may have needed to complete a karmic relationship with your abuser, or had to pay a karmic debt.

One wonders the target audience for her work, as it seems ill fitting for those recovering from tragedies or some form of abuse. While most processes of healing will encourage the seeker to take responsibility for his or her own past actions, and events that have in effect poisoned their psyche and/or body, Mada Dalian's dismissal of this type of pain is deplorable. Furthermore, it helps perpetuate the stereotype that victims were, in some fashion, deserving of their victimization.

In Search of the Miraculous, however, is not entirely without merit; Mada Dalian has broken down complex beliefs into simple, easy to follow steps in a very straightforward fashion. The section on the development of the ego is straightforward and easy to follow, as is her chapter on "Moving through the Seven Bodies". Her meditation exercises and visualizations offer a practical way to use the theories she has expounded on throughout the text, and they are simple and direct.

The book works best as a guidebook, as an intuitive and well-written exploration into the personal search towards self-fulfillment: as a reflection and counsel on healing it falls short of its lofty goal.

Apis Teicher's previous review for PRRB was "The Haiku Apprentice."



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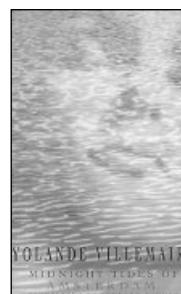
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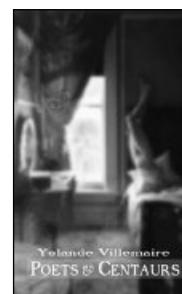


Quebec poet and novelist Yolande Villemaire has published widely in various genres. Her work (poems, literary criticism, radio dramas, novels) moves from its experimental days, in such reviews as *Hobo/Québec* and *Cul-Q*, to the development of a neorealism acclaimed by critics. Yolande Villemaire lives in Montreal, but has made extended visits to locations throughout the globe.

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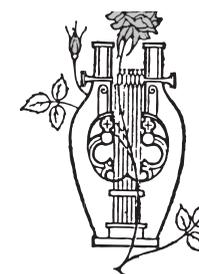
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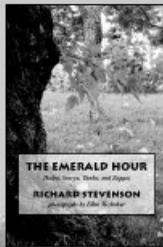


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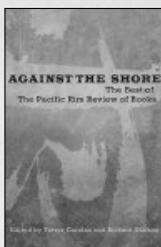
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