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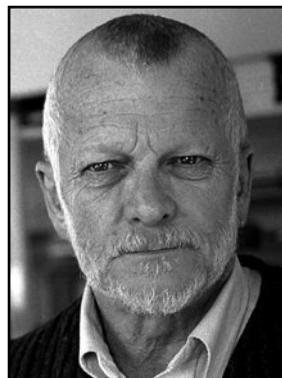
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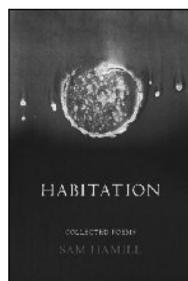
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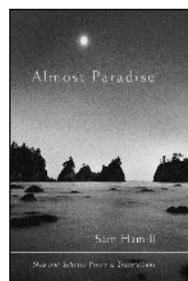


This issue of the
Pacific Rim Review of Books
is dedicated in part
to the memory of
Sam Hamill (1943-2018)

Great poet and publisher,
he will be missed.



Habitation:
Collected Poems
Lost Horse Press



Almost Paradise:
New and Selected
Poems and
Translations
Shambhala

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“RIGHT OVER THE PLATE” WITH THE TWO GEORGES

Colin James Sanders

Broadly configured, the poets George Stanley (born San Francisco, 1937) and George Bowering (Penticton, B.C., 1935) are in danger of becoming venerable. Their blood-lines are well-known: between them, they have been inspired and influenced by the poetry of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, John Wieners, Le Roi Jones (Amira Baraka), Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Robin Blaser, Josephine Miles, Helen Adams, in addition to Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, and other alternative and counter-cultural, largely non-academic, poets anthologized, along with others, in Don Allen’s (1960) *The New American Poetry* – all this by way of introduction to the new flip book they have jointly published with New Star Books.



Some End
George Bowering
West Broadway
George Stanley
A flip book, New Star
Books, 2018

By way of context, Stanley moved to Vancouver in 1971, and following a relationship break up, went to live with George and Angela Bowering and others, on York Street in Khatsahlano. Bowering has reflected, “I could never have predicted such a long friendship when I knew George only as one of the poetry gods from San Francisco, but one who, inexplicably, wound up living in north-central BC. And one whose work I have admired and adored for the past quarter-century. ‘Love and poetry,’ was George’s inscription on the flyleaf of my copy of *Gentle Northern Summer*. Love and poetry, George.”

Bowering attended UBC in the early 1960s and was a co-founder and editor of the poetry journal TISH. Other cofounders included poets Fred Wah, Jamie Reid, David Dawson and Frank Davey. Pauline Bunting has noted that others active in the group, though not officially editors, included Lionel Kearns, Daphne Buckle [Marlatt], Gladys Hindmarch, and Robert Hogg.ⁱ

Stanley, born into an Irish Catholic family, describes himself now as “a Catholic atheist.” His old friend Jamie Reid (they first met in 1964 at Gino and Carlo’s bar in North Beach, San Francisco) wrote in his poem, “Message to and from”: “George has a kind of taut Jesuit calm / that cover up his in-dwelling human kindness, his desire / to find a place he is in...”,ⁱⁱ while Bowering has written, “His parents knew how to be Irish, giving one son to the Church & letting the / other become a poet...” As an intimate of the San Francisco circle gathered around Jack Spicer that attended his seminal Poetry as Magic Workshop, Stanley’s friends and acquaintances included Robin Blaser, Robert Duncan, Ebbe Borregaard, Joanne Kyger, Richard Brautigan, Ron Loewinsohn, and Stan Persky, whom Stanley met in 1958, was to become a close friend.ⁱⁱⁱ At the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965 Stanley read from his work, alongside Robin Blaser and Richard Duerden.

Such is the *milieu* within which both Bowering and Stanley cultivated their imaginative poetic minds. Their friendship goes back several decades and they have made an inestimable contribution to a unique and novel Pacific Coast poetic community, inspiring many through their writing, teaching, and mentorship of another generation of writers, especially Vancouver poets.

On April 21, 2015 while walking his Bernese mountain dog to return books to Vancouver’s West Point Grey Library, Bowering suffered a cardiac arrest. “Imagine that,” he writes in this new book, “– my last words / might have been spoken to the dog, she / who saved my life, it has been said...” (“Taking off from an old WCW Poem”). Taken by ambulance to Vancouver General Hospital, Bowering remained in a coma for two weeks. The opening poems of this new collection gathers compositions written upon his recovery. In “If I Should”, Bowering recalls, “When I woke she wanted to know whether my / memory was still here, / was I in there, was I / an I?”

Thankfully, the “I” was intact “in there” and Bowering returned to the craft and art he has excelled at, and for which he has received significant public recognition. Bowering has been the recipient of two Governor General Awards (for both poetry and prose), the Griffin Poetry Prize, and is a member of the Order of Canada, and the Order of British Columbia. In these new poems, Bowering’s remembering ranges widely. There is humour, *pathos*, recollections of literary influences, and remembering friends



Photo: Mark Musher

Georges Bowering and Stanley

lost to death.

In an elegy for Jamie Reid, “Inside Ours”, Bowering reflects:

I’ve already thought of four things I wanted to tell him, but he
fell from our lives last week.
Fell from so many lives we will walk like holes through each
other’s environment...

Bowering moves on, recalling, earlier, formative days:

When we were assigning poet roles among us he became
another Rimbaud minus the sacred.
Jamie Rimbaud ran away from home and joined the insurgents
in the Paris Commune and national television...
I wanted to stand on the street and deliver that message, but
You are outside our galaxy’s skin now.
Outside our galaxy’s skin and inside mine.

Similarly, recalling F.R. Scott, the great poet, political and social activist, and Leonard Cohen’s former tutor in Montreal, and to whom Bowering once introduced Robert Creeley and Allen Ginsberg, in “Attired” Bowering writes:

Look at her in those blue jeans, watch
her long legs walking up that gentle slope –
that’s time passing by. F.R Scott used to do that,
I know him now, though he stood stiff, his
posture learned during a previous ka-ching!
of centuries... Scott, born in 1899, lived with
One eye, bit a cigarette holder, knew more about time
Than you’ll ever know.

In a comment on poetics, on writing, Bowering adds “I always said poems weren’t / supposed to get you anywhere but the end of the poem.”

Stan Persky has recalled of Bowering in the early days of the 1960s Canadian poetry wars, parochialism and Vancouver versus Toronto, “...at a time in Canada when it was fashionable among writers to display an anti-American literary nationalism, [George] had the courage not to go along with it. Instead, he insisted that the New American Poetry (of Olson, Jack Spicer, Creeley and others) was preferable to a lot of academic Canadian verse, no matter how loyal that verse was. *That is, poetry didn’t*

have nationality, it only had reality, or it didn't".^{iv}

The 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, organized and facilitated by Warren and Ellen Tallman and Robert Creeley, then teaching at UBC, was responsible for bringing together poets associated variously with Olson's Black Mountain College, the Beats (Ginsberg, Phillip Whalen) and the Berkeley Renaissance (Robert Duncan). The only female Canadian poet represented at the conference was Margaret Avison, and, in his new work, Bowering includes a poem, "The Weight", in her honour:

bpNichol worked in the basement of the U. of T. library, the weight of all those volumes above him, with Margaret Avison beside him.

She carried all those books happily inside her spirit, a poet from the word go, a vision by Barrie's ear.

She was famous in Boston and Tokyo and unknown in her icy home town by the lake.

He goes on to observe that, "In 1963, at University of British Columbia, she sat with all the hip / U.S. poets who'd read her in *Origin*, Look *that* up...", and ultimately praises "her Blakean soul".

Stanley's *West Broadway* poems, as always, are engaging and clearly articulated. His new work may be seen as continuing a longstanding tradition of writing a serial poem, and in particular, this collection appears to continue and complement earlier texts, particularly his *Vancouver: A Poem*. In writing of the commonplace daily occurrences on Vancouver's West Broadway corridor, imaginatively the street becomes a river: "This river runs both ways / there are no bridges, only crosswalks / monitored by traffic lights.

One could use *Vancouver* and the poetry in *West Broadway* to trace demolition and demise of architectural landmarks, urban geographies, and the loss of particular bars, restaurants, and bookstores, now gone (Stanley once worked for Duthie Books), lost to development and the gentrification of once affordable neighborhoods. The poet sees how "out my window / the building across Balaclava Kidsbooks used to occupy / will come down soon. The City changes / faster than the heart. We're reading / our next books".

In the section "My Room", comprising five poems, Stanley wonders:

Did I dream this room?
A refuge for my soul,
a cell of rainbow light,
where I can bask at sundown
in negligent regret
for the passing of desire...

Then he meditates upon his isolation and solitary existence, "...the daytimer with doctors' appointments / neatly penciled in...", amid

The fragrance of an altered world,
the sense of a perfected sensibility,
are supplanted by the reek of smoke and coffee grounds,
and all around, faint but sharp in the room,
the smell of one man alone.

In the section entitled "Writing Old Age", Stanley ventures into a dialogue of sorts pondering aging and writing:

Writing answers the question: Sure, Old Age, writing will come to an end, this piece of writing we're engaged in now will come to an end, but that's never what's on my mind. When I'm Writing, my sense is always one of beginning. I'm on my way somewhere, somewhere I've never been, or have even imagined. I'm beginning even if what I'm writing has already begun.

And in what seems to this reviewer an echo of Jack Spicer, he writes,

What do you care about then, Writing?

I care about, I wait for, a true line.

A true line. To hear it in language, bypassing thinking...

Inevitably, what the two Georges are renowned for is their shared enthusiasm for baseball.^v Bowering recalls, "...in the year 2010 my wife Jean and I attended four season's home openers with him [Stanley] - in Seattle, Victoria, Maui and Vancouver." Reflexively, in "Remonstrance on Behalf of Thoughts", Stanley recalls: "Now from the adjacent bedroom there enters an old man, / wearing just glasses (and, oddly enough, a Vancouver / Canadians baseball cap".

In an essay on the late John Ashbery, literary critic Helen Vendler asks, "Earlier decades were supported by knowledge attained from elders - but how many poems or paintings do we have telling us what it is like to live into our seventies or eighties?"^{vi} Bowering and Stanley's late work is testament to what living at this point may be like, and, for many of us in poetry, they remain elders conveying knowledge and the wisdom deriving from experience.

All in, this is a wonderful literary collaboration that captures the late thoughts and experiences of two friends approaching the ninth inning, ninth decade, of their interconnected lives. What cover artist could be more appropriate than Vancouver's own Jack Shadbolt with his brilliant, illuminating 1995 image with its fitting title of *Encounter* - offering readers' one image for each cover of this unique flip book.

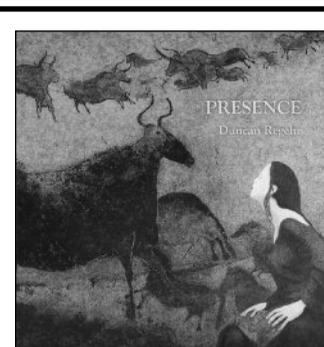
Colin James Sanders writes frequently for PRRB on contemporary North American poets and poetics.

Notes:

- i. Pauline Bunting. "TISH: The Problem of Margins". In *Writing in our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)*. P. Bunting and Susan Rudy eds. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier U.P. 2005, 49.
- ii. Jamie Reid. *A Temporary Stranger: Homages, Poems, Recollections*. Vancouver, Anvil. 2017, 190.
- iii. Persky's cover for first issue of his journal *Open Space* (1964), was a drawing of George Stanley by Bill Brodecky. Persky's *Open Space/Daniel Press* also published Stanley's *Beyond Love*, 1968.
- iv. Stan Persky. *The Short Version; An ABC Book*. Vancouver, New Star Books. 2005, 217.
- v. For an informative description of Bowering's love of baseball see Tom Hawthorn in *The Capilano Review*: 3.24 (2014); also *The Capilano Review: The George Stanley Issue*, pp. 125-128, for a brief memoir regarding Stanley, by Bowering, and "...ten of the things we do at the ball game."
- vi. Helen Vendler. *The Ocean, the Bird and the Scholar: Essays on Poets & Poetry*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2015.



Georges Bowering and Stanley



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JAPAN AND THE BEATS

Trevor Carolan

The whole matter of Beat Lit/Beat Culture's engagement with Japan has been overdue for thoughtful attention for too long. With writing on Beat Generation personalities and their work at near-saturation point in English, Japan's pivotal informative role in helping incubate Beat ethics, aesthetics, and insight practices especially has remained oddly elusive. Geographical distance plays a role in this. Few cities and decent-sized towns in North America are without a "Zen" café or fashion boutique nowadays; but even as the popularity of Beat-era writers Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder continues to soar, actual knowledge of what a term such as Zen might properly mean is skimpy. Globally, current generational interests in Asia palpate toward yoga, sushi, and beach & trekking holidays in Thailand and Bali, yet remain coy when it comes to matters of deep cultural immersion: that takes commitment. In Japan, however, the small current of Westerners drawn there in the post-war 1950s when it was one of few Asian-Pacific nations one could consider settling in to teach or study, expatriates found themselves in the presence of a deep and antique culture. Those pursuing serious literary, artistic or spiritual inquiries were compelled to acknowledge its prevailing Buddho-Shinto-Confucian ethical underpinnings. As R.H. Blyth discovered before them, to study haiku for example, was to be drawn irreducibly toward its informing cultural and spiritual elements. Zen, sacramental wandering, the Tao of Tea, martial traditions, poetry and calligraphy, notions of friendship and loneliness—all were vivid cultural signifiers in Japan that could not be ignored. Other important literary ambassadors who followed—Gary Snyder, Donald Richie, Kenneth Rexroth et al—understood that they needed to see more deeply; they readily absorbed what they encountered en route. As Ken Kesey might have put it in San Francisco, you were either *on* the bus or you weren't. Accordingly, in this volume Taylor Mignon, current Editor-in-Chief of *ToPoJo* and a former editor at *Printed Matter*, has worked to illustrate what it has meant to think, live, work, emulate, and yearn after Beat Lit/Beat Culture in Japan from both East and Western cross-cultural vantage points.

Featuring the text of Nanao Sakaki's poem "Anyday" in his own unmistakable handwriting, the edition's front cover prompts realization that, in Japan, Beat has not simply been an American phenomenon. Sakaki, a wacky, intensely eco-literate bard of worldwide mountain ranges and urban canyons, personifies virtually everything associated with Beat Lit and Culture in Japan. Paralleled in renown and notoriety by Vancouver-born, poet/wild-thing Kazuko Shiraishi, the pair have given Japan an utterly idiosyncratic, one-two punch unrivalled in Beat annals anywhere. In a landscape pioneered by Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Kerouac, W.S. Burroughs, Joanne Kyger, Snyder and others, that takes some doing. Yet no other place outside the U.S.—Paris, Tangier, India, Vancouver—has had the enduring resonance of place in Beat literature enjoyed by Japan. Both Shiraishi and Sakaki shine forcefully in this valuable, original edition.

Mignon's introduction establishes his terrain and details useful Nipponese linkages, noting a series of journals and magazines, Japanese and English language alike, that shaped lineage paths for a cluster of Beat-oriented/influenced writers and editors. As we move well beyond the old post-war generation literary influences of Donald Keene and Edward Seidensticker, this has needed crystallizing for outsiders especially. Rexroth's work is given a worthy discussion, and his disciples John Solt, Morgan Gibson, and Sam Hamill are acknowledged as the web of associations broadens. Younger neo-beat writers get a drum-roll too. Mignon dubs his collection a "definitive primer chock full of deep Beatitude."

In truth, the roster of contributors is substantial. Familiar East-West Lit veterans



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Ed. Taylor Mignon,
2018

include the inestimable Cid Corman, heavyweight Tanikawa Shuntaro, Leza Lowitz, Keida Yusuke, and the late-Hillel Wright and Edith Shiffert respectively. Ira Cohen offers a nutty poem "Tokyo Birdhouse" for Shiraishi, and Anne Waldman has an epitaph for Nanao. What unfolds is grab-bag of poetry, prose, elegy, encomia, letters, a music score, photos and drawings, the lot.

Robert Lee provides an excellent essay in appreciation of poet Shiraishi that positions the late-night mojo dynamo she is, and long has been, within a matrix of poetic, Shinjuku/NYC jazz bars, dance, and multi-media energies. There's simply nobody like her. Four of her poems in translation, her essay on Rexroth, and an interview of hers with Sakaki are also featured. Here's a taste from "My America":

...you've got that barbeque bubbling up
With love
Delicious goo
So good in bed
I like the inside of your thigh
Your tough elegant penis
That doesn't let anything on
Wipes out the gods
O let me say my prayers
At a time like this

Oh dear, what did Japan's literary guardians think of that in its day?

Shiraishi's essay on Rexroth is as perceptive as it gets. She understands him in a profound sense as poet-colleague and remembers his early championing of Ginsberg's oracular, dharma poetics, as well as Rexroth the Santa Barbara professor whose noble gesture allowed Vietnam War-era students to assign their own A-level grades; it deferred them from military conscription. It's a superb *pensée*, indeed an elegy that shows old master Rexroth and Japanese Lit in a recursive two-step; as an early, definitive devotee and translator of Japanese poetry he was instrumental in kick-starting the East-West poetic incubator that has steadily blossomed to its present condition of existence.

David Cozy relates in a fine essay that, unlike all the others, Sakaki-san remains known almost universally by his familiar name, Nanao. While the two never met, Cozy emphasizes Sakaki's approach to addressing his abiding poetic concern with wild nature, in fact the wilder the better. The sense we get is of a crafty trickster; but Nanao *was*, studying his craft in English assiduously, rising at dawn after nights of revelry to prepare carefully for his public readings and appearances. There's no mistaking Beat life here for slackerism; young wannabees make note.



Kazuko Shiraishi

A letter from Tanikawa Shuntaro on Allen Ginsberg's death in 1997 admiringly explains "I hope you'll forgive me that in my mourning for you, rather than the things you wrote, it is the warmth of your personality that I remember most...when I think of that warmth, I find myself believing it the wellspring of your poetry." Warm human connections between Ginsberg and Japanese writers were obviously reciprocal. It was in Japan in 1963 where, after a year and a half in India, and through Gary Snyder, Ginsberg met Sakaki and his Shinjuku and rural tribal mates, informally known as the Bum Academy. He would return to North America via the historic Vancouver Poetry Conference bringing alternative ideas of community that would find a hearing within the San Francisco countercultural project during the Sixties; several years later, Snyder's writing in *Earth House Hold* about his experience in Japan, particularly "Why Tribe" and about Sakaki's Suwa-no-Se Island commune, articulated further, critical trans-Pacific ideas to America's own back-to-the-land movement.

In "Considering Joanne Kyger in Kyoto", Linda Russo comments on Kyger's long friendship and correspondence with Philip Whalen, most notably throughout her Kyoto years in the early 1960s. While Whalen's own *Scenes of Life at the Capital* stands as a landmark title, Kyger's own first book *The Tapestry and the Web* would be fully developed as a result of her four-year tenure in Kyoto. Russo questions what the role

of Japan was on Kyger and offers a collegial nod to Cedar Sigo's recently edited publication *There You Are: Interviews, Journals, and Ephemera* (Wave Books, Seattle) that stands as a composite biography of this remarkable, unaccountably critically-neglected major poet. Russo writes, "The story of Joanne Kyger's life is, and is in, the poems, which take up the small details of daily life with deep awareness, humour, and grace. It is the story of inhabiting a landscape and a bioregion and making it a home." Kyoto, she clarifies, was "the site of this making." While it imbued Kyger's work with Buddhist awareness, it was also, she quotes Kyger in saying, "very restrictive." Language was at issue; so was the business of daily housekeeping. The roamings Kyger undertook with her then-husband Snyder led her to "near-inaccessible locations." These were not café Zen devotees: references to Han Shan, Basho and other monastic bards and wanderers, in addition to prominent cultural and ecological locations percolate throughout Kyger's *Tapestry* work that appeared in 1965 and that assure its place at the heart of the East-West/dharma/ Beat Lit that flourished following the initial Beat encounter with Japan.

This brings inescapable rise to the matter of Gary Snyder's stature within the ongoing Beat/Japan legacy. His presence flows through the volume but is perhaps

calculatedly subdued. A short piece by Simon Scott recollects Snyder's resounding Buddhist and ecological influence on Jack Kerouac that is recalled in *The Dharma Bums*. It explains what you need to know, to listen in with some familiarity in a discussion involving these titans. Otherwise, Snyder is accorded comparatively little treatment. Mignon concedes his collection is not comprehensive and that certain names are absent or nearly so—Sō Sakon, Suwa Yū, Nakagami Tetsuo, Whalen, Diane di Prima, and more of Ginsberg and Snyder. His hope, he says, is to "contribute to ongoing conversations about these important poets." In that, he more than delivers.

Beat Lit/Beat Culture isn't for everybody; it can take some acclimatization. For newer interests, this edition is bonanza. Almost inevitably, poetry selections by current neo-beats are uneven; however, Holly Lanasolyuna has a good one in "Breakfast in Neo-Tokyo", and Frank Spignese's "Death of a Fisherman, for Hillel Wright" is a raunchy, honest-sounding tribute to this character who loved boats and the salty life. Wright's own poem "Dreaming of Allen Ginsberg" situates things well: "*In the dream Allen was on the JR Nambu Line/between Kawasaki and Shinagawa...*" Joy Waller gets off some catchy, bitchy licks in "Mode on / Mode off", and Jessica Goodfellow registers with "Alphabet Confetti". Could there be a Japan/Beats collection without Fujiyama? Hirata Natsuko obliges intelligently, open field-style with "Foggy Mt. Fuji".

As always, there is the heart: the late centenarian Edith Shiffert, beloved by many in Kyoto slips gently into focus with lines as fine as any in Emily Dickinson with "Under The Trees, Transcendentalist": "*Old hag, goddess dying,/walks in a forest/just on the level ground./Suddenly she forgets her feet/and rises, rises./...oh this is ecstasy enough/with or without a fall.*" And as if in response, AJ Dickinson observes in six simple lines "for Edith Shiffert": *a candle / incense blossoms / for Edith /...101 goodbyes/Kyoto beats / passings*.

Physicist Fritjof Capra of *The Tao of Physics* and other masterworks has rightly argued that "our generation's version of Buddhism will be ecology." With much of contemporary environmental discourse seasoned with ecological awareness inspired by Buddho-Daoist and South Asian wisdom paths, it would be good to see one powerful essay, say, on poetry and nature consciousness from Beat Japan. Such work has been done elsewhere and Snyder, Hamill, Ken Rogers, John Einarsen among others have researched it within the many years of brilliant reportage in *Kyoto Journal*, so it is likely Mignon as editor reserved this in mind. Still, it deserves attention in the kind of more comprehensive follow-up edition he must now surely be contemplating. This, and some fuller foraging into how foreign writers adapted to, and adopted, a deeper view of Buddhism through their time in Japan would be meritorious stuff. But what Mignon has carpentered in this welcome book edition already commands respect. It's a new keeper on any shelf of serious East-East literature.

Trevor Carolan's current work is *New World Dharma: Interviews and Encounters with Buddhist Teachers, Writers and Leaders* (SUNY Press, 2016). He writes from British Columbia, Canada.

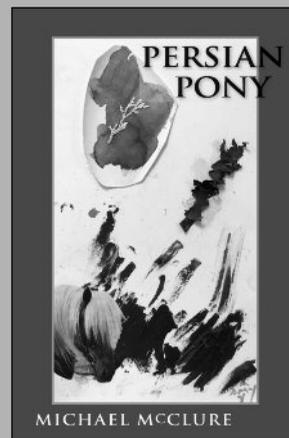


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McClure's poetry seems to me among the very best, among the most beautiful and joyous, being written these days. He has created his own form and his own idiom, and he had gone on to become an absolute master of it.

~ Aram Saroyan, *The Village Voice*



Michael McClure is an award-winning American poet, playwright, songwriter, and novelist. A key figure of the Beat Generation, he also participated in the '60s counterculture alongside musicians like Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison. McClure remains active as a poet, essayist, and playwright, and lives with his wife, Amy, in the San Francisco Bay area.

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SURVIVORS

Joseph Blake

I met Joni Mitchell once at a press conference. She was chain smoking and signing album covers. I've lost mine somewhere. I told her about P.K. Page's *Brazilian Journal*.

She seemed cold and close, open and wary, very present and somewhere else.

David Yaffe's new biography, *Reckless Daughter* is built on ten years of interviews with Joni, old friends, musicians, band members, boyfriends. It reminds me of that press conference. It portrays the musician's life with painterly detail.

A Syracuse University professor, journalist, and author, Yaffe builds Joni's tale with musical insight into the musician's skin-peeling poetics and open-tuned, weird chords favoured by her fans like Prince, Mingus and Miles Davis; it's a tale of woe replete with a succession of he-done-me-wrongs through to her aneurysm in 2015, three days alone on the kitchen floor, brain trauma, physical therapy, spacing out.

Hard to write an ending to Joni Mitchell's transformative life, but Yaffe tries, his final page describes



Reckless Daughter: A Portrait of Joni Mitchell
David Yaffe
HarperCollins, 395 pp



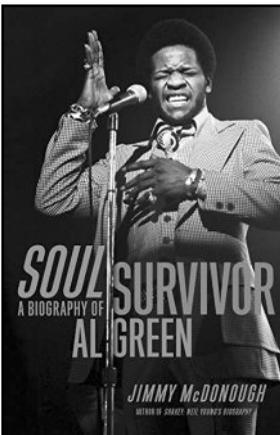
Joni Mitchell

the musician post-therapy, out-on-the town after a Chick Corea club date, Joni on Herbie Hancock's arm, spacing out. Yaffe writes that someone asks "Did you lose your train of thought?" and Joni answers, "Yes. But that's not such a bad thing for a writer to do."

Yaffe observes "Joni's songs taunt listeners into biographical readings, and they also invite us to understand the mind creating them. That's what I hoped to find out." In describing one of his interviews he concludes "Talking about the music meant talking about everything, because Joni Mitchell songs go straight to the heart, to the marrow, to the stuff of life." I'm thankful to Yaffe for reminding me of her greatness and the depth of her popular art.

In *Soul Survivor*, the new biography by Jimmy McDonough, the veteran music writer calls the 70-year old Al Green a "crazy old coot uncle," adding in another passage "His life has been endlessly chaotic and strange."

A critically acclaimed biographer of Neil Young, Tammy Wynette, and Russ Meyer, McDonough pours out 400 pages of Memphis gothic weirdness. My favourite



Soul Survivor: A Biography of Al Green
Jimmy McDonough.
DaCapo Press, 401 pp



Al Green

chapter, *Black Elvis*, captures Green's erratic, sordid, inscrutably eccentric high-wire dance between the sacred and profane—the countless women and children, the girlfriend/guest who poured boiling grits over him and then committed suicide in his house. McDonough describes a dramatic, unpredictable life. Green cheated his musicians and collaborators and then was surprisingly generous to others. Elusive, insecure, angry, difficult...the biographer piles on the contradictions from years of interviews with friends and family. It tracks from Green's sharecropper deep south birth to mid-west childhood church-singing to Memphis soul success and fame.

Producer and funky music mogul Willie Mitchell is the hero of this book, and his Hi Rhythm Band provides the kick drum punch behind Al's classic repertoire. Green sold 20 million albums. Now in the pulpit of his own church, Green's sexy hits—*Love and Happiness*, *Call Me*, *You Ought To Be With Me*, *Take Me to the River*, *Belle*—were the soundtrack to my youth.

McDonough captures Green's tortured soul informing his inspired, aching falsetto goosed even higher by Mitchell's roiling, whip-like studio rhythms and immaculate horn lines. The biography made me rush to the four-CD *Anthology* from my Al Green collection. McDonough's stories make me wince at Green's flaws and pain, but when Al sings! Transcendence....

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.



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ALDEN NOWLAN: COLLECTED POEMS

Richard Stevenson

I was a grad student in Creative Writing at UBC the year Alden Nowlan died (1993). My fellow students and I had gathered in a Buchanan Tower classroom for what must have been one of his final readings, sponsored by the English Department. I remember my first impressions: what a bear of a man! Shambling walk, huge head...! Then he read.

The poems were immediately accessible, poignant, often ironic, but completely lacking any self-satisfied smug or cold, distant, analytical tone. They weren't smarmy or macho, or academic, and didn't deal with male violence, abuse, poverty, or any of a host of the working class trials and tribulations the poet had experienced in his own tragically short life in any self-aggrandizing or pompous, judgmental fashion. Nor did he feel any compunction to steer his meditations over the sheer joy of being alive or responsive to the beauty of nature in any facile, glib, sentimental fashion. Nowlan wasn't over-reaching in his search for a deeper meaning: he'd just record – in the manner of William Carlos Williams' dictum of "no ideas but in things," the raw data, the often overlooked image, and let the reader reach his own conclusions.

As a child growing up in Hants County, Nova Scotia, Alden Nowlan had lived in extreme poverty. His father never had a full-time job, and sunk into a funk of alcoholism, abuse and violence, eventually forcing Alden to take up residence with his aunts and grandparents, initially. He grew up in a house with no electricity, no plumbing, proper insulation, or heat. He never went past grade four!

Eventually, he lied about his lack of a grade twelve education, and by dint or sheer wit and prodigious reading – often thanks to the ministrations or the women in his family, and long treks to the library, got himself a job as a proof reader for a small town paper in Hartland, New Brunswick at age nineteen, whereupon his life began to change, come under his control.

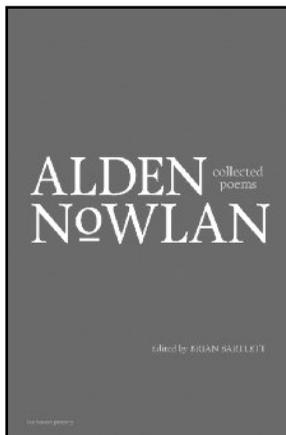
He subsequently worked for the Saint John, New Brunswick paper, *The Telegraph Journal*, as a general factotum, reporter, and editor, and in his last years – from 1968 to 1993! (imagine such government largesse now!) as a writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton.

He may have started with only a grade four education, but he must have quickly outstripped all of his fellow students' breadth of knowledge and academic skills. The model autodidact. He ended up writing poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and plays. (The bibliography lists 35 publications.) Not bad for guy who died at fifty, and only started to take writing seriously at twenty-five.

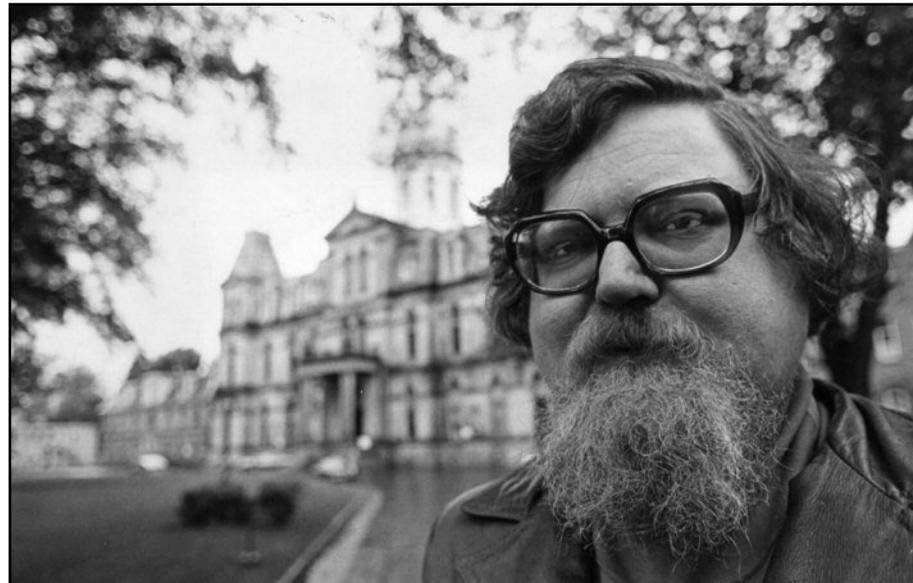
In the first three chapbooks – *The Rose and the Puritan* (1958), *A Darkness in the Earth* (1959), and *Wind in a Rocky Country* (1960), he presented his bona fides and perfected his skill at accentual-syllabic verse, rhyme, free verse, and set forms; later, as with many early modernists, gradually shifted, primarily, to free verse, perfecting his use of vernacular or near vernacular diction, the use of various personae, and lyric, narrative, and dramatic poems.

But enough summary narrative. The fact that Alden Nowlan became one of our finest and most revered poets is now abundantly clear with this summary volume.

While Nolan may have been a little naïve about the post-modern theory of line breaks (phonological phrases in place of feet; hanging indents to indicate drop of pitch, variable spacing to indicate duration of pauses in lieu of conventional punctuation,



**Alden Nowlan:
Collected Poems**
Ed. Brian Bartlett
Goose Lane editions,
2017, 661 pp., \$55.00
hardcover



Alden Nowlan

juxtaposition of variable fonts to indicate voicings, etc.), his line breaks were not without purpose, if occasionally idiosyncratic, and generally provide the reader with an accurate score of how to read the poems. He was also no stranger to lexical or syntactic ambiguity, and often the turning of the line would reveal a shift in his intended meaning or open up a poem to multiple interpretations.

In short, Alden Nowlan's poems only seem simple. What he dismisses in pyrotechnics he more than makes up for in mellifluous phrasing and moral complexity. His imagery is pellucid and precise, as befits a former journalist intent on reaching a wide range of readers.

O.K., let me say it outright: no Canadian poet I've read shows as much compassion for the lot of the common man; no poet is as self-effacing. His poems sneak up on you. They may begin in some prosaic, everyday circumstance – the poet/patient overhearing a nurse tell her husband she's working late and that he should pick up a can of tomatoes from the grocery for dinner in "Working Late," for instance. He first swings the camera eye back to describe his ill-fitting hospital gown (and who hasn't experienced the indignity of buttocks protruding from the back-tied, inaccessible back of the smock?!), the absurd-looking bonnet. Then he zeros in for the kill, as it were:

Such an ordinary message for her to send.
Such an extraordinary thing for me to hear.

It is not hard for me to believe
that great matters are being discussed today;
I know the world will go on,
whatever happens to me.

So if she had told him she was leaving him,
and had cried because of this
or for any other reason,
I would not have been surprised.
That would have fitted in.

But tinned tomatoes!
I'm reminded of how infinitesimal a part
I play on the universe,
of how minute is my share of reality.

Not a spectacular poem, this one, but notice how close to sentimentality – feeling sorry for himself, seemingly, he gets, then how he veers away from himself to consider what else the nurse might have said and the extraordinary turn that leads to the ultimate epiphany. Notice that he also gets away with the bald statement of analysis at the end. Shouldn't work, coming out and announcing the theme – rather like Dorothy's pronouncement in *The Wizard of Oz* to the effect that if we can't find what we're



*Allen Ginsberg & Alden Nowlan
March 25, 1967, Saint John.*

(Image originally photocopied from a Globe & Mail tribute to Nowlan, June 21, 2003)

looking for in our own back yard, we aren't likely to find it at all. (I'm paraphrasing.)

Not a trite observation, but one that dares a big abstract noun at the end that resonates with what has gone before in a way that leaves the reader pondering his or her own petty concerns in light of a bigger picture.

This sneak-up strategy is especially effective in my favourite Alden Nowlan poem, "He Sits Down on the Floor of a School for the Retarded" (p. 626).

The patients have been promised that they will be getting a big surprise, and "a child in a man's body" excitedly asks the poet if he, "a writer of magazine articles," and the accompanying band, *Ryan's Fancy*, are the big surprise. Another patient cries, and the poet has to tell him a little white lie: his favorite detective from TV hadn't come with them but sends his love.

Then comes an awkward moment, the moment a young woman cries to be held. The poet drapes an arm around her, to which she responds, "tighter." The poet is embarrassed and briefly muses on "someone in authority" crashing in on the scene, imagining him as a sex pervert. Here's how the poem ends:

"Hold me," she says again. What does it matter
 What anybody thinks? I put my other arm around her,
 rest my chin in her hair, thinking of children,
 real children, and of how they say it, "Hold me,"
 and of a patient in a geriatric ward
 I once heard crying out to his mother, dead
 for half century, "I'm frightened! Hold me!"
 and of a boy-soldier screaming it on the beach
 at Dieppe, of Nelson in Hardy's arms,
 of Frieda gripping Lawrence's ankle
 until he sailed off in his Ship of Death.

It's what we all want, in the end,
 to be held, merely to be held,
 to be kissed (not necessarily with the lips,
 for every touching is a kind of kiss).

Yes, it's what we all want, in the end,
 not to be worshipped, not to be admired,
 not to be famous, not to be feared,
 not even to be loved, but simply to be held.



Richard Hatfield, Stompin Tom Connors and Alden Nowlan

She hugs me now, this retarded woman, and I hug her.
 We are brother and sister, father and daughter,
 mother and son, husband and wife.
 We are lovers. We are two human beings
 huddled together for a little while by the fire
 in the Ice Age, two hundred thousand years ago.

The word *retarded* may be a little *outré* these days, but the harshness of the term merely serves to underline the universal power of Nowlan's observation of fearing judgment and we should probably allow the poet his mickey here.

Editor Brian Bartlett has done a marvellous job in editing this collection and provides an excellent introduction and sumptuous notes at the end.

This book is a work of love and rigorous scholarship; nonetheless, it shouldn't be considered a daunting purchase at twice the price and belongs snugly on every would-be poet's and every lover of poetry's shelf. It's that good, that essential.

Richard Stevenson is retired from teaching at Lethbridge College. He writes from Nanaimo, B.C. His most recent collection is *A Gaggle of Geese: Haiku, Senryu, Tanka, kyoka and Zappai* (2017)

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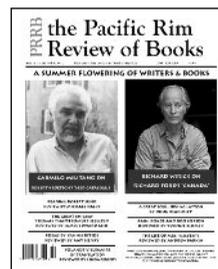
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A PUGILIST AT THE RIOTS: MAILER'S SIXTIES

Richard Wirick

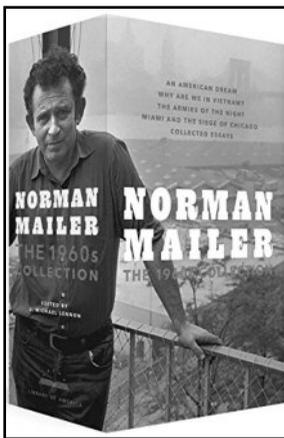
Mailer was a better journalist than fiction writer. Between *The Naked and the Dead* (1946) and his brilliant *The Executioner's Song* (1979), few of his novels matched his long essays on contemporary culture, social affairs, film, and other writers. This new volume from the LOA shows Mailer as really one of the inventors—along with Tom Wolfe, John Sack, Gay Talese and a few others—of what came to be called the New Journalism. It was a genre in which the old self-effacement of the journalist was largely scuttled, and the narrator's personality entered with a vengeance and vigor that made him a character as worthy (usually) of our concern as any of his subjects. With two books, the case can be made that the Sixties really wouldn't have been the Sixties, as we know it, without Mailer's reportage.

The first book was *The Armies of the Night*, his account of the 1967 anti-war march on the Pentagon, which he attended along with fellow literary figures like Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg. Sub-titled 'History as a Novel; the Novel as History,' Mailer himself appears as the narrator Aquarius, fitting the age and painting street scenes with an unforgiving, dazzling pen. He follows the marchers until he, along with Lowell, Ginsberg, Dave Dellinger and others, are forced by organizers to essentially lead the charge, linking arms in the style of the civil rights marches.

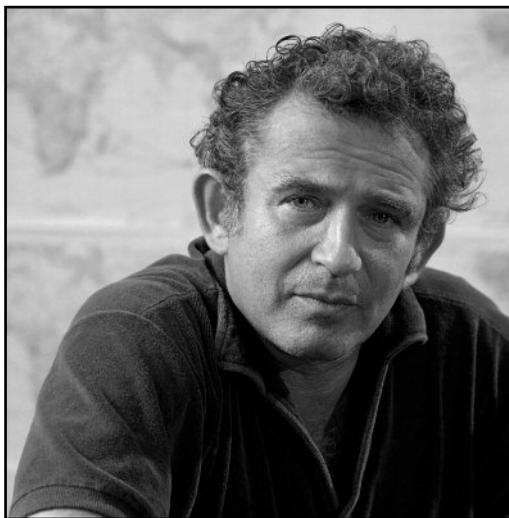
Mailer's descriptive powers are unmatched when applied to the canvas of real life, in a way he was never able to equal in the largely voice-driven novels. Mailer was arrested at the Pentagon event, consistent with his long fascination with incarceration as a subject and metaphor. Scenes of blocked bridges, tear gas clouds wafting over the Potomac and into monuments, and his sketches of oddball officials like Sen. Fulbright and the D.C. police chief all contain Chekhovian touches of the slightest minutiae—the way hair and fingernails were trimmed, the tone of slogganning voices and echoing police orders, the sleeping tent-armies of demonstrators lining the river like the pre-dawn Shakespeare's Agincourt Battle in *Henry V*. Willie Morris set aside an entire issue of *Harpers* to contain all 50,000 words, and it was an overnight, justified literary sensation that garnered him the 1969 National Book Award.

The Democratic National Convention in August 1968 was hot on the heels of the Pentagon book, and Morris again signed up Mailer to cover what would become *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. *Esquire's* Harold Hayes had commissioned Mailer to cover both the 1960 and 1964 Democratic Conventions, and with Mailer's dance card taken, Hayes assigned Terry Southern, Jean Genet, and William S. Burroughs to cover the Chicago juggernaut. These three musketeers—a shy, drunk pornographer, a convict, and a junkie—all had prodigious, hallucinatory perspectives on the coming event, but they weren't the most reliable of narrators. (Hayes thus sent a young editor, John Berendt [the later author of *Midnight In The Garden of Good and Evil*] to herd these cats and translate Genet's French.) Burroughs provided appropriately dystopic coverage, and probably the best writer among them—Genet—had such a sadomasochistic twist to his homosexuality that he began professing desire for many of the Chicago police who famously bludgeoned demonstrators. ("Their blue helmets make me think they are angels descended from heaven").

Much of Mailer's *Siege of Chicago*, for my money one of the greatest pieces of post-War 20th century journalism, is nothing more than a domestic version of his war



Four Books of the Sixties
Norman Mailer
Library of America
879 Pages



Norman Mailer

reportage. There were ghastly casualties in Chicago, but no one was killed. Mailer observes, from a penthouse in the Conrad Hilton on Grant Park, the CPD's truly savage charges against the marchers. Helmeted officers pushed scores of demonstrators through the first floor's plate glass window, prompting outcries from McCarthy and Senator Abe Ribicoff on the convention floor. Mailer frets about going down to the street, fearing that another jail stint would keep him from wiring his copy to Morris at *Harper's*. As an alternative, he headed back toward the hall and tried to organize two hundred delegates to march alongside the demonstrators. This was not successful, and soon delegates were nursing broken noses and head gashes. Sneaking away, Mailer meets the *Post's* Pete Hamill for drinks, getting so plastered that the two of them, goading national guardsmen in a razor-wired jeep, almost get arrested after all. Mailer is still Aquarius, the peace-loving autodidact who also aches for the *mano a mano*—this time with law enforcement—that landed him in the D.C. tank for a night.

Mailer weaves in the powerful and contemporary televised debates that enveloped these demonstrations, fueling their descent into violence. The most famously visible was Mayor Daley answering Ribicoff's criticisms of the cops, calling the senator a "Jew bastard" and inviting him to have carnal relations with himself. On ABC, two of Mailer's sparring partners, William Buckley and Gore Vidal, insulted one another to the point of fisticuffs, which Mailer the boxer would have welcomed. But there were Yippies to interview, armored jeeps to chase down, tear gas to wash out of his hair.

Mailer's most powerful portraits are of the candidates themselves, Nixon and the Minneapolis "drugstore liberal" Humphrey, champion of Daley and the older unions and ward bosses, but carrying the inherited Vietnam War on his back like a poor, plodding plough horse. In this passage from the Nixon/Miami segment, how deftly the author vivisects the psyches of the candidate's "great, Silent Majority of Americans," without condescension or stereotyping:

There was no line like the wealthy Republicans at the Gala, this was more a pilgrimage of minor delegates, sometimes not even known in their own small city, a parade of wives and children and men who owned hardware stores or were druggists . . . a widow on a tidy income, her minister and fellow-delegate, minor executives from minor corporations . . . editor of a small town newspaper, professors from Baptist teachers' colleges, a high school librarian, a young political aspirant and young salesman—the stable and the established, the middle-aged and the old, a sprinkling of the young, the small towns and the quiet respectable cities of the Midwest and the far West and the border states were out to pay homage to . . . the representative of their conservative orderly heart, and it was obvious they admired him in a way too deep for applause . . . moving forward in circumscribed steps.

And there is poetry and rhapsody in Mailer's descriptions, linking the countries' metropolises like bangles on a long-worn, grubby bracelet that he shakes, bauble by bauble, metaphor by metaphor, until he comes down to the anthemic embrace of the City that Works:

Chicago is the great American city. New York is one of the capitals of the world and Los Angeles is a constellation of plastic, San Francisco is a lady, Boston has become Urban Renewal. Philadelphia and Baltimore and Washington wink like dull diamonds in the smog of Eastern Megalopolis, and New Orleans is unremarkable past the French Quarter. Detroit is a one-trade town and Pittsburgh has lost its golden triangle. St Louis has become the golden arch of the corporation, and nights in Kansas City close early. The oil depletion allowance makes Houston and Dallas naught but checkerboards for this sort of game. But Chicago is a great American city. Perhaps it is the last of the great American cities.

Mailer took the "tough, spare, particularly American" form of writing Hemingway had handed him, applying that palette to an incredibly divided, uncharacteristically politicized population (sound familiar?). His jabs and left hooks fly like lightning as he punches every other working reporter out of the ring.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

THE WILDS OF POETRY

Scott Lawrance

*"We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from" – Robinson Jeffers*

Sometimes, to see the bird, one must adjust the glasses. And then, while the warbler shifts into focus, a new field reveals itself; a screed of branches, now stands, transformed, in relief. And so it is with some books, clarifying that which was already present, but unrecognized.

Variouly thesis, diatribe, manifesto, anthology, Hinton's "The Wilds of Poetry" reminds one of such works as Bly, Hillman, and Meade's "Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart", composed of short introductory sections interspersed with well-chosen, illustrative poems. But, while that book cast a similarly broad net, capturing works on a variety of related themes, this one illuminates a particular poetic trajectory, and link a range of poets who may previously have seemed quite disparate in both form and intention, into a vital and necessary lineage.

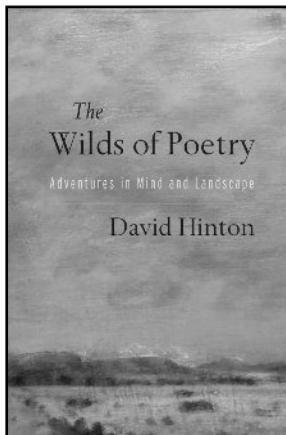
Wilderness, poetry, and meditation – these three domains have held my attention since adolescence. A fourth subject, psychotherapy, has similarly occupied my time and my bookshelf, and vocation. But that first triad precedes and indeed holds within its net the latter, a fish that shimmers and shape shifts like Proteus. Like other wilderness vision fast guide and meditation teachers, there are a range of poems that I have drawn upon in my teaching capacity, poems that have become catechismic within those communities.

The poems of Mary Oliver, David Whyte and a smattering of other "spiritual" poets, such as Hafiz and Rumi function as a virtual catechism in a range of workshops and retreats. Here, they offer relief from the prosaic and predictable, albeit "inspirational", discourse of the teacher, guide, or facilitator of the wisdom (or techniques) being offered. I have nothing against these poets and their poetry per se. It often moves me quite profoundly, but upon reflection, I invariably find something lacking. Or rather, it is not that there is a "lack", but rather a surfeit, an overabundance of certainty, a stridency whether the subject is grief or jubilation. It is like "the weekly wisdom that inspires you." Not exactly Hallmark cards, but with the same self-assured and somewhat complacent tone.

At heart, this problem belongs not to the poet, or the person writing (with Mary or with David, and for sure not with Rumi, but then we are never reading him in the original so we don't really know him). The problem is with the medium itself, our written English language, itself now rapidly morphing with the pressure and pulls of Insta-grams and emojis. As Martin Prechtel (And David Abram, perhaps) point out, a language rooted in the verb "to be", gives rise to, and maintains, an alienated stance toward and within the world; a perpetuation of what Steven Foster called "the Big Lie." White and Oliver, whatever ambivalence they may have toward the written word, seem comfortable enough there, reporting and evoking epiphanous experiences from the front lines where they are embedded with the Verb Police. I know I am being too harsh here. I would go as far as to say that there are poems of Mary Oliver's that I truly love and gladly share with others, such as "Wild Geese", "The Journey", and "The Summer Day". But Hinton's book takes us "further", or on a different flight.

While he has a new book of poems out (Desert, from Shambhala), Hinton is best known for his translations from the Chinese: *Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), *The Mountain Poems of Hsieh Ling-yun* (New Directions, 2001), *Mencius* (1999), *The Analects of Confucius* (1998), *Chuang Tzu: Inner Chapters* (1997), *Forms of Distance* by Bei Dao (1994), *The Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* (1993), and *The Selected Poems of Tu Fu* (1989). Anne Waldman describes *Hunger Mountain* as a guidebook, "a beautiful and compelling meditation on consciousness and the cosmos through a series of peregrinations around and beyond the intricacies of Chinese philosophy and religion."

In "The Wilds of Poetry", Hinton provides us with (a Lonely Planet guide, a Fodor's guide) a map upon which the journeys of (the ancestors of the lineage) are traced. His approach is grounded in a decades long engagement with Chinese poetry as an expression of an East Asian philosophical tradition that is not so much "spiritual"



**The Wilds of Poetry:
Adventures in mind
and landscape**
David Hinton
Shambhala Publications

or "mystical", but thoroughly empirical and muscularly pragmatic. Analogous to the systemic thinking of Gregory Bateson and elaborations from Maturana and Varela, Hinton's work is grounded in the insight that "the cosmos is a spontaneously self-generating organism whose basic nature is change. All things are always changing, one growing out of another. That's the basic truth of reality."

Here, he advances his contention that, "in the early twentieth century, American poets began abandoning Victorian abstraction and embellishment in favour of a clear, precise language of unadorned experience, and Chinese poetry helped bring about that change. It remained influential for decades after that, especially in the work of Kenneth Rexroth, the so-called father of the Beats, and Gary Snyder, who combines poetry and environmentalism." The collection gathered here serves to not only illustrate, but to embody the shift in world culture referred to as "avant-garde". He argues here that the avant-garde, consciously or not, sought to develop a "non-mimetic language", whose presence they detected within Chinese poetry. Engaging with the practice of this poetry evokes *contact* with the primal energy of experience, as manifest in the range of poems here.

The heart of the book, the center section, is devoted to beat writers, specifically Gary Snyder and Michael McClure, along with the aforementioned mentor, Rexroth. This core is preceded by older ancestors (Thoreau, Whitman) and followed by a range of contemporaries, some of who are less well known than others and indeed often associated with significantly different styles. Preceded and followed, but in ways it would be more accurate to imagine all of the writers presented here as rings in an old growth tree, both surrounded by and surrounding kindred voices.



David Hinton

For example, *Mind Wilds*, on the work of Charles Olson, lays out the relationship between the physiological basis of Olson's projective verse and Hinton's central thesis regarding "contact": his "poetics suggest that a wild, unmediated, and improvisational response to experience produces the deeper complexities an orders of *contact*, that it is a way of belonging fundamentally to Tao." From here, it is a short leap to the more explicitly Taoist and Buddhist informed work of Snyder and McClure.

Of Snyder, is work "gives individual voice to the mystery of a universe that is a "vast breathing body" (Tao), using that primitive breath energy-in all the ways Olson describes to create something akin to an oral poetry at once primitive and modern in its incantation of that ecstatic "Ah!" And, of McClure, "to reinvent thought/identity at a fundamental level means reinventing language. McClure's poems, with their cascades of language and idea and image, are meant to induce a revelation experience in which we feel ourselves at this primal level of existence as mammal, as a swirl in the galactic onslaught of interpenetration and transformation."

Following McClure's section, "Mammal Wilds", is a section devoted to poet and anthologist, Jerome Rothenberg, entitled, "Primal Wilds". Rothenberg, of course, is most notable for his forays into the realm of ethno-poetics, which in Hinton's treatment becomes one other aspect of the underlying philosophy that he is tracking here. Beyond that, Rothenberg's sense of the anthologist is entirely relevant here: "From these I sensed the possibility of the anthology as (1) a manifesto; (2) a way of laying out an active

(continued on page 12)

INFINITE GRADATION

Linda Rogers

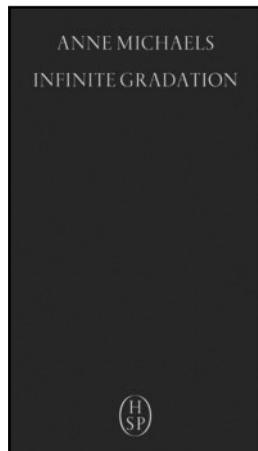
Every holy moment deserves a liturgy, words on the page that capture fugitive moments. The pages in Anne Michaels' *Infinite Gradation* are steps on a ladder, possibly crystal stairs, and the facets of transformation as body becomes spirit and present moment turns into memory.

Recognizing the infinite possibility of metaphor, the book cover is cuneiform: mother, tombstone, grave, a portal, the door that opens both ways in Chinese proverb to an order of service every grieving person deserves.

Grief is the absolute, memory the evidence as we seize the moments in art. Ultimately it is about about loss, but loss is never absolute. As the Beatles sang, "...lalalalala life goes on."

"We belong," she writes, "where love finds us," and that can be at any point in the line that defines a life without end, never too soon or too late. We are mostly water, and, just as the ocean adjusts and makes room for the arc of every intruder, as do we, for love, pain and loss, and, as certainly as space is occupied, so does it disappear when the moment passes and the swimmers, phenomenal and/or invisible, move on.

If you could take in that
unending movement, that light, the
moment water is replaced by water.
You knew there was an answer there.
In that infinite gradation.



Infinite Gradation
Anne Michaels
Exile Editions,
2018, paper, 81p



Anne Michaels

Infinite gradation is diversity, change, transformation, the possibility in all matter and Michael's poetic discourse allows the magic to occur in accessible language. This is plainsong, and it speaks to the mind and the heart without affectation, transcending the matrix of prosody, philosophy or aesthetics, becoming the rainbow.

What language can we have for the
Unknowable? What words for a mystery
Distinct from thought?

Ultimately, that leads us to silence, a moment that follows astonishing beauty, the pause at the end when the reader, the viewer and the listener experience a little death,

where there is no listening, no act, just pure being, revelation, intimate knowledge.

For Michaels, art is illumination, one mystery after another revealed in paint or words or notes. Art transcends belief systems, the mind itself and becomes the higher reality. She chooses three creators: Ety Hillseum, for whom war became the crucible of conflicted meditation, Jack Chambers and Claire Wilks, painters seeking to transcend fugitive pigment, to demonstrate the valour and ultimate futility of art, each seeking to define the indefinable shadows on their walls, every struggle painful and sublime, all shadows are elusive as we dance with the paradigms.

Morality is muscle memory. Though the heart is a muscle that fails itself, we persevere because, like ants, we are programmed to carry the moral load and exhaust the possibility of enduring love, capturing the moments when water becomes light.

What we make of death, what art
Makes of death: love's defiance

Love's defiance is the game of mirrors as we bounce images off water. This is all about reflection, the way we meditate on archetypes that, although interpreted through the mutability of body and mind, remain fixed. "Love does not alter when it alteration finds."

We are fortunate when writers, painters and composers demonstrate for us the semiotic variations, art for life's sake, because in the end it is always about the chakra that rebukes aspiration and rewards goodness. Anne Michaels reminds us, through example and parable, of the meaning of life.

Linda Rogers' recent book, *Crow Jazz*, Mother Tongue Publishing, is passerine elegies. The birds know.

WILDS OF POETRY (continued from page 11)

poetics – by example and by commentary; and (3) a grand assemblage: a kind of art form in its own right."

In effect, the text functions as an interlocked series of sadhanas (ritual practices of invocation and embodiment) introducing the reader to a full range of the possibilities of "wildness", including in addition to those already mentioned, "nameless wilds" (Merwin), "no-mind wilds" (Cage), "contact wilds" (Eigner), "mosaic wilds" (Johnson), "China wilds" (Pound), and "coastal wilds" (Jeffers) to name a few.

Quibbles with the book as involve exclusions, those who get left off the list. The poets contained herein are primarily white, male, and American (a shortcoming addressed in the Rothenberg anthologies.) Significantly, Hinton also neglects the role of women poets in the development of this trajectory. He acknowledges this lack in the introduction, alluding to "the well-rehearsed reason that women were largely excluded from the intellectual and literary world through the years discussed in this book." He contends that the book, indeed, is "an attempt to excavate a female dimension in the tradition." It is therefore unfortunate that he did not see fit to include some of the significant female voices in the development of relevant "avant-garde" such as Dianne di Prima, Joanne Kyger, Anne Waldman, and Jane Hirschfield (and from an earlier generation, even H.D. and Gertrude Stein). There is also the absence of other male writers who would readily come to mind, such as Philip Whalen.

That stated, Hinton's work nevertheless remains a brilliant display of a necessary gestalt within contemporary poetry, a corrective impulse that answers the anguished cry that arises from the dislocations, political and environmental, that permeate our world. Williams wrote that, "it is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there." Here is Hinton's news announcement: "'Tzu-jan is a very different manner of thinking about the universe than what we're used to in the West. We think of time in linear terms, whereas in ancient China they thought of existence as a burgeoning forth, an ongoing generative present in which things appear and disappear in the process of change. And this constant birthing goes on both in the physical world and in human consciousness, for consciousness is as much a part of that process as surf or a rainstorm or blossoms opening in an almond orchard.'" We ignore this at our peril.

Scott Lawrance continues work on epic *Turtle Island* while trying to find how to stand on the shifting sands of the Anthropocene.

A PEACE TO END ALL PEACE: FOUR BOOKS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

James Edward Reid

I spent much of the winter of 2017-2018 reading a number of deeply informed books about the Middle East. They were published, with two exceptions, between 2001 and 2016. The books reviewed here provide a broad picture of the troubled and violent area of the world referred to, whether in ignorance, or thoughtfully, as the Middle East.

Robert Fisk is the war correspondent for the *Independent* newspaper in England, although he spends most of his time in the Middle East, where he has lived for over 40 years. I discovered his timely and accurate reports, decades ago, as President Bush, and his misinformed neocons, launched their ill conceived and genocidal Gulf War in Iraq in 1991. I confess that I am slowly working my way through Fisk's masterpiece, his 1,392 page *magnum opus*, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*.

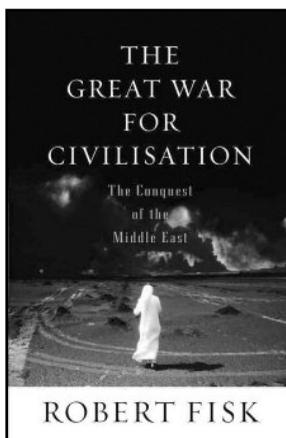
While other reporters in the Middle East were embedded inside heavily armed and comfortable American war machines, and reporting what American Public Relations people wanted them to write, Fisk was reporting on the ground, from the hell in Baghdad. In one memorable report, he accompanied an Iraqi doctor on his rounds in a hospital in Baghdad. At the same time, American reporters were reporting no casualties in Baghdad worth mentioning. But so many people had been killed in the hospital when it was bombed by American forces, that Fisk and the doctor were walking in halls where the blood of the dead and dying was sloshing around their feet with each step. Fisk continues to report from the Middle East, and is occasionally interviewed live on *Democracy Now!* where I heard him file that report from Baghdad.

In describing British journalist Patrick Cockburn's reporting from the Middle East, the Judges of the *Foreign Affairs Journalist of the Year Award* in 2014, said this about the quality of Cockburn's reporting: "Patrick Cockburn spotted the emergence of ISIS much earlier than anybody else and wrote about it with a depth of understanding that was just in a league of its own." The honest and trustworthy journalist Seymour M. Hersh, who broke the My Lai massacre story in Vietnam in 1969, and is still working, described Cockburn as, "Quite simply, the best western journalist at work in the Middle East Today." I can't say it any better than that. Cockburn is a Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* newspaper in England. His writing is clear, cogent and merciless in describing incompetence, as in the excerpt below:

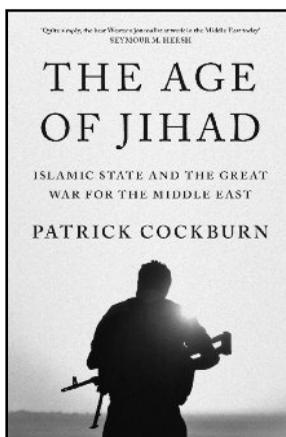
"In keeping with the British Government's well-established record of comical ineptitude in dealing with Libya, William Hague, the foreign secretary, chose to recognize the rebel leaders in Benghazi as the legitimate government of the country at the very moment some of them may have been shooting or torturing to death their chief military commander." (Cockburn, *The Age of Jihad: Islamic State and the Great War for the Middle East*, p. 221).

In many ways, the devastation of the American "war on terror" in Iraq was a prelude to the current poorly planned war in Syria. In *ISIS: The State of Terror*, the American scholars Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger have taken a close look at the genesis of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. They remind us that:

"Jihadi leaders around the globe described the U.S. occupation [of Iraq] as a boon to their movement. . . . Abu Musab al Suri, one of the jihad's most prominent strategists, claimed that the war in Iraq almost single-handedly rescued the movement." Current



Robert Fisk
The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East
Vintage, 2005



Patrick Cockburn
The Age of Jihad: Islamic State and the Great War for the Middle East
Verso, 2016

Jihadi leaders must again be celebrating the recent American bombing of Syria.

Stern and Berger also note that jihadists who are recruiting young jihadis, have found a particularly effective tool of recruitment. They regularly recruit new jihadis by showing them horrific and engaging videos on Facebook. These videos show jihadis brutally decapitating western prisoners. The presence of these horrific videos on Facebook has been repeatedly reported to Facebook's Zuckerberg. So far, he has done nothing to remove these very effective jihadi recruiting tools from Facebook. Given the effectiveness of these videos, new videos of westerners being decapitated will lead to even more jihadi recruiting.

In case any Canadian readers feel safe in the true north, or while travelling on a Canadian passport, may they take note of the action recommended by ISIS chief spokesman, Abu Muhammad al Adnani on September 21, 2014: "If you can kill a disbelieving American or European . . . or an Australian, or a Canadian . . . kill him in any manner". It may now be only a matter of time.

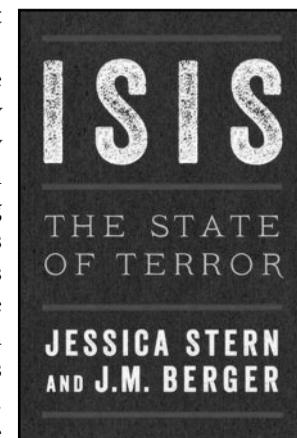
David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* is a bit of an outlier among the other books discussed here. But a most welcome outlier. It was published in 1989, and contains 4 pages of informative historical maps of the shifting borders in the Middle East, 32 pages of high resolution black and white photographs printed on fine paper, a 12 page Bibliography, and 36 pages of meticulous end notes in a small font. The opening sentences of this fine book carry the reader back to a forgotten, and more peaceful time, just before the First World War opened the door into the unprecedented bloodshed of the 20th Century:

"In the late spring of 1912, the graceful yacht *Enchantress* put out to sea from rainy Genoa for a Mediterranean pleasure cruise—a carefree cruise without itinerary or time-schedule. The skies brightened as she steamed south. Soon she was bathed in sunshine." In many parts of the world, it was the last period of bathing in carefree sunshine for over a century."

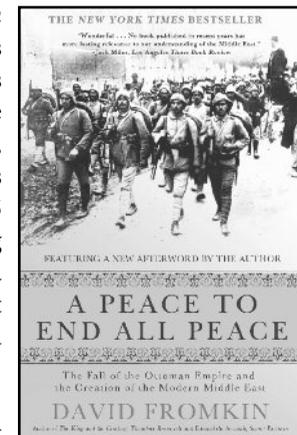
A Peace to End All Peace is still occasionally bathed in rare sunshine. The photograph stretching across the front cover, spine, and back cover of this book presents an arresting image. The pyramids and the great sphinx of Giza loom on the horizon in the far background. In the foreground, ten horses carry Englishmen in starched collars, school ties, fedoras, bowler hats, and pith helmets across the endless sands of time in the desert. The Brits are riding as obliviously as if they were crossing a cricket pitch at Oxford. On the back cover, crossing the desert, two English ladies are walking on foot in heavy full length dresses, and under very large hats. The whole image is astonishing and almost incredible.

Also incredible are passages both illuminating and arresting in *A Peace to End All Peace*, such as this:

Yet the First World War was barely over before the (British) Cabinet in London was forced to recognize that its policy in Arabia was in disarray. Its allies—Hussein, King of the Hejaz, and Ibn Saud, Lord of Nejd—were at



Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger
ISIS: The State of Terror
William Collins, 2015



David Fromkin
A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East
Holt Paperbacks
20th anniversary edition, 2009

(continued on page 39)

PRESERVING FIRE

Allan Graubard

Philip Lamantia was a poet of rare originality. His quick rise to prominence in 1943 at the age of 15 framed his influence thereafter through successive generations of creators in the poetic, visual, physical, and sonic arts. But what of the prose he wrote in his letters or his articles scattered through the various magazines he collaborated on and in several books, or his yet unpublished texts or notations?ⁱ

Garret Caples — who, along with Nancy Joyce Peters and Andrew Joron, edited Lamantia’s *Collected Poems* (California, 2013)ⁱⁱ — has resolved the issue. In *Philip Lamantia Preserving Fire: Selected Prose* (Wave Books, Seattle, 2018), Caples presents a generous portion of the prose that Lamantia wrote. The heterogeneous character of the 40 selections, each written in response to a particular context or request, provides a mixed composite of Lamantia’s arc. And whether each selection speaks of the poetic experience through writing or off the page, their relationship to magic, alchemy and the hermetic arts, Native American ceremonialism, or as a convulsive diary account — explicitly or implicitly — the fire that Lamantia will later identify as Prometheanⁱⁱⁱ and, with passion, the heart of poetry, is there.

Fronting the collection is a detailed introduction that clarifies each selection historically, along with other interesting biographical information. Caples knew Lamantia well, and the knowledge their friendship gave them he uses to effect. The perspectives that Caples provides will certainly aid readers; those familiar with Lamantia’s poetry and prose and those new to either or both.

Poignant casual photos of Lamantia filter through the book, mostly solo although with friends in several shots. First, however, there is the formal portrait of the 15-year-old poet. He’s quite a handsome young man in a white shirt open at the neck whose wide collar falls onto the lapels of a sports jacket. His eyes, perhaps a third way up from the photo midline, have a uniquely arresting quality that draws me to him and his softer facial features below. Previous, and the first prose selection, is the letter he wrote to Charles Henri Ford, most probably at the same general time



Philip Lamantia

the photo was taken, perhaps April 1943. After hesitantly introducing himself, he depicts what moves him most. When Ford reads the selection of poems that Lamantia includes with the letter, Ford does not hesitate. He agrees to publish five poems in *View* and invites Lamantia to New York.^{iv}

In this letter Lamantia identifies two vectors to explore human expression with, which he will refine as he matures but which nonetheless are fundamental: primitive art and Surrealism. As Lamantia writes then: “Primitive art, through the untamed emotions, and Surrealism, through the world of dreams and desires, will be, after all is said and done, the only great literary and artistic movements of the twentieth century.” Despite the hyperbole, whether or not in the current era this holds true for us, in whole or in part, and why, is something to consider.

Some six months on in October 1943 is Lamantia’s letter to André Breton, which follows the photo just noted. Lamantia buttresses his stated position (to Ford) by formally adhering to the surrealist movement as defined by Breton; fulfilling an earlier request by Breton that he do so. Breton celebrates the inspiration that Lamantia possesses, or which possesses him, and which Lamantia roots in Lautremont; this voice that feeds the “fire that has begun to issue from my depths.” Along with the letter, Breton publishes three of Lamantia’s poems in *VVV*.^v

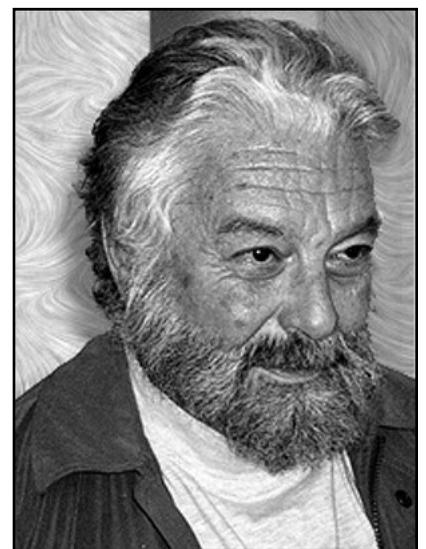
PHILIP
LAMANTIA
PRESERVING
FIRE
SELECTED
PROSE

*Preserving Fire:
Selected Prose*
Philip Lamantia
Edited by Garret Caples
Wave Books

From this vantage point, Lamantia’s growth as a poet takes off, moving through several developments, one of which is heir to his accomplishments, the Beats. Other developments, which Lamantia draws into his poetic practice include his encounters with Native American cultures, anarchism, the use of psychoactive substances to provoke visionary states, the rise of ecological awareness, an expansive study of hermetic/alchemical sources, and a late inclusive interest in birds — all in service to the “surconscious,” a state of being defined by the artist Wolfgang Paalen, as Lamantia notes, “when conscious and unconscious cease to be contradictions.”

Although not in the table of contents, which follows the chronology of texts that Caples has published, it was useful for me, at least, to group the texts into several general periods. The first, of course, encompasses Lamantia’s initial year stint in New York, where he works on *View* in an editorial capacity and interacts with the avant-garde scene provoked by European émigré writers, poets, artists, and intellectuals fleeing Fascist Europe — the first five selections.

The second period has Lamantia back in his native San Francisco, where he associates with the older poet and critic Kenneth Rexroth, in whose circle are also Robert Duncan, William Everson, and others who will form what we now call the “San Francisco Renaissance.” Along with Rexroth, Lamantia also singles out Henry Miller, living then in Big Sur, as an older writer of significance. The leading article in this section, “Letter from San Francisco,” sets the city, in contrast to New York, as a launching pad for a new American poetry and as a magnet for anarchist libertarian thought.^{vi} And that certainly turned out to be true.



Philip Lamantia

The third period includes his two introductions to the poems of his late friend, John Hoffman, and “The Beat Generation.”^{vii} Here, Lamantia references the influence of Bebop in the person of Charlie “Bird” Parker, along with the poet and artist animators of Beat: from John Wieners, Michael McClure and Gregory Coors to Iris Brody, Bruce Conner and Harry Smith, among others, of course; all of whom were friends of Lamantia. “RevelatNewspost” is a curious, if damning, high-octane account by Lamantia of his being jailed for five days in Morocco for possession of kif, with several other Americans. Although the author is one Raphael Kohler, we know this as an alias for Lamantia.^{viii}

A fourth period signals Lamantia’s return to surrealism, initially through the aborted construction of a poetic and metaphysical nexus in “Notes Towards a Poetics of Weir,” which he describes in a letter to Bob Hawley, founder of Oyez Press; for which Lamantia is also preparing his revised manuscript of his early poems, retitled now as *Touch of the Marvelous*.^{ix} What “weir” means is somewhat difficult to say as Lamantia seeks within it an analogy between different precipitous internal and external states that enable a “Seeing in *another way* beyond the ordinary, including the ‘ordinary’ fantastical or the too/obvious ornamentally ‘surreal.’” Lamantia ends the text with two premiere poetic sources: the Sphinx and E. A. Poe, citing Poe’s poem “Ulalume” as a “sonic bridge” that performs a function similar to that of the Sphinx — returning man through riddle, or in Poe’s case, poetic resonance, to the true measure of himself. Interesting as well is Lamantia’s critique of surrealist clichés, which will also play a significant role in his major critical texts on poetry to come.

By 1970 Lamantia has publically signaled his affiliation with the surrealist movement as it has manifested in San Francisco and in Chicago. Ever seeking new sources and horizons, his realignment with surrealism is vital. His refusal to accept “previously conquered areas of association” opens up in “Between the Gulfs” a “theory of ‘volatile-negative-analogies’...through a group of poems with the title *Becoming Visible*.” The title is exact to what Lamantia can now sense as possible and, I might add, not only within his compass but also throughout the corpus of poetry and poetic experience.^x

In this text and the related brief texts that follow — “Vital Conflagrations,” “The Crime of Poetry,” and “Harmonian Research” — Lamantia lays the foundation of a

principled, risk-laden arena for poetic and social research, and the praxis they imply. One pivot of that praxis Lamantia finds in the choreographic works of Alice Farley, a close collaborator and member of the surrealist group then. He writes three texts in response to three different performances, both in theater and site specific, compelled by the “lyric-erotic gestures of her choreography...[that] presents a state of disquieting relations in space, germinations of a poeticized space of dynamic analogies and *becomes poetry itself moving visibly*”; in effect, as Lamantia states elsewhere, Farley’s performances are a “dream realized in space.”^{xi}

Lamantia’s two major published texts, both fully formed and precisely written, are “Poetic Matters” and “Radio Voices: A Child’s Bed of Sirens.”^{xii} The former is his most consequential statement on poetry and deserves serious reading. In it, he redefines the definition of poetry from “the mistaken notion of ‘image making’ or ‘image building’” to a deformational action in which imagination supersedes nature. Turning to philosopher Gaston Bachelard, he states that the “imaginative faculty must be understood as *freeing us from the immediate images of perception*” and that, quoting Bachelard, “‘The value of an image is measured by the extent of its imaginary radiance.’” Both points will support Lamantia’s re-visioning of poetry as the “superior principle of language,” expanding his discussion into philosophical, alchemical, and social domains.

The text offers a thorough critique of the American canon, exemplified by Ezra Pound and his emulators, which include Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, and their colleagues and followers, along with more elder poets; the “fixed form addicts...such as Yvor Williams and R.P. Warren.” As a critique of the canon, there is nothing quite like it. The sweep, passion, and epiphanic quality of its argument reveal Lamantia at the height of his powers, and with the advantage that his experience, spread now over four decades, gives him.

Clarifying the present state and needs of surrealism, Lamantia points to “our immediate precursors”: poets Samuel Greenberg, Mina Loy, and Harry Crosby. Of his living allies who are not surrealists but authentically inspired poets, and who refuse to play along as literary celebrities, there are: Bob Kaufman, Gregory Corso, and Daniel Moore.

Perhaps most revealing is Lamantia’s recognition of communal mythopoesis — the goal of poetry — in the Hopi *Katchina* ceremonies, whose masked dancers Lamantia encountered several times at Hopi mesas high over the Arizona desert. The ceremonies, which became for Lamantia a “veritable moving vehicle of the Poetic Marvelous,” transport him “straight into those regions in the mind that surrealism has always exalted.” The text continues to unfold, with a section titled “Notes Toward a Rigorous Interpretation of Surrealist Occultation” and other key commentary, but I leave that to readers.

“Radio Voices: A Child’s Bed of Sirens” takes another tack but also quite personal. Here Lamantia discusses what his listening to radio crime dramas as a growing child meant. As he puts it: “I can trace a profound awakening of the poetic sense of life and language directly to the exemplary magical myth of *The Shadow* and for those disquieting transgressions —

veritable sagas of patricide and matricide — revealed by *The Whistler*.” He notes other programs with a similar charge that he, and millions of other children, listened to as well, such as *Mandrake the Magician*, *Boston Blackie* and *Alias Jimmy Valentine*.

Replete with noir-esque murders and private detective heroes who employ magical and other ingenious means to solve them, they emerge as “vehicles of representational non-repressive sublimation.” Ever significant supports for ego development in adolescence, as Lamantia notes, they also served “our real needs...for the pleasures and excitement of an authentic magico-poetic experience: poetry invoked and provoked.”

Steeped as we are in visual culture from our digital screens, it is important not to forget the aural character of the experience that Lamantia explores. Listening to a disembodied voice coming from a small speaker and recreating in the mind the visual tonic of the action as the story unfolds engages the imagination actively, not passively. Add in the place, whether in the family living room or, more often, disobeying parental orders to sleep by listening to the later evening “adult” dramas quietly in bed in the dark, the act takes on an additional subversive character.

Other texts of interest follow: “The Future of Surrealism,” written with his wife



Phillip Lamantia

Nancy Joyce Peters; a brief “heraldic” celebration of the artist Marie Wilson; his poignant commemoration of writer Clark Ashton Smith; the vivid “Letter from Egypt”; his commentary on “Surrealism and Mysticism” taken from a last interview; and several more.

This book is a treasure trove, reaffirming Lamantia’s distinction. Poet, animator, voyager, seeker, magnet, observer, commentator, scholar, critic or contrarian; sometimes generous in his relationships, other times secretive or meager; lover, friend or antagonist — yes, he was all of these, and more. The extent of his experience and reading, his talents as a conversationalist able to discuss diverse subjects at length, and his effort to reveal poetry in life as on the page make this book compelling in its own right but also as context, when appropriate, for those drawn to his poetry.

Although Lamantia died in 2005, his voice sustains because of his posthumous editors: Garret Caples in this volume, and colleagues Nancy Joyce Peters and Andrew Joron in his *Collected Poems*. I thank them for their work. Read Phillip Lamantia.

Notes

- i Phillip Lamantia’s literary estate is housed at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- ii Reviewed by Allan Graubard in 2013 (*Pacific Rim Review of Books*).
- iii See Lamantia’s text, *Poetic Matters*; pp. 85-100.
- iv Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler are founders and editors of *View*, the leading avant-garde literary and art magazine in New York, which publishes from 1940 to 1947.
- v *VVV*, the organ of the exiled surrealist movement, is edited by David Hare, with the participation Andre Breton, Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst. It publishes four issues from 1942 to 1944.
- vi This text publishes in *Horizon*, No. 93-94 (October, 1947, London); reprinted as “Letter from San Francisco (Coventry, England: Beat Scene Press, 2009); pp. 21-27.
- vii These introductions finally appear in Lamantia’s *Tau* with *Journey to the End* by John Hoffman (City Lights, 2008); pp. 35-40. “The Beat Generation” is published here for the first time; pp. 46-48.
- viii The article is first printed in *The International Times* (no. 38, 1968); pp. 51-61.
- ix *Touch of the Marvelous* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1966).
- x “Between the Gulfs” is published in *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, No 2 (Chicago, 1973); 77-78.
- xi The three texts on Farley include: “The Oneiric Light of Alice Farley,” p. 83; “Invisible Webs,” pp.101-102; and “Alice Farley: Dancing at Land’s End,” pp.124-125. The Dance Theater of Alice Farley continues its work to this day.
- xii “Poetic Matters” is published in *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, No 3 (Chicago, 1976); pp. 85-102. “Radio Voices: A Child’s Bed of Sirens” is published in *Cultural Correspondence*, No. 11-12 (Providence, RI, Fall 1979). It is republished in *Surrealism & Its Popular Accomplices* (San Francisco, City Lights, 1980); pp.104-120.

Allan Graubard is a poet, playwright and critic. His play, *Woman Bomb/Sade*, was produced in New York in 2008.

WHERE THE DAYS GO

Richard Wirick

What is time? Is it something real, or is it simply part of our human perceptual framework, one of the categories of pure understanding Kant posited in the Eighteenth Century? Those categories, he believed, require that episodic actions be sequenced out and not experienced in a simultaneous mush. Is time something that actually exists “out there” or is it a useful measurement of change, with no actuality in and of itself? Carlo Rovelli is one of those scientists and scientific writers (he is a quantum physicist) who can take the most abstruse concepts and add to them the spark and music of poetry, all of it somehow comprehensible and delightful.

Newton thought time an absolute concept, that there was an “absolute time” ticking relentlessly across the universe. It kept ticking even if there were no objects in space, no human subjects to experience it—as Heidegger famously did—as “the essence of boredom.” This is, indeed, how most of us give time its “felt life.” It is its main feature as a phenomenon if we stop to think about it.

Rovelli also considers Aristotle’s belief that “time” is something utilized by the brain for different purposes. It doesn’t exist “out there” like air or the oceans. It is simply a “measurement of change.” If nothing continued to change, the Athenian would have it, time would for all practical purposes be non-existent. Again, Newton would disagree—if the universe was somehow frozen, like in the famous Ed Wynn ‘Twilight Zone’ episode, time would tick on at different speeds depending upon the influences of light and gravitation, and what then were perceived of yet not named as the “weak’ and “strong” forces.

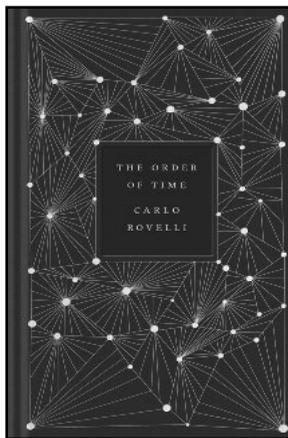
Einstein, the third of Rovelli’s “Great Three Dancers” (like something out of Hindu myth) said both Aristotle *and* Newton were correct. Aristotle correctly noted that time had a “flow,” what the logician (and metaphysician) Quine called “a river process,” that made sense only in relation to a before and after. And Einstein also saw Newton’s “absolute time” as having a plausible existence—but only as a special case of Einstein’s relativity-based “spacetime” theory of gravity, in which space and time were simply two sides of the same barely comprehensible coin.



Carlo Rovelli

Einstein thought of gravitation as the universe’s most important force, as a field, a sort of sheet upon which spheres like the sun and earth moved, staying out of one another’s way by bending time down to a slower process than if it had never been gravitated. Rovelli feels that reality is really just a complex series of events on which we cast, like shadows, our experiential episodes—past, present, and future. The universe obeys the laws of quantum mechanics and Newton’s thermodynamics, out of which time emerges from the gravitational field. Its different “speeds,” to risk making the argument circular, accelerate or affect “drag” depending upon its gravitational position and purposes at any one time, and for many different observers and sets of instrumentation.

The way this works is that events (the given time and location at which something might happen), rather than particles or waves, are the basic constituents of the world. Physics’s job is to describe the inter-event relationships as though describing a weather storm—“[A] storm is not a thing, but a collection of occurrences.” From our



The Order of Time
Carlo Rovelli
Riverhead: 239 Pages

perspective, each of those event/occurrences looks like the interaction of particles at a particular position and time; this is fine so long as we realize time and space are not some framework containing the events, but really just a “web” of their interactions and the force of causality between them. Rovelli concludes:

There is no single time: there is a different duration for every trajectory, and time passes at different rhythms according to space and speed . . . the substratum that determines the duration of time is not an independent entity different from others that make up the world. It is an aspect of a dynamic field. It jumps, fluctuates, materializes only by interacting, and is not to be found a minimum scale

The third segment of the book delves into the theory of knowledge and focuses on how certain illusions arise from the universe’s scaffolding of quantum mechanics, thermodynamics, electromagnetism, and other “fields” similar to that of the “sheet” of gravitation. Our perception of time’s flow (he quotes Rilke’s greatest verses on this) depends on our inability as knowing subjects to comprehend the world in all its detail. Quantum uncertainty means we cannot know the positions and speeds of all the universe’s particles in one conceptual glance. If we could, there would be no entropy, no “unravelling” of time, no step into the waterflow of the “river process.” His explanation of this occurrence cluster and how we cannot step back from it enabled him to originate this ‘thermal time hypothesis’ and quantum gravity looping with the French mathematician Alain Coines.

The book is elegantly translated from the Italian by Erica Segre and Simon Carnell. It is colored by not only Rilke snippets but by an ode (starting each chapter) from the last great Latin poet Horace, ever transfixed by the faster passage of time he experienced on his estate after contemptuously leaving Roman politics. The book explores questions very much alive and very much contested in quantum physics. The other, less testable and more bizarre comprehensive picture of physics is that of string theory, which gets more press than Rovelli’s loop quantum gravity simply by virtue of its oddness and sci-fi features like parallel universes.

This writer, trained in philosophy, is astonished at how well Rovelli grasps many concepts in the philosophy of mind and language, disciplines so essential for the conceptualization of physics. He marvelously picks apart Hilary Putnam’s view that Einstein’s simultaneity allows for future events to exist presently in Putnam’s “Twin Earth” epistemological games. Putnam has it that if the earth and (what he calls in his papers) Twin Earth are approaching each other, an event A is simultaneous with an event B on Twin Earth, which in turn is simultaneous (for those of us on Twin Earth) to an event C back on earth, that *is in the future of A*. Putnam mistakenly views “being simultaneous” as “being real now” and deduces that this has to mean the future event C is presently real. The error is to see Einstein’s simultaneity as having an ontological value, whereas it is only a definitional convenience that reduces a relativistic notion to a non-relativistic notion through an approximation process. (Non-relativistic, or purely philosophical simultaneity, is a reflexive and transitive process, where Einstein’s is purely mathematical and explanatory—the two have no ontological relation.) As Wittgenstein would say, with his customary, guileless beauty, “The only correct answer is that the question makes no sense.”

Once in great while a science book comes along that is so much more. Lewis Thomas’s *Lives of a Cell* and Greene’s *The Elegant Universe* are examples, as well as the works of the late Steven Hawking. Rovelli’s book is one of those. They occupy a very narrow shelf on which this one belongs.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.



Rest in Peace
Julia Vinograd
Street Poet of Berkeley
(1943-2018)
"Eat Poetry!"

“UNASSIMILABLE”: ON KENNETH REXROTH

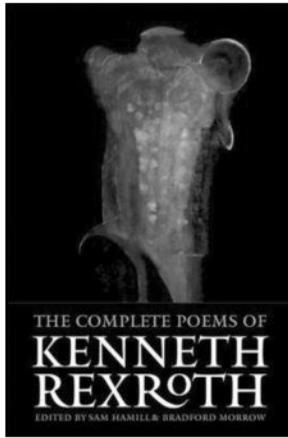
Jack Foley

I have seen no more evident monstrosity and miracle in the world than myself.

— Montaigne

I starve under capitalism, and I would starve under a dictatorship of the proletariat for the same reasons. After all I am interested in perpetual revolution in a sense other than Trotsky's—the constant raising into relevance of ignored values. Poetry has for its mission in society the reduction of what the Society of Jesus named “invincible ignorance,” and the true poet is as much to be feared by the proletariat as by the bourgeoisie.

— Kenneth Rexroth (1931), quoted in Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (1991)



Complete Poems
Kenneth Rexroth
Copper Canyon Press

Copper Canyon Press has just released Kenneth Rexroth's *Complete Poems*. It's a most welcome volume, carefully and lovingly edited by poet Sam Hamill and Bradford Morrow, Rexroth's literary executor. It contains even more work than the New Directions volumes, *The Collected Shorter Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (1966) and *The Collected Longer Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (1968). Though born in South Bend, Indiana, Rexroth (1905-1982) was at the absolute center of the San Francisco Renaissance. His poetry, his poetry readings—often to jazz accompaniment—his radio broadcasts, his lively newspaper columns, his considerable body of essays, and his even more considerable personal brilliance and charisma made him a force to be reckoned with on the West Coast. “I came to California in 1927,” Rexroth told David Meltzer in a 1969 interview collected in *The San Francisco Poets*:

The day I got into town, San Francisco's leading poet, California's leading poet, killed himself. George Sterling. He pretty much represented the California scene in those days ...The San Francisco literary world was dominated by people to whom the native son and daughter thing was all important, although most of them were not native sons and daughters...

It's hard to believe now, with all the tremendous activity that has been in San Francisco, that San Francisco, when we came there to live, was very much of a backwater town... We met people who would say to you, “Who do you think is California's leading writer?” And you would say, “Gertrude Stein.” They would say, “Who is that?” And then they would say, “Oh, yes!” They knew her, you see, her brother was in society on the Peninsula, but they didn't know she wrote... We just didn't have any competition. It was like Picasso dropping back into the world of Trollope.

Though San Francisco was definitely a cultural backwater, Rexroth frequently insisted that one of the city's chief attractions was the fact that it was “the only city in the United States which was not settled overland by the westward-spreading puritan tradition.”

It's easy to forget that work by Kenneth Rexroth was included in Louis Zukofsky's famous 1931 “Objectivist” issue of *Poetry* (Chicago). In a letter to Zukofsky—whose work Rexroth admired for a time—Rexroth confesses that in writing this kind of poetry, “The most diverse influences have arisen to name the ideas on my page, from Proclus to Bradley or Royce, from Stoicism to the ‘organic philosophy.’ I really had no idea my brain contained such a horde.”

Rexroth did not continue to write in the style published under the banner of “Objectivism,” and he is not even mentioned in Michael Heller's *Conviction's Net of Branches: Essays on the Objectivist Poets and Poetry* (1985). Nonetheless, he remained sympathetic to that early work and referred to it, not as “Objectivist” but as “Cubist” poetry. “Cubism” in poetry, writes Rexroth in *Pierre Reverdy: Selected Poems*,

is the conscious, deliberate dissociation and recombination of elements into a new artistic entity made self-sufficient by its rigorous architecture. This is quite different from the free association of the Surrealists and the combination of unconscious utterance and political nihilism of Dada... Only Walter Conrad Arensberg in his last poems, Gertrude Stein in

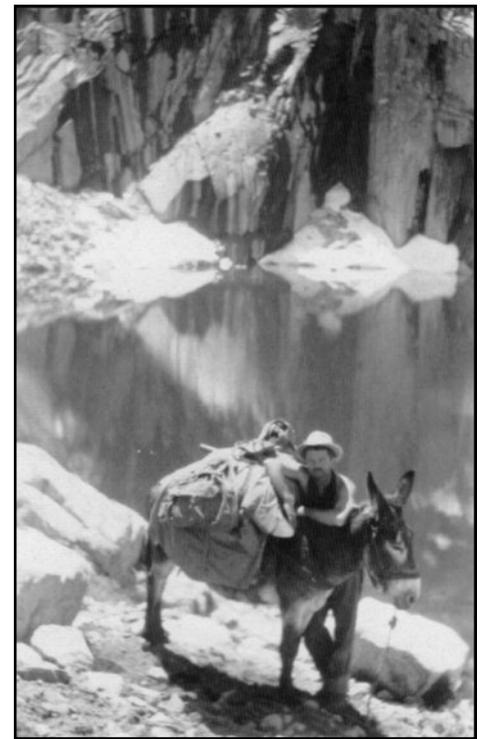
Tender Buttons and a very few other pieces, much of the work of the young Yvor Winters and others of his generation of Chicago Modernists, Laura Riding's best work and my own poems later collected in *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* could be said to show the deliberate practice of the principles of creative construction which guided Juan Gris or Pierre Reverdy.

He goes on to assert that T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*

works...with fragmented and recombined arguments; Pierre Reverdy with dismembered propositions from which subject, operator and object have been wrenched free and restructured into an invisible or subliminal discourse which owes its cogency to its own strict, complex and secret logic.

Poetry such as this attempts not just a new syntax of the word. Its revolution is aimed at the syntax of the mind itself. Its restructuring of experience is purposive, not dreamlike, and hence it possesses an uncanniness fundamentally different in kind from the most haunted utterances of the Surrealist or Symbolist unconscious. Contrary to what we are taught, it appears first in the ultimate expressions of Neo-Symbolism in Mallarmé,...above all in his hieratic metaphysical ritual, *Un Coup de dés*.

Rexroth was deeply aware of his friend Yvor Winters' rejection of this kind of verse as “the deliberate courting of madness.” Yet, “when the ordinary materials of poetry are broken up, recombined in structures radically different from those we assume to be the result of causal, or of what we have come to accept as logical sequence, and then an abnormally focused attention is invited to their apprehension, they are given an intense significance,...they seem to assume an unanalyzable transcendental claim”:



Kenneth Rexroth in the Sierra

We still know almost nothing about how the mind works in states of rapture nor why the disjunction, the ecstasis, of self and experience should produce a whole range of peculiar nervous responses... We are dealing with a self-induced, or naturally and mysteriously come-by, creative state from which two of the most fundamental human activities diverge, the aesthetic and the mystic act. The creative matrix is the same in both... [I]f poetic vision is refined until it is sufficiently piercing and sufficiently tensile, it cuts through the reality it has reorganized to an existential transcendence.

Finally, Rexroth argues that

The revolution of the sensibility that began with Baudelaire became in the latter work of Mallarmé a thoroughgoing syntactical revolution in the language because it was realized that the logical structure of the Indo-European languages was an inadequate vehicle for so profound a change in the sensibility. In actual fact, although Apollinaire is usually considered the watershed of modern poetry, no single poem of his represents as thoroughgoing a change in method as Mallarmé's.

Reverdy, Rexroth insists, “has certainly been the leading influence on my own work—incomparably more than anyone in English or American.”

What kind of poetry did Rexroth's “restructuring of the mind”—his attempt to cut “through the reality it has reorganized to an existential transcendence”—produce?

“A Prolegomenon to a Theodicy” (1925-1927) is perhaps the finest of Rexroth’s Cubist poems. The title suggests its religious orientation—as does the apocalyptic tone of its concluding pages:

The bell
Too softly and too slowly tolled
And the first wave was snow
The second ice
The third fire
The fourth blood
The fifth adders
The sixth smother
The seventh foul stink
And unnumbered beasts swam in the sea
Some feather footed
Some devoid of any feet
And phosphorescent breath
The enduring bell
The wash of wave...

Some lay with their knees partly drawn up
Some lay on their sides
Some lay stretched at full length
Some lay on their backs
Some were stooping
Some held their heads bent down
Some drew up their legs
Some embraced
Some kicked out with arms and legs
Some were kneeling
Some stood and inhaled deep breaths
Some crawled
Some walked
Some felt about in the dark
Some arose
Some gazed, sitting still

That is Gertrude Stein filtered through a religious sensibility—Gertrude Stein as the Last Judgment—and its rhythms and repetitions had an effect on the much later “Thou Shalt Not Kill” (1953), a brilliant poem written in memory of Dylan Thomas:

They are stoning Stephen,
They are casting him forth from every city in the world.
Under the Welcome sign,
Under the Rotary emblem,
On the highway in the suburbs,
His body lies under the hurling stones.
He was full of faith and power.
He did great wonders among the people.
They could not stand against his wisdom.
They could not bear the spirit with which he spoke.

But “Thou Shalt Not Kill” is something of an anomaly in Rexroth’s later work. Compare the lines from “Prolegomenon” to these from *In What Hour* (1940). In these latter lines, Rexroth achieved the tone that would characterize much of what he would do throughout the rest of his career:

The great geometrical winter constellations
Lift up over the Sierra Nevada,
I walk under the stars, my feet on the known round earth.
My eyes following the lights of an airplane,
Red and green, growling deep into the Hyades.
The note of the engine rises, shrill, faint,
Finally inaudible, and the lights go out
In the southeast haze beneath the feet of Orion.
As the sound departs I am chilled and grow sick
With the thought that has come over me.
 (“Requiem for the Spanish Dead”)

In his excellent book, *The Relevance of Rexroth* (1990), Ken Knabb quotes

Rexroth on “the Social Lie or the Great Fraud—to know that the ‘official version of anything is most likely false and that all authority is based on fraud.’” The following quotations are all from Rexroth:

Every day all states do things which, if they were the acts of individuals, would lead to summary arrest and often execution...What is called ‘growing up,’ ‘getting a little common sense,’ is largely the learning of techniques for outwitting the more destructive forces at large in the social order. The mature man lives quietly, does good privately, assumes personal responsibility for his actions, treats others with friendliness and courtesy, finds mischief boring and keeps out of it.

An appreciable number of Americans really do believe the Great Fraud of the mass culture, what the French call the *hallucination publicitaire*. They only know what they read in the papers. They think it is really like the movies...The art of being civilized is the art of learning to read between the lies.

Most of the real difficulty of communication comes from social convention, from a vast conspiracy to agree to accept the world as something it really isn’t at all.

Linda Hamalian’s warts-and-not-quite-all biography of Rexroth is proof that Rexroth the man often had difficulty living up to his own vision of “maturity.” (Even his admirers speak of the toll taken on him by “paranoia.”) But Rexroth’s railing against “the Great Fraud” is surely an indication of one of his deepest convictions. Though, like Jack Kerouac, he retained throughout his life a relationship with Roman Catholicism and died a Catholic—and maintained a considerable interest in Buddhism as well—in these quotations he seems like nothing so much as a secular version of a fire-and-brimstone Protestant raging against the wickedness and unreality of the world. Rexroth never lost his religious sensibility and his desire to break through to “an existential transcendence”—nor the sense of fierce dualism which gave rise to that desire—but they were replaced to some degree by the practice of what he called “the art of being civilized.” (The word “civilized” is one of the most important words in his *oeuvre*.) Rexroth’s shift of esthetic tone was a shift to another mode of religiosity. The desire to “restructure the mind” became the basis not only of a change in poetic strategy but of what we now call an “alternative life-style.” Rexroth liked to begin his poetry readings by asking, “Well, what would you like tonight—sex, mysticism or revolution?” and was delighted when a woman in the audience responded, “What’s the difference?” More and more, erotic love—not politics, poetry or religion—seemed, if properly performed, the instrument of social change:

We slept naked
On top of the covers and woke
In the chilly dawn and crept
Between the warm sheets and made love
In the morning you said
“It snowed last night on the mountain”
High up on the blue black diorite
Faint orange streaks of snow
In the ruddy dawn
I said
“It has been snowing for months
All over Canada and Alaska
And Minnesota and Michigan
Right now wet snow is falling
In the morning streets of Chicago
Bit by bit they are making over the world
Even in Mexico even for us”
 (“Gradualism”) 1/

Rexroth produced a number of long poems throughout his life, beginning with “The Homestead Called Damascus,” which the author claimed was “written before I was twenty years old.” In its opening lines he makes a bold reference to a phrase in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “the ineluctable modality of the visible.” Allowing his religious sensibilities full play, Rexroth turns Joyce’s phrase into “the ‘ineluctable modality’ of the invisible”:

Heaven is full of definite stars
And crowded with modest angels, robed

In tubular, neuter folds of pink and blue.
 Their feet tread doubtless on that utter
 Hollowness, with never a question
 Of the “ineluctable modality”
 Of the invisible; busy, orderly,
 Content to ignore the coal pockets
 In the galaxy, dark nebulae,
 And black broken windows into space.
 Youthful minds may fret infinity,
 Moistly dishevelled, poking in odd
 Corners for unsampled vocations
 Of the spirit, while the flesh is strong.
 Experience sinks its roots in space—
 Euclidean, warped, or otherwise.
 The will constructs rhomboids, nonagons,
 And paragons in time to suit each taste.
 Or, if the will, then circumstance.
 History demands satisfaction,
 And never lacks, with or without help
 From the subjects of its curious science.

The problem with this dense medium—slightly reminiscent of Hart Crane—is that over the course of a long poem, it is utterly unreadable. (Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, dismissed “The Homestead Called Damascus” as “a lot of talky talk.”)

Many people have commented on the wide range of Rexroth’s erudition—in many languages—but if he had a single “precursor” poet, it would have to have been Ezra Pound. Rexroth was far from Pound politically, but there is so much about Rexroth that reminds you of Pound: translations from the Chinese and Japanese, an intense interest in the troubadours (many of whom Pound had translated), a commitment to free verse and the long poem, the denunciation of the present day, even the intensely hectoring tone of much of the work, which insisted that the poet’s opinions about society were intensely meaningful. Indeed, even Rexroth’s interest in poetry and jazz was a kind of extension of Pound’s admiration of the troubadours—poets whom Pound associated with the Homeric singer. Jazz poetry, wrote Rexroth, “returns poetry to music and to public entertainment as it was in the days of Homer or the troubadours.” Like Pound, Rexroth collected a group of younger writers whom he both pushed forward and “educated.” “We were all brought up on Daddy Rexroth’s reading list,” remarked Robert Duncan. “The amount of labor and confusion he saved younger people was immense,” said poet-critic Thomas Parkinson. Like Pound, Rexroth had a deep distrust of “the academy,” calling universities “fog factories.” And like Pound, Rexroth took to the radio—Berkeley independent station, KPFA-FM—to expound his theories. 2/

Rexroth opened his *Collected Shorter Poems* with these lines, quietly attributed to “Anonymous Provençal”:

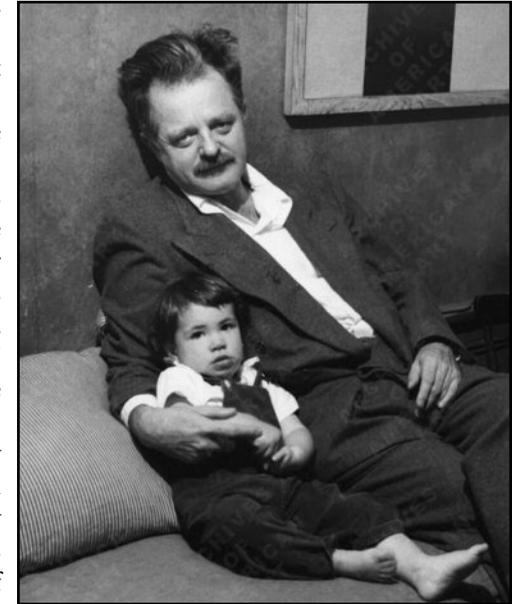
When the nightingale cries
 All night and all day,
 I have my sweetheart
 Under the flower
 Till the watch from the tower
 Cries, “Lovers, rise!
 The dawn comes and the bright day.”

The lines deliberately recall Ezra Pound’s famous tour-de-force, “Alba” (Dawn), a poem Pound placed at the beginning of his own translations from the Provençal:

When the nightingale to his mate
 Sings day-long and night late
 My love and I keep state
 In bower
 In flower,
 ’Till the watchman on the tower
 Cry:
 “Up! Thou rascal, Rise,
 I see the white
 Light
 And the night
 Flies.”

Initially one wonders why Rexroth would place his rather pedestrian rendering

of the poem against Pound’s obviously brilliant, obviously superior version. (Pound even gives an equivalent of troubadour rhyming—a practice Rexroth does not follow either here or in his translations of Reverdy.) The answer is that Rexroth’s poem is making a rather subtle point. What is “brilliant” for one person, after all, may be merely “flashy” for another. There is a problem with Pound’s poem: it centers in the concluding word, “Flies.” Obviously, Pound means the word as a verb: he is talking about the night “flying” away. Yet, from a syntactic point of view, it is possible that the word could be a noun: that is, Pound could be talking about creatures, “night flies.” He isn’t, of course, but the ambiguity—the inexactness—remains. Rexroth’s version is more pedestrian than Pound’s in every way, but it is also more exact. Pound needs “flies” for his rhyme—he couldn’t use “And the night is flying away,” for example—but the meaning of his poem suffers because of it. (Pound might have written “And the night / Dies”—but the poem might well have died along with it.)



Kenneth Rexroth

Ezra Pound is a particularly important figure for Kenneth Rexroth because the *Cantos* represents a way of dealing with the genius-poet’s “diverse influences,” his “horde” of references. The problem for Pound was to find some form in which it was possible to exhibit the multiplicity of his imaginative constructs without falling into utter chaos—the shapelessness that is the poet-sculptor’s deepest enemy. When Pound is successful in doing this—as he is in Canto LXXIV or Canto 99—the effect is nothing less than thrilling: it is as if the mind’s sense of its own infinity had momentarily found a home. (Pound of course had his doubts as to whether he could achieve the same effect in the *Cantos* as a whole.) Rexroth’s problem was to do what Pound did without sounding like Pound. In addition, there was the problem of “obscurity”: Pound’s *Cantos* were notoriously difficult to understand. If, as a young man, Rexroth thought that “literary Cubism was the future of American poetry,” Ken Knabb points out that as Rexroth began to actually produce such poetry he began to realize that—despite the fact that “the current language of society [has] been debauched by the exploitative uses to which it [has] been put, and...it [is] necessary to find gaps in the structure of communication which [are] still fluent and through which the mind of the reader [can] be assaulted”—it was necessary for him to function in more accessible forms if he wanted to have an audience.

The Dragon and the Unicorn (1944-1950), is one of Rexroth’s solutions to the problem of the long poem. It begins with a rather problematical reference to an incident in the life of Christ:

“And what is love?” said Pilate,
 And washed his hands.

(Pilate in fact asked, “What is truth?” See John 18:38.)

The poem then moves into an “accessible,” fairly straightforward travelogue—an anecdotal mode, often quite beautifully written, which Rexroth maintains throughout the poem, though always with interruptions:

All night long
 The white snow falls on the white
 Peaks through the quiet darkness.
 The overland express train
 Drives through the night, through the snow.
 In the morning the land slopes
 To the Atlantic, the sky
 Is thicker, Spring stirs, smelling
 Like old wet wood, new life speaks
 In pale green fringes of marsh
 Marigolds on the edges
 Of the mountain snow drifts.

Against this language—always interesting, full of wit and stories, close to Rexroth’s celebrated conversation—is another, more problematical, more abstract language, a

language of philosophical distinctions:

It is doubtful if the world
Presents itself in any
Important aspects under
The forms of serial time
And atomic space. It is
True that the intellect has
Come to be conditioned by them,
But important experience
Comes to us in freedom and
Is realized as value,
And the intellect alone
Can know nothing of freedom
And value because it is
Concerned with the necessary
And they are by definition
Unnecessitated. Love
Of course is the ultimate
Mode of free evaluation.
Perfect love casts out knowledge.

The poem, like much of the work of the troubadours, is the interplay between these two uses of language, abstract and particular, philosophical and anecdotal. Though the philosophical passages are far from “accessible”—and are clearly necessary to the poem—they can be skipped by the reader who finds them tedious. For the reader who is philosophically equal to them, they are there in all their glorious abstraction; but for other readers there are stories, jokes, and they are often quite good stories and jokes:

The author of *Le Rideau levé*,
Approached as a colleague by
Sade in prison, repulsed him
Succinctly, “Mon Sieur, je ne suis
Pas ici pour avoir donné des
Confits empoisonnés aux femmes
De chambre.” The existentialistes
Don’t like him very much.

(The French is “Sir, I am not / here for having given / poisoned preserves
to / chambermaids.”)

Pound of course is capable of stories and jokes as well, but Rexroth carries Pound’s techniques further—and, unlike Pound or Olson, he does not move the words of his poem around the page. There are no disturbing “field techniques” in Rexroth: the left-hand margin is always returned to.

The Dragon and the Unicorn is a triumph of Rexroth’s determination to write a poem which could be read by anyone but which does not simplify his complex sense of the world. There remains a problem, however. The passage quoted above indicates Rexroth’s antipathy to the “existentialistes,” with their powerful sense of alienation. In his introduction to the *Collected Longer Poems*, Rexroth writes that “It is easy to overcome alienation—the net of the cash nexus can simply be stepped out of, but only by the self actualizing man”:

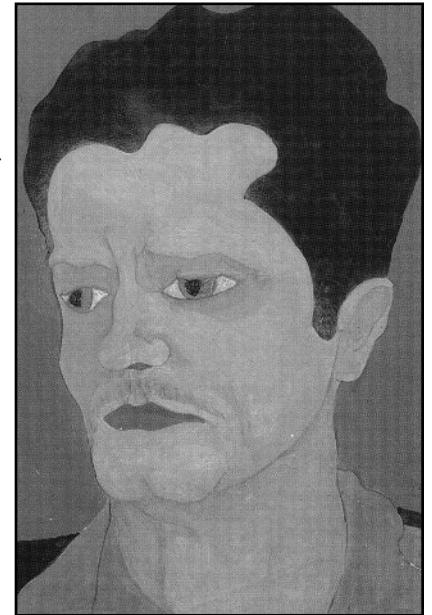
But everyone is self actualizing and can realize it by the simplest act—the self unselfing itself, the only act that is actual act...I hope I have made it clear that the self does not do this by an act of will, by sheer assertion. He who would save his life must lose it.

Discussing Cubist poetry’s “unanalyzable transcendental claim” Rexroth alludes to “certain projected physical responses” which accompany “the person undergoing the poetic experience, whether poet or reader”:

Vertigo, rapture, transport, crystalline and plangent sounds, shattered and refracted light, indefinite depths, weightlessness, piercing odors and tastes, and synthesizing these sensations and affects, an all-consuming clarity. These are the phenomena that often attend what theologians call natural mysticism. They can be found especially in the poetry of St. Mechtilde of Magdeburg and St. Hildegard of Bingen, great favorites of the psychologists who have written on this subject, but they are equally prominent in the

poetry of Sappho or Henry Vaughan or the prose of Jacob Boehme, as well as in many modern poets.

It is important to note here that Rexroth does not understand “mysticism” to be an experience beyond words: rather, it can be embodied in the poetry of writers such as Pierre Reverdy. At the same time, Rexroth insists that such poetry—the work of the “self actualizing man”—involves “the self unselfing itself”: “He who would save his life must lose it.” Rexroth is right to insist that mysticism as a *literary technique* is a very important way of approaching a good many modern poets. At the same time, however, his own poetry is a case of the self’s inability to “unself itself.” His is not a poetry of unselfing but of fierce ego assertion, of judgment; it is an attempt—by no means always successful—to embody wisdom:



“Self Portrait” by Kenneth Rexroth, published in *Chicago Review* issue 52

Why this sudden outburst of Homosexuality?

The American mass culture
Has identified the normal
Sex relation with the stuffing
Of an omnivorous and
Insensate vagina with
Highly perishable and
Expensive objects of non
Utility. Useless value
Has replaced use value and has
Been linked with sex satisfaction.
Since every young American
Male knows that very soon the State
Is going to take him out and
Murder him very nastily,
He is inclined to withdraw from
The activities prescribed for him
In the advertising pages.
Since it is physically
Impossible to realize
The fullness of love except
Between a man and woman,
This is at best a sort of
Marking time before execution.
For similar reasons, children
In the highschools take heroin.

That passage is a poetry of statement—of extremely dubious statement. We are much more likely to find Rexroth’s verse “beautiful” if we at least tentatively agree with his opinions. Here, in his benighted insistence that “it is physically / Impossible to realize / The fullness of love except / Between a man and woman,” he is as offensive as Pound on the Jews. Opinions, often debatable ones, come fast and furiously throughout *The Dragon and the Unicorn*:

Lawrence, Lawrence, what a lot
Of hogwash you have fathered.
Etruscan art is just plain bad.
It is the commercial art
Of mercenary provincials,
On a par with Australian
Magazine covers. Where it is
Good at all, it was done by Greeks.

We can see more clearly what is disturbing in Rexroth’s conception if we turn to another follower of Pound’s, Charles Olson. Though Olson was equally noted for his ego-assertion—he could be as dogmatic as Rexroth—he nevertheless kept himself rooted in what he understood to be “Negative Capability,” a concept which comes from the Romantic poet John Keats. In a letter to his brothers George and Thomas

(December 21, 1817), Keats explains Negative Capability in this way:

that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.

In another letter—to Richard Woodhouse (October 27, 1818)—Keats asserts that “the poetical character...is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing”:

It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen.
A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity—he is continually infor[ming]—and filling some other body.

In the central sections of Olson’s famous poem, “The Kingfishers,” the pronoun and the concept “I” simply disappear from the poem, though they return with a vengeance in the concluding section. One can sense something of the same thing happening in this short piece from Olson’s *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI*:

Maximus, March 1961-2

by the way into the woods

Indian otter
“Lake” ponds orient

show me (exhibit
 myself)

In a way similar to Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de dés*, the spaces around the words allow for multiple meanings (the word “orient,” for example, might be a verb or a noun) and, while one has a sense of an intense experience happening—indeed, an experience which “shows me myself”—one does not have a sense of the individuality of the person doing the experiencing. The poem is in this sense the opposite of a “dramatic monologue.” (In *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* George F. Butterick tells us that “Olson spoke of this poem as resulting from or having to do with a revelatory experience made possible...through the consciousness-expanding drug, psilocybin, a synthetic form of the Sacred Mushroom of the Mexican Indians—which he experienced a few weeks earlier, in February 1961, in an experiment conducted by drug researcher Timothy Leary.” Similarly, Rexroth remarks in the introduction to his Reverdy translations that “At the present moment [1969] the quest of such experiences [of natural mysticism] by way of hallucinogenic drugs is immensely fashionable.”)

“Negative Capability” implies the disappearance of the poet as ego, as self. Despite Rexroth’s theme of “unselving,” there is little “Negative Capability” in his work. 3/ In “Remembering Rexroth” (*Poetry Flash*, January, 1992), Morgan Gibson correctly observes that Rexroth always “had an extraordinary conviction of being right.” At times—as in the passages quoted above—this makes for boring, even annoying writing. At other times, however, it is Rexroth’s great strength:

FOR ELI JACOBSON
December 1952

There are few of us now, soon
There will be none. We were comrades
Together, we believed we
Would see with our own eyes the new

World where man was no longer
Wolf to man, but men and women
Were all brothers and lovers
Together. We will not see it.
We will not see it, none of us.
It is farther off than we thought.
In our young days we believed
That as we grew old and fell
Out of rank, new recruits, young
And with the wisdom of youth,
Would take our places and they
Surely would grow old in the
Golden Age. They have not come.
They will not come. There are not
Many of us left. Once we
Marched in closed ranks, today each
Of us fights off the enemy,
A lonely isolated guerrilla.
All this has happened before,
Many times. It does not matter.
We were comrades together,
Life was good for us. It is
Good to be brave—nothing is
Better. Food tastes better. Wine
Is more brilliant. Girls are more
Beautiful. The sky is bluer
For the brave—for the brave and
Happy comrades and for the
Lonely brave retreating warriors.
You had a good life. Even all
Its sorrows and defeats and
Disillusionments were good,
Met with courage and a gay heart.
You are gone and we are that
Much more alone. We are one fewer,
Soon we shall be none. We know now
We have failed for a long time.
And we do not care. We few will
Remember as long as we can,
Our children may remember,
Some day the world will remember.
Then they will say, “They lived in
The days of the good comrades.
It must have been wonderful
To have been alive then, though it
Is very beautiful now.”
We will be remembered, all
Of us, always, by all men,
In the good days now so far away.
In the good days never come,
We will not know. We will not care.
Our lives were the best. We were the
Happiest men alive in our day.

That poem is as much a poetry of statement—and of the ego—as the passage I quoted from *The Dragon and the Unicorn*, yet it is, as Ken Knabb and others have pointed out, enormously moving. Perhaps the deepest element of Rexroth’s verse is its nostalgia, its sense of elegy. There are few poets who can touch him in this regard:

At the door of my thatched hut,
Buried deep in the forested mountains,
The wind in the ancient ginko tree
Sounds like the rustle of brocaded silk.

(“Erinnerung” from “Imitations of the Chinese,” 1974:
the title means “Remembrance,” “Memory”)

“Colors of things gone dead,” he wrote in an early poem, “of dear moments lost in tragedy.” Time, the great theme of elegies, is a subject Rexroth returns to again and again—the word “gone” echoes throughout his work—as is the notion that value is to be found only in *this* world ecstatically apprehended:

The order of the universe
 Is only a reflection
 Of the human will and reason...
 The great principles and forces
 That move the world...have order
 Only as a reflection
 Of the courage, loyalty,
 Love, and honesty of men.
 By themselves they are cruel
 And utterly frivolous.
 The man who yields to them goes mad.
 ("They Say This Isn't A Poem")

Rexroth faced the challenge of Pound and of "that revolution of the sensibility that began with Baudelaire" in a brave and often brilliant way. He is rightly praised for the depth and beauty of his nature poetry. The American West, writes Linda Hamalian in her essay, "Rediscovering Community: Rexroth and the Whitman Tradition," created in Rexroth "a pervading, comforting conviction that no artistic accomplishment could ever match this landscape" and aroused in him "a sense of a sacramental presence in all things..." He was extraordinarily erudite, but he could use his erudition in a playful manner. He translated lines by William Carlos Williams—the great advocate of "the American language"—into Latin ("De Fera Dormita"): suddenly Williams sounds like Catullus! And in a poem addressed to Williams, Rexroth defined the poet as "one who creates / Sacramental relationships / That last always." In his later years Rexroth placed much of his hope for change not in "poetry" but in song. Song, he insisted, gets to the root of the matter by presenting "an alternative kind of human being" ("Back to the Sources of Literature"):

The real thing about your [David Meltzer's] stuff, or Joni Mitchell's stuff...is that it involves and presents a pattern of human relationships which is unassimilable by the society. What the songs speak of cannot be assimilated. I mean, here is a love song...but the kind of love it sings of can't exist in this society. The song gets out like a bit of radioactive cobalt. It just foments subversion around itself as long as it is available...

The whole problem is to find works of art which remain permanently unassimilable and permanently corruptive...The songs of Shakespeare are permanently indigestible and permanently subversive.

(Interview, *The San Francisco Poets*)

If Rexroth was not capable of the lyrical heights of his friend, Robert Duncan (Duncan's "Such is the Sickness of Many a Good Thing" is one of the most beautiful and musical examples of free verse ever written), he was certainly capable of considerable depth, insight, and passion.

This last perhaps made him a rather difficult person, despite his charm. In his introduction to the *Complete Poems*, co-editor Sam Hamill writes, "Although apparently incapable of monogamy, [Rexroth] nevertheless believed in marriage as the highest sacrament." Rexroth's biographer, the unforgiving Linda Hamalian, makes the point in a somewhat fiercer way: "He saw no contradiction between his longing for a stable, profound relationship with one woman and his predisposition to screw anyone within reach." Despite the fact that Rexroth encouraged and attracted many prominent women writers, who admired him as well, he could refer to them at times as "writresses." (Cf. "waitresses.") Used after his own desert, remarked Shakespeare, which of us would 'scape whipping? Rexroth was both monstrosity and miracle, and he deserves considerably better than he has received.

*

In 1992 Morgan Gibson wrote, "The point of many of [Rexroth's] allusions may be clear, but the processes of his imaginative thinking are not so easily grasped. More, not less, explication of his work is needed." Donald K. Gutierrez's *Revolutionary Rexroth* appeared in 1986 and his "*The Holiness of the Real: The Short Verse of Kenneth Rexroth*" ten years later, but apart from such efforts there has been very little. Gibson may be right about the "clarity" of Rexroth's myriad allusions, but a guide to the allusions—like the guides to Pound's and Olson's poetry—would be a very useful volume. *The Dragon and the Unicorn* quietly quotes from Eugene V. Debs, for example, and Rexroth re-writes St. Augustine's "Love God and do what you will" as "Love and do what you will."

Kenneth Rexroth saw himself as a member of an international community. Currently even his sympathetic critics tend to regard him as a regional (California)

writer, albeit one of genius. One review of the *Complete Poems* bore the headline, "A poet transformed by California / Kenneth Rexroth collection shows how state worked its magic on him." 4/ Rexroth might well have regarded such a designation as another example of the provincialism—"the native son and daughter thing"—he battled all his life. In writing this essay I myself have said nothing of his fine translations or, to use Ken Knabb's word, of the continuing "relevance" of his social conscience: subjects for another paper. In 1969 Rexroth—always the anarchist—told David Meltzer,

What happened with Vietnam, and the Russian-Chinese split, was that the movement again fell into the hands of people who were representing other people's foreign offices. American radicals are placed in the ridiculous position of supporting the foreign policies of Ho Chi Minh, or Chairman Mao, or Fidel Castro, or Tito, or Israel. That may be better than Stalin, but it is still an army, it is still a foreign office, it is still a state...You know! Here's a Negro in San Francisco and he is running around in African clothes and he's talking about the glories of the Congo or Nigeria or Ghana or whatever side he has taken. Why? What for? It is just another state. It is the same old shit come back.... 5/

In addition to this *Complete Poems* and a handful of books still in print, Ken Knabb's Bureau of Public Secrets website has a considerable amount of Rexroth material: <http://www.bopsecrets.org>. You can also find information about Rexroth at the Modern American Poetry site:

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/rexroth/rexroth.htm.



Group photo of the City Lights in North Dakota Conference, in Grand Forks, North Dakota, sponsored by the UND English Department. Clockwise from top left: Michael McClure, Gregory Corso, Miriam Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Peter Orlovsky, Gary Snyder, Janie McClure, Shig Murao, Curator (name unknown - female), Joanne McClure Curator (name unknown - male), March 18, 1974. - Photo by D.Sorensen

Notes

1. Cf. these passages from *The Dragon and the Unicorn* (1944-1950):

[A]s the dual,
 The beloved, is known and
 Loved more and more fully, all
 The universe of persons
 Grows steadily more and more real.
 Eventually loss or pain
 To the least of these, the most
 Remote known person of the
 Other, is felt personally
 Through the intense reality
 Of the dual.

*

What we realize
 In the beloved is the
 Growing reality of
 All the others.

Cf. also Rexroth's notorious remark, "I write poetry to seduce women and to overthrow the Capitalist

system. In that order.”

2. In *American Poetry in the Twentieth Century* (1971) Rexroth asserts that “KPFA has been the single most powerful cultural influence in the [San Francisco] Bay Area.”

3. In the late sequence, “The Silver Swan” (1974-1978), Rexroth represents the process of “unselving.” A female apparition comes to him and asks,

“Lover, do you know what Heart
You have possessed?
Before I can answer, her
Body flows into mine, each
Corpuscle of light merges
With a corpuscle of blood or flesh.
As we become one the world
Vanishes. My self vanishes.
I am dispossessed, only
An abyss without limits.
Only dark oblivion
Of sense and mind in an
Illimitable void.
Infinitely away burns
A minute red point to which
I move or which moves to me.
Time fades away. Motion is
Not motion. Space becomes Void.
A ruby fire fills all being.
It opens, not like a gate,
Like hands in prayer that unclasp
And close around me.
Then nothing. All senses ceased.
No awareness, nothing.
Only another kind of knowing
Of an all encompassing
Love that has consumed all being.

Despite the theme of “unselving”—and the assertion that “My self vanishes”—nothing in Rexroth’s language actually places the ego sense in question. Rather, the effect of the passage is something like “Look what happened to *me!*” It still depends on ego assertion. The interplay of various voices one finds in Pound, Eliot, Duncan and Olson is rarely to be found in Rexroth—though Rexroth does insist in his introduction to *The Collected Longer Poems* that his work embodies “the interior and exterior adventures of two poles of a personality.”

4. David Kipen, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 1/25/03. In “Rexroth Rediscovered,” an article written for the *LA Times*, Dana Gioia suggests that Rexroth has suffered the fate of the regional writer—neglect from the East:

Rexroth’s place in the American literary canon, like that of many Californian poets such as Robinson Jeffers, William Everson, Josephine Miles, Yvor Winters, Robert Duncan, and Jack Spicer—remains open to critical debate. Consistently ignored or underrated by the Eastern literary establishment, these poets continue to exercise an active influence on West Coast writers, and they continue to be read, though largely outside the academy.

Interestingly, *The Dragon and the Unicorn*—which is probably Rexroth’s central utterance—takes place for the most part in Europe. Rexroth’s primary publisher was New Directions, which in 1958 published Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s *A Coney Island of the Mind*. Had Rexroth written anything that sold like Ferlinghetti’s book, his status as a “Western writer” would have been utterly transformed.

5. Rexroth puts it in a more positive way in *The Dragon and the Unicorn*:

Keep uncompromised;
Stay poor; try to keep out from
Under the boot; love one another;
Reject all illusions; wait.

*

There is no need to assume
The existence of a god
Behind the community
Of persons, the community
Is the absolute. There is no
Future life because there is
No future...
At
The heart of being is the act of
Contemplation, it is timeless.

Jack Foley is a widely published San Francisco poet and critic. Foley’s recent, monumental *Visions & Affiliations: A California Literary Time Line 1940-2005* is recognized as an important compedium of California poetry. He lives in Oakland, California, and June 5, 2010 was proclaimed “Jack Foley Day” in Berkley.

THE SHADOW IN THE GARDEN

Richard Wirick

In this guidebook for the derivative artist known as the biographer, the esteemed polymath James Atlas does not brook idols easily. He is fair, but is severe about social critic Dwight Macdonald, who spent many hours editing Atlas’ fine life of Delmore Schwartz. Atlas gives many examples and creates little bubbles of mini-bios as he goes. An envious blowhard, Macdonald exclaimed that “Hemingway couldn’t write” and that the learned man-of-letters Edmund Wilson was interested only in “showing off how much he’s read.” Atlas later notes that Wilson “never showed off his vast erudition.” Finally, Atlas found the “fierce, irascible, antagonistic” Macdonald intolerably oppressive.

Atlas’ portraits of Alfred Kazin and Richard Ellmann are accurate. Kazin, whom Schwartz called “a serious menace to criticism,” was venomous, retributive and bitter. Ellmann, whose life of James Joyce is the greatest modern biography, was brilliant and kind. But in a fit of pique Atlas misjudges John Bayley, who refused to tutor him at Oxford. Bayley was an exceptionally stimulating lecturer and teacher. His memoir of his wife Iris Murdoch descending into the darkness of Alzheimer’s, “Elegy for Iris” is not “pitiless,” as Atlas asserts, but self-sacrificial and sympathetic.

The Shadow in the Garden contains beautiful, forceful writing but does not adhere to a traditional narrative structure. Atlas follows chronology, even if he returns to the same subjects in different chapters and drops derivative sketches of Greek and Roman historians where appropriate. The book is abundant with needed footnotes, and in these Atlas is also generous. But sometimes it seems as if the reader must jump between parallel texts. It’s a good thing Atlas didn’t touch upon the philosopher Karl Popper, whose footnotes often swallow the text like Uroburos devouring its tail.



James Atlas (pic: Michael Lionstar)

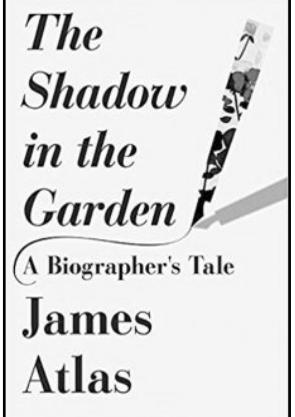
Atlas describes following the author’s trajectory from birthplace through foreign travels to the grave (“Death,” Atlas sadly observes, “is the biographer’s worst enemy”), studying unpublished letters and manuscripts in widely scattered archives, searching for school records, finding family and friends to interview, and discovering that famous older people are often quite lonely.

During interviews with Bellow, Atlas did not use a tape recorder. Bellow learned to draw people out and remain silent, to take notes while eating and (sometimes) getting drunk, adding to his notes immediately after leaving. He refereed fights, often about money, between the children of different wives. Responses from valuable sources ranged from “I curse the day you ever heard my name,” to when Bellow tried to extract a privately owned manuscript by Somerset Maugham to “I’ve been waiting all my life for you to come” from the daughter of Robert Frost’s lover.

But there’s no need, as Atlas suggests, to “get it all in.” Not everything matters, and you don’t have you scrutinize “every electric bill, every grocery list, every torn envelope.” Biographers should remain an unobtrusive presence, concentrate on the reader’s interest rather than their own obsessions, and focus not on the facts of the live but on what these facts *mean*.

Atlas, who can’t quite break free from his subject, ends his book with a description of his own life that inadvertently recalls the sad end of Schwartz. The writer took out his garbage, suffered a heart attack and died in the elevator of a seedy Times Square hotel. Atlas, in a burst of welcome empathy with his subject, races his trash out to the hall drop shaft and then races back before anything terrible can happen.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.



The Shadow in the Garden: A Biographer's Tale
James Atlas
Pantheon: 400 pp

TREE OF BLUE RIVERS

Richard Wirick

If President Xi's new-found, perpetual hold on power has any effect on the average Chinese citizen, it is not obvious in the evening strollers on the Bund, Shanghai's great financial district laying along the barge-flecked Huang-pu River. It has long been the third largest in the world (after Wall Street and London), and if my economic consultant is correct that China will essentially rule the world by 2050, it will have moved to first place sometime long before that. The breezes from the night river make this a perfect walking promenade, and as you look across its waters to the new trading district of Pudong, sheer visual wonder is hard to contain. The towers look like several Manhattans strung together, and the highest, like the sinewy Shanghai Financial Center at over two thousand feet, the world's second-tallest, perfect what Dallas design-builder Anthony Robinson has called the Vertical City. There is nowhere to look but up; if you look down, the swift, obsidian water mirrors back the long parade of shifting, glassy fire.

The wise political prediction money saw Xi's ascent as not inevitable, but certainly not too surprising. Though Xi was placed in posts that established him as the Chinese Communist Party's future dynamo, he went a step further and ensured he could have no possible successor. The late winter suspension of term limits thus indicate that he intends to emulate Mao and stay on into old age (he is only 65), a state of affairs unheard of in the post-Deng era. Xi has taken the chair of numerous economic and graft-watchdog committees, posts that the heir apparent for them, Li Keqiang, seemed destined to fill. But Xi has pushed to the forefront his theory of the "three represents," authored by new politburo member Wang Huning. The Three Represents is a hodgepodge of "new authoritarianism," aversion to Western democracy, and, as if to guarantee lesser freedoms will operate cleanly, the ever-present zeal for anti-corruption measures, sometimes created on the fly like some sort of Trumpian overnight publicity gesture.

Wang Huning is a fascinating figure. He is gaunt and tall—most un-Chinese—contrasting with Xi's stalwart and straightforward blandness. Wang did not seek out his power. He is the type of intellectual that many leaders opportunistically foreground to legitimize blunt policy moves. Wang is from here in Shanghai, a young professor at the prestigious Fudan University. He has the deep historical-intellectual bent of a Kissingerian academic: aloof, detached, a "mere scholar" who nevertheless keeps a sharp lookout for moments of effective policy influence. His anti-Western bent should work well with Xi's new policies, though the latter involves the union of state-owned enterprises with (often) foreign and privately-owned service sectors. Xi has long promised economic reform in the style of Deng Xiaoping, but he has yet to deliver.

But Xi is first and foremost a figure of power, of control over the media and the police-repressive apparatus of government militias and intelligence services. Xi has made himself the head of committees on foreign affairs and national security. And while the presidency gives the nation's leaders equal footing with foreign diplomatic representatives, the cold, hard truth of chairmanship is a very anti-Western control of the military. After all, the People's Liberation Army belongs to the party, not the nation. This makes China unlike almost all other great nations of the world, even Russia. And it all goes back to Mao's first axiom of realpolitik, that "all power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

If the foregoing gives the equivalent of a macro view of things as we see in physics, the population builds itself incrementally, in a granular manner, at what might resemble a subatomic level of progress. Learning new, practically effective mundanities is a slow and bumbling process. But Chinese tenacity is a model for the human spirit, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the mastery of Western practical habits. The skill set most dramatically acquired in the last two decades is best chronicled by my compatriot Peter Hessler, the Beijing bureau chief for *The New Yorker*. It amounts to driving an automobile, to gaining that most precious of inland grants of freedom—the driver's license.

We don't get to see the slapstick of this in coastal cities. But China, not unlike the United States, amounts to a large geographical mass that must be traversed by the internal combustion engine. And do not even dream of alternatives to fossil fuel transportation. If my own governor, Jerry Brown, dreams of an emissionless future of electric vehicles and bullet trains, his nightmare is the Chinese future, where coal burn-off and photochemical smog make the capital of Beijing look like a toxic fog chamber. My hairdresser describes Shanghai as the world's "sexiest" city, referring mainly to fashion. If it has crept inland to the capital we need to start with D & G and Tom Ford



Shanghai's financial district

facemasks, bright and necessary flecks in the haze that gives you only a one or two-block visual range.

So let's stick with the sub-atomic for awhile and apply for a Chinese driver's license. The exam questions are often like something out of a Marx Brothers movie, and are punctuated by simple edicts one might not even think of, like "In taxi, is fine to carry a small amount of explosive material." Translations of the booklets are difficult, but you get plenty of zaniness and a constant theme of aggression:

China did not become the Asian dynamo by tolerating the word for traffic jam, largely untranslatable save for the phrase "a go-slow." The rules for passing another vehicle are what gives the Western taxi passenger, and driver license student, the willies:

80: If, while preparing to pass a car, you notice that it is turning left, making a U-turn, or passing another vehicle, you should:

- a) pass on the right*
- b) not pass*
- c) honk, accelerate, and pass on the left.*

I have been impressed with the safety-consciousness of motorbike and trishaw taxis in Shanghai. But in the interior, the pedestrian, oddly, is not the king, and "the formation of aggressive skills" translates into "passing the test with the examiner:"

117: When approaching a marked pedestrian crossing, you should:

- a) slow down and stop if there are pedestrians;*
- b) accelerate in order to catch up with the car directly in front of you, and then cross closely behind him;*
- c) drive straight through, because pedestrians should give vehicles the right of way.*

The courtesy of fair warning has been at least internalized by downtown Shanghai drivers, who would do well in short stints as instructors in the countryside. Who said there was a shortage of jobs for new college graduates? There are crashes galore all over the interior here, from Chengdu to Yunnan. But as is often the case with progress, forgiveness is more easily dispensed than permission.

353. When passing an elderly person or a child, you should

- a) slow down and make sure you pass safely;*
- b) continue at the same speed;*
- c) honk the horn to tell them to watch out.*

269: When you enter a tunnel, you should, you should:

- a) honk and accelerate;*
- b) slow down and turn on your lights;*
- c) honk and maintain speed.*

335. When driving through a residential area, you should:
- honk like normal;
 - honk more than normal, in order to alert residents;
 - lean arm on horn to notify residents you have arrived.

Again, my affection for my fellow Angelinos notwithstanding, I would grant, had I President Xi's authority, the equivalent of a Ph.D in Chinese Driver Education to each of the four million motorists in the greater L.A. Basin. The horn is obviously key here, even in the smaller, mid-country cities. Hessler describes it as an essentially neurological extension of the body, something that channels the driver's reflexes. He compares it deftly with the difficulties of acquiring their language, and shows that subtleties of pitch and deliverance can make all the difference.

Chinese is tonal, which means that a single sound like *ma* has different meanings depending on whether it is flat, rising, falling and rising, or falling sharply. A single Chinese horn, on the other hand, can mean at least ten distinct things. A solid *hooooonnnkkkk* is intended to attract attention. A double sound—*hooooonnnkkkk hooooonnnkkkk*—indicates irritation. There's a particularly long *hooooonnnkkkkkkkk* that means that the driver is stuck in bad traffic, has exhausted curb-sneaking options, and would like everyone else on the road to disappear. A responding *hooooonnnkkkkkkkkkkkkkk* proves that the recipient isn't going anywhere. There's a stuttering, staggering *honk honk hnk hnk* that represents pure panic. There's the afterthought *honk*—the one that rookie drivers make if they were too slow to hit the button before the situation resolved itself. And there's a short basic honk that simply says: My hands are still on the wheel, and this horn still serves as an extension of my nervous system.

The passage is not only accurate but is quintessential Hessler. If, as Wittgenstein said, reality is the shadow of grammar, then linguistic tonality is the mirror of the Nanking Road's essential, incessant clamor—a signal that the microcosmic, coral-like granules of civilization have arrived and are beginning to assemble themselves.



Drivers step out of their vehicles for a better view while stuck in traffic along Beijing's Second Ring Road on a "Car Free Day" on Sept. 21, 2010.

The night music of the Bund has no such discordance. I walk along it with my son, a banker, who notices it also. The walkers' faces are awash with the peace of economic stability. To be rich is glorious, and by the standards of much of Asia the urban Chinese are rich indeed. They do not put their money in their wardrobes or driveways, but in their childrens' educations, in American real estate, in the ever-burgeoning companies whose stunning, flickering ads make the Pudong towers resemble something out of Blade Runner's sensory overload. Only calmer, less menacing.

For now, the Chinese populace is willing, like Russia's, to lean in to old autocratic models to keep this equilibrium of prosperity. The psyche of the individual Chinese citizen—that mixture of conformity with brash self-reliance—will probably remain an enigma to Western sociologists. But physical well-being is growing, fanning out like the budding "blue rivers" of the ancient scroll painters. Xi has been described, not without some queasiness, as the new Sun King. But as the old proverb goes, "The sky is high and the Emperor is far away." For now, for this moment, the Bund walkers are blessed with calm waters and soft breezes.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

OCEAN PLASTIC

Stephen Bett

Only an innovative, critical eco-poetics can track language unit by unit while simultaneously showing us nasty fibrous bits from the clothes washer that spill into the food-chain in our water systems. In her new, impressive (and pointedly impressive) chapbook, poet Orchid Tierney melds together units of speech simulating or riming with the synthetic microfibers of polyester (how appropriate for our post-postmodern times!). Her page by page, ever expanding text adds phrasal chunks together in cumulative strings mimicking the gross indignities we inflict on the natural world. (If you eat fish, the poet tells us, you can be sure that you're also eating plastic.) And her methodology similarly reminds us of parsed sentences, of dependent clauses trapped like splintered shards inside independent ones, at their beginning, middle, and end. The ultimate chop and change of generative language globs. Accruing, accumulating, like clogged up lengths of stringy garbage. "[An] amputated sea welts sympathy," we're told, and we can sympathize graphically: a living praxis of mish-mashed phrases coiled to the point where our brains actually throb. Positing an inventive, water testing vocabulary to outline what we do to our ecosystems likewise.

Throughout Orchid Tierney's steadily self-generating text we find ourselves spinning inside the swirling machine, moving from "airy spines spun with sea gull stomachs" (the opening page) to "polymermaid / ... / gritty grains gauge / ... / garbage gyres / polyester / ... / a hurd of nurdles / ... / polyghosts / ... / nylon-riots" (closing page). Advancing the work so ingeniously foregrounds both text and texture, linking a spiny, tight phrasing with polyester's poisoning of the water. Units of speech



ocean plastic
Orchid Tierney
BlazeVOX Books, 2018



Orchid Tierney

accumulated, then, right to the sharp-eyed edge of our eco-madness. (We are, after all, water bred creatures.) Tierney's language strings spin-cycle us along in a seasick ride from her opening page's single phrase to a closing 35 unit conglomeration of brilliantly messy bits, buried at the singular heart of which the—literally, central—phrase "finger lichen good," voyaging us from this (washer) load of piled up phrasal clutter to the final site of our inevitable ocean-cide. With our natural resources now truly at stake, we're really getting to the drowning point here, where the washer hits the waves, spilling those spikey microfibers ghostlike into the food-chain: "guppy globsters tumbling over gill filters / ... / partial polyghosts soupify in garbage gyres." Turning and turning indeed in widening gyres. Feels like we're hitting the catastrophic end.

Stephen Bett writes from Victoria. His forthcoming works include a collection from Salmon Poetry and a chapbook from Finishing Line Press.

BAD ENDINGS

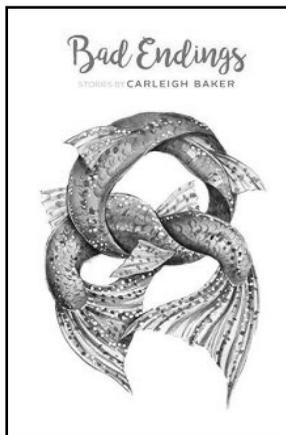
Chelsea Pastorchik

For most people born and raised along the rivers, creeks, and streams of British Columbia, the image of the salmon is full of promise – the promise of changing seasons, bounty, struggle and perseverance; of mossy banks, foggy mornings, gull cries and the fertile stink of rotting fish. Carleigh Baker’s collection of stories, *Bad Endings*, lives up to the promise of the entwined sockeye painted on its cover. The collection is intensely local and unflinchingly frank in its portrayal of characters slogging through everything from mundane disappointment to life-altering tragedy.

Baker makes you feel as though you are living inside the brain of each protagonist. Each story hits without preamble, the reader dropped directly in to the character’s inner monologue: “Divorce is something you should look good for,” “Melanie is mad, I can tell by the way she’s picking at her nails,” “It’s the middle of the day, who cares when exactly, grey on goddamn grey.” Each story is an honest depiction that does not ask for pity or judgement – they are unapologetically themselves.

Although no two stories in this book are connected, Baker has woven them through with many of the same motifs, leaving you flipping back to earlier stories to double check character names and locations, convinced there must be some hidden bridge between the stories. Four stories feature honey farm workers, while bees buzz in the background of other tales too. We interact with recovering addicts and addiction workers, with survivors and perpetrators of violence, with Lana and Lara, with partners clinging on desperately and partners walking blithely away.

This blurring of storylines is increased by their common landscape. Almost all the stories are either cloaked in the cold, clinging fog and rain of a West Coast winter or smothered in the heat of a stubborn summer drought. In her first story, Baker roots us firmly in the uniquely Cascadian misery of a wet winter morning: “It is raining – misting really – a wet that will sneak up on me as the morning progresses.” Later, we are transported to late summer in the Interior: “Al parks the truck and the dust cloud catches up to us. Otherwise it’s still, and already very warm.” Even when a story takes us further away from home, seasonal extremes dominate – the end of the dry season in Thailand; the endless days of a Yukon summer; the grey, mud, and chill of an Arctic



Bad Endings
Carleigh Baker
Anvil, 2018. 168 pp.
\$16

river. The human and the natural blend together against these backdrops, the one running into the other: “I think I see Lucy’s upside-down laughter run down to the ground like honey. Absorb near the tree roots.”

As they struggle with and against the landscape, Baker’s characters also struggle with themselves. They wrestle with their pasts, their uncertainty about their future, and their roles as partners, parents, siblings and coworkers. Their battles are often average and relatable, making this book good company for the lonely and the lost. Baker also explores a particular kind of identity struggle – the self-definition of a mixed-blood Indigenous person. Cree-Métis/Icelandic herself, Baker has several Métis characters whose identity is challenged by others or themselves. While catching brood stock salmon with a First Nations woman, one character finds herself singled out:



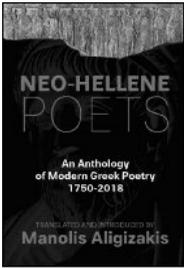
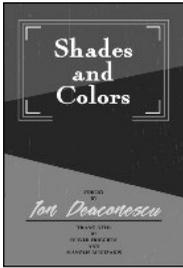
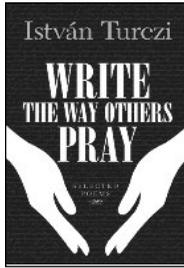
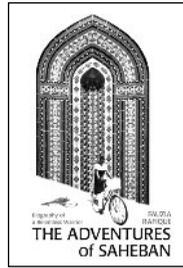
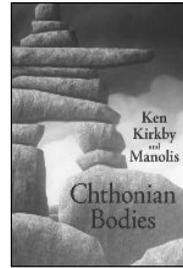
Carleigh Baker

“She looks me over: black hair, pale skin. “You’re not an Indian.”
“Métis.”
“Half-bloods.” She snorts. “You guys are the real nobodies.””

Sometimes, this questioning of identity is internalized: “I may be mixed blood – Sean and I are both Cree-Métis – but we were also both raised white. All we know are white-people things.”

Although this book is called *Bad Endings*, there is very little closure in its pages. Most often, the reader is dropped into a story, lives inside a character’s head for a while, and is ejected unceremoniously whenever Baker wants. The result is an escapist’s dream – stay just long enough to find company for your own pain, then jump out before you get too committed. These glimpses of lives are tender, honest, and vivid – and as ephemeral as spawning salmon.

Chelsea Pastorchik is a frequent contributor to PRRB. A mother and school-teacher, her last article was *Nearly Normal*, #23.

						
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WHAT WE MUST REMEMBER

Micheline M. Soong

Decades before the searing image of Jim Crow-era white supremacy in the United States with its incomprehensible 1955 acquittal of the abductors and killers of Emmett Till, there was the abduction, torture and murder of Joseph Kahahawai in Honolulu, Hawaii, on January 8, 1932. Kahahawai, along with four other young local Hawaii men, Ben Ahakuelo, Horace Ida, David Takai, and Henry Chang, was falsely accused of raping Thalia Massie, the white wife of a U.S. Navy officer.

Utilizing the unusual venue of *renshi*, a Japanese *renga*-inspired form of modern, English-language, collaborative, linked free-verse poetry, *What We Must Remember* transports readers back to 1931 and 1932, immersing them in the world of the Massie-Kahahawai case. Under the deft hands of local Hawaii poets Christy Passion, Ann Inoshita, Juliet S. Kono, and Jean Yamasaki Toyama, the result is a riveting collection of twenty-eight linked poems and subsequent commentary.

The poets, in a prescribed order, begin with Passion decidedly setting the tone with the group's first poem, "Reading Assignment: Stannard's *Honor Killing*" (a massive historical study on the trials that the poets agreed to read in preparation for the *renshi* sequence):

I don't want to read this story.

Don't want to know their names, imagine their faces.

I catch my breath as the words surface:

Tin Can Alley, bare feet football,
brown-skinned boys wearing white silk shirts.
See them behind the wheel—immortal for the night;
hear the ease in their laughter
stronger than daylight and the poor.

Too close to home.

[...]

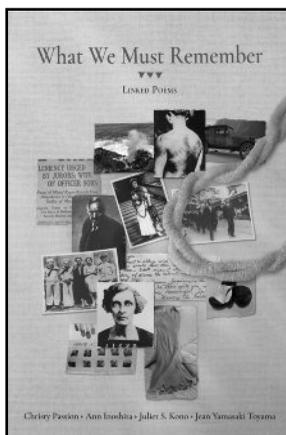
This is not Michener's Hawaii.

I skip to the end where she commits suicide—
and feel like a child burning ants, feel
a false sense of power. The end gathers me up
for the journey back.

This story is the unwanted family heirloom
the ugly vase,
the chipped china,
the bastard child everyone whispers about,
but no one calls by name. (31)

In writing this sequence of linked poems, each poet agrees to compose her own poem within two weeks, and post it on the Bamboo Ridge Press website for the next poet and the public to scrutinize. Taking the last line of the first poem, the next poet begins her poem with that line, and composes an entirely new poem, and passes it onto the next person. This goes on for seven rounds.

To fully appreciate a *renshi* sequence is to read each poem, not just individually on its own merit, but together with the one before and after, as each paired combination has a particular resonance as a unit, and then deeply the entire collection as a whole. In twenty-eight poems, the reader engages both key figures whose voices have been



What We Must Remember: Linked Poems

Christy Passion, Ann Inoshita, Juliet S. Kono, and Jean Yamasaki Toyama
Bamboo Ridge Press
Issue #111, 2017



Poets Ann Inoshita, Christy Passion, Juliet S. Kono and Jean Yamasaki Toyama

represented before, as well as those who have never been heard from. The famous ones are re-examined through a critical lens in light of the Civil Rights movement and Hawaii's post-colonial reckoning, and those who have long been silenced are heard with a poignant intimacy that restores their humanity in the face of erasure.

The poems are written from various perspectives from the Massie trial and among them are: the green dress that Thalia wore on the night of the alleged attack; Rear Admiral Yates Stirling, Jr., stirred to come to the aid of Massie; Ida's mother despairing of her son's chances of getting a fair trial; the deadlocked jurors arguing over the details of the case resulting in a mistrial; and several from Massie's mother, Grace Fortescue's vantage point, one being that she was particularly gratified that one of her son-in-law's peers abducted and brutalized one of the released men trying to get him to confess.

The sequence also covers the various perspectives surrounding the subsequent abduction, torture and murder of Kahahawai by Fortescue, Massie's husband, Thomas, and two of his peers. Notably, the poets capture the perspective of Kahahawai's mother while waiting for the rape trial to conclude, contrast it with her taking the stand during the murder trial, Kahahawai himself while dying, and of Kahahawai's father delivering the eulogy at his son's funeral to two thousand people. The poems also reference the murder trial's outcome that the party was found unequivocally guilty of manslaughter, and the stunning miscarriage of justice that the mandatory sentencing of ten years hard labor was commuted to one hour spent in the Territorial Governor's office.

Significantly, while the acquittal for Emmett Till's murder inspired both black and white Americans to agitate for the striking down of Southern Jim Crow laws in the 1960s, by contrast, the outcome of the Kahahawai case has subliminally reinforced white supremacist attitudes in the islands since the 1930s, while galvanizing the non-white locals to identify with a shared cultural identity against privileged whites. Many locals in Hawaii have found that narratives surrounding the murder of Kahahawai too painful to keep in circulation to contemporary times, and have censored themselves, sublimating their fear and anguish against crushing systemic discrimination, by refusing to talk about it, allowing it to pass from memory.

Toyama raises the pivotal question of *What We Must Remember*, in the final poem of the sequence "Through the Years"

we'll forget the dates and details of the alleged rape;

we'll forget the green silk dress, the names of the accused, Tin Can Alley,
the make of the car;

we'll forget the who of the defense, the why of the prosecution, the headlines,
the dirty accusations, the howling retorts;

(continued on page 29)

MY YEAR OF DIRT AND WATER

Maryse Cardin

In *My Year of Dirt and Water* Tracy Franz transports us to Japan, specifically to the year she lived there alone. Her husband Koun spends that time residing in a monastery in training for Zen priesthood.

While she profoundly misses her husband, this beautiful memoir is not about a woman waiting. Franz is deep into her own training during that year. She is a student of many practices furthering them at home as Koun does his in the monastery. She too is a student of Zen, of karate, of the Japanese language, and of traditional pottery.

The book is a diary of many of the days of that year. Each entry is self-contained, linking to the other entries, but also standing alone. Many moments and routines repeat themselves— another ceramic cup crafted, another phone call from her husband, another meditation session — but each is also unique, presenting in all their newness a multitude of opportunities. As we read and slow down, we come to savour each one as it ends in a reflection, a dilemma, or a revelation. Take this excerpt:

“While drying one of my favourite tea cups this morning, I fumble and the cup flies free of wet hands and towel — shooting out neatly in an upward trajectory, pausing (it seems) in midair, and then completing the arc. The sound as it hits the floor is slight but decisive — a body exploding outward from the point of impact. For a few brief seconds, I believe I can preserve the cup by simply willing myself to get a better grip, to make a less aggressive pull with the towel. A course correction in the past tense. But this fallacy is quickly eclipsed by the forward motion of cause-effect logic. I cannot undo what has already been done, or not done. There is only this moment and then this moment and then this moment and then... this moment. *Well, I think, at least now I'm paying attention.*”

There is discomfort and confusion as Franz faces this year alone. She doesn't try to escape from the uncomfortable feelings that come up. There are few distractions in this year of training and contemplation: “I can't sleep, so I get up to sit with it all. I understand. I understand. This life, too, will pass.”

She contends with the strangeness of being a foreigner in Japan, and living in a constant state of semi-confusion— “As usual, I do not understand anything.” There's the striving to ameliorate her practices. There are the resurfacing memories of a hard childhood. And there's a deep longing for her husband.

“There is that constant and pervasive loneliness of being foreign, of being out of context. And then there is the new loneliness of missing him. There's a rawness there, a new shock to the system. But it's only been a month. How will I feel exactly, in six months? Or eleven? I just don't know. I do wonder how we'll have changed in that time.”

“Or if he will change and you won't?”

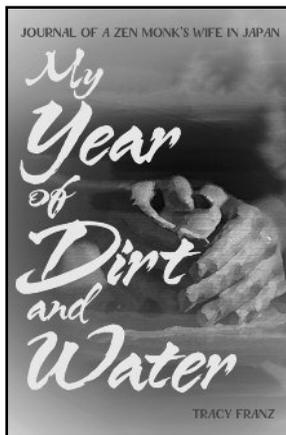
“Yes, that's the fear, isn't it? Or worse — that he won't change at all. Twelve months apart for nothing.”

Franz works as a university teacher. She is either a teacher or a student in many contexts of the book. The Japanese words for teacher (*sensei*), practice (*renshu*), and training (*shugyo*) come up throughout the text.

Her study of Japanese pottery is telling. Franz sits lesson after lesson making an interminable number of tea cups — the majority of which are deemed unworthy by her teacher and are destroyed. Yet she comes back to the wheel wholeheartedly each time.

“This evening in pottery class, I falter. I can't seem to get the cups to stay put for trimming, as my heavy-handed, clumsy scraping yanks them clean off the wheel again and again.”

I enjoyed reading the tactile descriptions of her time at the pottery wheel, holding the wet clay, giving it form. The cover of the book itself is coated



My Year of Dirt and Water, Journal of a Zen Monk's Wife in Japan
Tracy Franz
Stone Bridge Press, 2018



Tracy Franz

in a material that makes it feel thick, soft, satisfying to hold. As I am reading, I am aware of my hands holding this book.

There is so much that resonates with me in this story. I too am a university teacher. I too lived in Japan, and studied Japanese. Franz' book transported me back to that country, to its idiosyncrasies, its ancient customs, modern ways, and mysteries. I lived in Japan about the same number of years as Franz, and was about the same age as her. That's where the similarities in our stories end. My life in Japan was everything but contemplation, and practice. I lived in Tokyo, and worked long hours in a PR agency. I was fully immersed in what this fast city had to offer. I saw Baryshnikov dance; I wrote restaurant reviews for a local magazine; I was a regular on the nightlife scene.

But I can also see that some seeds of contemplation and practice were planted that would take root later. I often visited neighbourhood shrines, enjoying their solitude. I knelt and chanted with my Japanese host family in front of their home altar. Now I too am a student and practitioner of Zen Buddhism. As life would have it, the week that I am reading *My Year of Dirt and Water*, I am attending a Zen meditation retreat. As I sit for hours on my cushion each morning, Franz' words come to me: about how meditation (*zazen*) is different each time we sit, and how the mind struggles mightily during some sessions.

“You could give up on *zazen* for a while.”

“Sure, but it doesn't only happen in *zazen*. My mind is always ugly.”

Underlying everything else is the love story. Each phone call and letter from Koun is treasured. In the few times she is allowed to visit the monastery, they cannot touch and can hardly speak to each other. Yet, in these visits, there is a tenderness, a bubble of intimacy that is created around the two of them as they chop vegetables side by side in the communal kitchen. They cannot stop grinning in each other's presence. He stands to attention as she drives down the steep mountain road away from the monastery.

“There's a certain pleasure in solitude, and yet I miss Koun in every moment of every day. These twin feelings reflect each other: I don't know what it means.”

Maryse Cardin writes from West Vancouver. Her last article for PRRB was *Seeds of Peace*, #21.

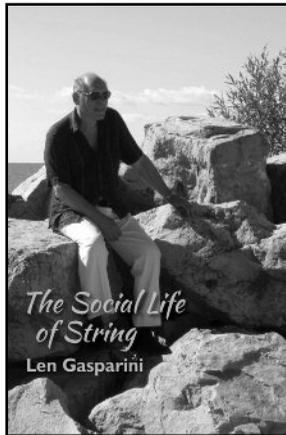
THE SOCIAL LIFE OF STRING

Ryan Pastorchik

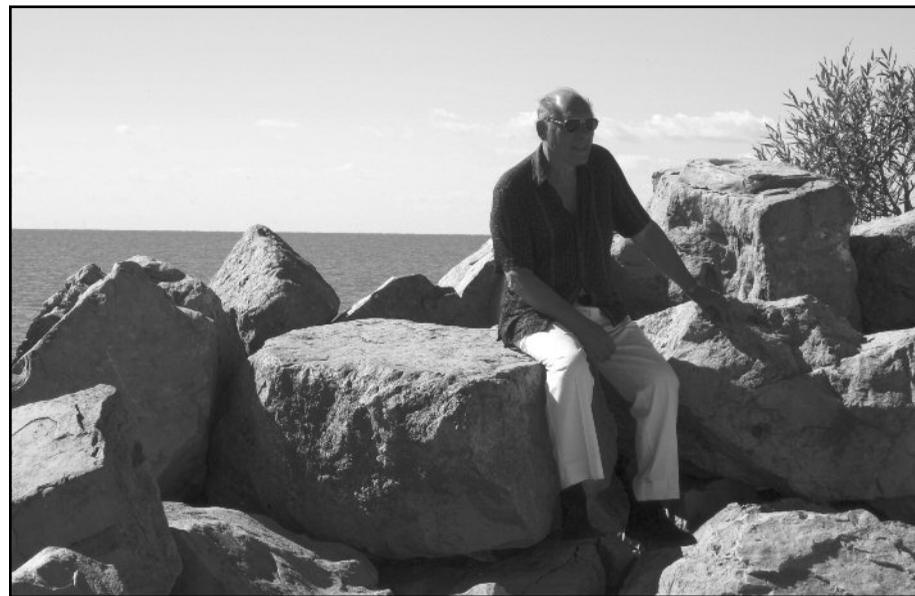
Resting on the rocks, horizon behind him, Len Gasparini smiles at you from the cover of *The Social Life of String*. The photo is a fine metaphor for Gasparini's latest volume. The Social Life of String is a collection of memories, shared in whispers or roars, but as clear as images on film.

The intimacy with which Gasparini tells his stories is inviting. This is felt even in the first tender line of the leading poem, "Halloween, 1945," where Gasparini begins by saying, "I remember riding on my father's shoulders." Gasparini then develops a child's Halloween vision where "On front porches, jack-o'-lanterns leered, grinned, or grimaced." This ghoulish scene does not last. Instead, Gasparini haunts us, asking "What mischievous djinn assumed the shape of a mushroom cloud?" Though we are made to contrast the innocence of childhood trick-or-treating with the radioactive fallout of nuclear war, Gasparini keeps us safe with him on his father's shoulders.

Nostalgia plays such a prominent role in *The Social Life* that we feel Gasparini's loss. "A Walk through Lanspeary Park" captures the distress tailing Gasparini as he recalls a childhood park that has been paved, surveilled, and left mute—replaced by a digital landscape. Gasparini's ambling rhymes and adjective-sparse verse allow a clear image of Lanspeary Park to exist while keeping us just shy of complete understanding, creating a place that was, but is no more. The feeling that the environments of the past are disappearing is resurgent throughout *The Social Life*, shown in "memories that make the present look bleak." Gasparini is not afraid to turn the past into poetry, but there is a constant echo chasing these thoughts, admitting that "where I belonged no longer existed."



The Social Life of String
Len Gasparini
Ekstasis Editions
74 pp. \$23.95



Len Gasparini

While Gasparini lends us his feelings of loss for the places that have been buried by time, he also shares his visions of the world in their tender forms. "Dandelion" is a striking poem that celebrates the "most familiar weed," while also reminding me of "that inward eye" from Wordsworth's celebration of the daffodil, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." Nature is the setting of maxims and mantras. The images of "Wild Asparagus" are delicate and call to mind teenage disinterest and the lasting lessons that defeat it. As Gasparini recalls, "What did I know of nature's laws/ or care where bobwhites built their nests? ...At fourteen my mind was elsewhere." Despite this seeming ambivalence, the moments have been saved and Gasparini tells us that "Often in thought I wander there." With a world that is changing too fast, the memories we have are all the more important to save.

The Social Life of String offers a buffet for anyone with a tenderness for our landscape and the things that populate it—anyone looking for a serving of art will also

be satisfied. Gasparini's collection is a gallery of musings on music, painting, and poetry. Gasparini provides a commentary on the works occupying his attention. "Death and the Maiden" is a passionate reflection on the life of composer Franz Schubert. Gasparini tells Schubert's story, syphilis and all, with honest frankness. The result is a breathy and musical vision where, "Lying there delirious, singing softly,/ the singer at last was lost in his song." This is a poem that can be heard as well as it can be read. Inspired by "American pop-culture," Gasparini's art selection has an eclectic feel, nodding to the influence of Beat Generation romanticism.



Len Gasparini

Humour also makes an appearance in *The Social Life of String*. At 77 years old, Gasparini has taken time to reflect on not only the past, but also the unknown future. Mortality features in several poems, grouped together to form a trio of considerations that orbit around the idea of death. These raw and honest poems are immediately followed by "Le Petite Mort," creating an abrupt shift from death to contemplative orgasm where Gasparini feels "like I am Faust/ on the Brocken." "Easter Eve" is the next offering, a poem that puts the contrasting images of the crucifixion and copulation side by side, challenging death: "And so I resurrect myself;/ I find one sweet mortal more/ to guide my pilgrimage/ to her bright, life-giving shore." In the face of death, Gasparini still stands erect and thrusts ahead.

Tailing his collection of poems, Gasparini concludes *The Social Life of String* with a pair of essays that affirm his place as both a practitioner and student of the arts. "Memories of a Raymond Souster Poem" is a requiem for a mentor and master of the "life within a life" that reveals Gasparini's style: "the most effective style of expression is that which suggests rather than explains." The two prose additions to *The Social Life of String* speak to the lifetime of study Gasparini has put into his work and should be a feature on any aspiring writer or student's works cited page at one point or other.

The Social Life of String is a book of secrets and memories that are private and personal as well as inviting and interactive. Gasparini opens his diary and welcomes the reader to make connections between themselves and the recollections. In a letter to my high-school writing classes, Gasparini said that he was trying "to create a poetic image of reality". A reading of *The Social Life of String* will demonstrate what attending to life looks like as Gasparini turns the world into poetry.

Ryan Pastorchik is a regular reviewer with PRRB. He writes from Abbotsford, B.C.

WHAT WE MUST REMEMBER (continued from page 27)

we'll forget the hung jury, the cowboy admiral, the kidnap car, the caliber of the gun (what gun?), the mother's smirk (you know which one).

We've forgotten President Hoover who refused to declare martial law and Governor Judd who commuted the ten-year sentence required by law to an hour in his office for the killers to toast their punishment with champagne; but

tell me what must we remember? (83)

One response is the power of "*Ho'omana'o*," the single word engraved on Joseph Kahahawai's headstone, "*Remember*," found also on the back cover of the book. The poets call us to remember that an innocent man was brutally murdered due to a lie, and that his killers were unduly set free. Let us not be doomed to repeat the past. This is a timely book for our trouble times.

Micheline Soong, born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii, teaches East Asian Literatures and Literatures of the Pacific at Hawaii Pacific University.

SHAKESPEARE, BAKHTIN, AND FILM

Linda Rogers

“What fools these mortals be!” my four year old grand-daughter insisted when we walked out of a production of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* into the traffic of human behaviour. This is probably the most telling evidence for Keith Harrison’s Bakhtinian hypotheses about Shakespeare in film. Words just shapes, empty vessels filled and emptied *in situ*, are crows, shape-changing and transforming their voices as they improvise in ancient trees. Truth is immortal and Shakespeare, who lived in the theatre of rational discourse, on an apron stage is now writing with light on movie screens.

In the end, the paradigm is the paradigm and, lacking consciousness, we are stuck repeating ourselves, frame after frame, which is why Shakespeare is the logical linguistic model for film *auteurs* obsessed with the tragic-comic human condition. What T.S. Eliot called the “objective correlative,” the symbolic interpretative component of every animate and inanimate entity, is the portal to improvisation, same story, changing context.

Look at a *Midsummer Night’s Dream* for a totalitarian argument relative today. Superficially, the bard supported the status quo, but what is the sub-text, what do signs reinforcing collective social values trigger in lateral intelligence?

“From this Bakhtinian viewpoint, Shakespeare’s plays are often carnivalesque assemblages of pre-existing semantic materials,” Harrison argues. There is only one human story and, just as pre-literate storytellers depended on memory, so do contemporary writers and filmmakers rely on the infrastructure of enduring narratives. However, there is variation, transubstantiation (boys acting girls), and transformation. Shakespeare was no mortal fool.

What are we to make of it when crows mock and grieve, articulating Shakespearean dialogue at heights inaccessible to linear intelligence? This is the question Harrison asks of himself and other scholars of dialogic discourse. How do artists transpose immortal truths to mortal experience? What is the transcendent veracity of film?

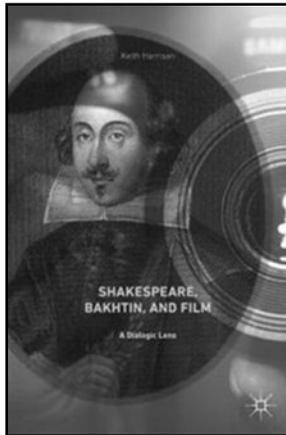
There is academic jargon of course, a language holding its own mysteries, but how does this translate?

Chronotypes “set pieces” as it were, serve as the metaphors or “signifiers” fleshed out in dialogue. Because we rely on linguistic recognition, our function in the theatre of ideas and memory, we collectively understand and amplify. This is lift-off in the story of flight, three-dimensional storytelling.

Shakespeare is the vehicle because even four-year olds relate to the old stories he tells in accurate metaphors. This makes him an ideal companion for filmmakers who, like composers of music, know their medium is ephemeral.

Effectively, films are semiotic sound walks using image, language and music to orient the voyageur. We recognise the signs, reacting logically and intuitively to phenomenal clues. Shakespearean plots, life, copulation and death, are the familiar trajectories of filmmakers as diverse as Godard, Greenaway, Kurasawa and the literal Branach. Life is a tree with many branches and birds singing in many dialects.

In his chapter *Romeo and Juliet*, Polyglossia and the Romantic Politics of Deepa Mehta’s *Water*, possibly the most deeply political Shakespeare film adaptation, Harrison throws his arguments into the crucible of dramatic tension. Perhaps nowhere else than the Raj has the superimposition of language and meaning been more relevant. As England strived to anglicize and control India, most comi-tragically evident in the couplets of Vikkram Seth, taking over the minds of ambitious men, the women endured, their shape-changing for survival as they dissembled, never fully assimilating



Shakespeare, Bakhtin and film, a Dialogic Lens

Keith Harrison
Palgrave, 263 pp



Deepa Mehta

the binary traditions that oppressed them.

This is the dilemma presented in Mehta’s widows and *hijira*, outcasts in a system of outcasts living in hierarchal society.

Shakespeare, the perceived as ultimate Englishman, is the architect of a film steeped in tragedy. From the outset, the Indo-Canadian Mehta was made ill by the prospect of challenging not one but two overlapping status-quos, and so, as love is also death in every story, the film itself was assaulted by controversy, the cathartic objective of theatre.

It is the *hijiras*, ladyboys caught between genders, who represent the Bakhtinian hypothesis that nothing is resolved, not gender or sexuality, not politics, often neatly and inaccurately described as a dialectic process, and certainly not man’s relationship with the stars or whatever constitutes the mutable universe.

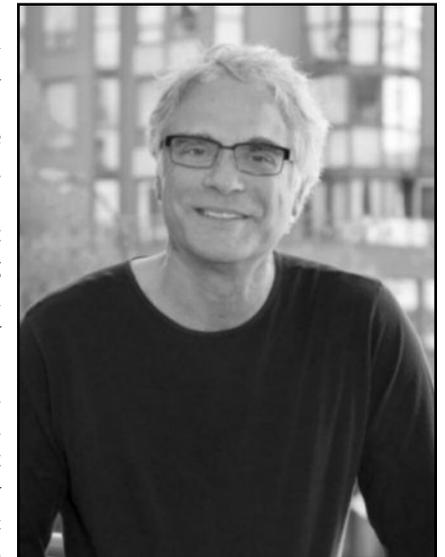
The crows know all God’s children get to sing in the choir, in endless variation and eerie similitude.

Until recently, movies have been volatile and ephemeral, subject to the vicissitudes of aging. One thing filmmakers have demonstrated is the conviction that story endures beyond phenomenal reckoning. The life of the mind is immortal. Flight is possible. As the frames fly by, we connect even when we can’t cognitively assemble the infinite possibilities of language and image.

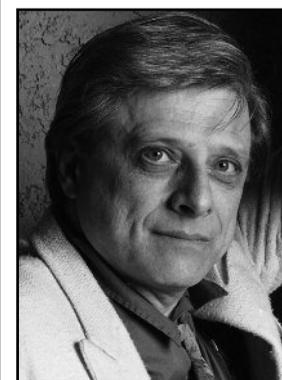
Given the opportunity to “engage in the creative act of seeing and “seeing through” multiple chronotopes simultaneously while listening to a global polyphony,” we are invited to the choir, to participate in stories we already know, from genetic memory and our experience of language as a plastic medium.

For film scholars unfamiliar with literary theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes, this study is a jump in the deep end, best rewarded by a tasting, one chapter, one holy sip at a time. The reward is a deeper understanding of theatre as life, the dialogue that sustains our constant sacrament. Shakespeare is the benign celebrant, repeating a liturgy we know and trust. It is safe to jump. That is the lens.

Linda Rogers is a regular contributor to the PRRB. Her most recent publication is the short story collection *Crow Jazz*, from Mother Tongue Publications.

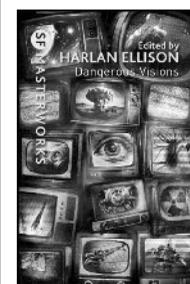


Keith Harrison



This issue of the *Pacific Rim Review of Books* is dedicated in part to the memory of Harlan Ellison (1934-2018)

A great writer and visionary, he will be missed.



Dangerous Visions
Gollancz reprint edition of the famous anthology edited by Ellison



I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream: The Harlan Ellison Collection
Open Road Media

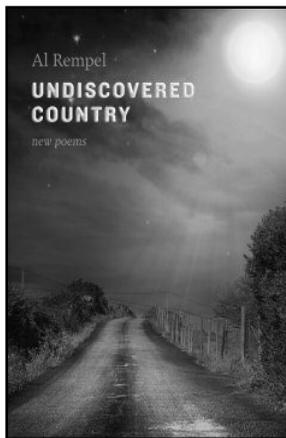
SOME STREAMS IN CURRENT B.C. POETRY

Paul Falardeau

If the arts in Canada have been known for one thing, it is the exploration of nature and our priceless inheritance of wildness. In the wilderness Canadians such as Emily Carr, M. Wylie Blanchett, Farley Mowat and Robert Bringhurst have undertaken the challenge and vastness of the natural world and found in it unflinching majesty, brutal hardships and even a deep spiritual balance. Though there is reason to regard such tropes as tired or overused, a new clutch of releases from Canadian poets dips into that well again. These include veteran poet Patrick Friesen's *Songen*, Al Rempel's *Undiscovered Country*, and Tanya Evanson's *Bothism*. What these poets find are much more than the same old thing. These are exciting new explorations into time, death, duality and beauty.

In *Undiscovered Country* Rempel has created a masterful, engaging work. Largely set in northern British Columbia, Rempel, a resident of Prince George, does not write about nature. Instead, he lets it inhabit his work. Like the northern setting, there seems to be a blurred line between woods and city; everywhere the veneer of civilization and order cracks and is grown over. Far from despair or collapse though, these poems are simply snapshots of the world as it is; of what might be taken, and of what there is to give. The wild has its own lessons to teach. Rempel, to his credit, does not fawn over beauty nor does he whack readers over the head with overdrawn isms or philosophies. Instead, his poems exude a simple, subtle vitality that provides the reader with a lived-in feeling. "All I Have to Do is Go to Work & Come Home" (a title that aptly exemplifies that inhabited quality) opens with "The trees are heavy with rain. They lower themselves/ over the walk onto my shoulder & neck & head." and later ends with the speaker struggling to open the front door of their own home, wet, tired and stunned by the oppressiveness and repetition of the daily grind. Rempel, himself a teacher, is aware of a lesson being taught and does a truly memorable job of capturing moments in detail that is sparse but lush and heavy with meaning.

Like "All I Have to Do," many of the poems in *Undiscovered Country* look at the small moments that make up a lifetime. Together they splash the reader with waves of beauty, sadness, responsibility and the yoke of time. Nowhere is this more evident than in "Into the Cloud of Unknowing" one of the two long poems that bookend the collection. The poem, a meditation on the inescapable flow of time, demands multiple readings. This, not only because it weaves somewhat erratically amongst a tapestry of images and scenes, but because Rempel deftly creates his own inescapable flow within the work. It starts with the memorable image of the cars of working folks disappearing in morning fog ("a procession of exiles —/and yes, that's us, going to work,/ disappearing into the thick of it/ down by the river, one vehicle/ after another; the far end of the bridge/ an unknowable mist") sets the tone of the work that will deal with the death of loved ones and the realization that we are all travelling into that same fog. Later in the poem, Rempel thinks of a childhood fear of spiders and imagines "you can feel the tips of their legs tapping you/ on the wrist — *you're next. you're next*" Nature is often the herald of time's onward march, yet here is the crux of things, here is Rempel's undiscovered country: there is no fighting time or aging or death, but one may revel in its certainty; that we are part of this cycle and that we have what we now do. The poem ends "you could be anywhere —/ but you're not, you're here. Call it fate or karma if you will, Rempel seems to echo Gary Snyder's late life



**Undiscovered Country:
New Poems**
Al Rempel
Mother Tongue
Publishing, 2018
80 pp

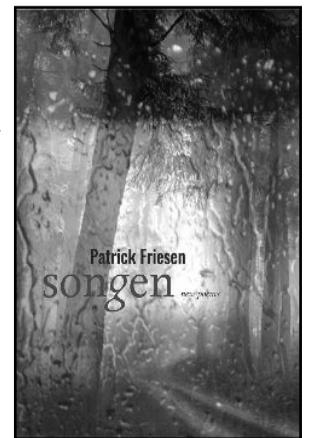


Al Rempel

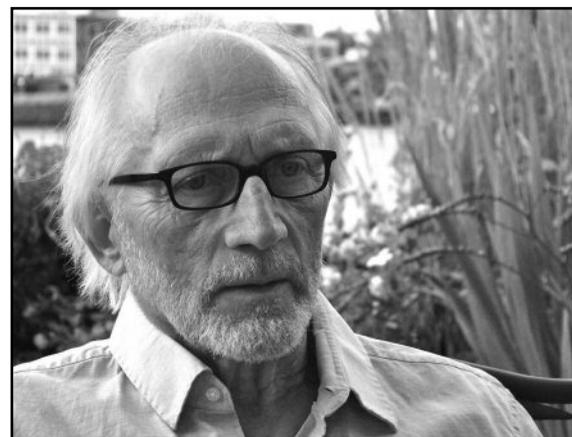
masterpiece, *This Present Moment* in which he too is confronted by age and death, and offers the similarity freeing "this present moment/that lives on/to become/the distant past."

Patrick Friesen sets out to plumb similar depths of aging and time. His poems are shorter, each a single extended sentence. Perhaps because of their brevity, Friesen seems a bit less melancholic about the whole thing, the title being *Songen* after all (as in *songen* and *dancen*). Indeed, here, though the poet is aware of the same inevitability as his peer, he seems to skip along the path a little more gleefully, perhaps already having reached the acceptance Rempel apparently acquires. Friesen also situates himself in the grand flow of things by including snippets of low-German and middle-English. Language too changes and evolves over time and of course that is of interest to a poet. He combines language and death and nature wonderfully:

flautrijch, he says, meaning heart
some kind of finch on its perch beside
an open door, agitated and ruffling
its wings, waiting for the right moment,
you don't simply, leave, everything
has its time, but you must be ready,
and he is, he thinks, the yellow bird
cocking its head, and his heart fluttering
a little more every day, flautrijch like
a flame in a cave.



Songen: New Poems
Patrick Friesen
Mother Tongue
Publishing, 2018
89 pp.



Patrick Friesen

natural and artificial, language and knowing, what is ruled by time and what exists outside of it.

Bothism, a fine effort from Antiguan-Canadian poet, Tanya Evanson, take this exploration even further. While Rempel and Friesen have written pieces centered on the inevitable realizations of later years, Evanson presents us with a burning exploration of time and nature through experimentation. What is hinted at in *Undiscovered Country* and danced through in *Songen* is full center here: How can two things, seemingly opposite, exist at once in the same space? Evanson harnesses the wisdom of Sufism, Taoism and other philosophies to attempt to answer this, as well as the natural world in the form of cell division, mushrooms and the human body, itself an implacable mystery as it moves and reacts to the world around it.

Impressively, Evanson also employs a variety of forms from concrete poetry to lists to short fiction. Some of the standouts in this work though are the impressive visual poems that include Zen style paint brush circles and the beautiful "Cell Variation I & II" which bring to mind Fritjof Capra's seminal work, *The Tao of Physics*. With her words, Evanson is able to experiment with the nature of opposition, propping stanzas

(continued on page 32)

LONELY CANADIANS IN EXOTIC LOCALES

Eric Spalding

Canadian author Stephen Henighan has many books to his credit, including four short-story collections, five novels and several works of nonfiction. *Blue River and Red Earth*, with eleven short stories, is his latest collection.

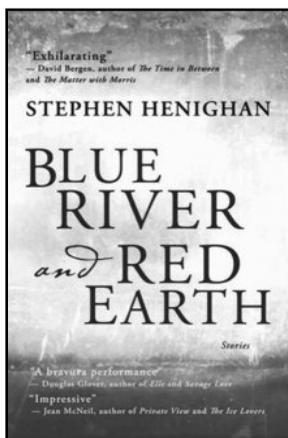
Nearly all of the stories feature a protagonist who is away from home, travelling in far-flung lands. Often, the setting is Central America and the Caribbean, but one story takes place in Russia, another in Romania and yet another in Mozambique and South Africa. Henighan must be widely travelled, because he provides details that can only come from first-person observation of a place. A favourite story of mine from *Blue River and Red Earth*, “Where Are You in America?”, focuses on a woman returning to her birthplace in Jamaica. The way in which he describes her walk up to the property seems very true to life. “Bougainvillea and hibiscus,” he writes, “blossomed above her head with violent brightness.”

The prose is meticulous and information-rich. Indeed, many of the stories come across as if they were abridged from longer narratives. They demand attentive reading. In a few cases, it took me two or three pages before I figured out who the main characters were and where the story was going. Sometimes, moreover, I would get lost and have to reread a section before getting the gist of it. Henighan also seems more interested in detailing the setting than in advancing the story. There are in-depth descriptions of the scenery as a character goes from one place to another. Meanwhile, full-fledged scenes with dialogue receive short shrift.

Even so, there were passages where the author absorbed my attention. Two effective stories for me were “Blue River Hotel” and “Dodging the Bullet.” Towards the end of the former, the narrator returns to Guatemala after a ten-year absence. He is intent on finding out what became of a lost love by the name of Rhea. The scene in which he interacts with a hotel desk clerk who remembers Rhea is very atmospheric. In the second story, a key character has cancer, and the realistic description of the ravages of this affliction is poignant.

As for the last five stories in the book, they all feature the same interracial couple. Doreen is a Canadian of Jamaican descent who grew up in Toronto, while Philip is a white Canadian from Kingston, Ontario. Henighan explores the different manners in which strangers perceive these two as they wander about the Caribbean. Also, there is ingenuity in the way each of the five stories is self-contained while contributing towards depicting a relationship from beginning to end. Two of the stories, “After the Hurricane” and “Who Killed Martin Coombs?”, are particularly complementary. One focuses on a trip to Grenada hampered by Doreen’s moodiness; the other focuses on a journey to Jamaica that follows directly upon the first trip and throws light on the previous story. I thought of the *Alexandria Quartet*, wherein each novel of this tetralogy author Lawrence Durrell offers a different perspective on what is going on.

Like the couple in the last five stories, many of the protagonists are Canadian, but Henighan is more interested in depicting their travels than in detailing their lives in Canada. The male protagonists are attractive to women and have no trouble sleeping with them, but the relationships that ensue are fragile and short-lived. In one story, a narrator says, “Our lives were stumbling improvisations.” In another, Henighan describes a character as “rambling from place to place, never staying at home long enough for his relationships to stabilize.” These statements apply to many of the



Blue River and Red Earth

Stephen Henighan.
Cormorant. 240 pp.
\$22.



Stephen Henighan

characters, lonely souls who encounter each other on the road and have affairs, but are unable to make their liaisons last.

As a reader, I was not always up to the challenge of figuring out what was going on and staying alert. I do prefer stories that are more plot-driven. At the same time, I appreciated the author’s eye for detail and his meticulous style.

Eric Spalding writes from Surrey, BC. Widely travelled, he writes regularly for PRRB. His last article was *The Language of Family*.

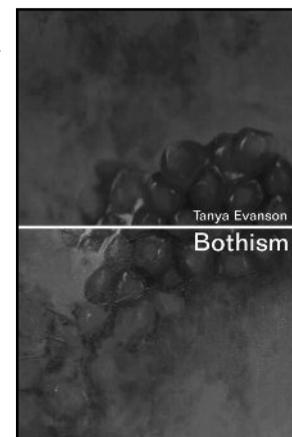
B.C. POETRY (continued from page 31)

of competing narrative up against each other in parallel columns allowing them to initially compete, but inevitably support and strengthen the work as a whole. Furthermore, many poems can be read backwards, forwards, simultaneously or interchangeably. The form truly is a deep exploration of the subject.

To look at how the poet has experimented with the use of words is imperative to the work, but it would be a crime to ignore her beautiful wordplay and thoughtful diction. She writes, “the honey collected/ from a good kiss/ is the very ambrosia/ of survival,” and elsewhere, lays out stunning passages like this one from “Crepuscule”:

Our long Muslim robes both
hide and reveal and equilibrium
witness to lightning and
middle night.

The pillow of my bosom was
made for this. For the resting
head of all things. Dust to dust
Returning to itself.



Bothism

Tanya Evanson
Ekstasis Editions. 2017,
52 pp.

In other words, Evanson never lets her experiments exorcise the beauty she has seen in the world from her work. In fact, it seems like that is the answer to her queries. The comfort of uniformity is replaced with the chaos of multiplicity. Yet, this is only a problem if we fight it. If we should choose to accept this as the state of all things and find in it the beauty, we can rise up. *Bothism* is a celebration of the principle that is not only becoming increasingly ubiquitous in 2018, but which may be the key to our survival as a species on this planet.

All three of these poets have created fine work that should earn them repeated, close readings and a place amongst the many notable Canadian poets and artists that have come before them. Like their predecessors, there is a debt to the natural world, whether it is Rempel’s northern imagery or Evanson’s exploration of the principles that guide a deep understanding of duality and interpenetration. In a sense, these poets do follow that tradition, but there is more. Each tackles the mystery of life in a unique and exhilarating way and expands that mystery in doing so. This is not an obfuscation though, it is an acceptance which all three seem to make. There is more to this than us, that we are larger than we can even imagine and that with that understanding, this place, right here, right now, matters just the same, perhaps even more so.



Tanya Evanson

Paul Falardeau has been a regular contributor to PRRB for many years. He is currently concluding qualification training for a teaching career.

BIRNAM WOOD

Antonio D'Alfonso

Birnam Wood by José Manuel Cardona, translated by Hélène Cardona, the poet's daughter, was published in Ireland by Salmon Poetry. The collection measuring ninety-six pages of poetry is divided in three sections: 'Poems to Circe', 'The Vitner', and 'Other Poems', introduced with a prologue by Andrés Neuman. The original text was published in 2007 by the Consell Insular d'Eivissa, Ibiza, Spain, as *El Bosque de Birnam*.

Here we have the wood near Birnam in Perthshire, Scotland, which in *Macbeth* is a symbol of Macbeth's defeat. The world moves like a branch in the hand of a man moving. The collection opens with a quote from Shelley: 'Language is a perpetual orphic song.'

Writing to a god is a tricky adventure. If the poet is a believer, Leopardi's infinity of silence is dealt with humility. If the poet is a believer, Ungaretti's immensity of light fills him with glory. If you're not a believer, well I guess, there is a problem and so you will have to seek for more tangible thematics.

José Manuel Cardona's prayer, 'Poem to Circe', is proof of faith. 'I don't know... where you, reality, start/And where, I, desire, end' (25). Interestingly, the obvious is not so obvious. Cardona's Odysseus, a symbol of desire, is less real than Circe, the god of his soul. The universe is ripped inside out. Circe, a nymph, a witch changes men into hogs. Odysseus, however, is protected for having swallowed the drug *moly*. Cardona, however, is under the influence. Hence, desire is less truthful than the concretion of a goddess. 'I kept recreating you in my image', writes the poet. Between reality and non-reality lies the image. Poetry resides there. And the greatest of poets. And the loneliest of poets too: 'And I remain alone and amazed.'



Birnam Wood
José Manuel Cardona
Translated by Hélène Cardona
Salmon Publishing
Bilingual edition

Why the aloneness? Because, as the poets confesses, he believes in magic, sees masks and pulp, bites into the stem, and cannot explain the clamor of drums and the jungle. He created the goddess he can't ignore anymore, and so, back turned against friend and slave he, 'No one', alone awaits the 'revelation'.

The poet is a foreigner in a foreign land, with 'the ageless power of volcanoes' and a 'thirst for adventure', 'having to abolish Death'.

'Those who believe in me will not die./ I love the pain: my Kingdom is of this world.'

These verses bring to an end the prayer, a love song to life.

Follow individual poems such as 'Ibiza' (with its verse: 'this land has made me a prisoner', a masterpiece), 'From the Euxine Sea' ('Inhospitable city... Why the will to always move forward/ to go deeper into forests/ and embrace the maelstrom?'), 'The Spell' ('I don't think we'll ever leave the cave'), the 'Four Orphic Sonnets' ('Image of love too, death/finds us among reeds. Baptistry./ Splendid gargoyles or lifeless dream.'), and the final 'Inhabited Elegy' dedicated to Luis Cernuda ('Take me by the hand, pilgrim.... Yet I will follow your narrow path').

José Manuel Cardona, why have I not read you before? We must thank Hélène Cardona for this 'act of revelation'. For is this not what translation is? Offering illumination from the unknown for me the daub.



José Manuel Cardona

BEYOND ELSEWHERE

Antonio D'Alfonso

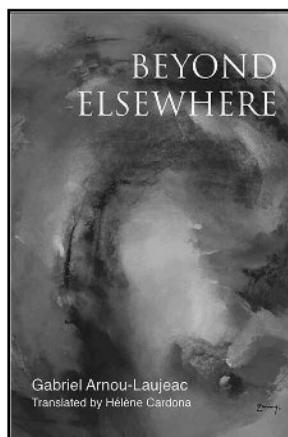
Every so often the French produce poetry brimming with spirituality. It begins with Eros but soon Agape flows in and sweeps reality into metaphysics. Such is Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac's undertaking. I quote Hélène Cardona's painterly words: 'Beyond this day-to-day too narrow for our wings exists a place revealing the supreme star.' The stuff contemplated in such a literary project goes beyond content, if such a visualization is appropriate.

Like a prayer, like a psalm, the form takes over and becomes its content. Words become diaphanous and what we read is sound, image. Whatever the reader wishes to use in order to appreciate this moment of religiosity.

In the Afterword, Basarab Nicolescu mentions William Blake as an inspiration. There is also Dante, George Herbert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, William Everson. There are many, many more who explored this experience. Paul Schrader called it transcendental style. I like that. Something special occurs when you open any page of this long prose poem. It is like looking at the dark paintings of Georges Rouault's *Miserere*, 'the painter of original sin'.

'This is the absolute dawn... Everything here is an Elsewhere', writes Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac. I use the verb 'writes' but 'writing' is the last action a poet produces when embarking on such an adventure.

'Where is the burnt toast?' asks the realist. There are no kitchens, no living rooms, no fast cars, no quickies. 'Love tucks you in bed one last time and gives you the big

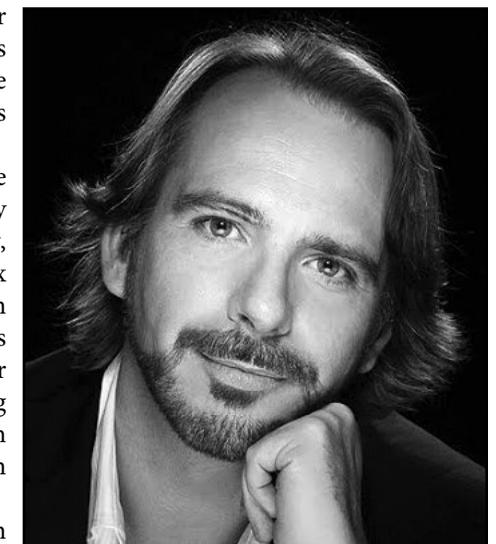


Beyond Elsewhere
Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac
Translated by Hélène Cardona
White Pine Press

night kiss.' Even passion is a vast hunger and its end devastating (Arnou-Laujeac's imagery used here). Clearly we are guided into a parallel world with its correspondences with this one.

In her Introduction, Hélène Cardona mentions how the poetry 'conveys a wild carnal and sensual body, animal and glorious...'. Don't see paradox where there is none. No contradiction here. I mentioned parallelism but it is more like superimposition, an overlay of sorts. A pellicle-film covers the thing we thought we saw. 'All this warm flesh drunk with the wine of oblivion nauseated me.'

This is a short book, sixty-seven pages, which includes the Introduction and the Afterword. The intensity of the prose poetry took my breath away. I had no idea how to explore such a fine work without having to look elsewhere for explanatory concepts. That is the nature of the best translation is. We are in unknown territory. Translators are guides to these foreign lands. Hélène Cardona is a masterful pilot.



Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac

Antonio D'Alfonso is a Canadian writer, editor, publisher, and filmmaker, and was also the founder of Guernica Editions.

THE MAN WHO BEST DREW WOMEN

Carmelo Militano

There is in Canadian letters a consistent use of poetry (a tradition?) to explore the life and times of non-fictional artists or historical figures. Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Gwendolyn McEwen's *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (Jazz originator Buddy Bolen) and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and Mary di Michele's *The Flower of Youth*, (the young Pasolini) to name a few, are fine examples of works that use prose poetry and poetry to explore turbulent or complicated personalities and the arc of their life and times. Of course, there may be more to this list that I have mentioned, but for now we can include for certain Martin Gray's *The Man Who Best Drew Woman*, a long narrative poem on the life and art of Amedeo Modigliani.

Gray is no slouch when it comes to writing poetic biography. In 1998 he released *Blues for Bird*, a 5,400-line biographical poem written in tri-meter on the life and times of Jazz great Charlie Parker, and a few years later in 2004 he published another long biographical poem *Jackson Pollock: Memories Arrested in Space*.

Gray is also an internationally recognized authority on the 19th century poet Alfred Lord Tennyson.

The general outline of Modigliani's life, or 'Dedo' as he was known to his family and 'Modi' to his friends, has a ready-made drama built into it. He dies at the age of 35 penniless in Paris, January 24, 1920 of complications due to Pleurisy, an inflammation of the lining of his lungs and which may have included TB and pneumonia. His death more than likely accelerated by copious drinking and drug use, a maniacal painting schedule, and not to mention his refusal to get medical help. Two days after his death his twenty-two-year-old wife Jeanne Hebuterne, eight months pregnant with their second child, jumps to her death from the fifth floor of her parent's apartment.

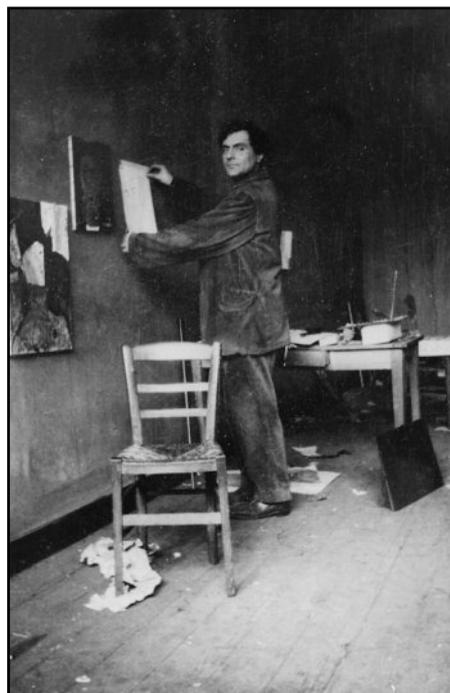
In between his arrival in Paris in 1906 and his death in 1920 (a mere fourteen years), there is his marriage to Jeanne, who he loved dearly but treated badly; a high-minded disdain for the ordinary, quarrels with his contemporaries such as Picasso and constant womanizing. There is also his addiction to drugs and alcohol, romantic liaisons with poets and writers such as the gifted Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, and a hard-scrabble existence. He often sold his sketches and paintings for the price of a meal or a few glasses of wine. Modigliani was ignored and sold only a handful of paintings in his life time and was well-known as a quarrelsome, unpredictable, and often contradictory personality. He was also remarkably generous to many artists such as Utrillo and Soutine, and was known for the 'purity' of his vision and spirit in the artistic communities of Montparnasse and Montmartre in early 20th century Paris. While still alive, some of his fellow painters dubbed him the 'Prince of the Bohemians'.

Modigliani arrived in Paris from Italy a handsome, cultured and cultivated painter and then proceeded to transform himself. He died a penniless martyr to art with a capital A and his artistic vision. He pretty much fit the early 19th century Romantic idea of the tortured genius who suffered for his art and was 'bad, mad, and dangerous to know' to quote the romantic poet Byron.

In that mad fourteen-year period he created hundreds of sketches now lost or destroyed by Modigliani because he considered them inferior. What remains are several



The Man Who Best Drew Women
Martin Gray
Ekstasis Editions, 2017
231 pages



Modigliani in his studio

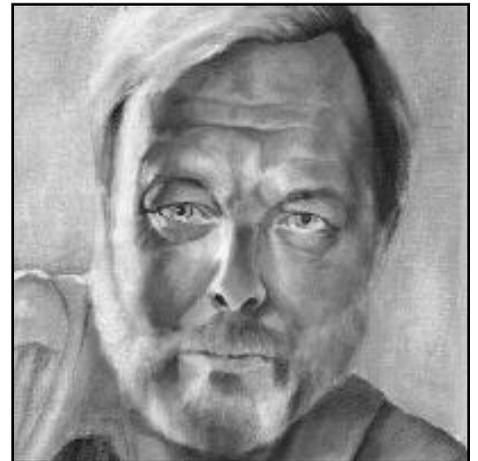
hundred paintings; there is some dispute over the exact number since many forgeries have cropped up over the years. Nevertheless, Modigliani's work is essentially portraits, nudes, and sculptors. No landscapes or still life.

Gray chooses to enter and write about such a rich, intense and dramatic artistic life by taking a documentary point of view, and writes a series of fact-based portrait or imaged-based poems. The poems have no titles and begin simply with the number 1 and end with number 213 at Modigliani's death, each poem following after another in a linear fashion. The narrative flow is not arrested or confused by jump-shots, so to speak, nor a movement back and forth in time

The poems start with his mother Eugenie 'recognizing his style with great encouragement' (No.4) and proceed step by step to show small intimate portraits of the Modigliani's family setting, his development as an artist in school and later in Florence, Venice, and Rome, early flashes of impish behavior and erotic transgression (Modigliani said he seduced the family maid at 16) and so on.

The poems are each small set pieces or tiles some no more than five lines and are based on the 'facts' of Modigliani's life admirably assembled elsewhere, especially in two recent biographies, one by Meryl Secrest's biography *Modigliani: A Life*, and the other by Jeffery Meyers, also oddly called *Modigliani: A Life*.

The poems or tiles collectively end up creating a large mosaic/ portrait of Modigliani from childhood to his tragic end as an adult, as well as providing some insight on his method, and how he viewed his work and how others viewed him as a working artist. The other notable feature about Gray's method is his use of free form tri-meter and the absence of his voice. Gray is nowhere to be found in this work and the tone can best be described as neutral. Thus, the poems are easy to comprehend and do not challenge or provide us with anymore than the known narrative of Modigliani's life. This ends up being both the strength and weakness of Gray's long narrative poem. There are endless possibilities to speculate, imagine, adopt another's voice – say Modigliani's- or to enter into the interior life of such an passionate and complex painter who was also a lover of poetry and a poet. There is also the rich cast of his contemporaries. Instead, Gray sticks to the facts as documented elsewhere and converts for the most part the significant details of the life and art of Modigliani into transparent and uncomplicated poems. The result is that the narrative poem often sags in energy, and feels both prosaic and chilly. Gray's desire to let the life and work speak for itself ends up sometimes creating poems with a flat surface regardless of the complexities of his use of rhythm, juncture, and accent in the various poems. It would have been far more interesting if Gray chose on occasion to enter into the consciousness of Modigliani or any other member in his orbit such as his wife Jeanne, or adopt the voice of say Picasso or even his mother in poetic form. This is not to suggest, however, there are no fine individual poems to be found in this long narrative and that Gray does not understand his subject. Poem #195 describing Jeanne and Modigliani's love for her is beautifully rendered. The lucid poem #168 which quotes Modigliani on his method is picture perfect, no pun intended. The series of poems (#110-129) describing Modigliani's passionate and sometimes violent relationship with Beatrice Hastings are also good examples of where letting events speak for themselves works very well. But a poem, in this case a long narrative poem, on an artist and poet whose artistic life had the elements of a Greek tragedy combined with a Horatio Alger rags to posthumous riches story suggests a different poetics, a different use of language, or even a more varied approach. Modigliani was an artist who was the proverbial blazing comet across the night sky, but he was also one who, like Yeats, could cast a cold eye on death and art in equal measure. Gray's long poem *The Man Who Best Drew Woman* gets half of that equation. The rest is silence.



Martin Gray

Carmelo Militano is a poet and novelist. His latest work is *Lost Aria*, a short story collection. (Ekstasis Editions, 2018)

ARGÜELLES IN ELYSIUM

Jake Berry

In the latest of a series of splendid books by Ivan Argüelles published by Luna Bisonte we discover the poet in a mode he has never explored so empathetically before - the elegiac. The poems themselves frequently seem to disappear before the song is complete, reflecting the loved ones that have disappeared. Most notably here is the presence, absence and memory of the poet's twin brother Joe, known to the world as José Argüelles, the author and sage. Another frequent presence, by dedication and influence, is Adelle Foley, poet, friend for much of his life, and wife of the poet Jack Foley. The following lines were written immediately after Adelle's passing from an illness that was unfortunately not discovered until a few weeks before it took her life.

who can know what the soul is
either a swarm of bees
clustering in the meadow of a noon
light honey and green fragrance
or the place smoke goes when
sky fades at the end of day
try as one might to understand the body
what is it but an infirmity of mind

We take consolation in the eloquence of the poetry, a beauty that has been one of the enduring, though rare, pleasures in contemporary poetry, a lyricism clouded with brooding reflection. "Try as one might to understand the body / what is it but an infirmity of mind."

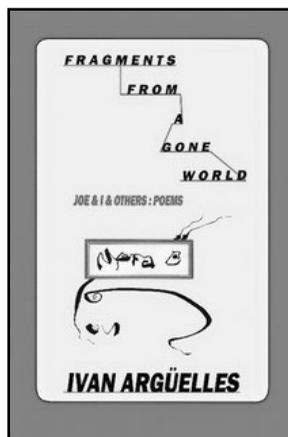
It brings to mind Yeats' "Under Ben Bulben", a poem written as his own epitaph:

Many times man lives and dies
Between his two eternities...
Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
Sharp their spades, their muscle strong,
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again.

The rumination is long and deep on mortality. The brevity of life can only mean that it is an illusion in the greater unbounded domain beyond the limits of our life-blinded eyes. The title of one of the poems in this collection covers the same nameless terrain, "THE DAY AFTER TIME IS THE SAME DAY AS THE ONE BEFORE TIME". Or these lines from the opening poem in this volume:

just as you and I traversing the lawn
of eternity one fine summer hour
came to a dead-stop by the riverbank
where the clarity of day exposed
our faces in the water of negation
what was the *other* trying to become
if not the undefined One?

Argüelles has always written from intuition. Daily the words pour out of that unfathomable resource Jung called the collective unconscious. But these poems bring that mythopoeic revelry to light through the scrim of personal memory and more often than not memory of those who have passed. Joe, dead six years at the time of publication, "that other half of me" in the book's dedication, resurfaces in moments the two shared together - as two halves of one whole. Their heritage in Mexico whose ancient terrain is particularly resonant, from memories of the brothers visiting Aztec and Mayan cities. In Mayan mythology the twins of the *Popol Vuh* figure prominently in creation. Creation, that bringing to life out of chaos, which Argüelles' poetry accomplishes perhaps more purely than any other living poet, is summoned by the absence of a beloved other. The desire to return from that absence is palpable here. Is he bringing dark elements into the light or walking among them in some twilight Elysium and casting them back into the



**Fragments From A
Gone World: Joe & I &
Others**
Ivan Argüelles
Luna Bisonte Prods
\$19.00

sun's glare? Are these poems rumination or revelation? They are both and more.

we knew! we knew! the uninvited wheel of thought
the skies! the pluperfect skies of Teotihuacan
Aztec thunderheads rippling Mayan corn clouds
you were me I was you and together we were
a hundred billion constellations passing through
the life of a rain drop immense and nostalgic

The poet has lost nothing of the vitality and lyrical beauty of his earlier work, but he has gathered from death something that demands other voices for expression.

For example, the fragmentary lines of lists in "POETRY IS WHAT SWIFT KNIFE SO DARK" dedicated to Olchar E. Lindsann and no doubt inspired by his poetry:

tortured clock, the watch on the wall, ignominy,
iridescent flues, of the sky, hidden engines,
the clouds perseverating, like aphasics, topless
dancer's mimic, islands! without rain forty days,
scissors, cigarettes lonely as, ears unplugged,
float free in, the epic with Mary and Jesus, a,

Clearly, some of these are lines disjointed by commas, but some of it reads more like broken thoughts, voices overheard, or grabbed incomplete from the mind's deep reservoirs. The music is Argüelles, but the cadence is shattered. There also poems written in dialog, poems that list memories and particular items unique to individual lives - themselves rendered as something other than individual by the passing of the individual and the semi-fictional mythologizing of memory.

One feels throughout the book for that we are getting glimpses of worlds that might have been if only death had not interrupted. And isn't death always an interruption, regardless when, to whom, and at what age and circumstance it arrives? We forever imagine another day. But what if that day is otherwise? What if whatever the self is fails to appear tomorrow? It seems to me that the entire body of this poet's work is a response to these questions, but never more so than in this poetry where he confronts our most conspicuous interruption so directly.

Yet, in the very undoing these fragments address, the intense vitality of Argüelles' work remains. This is a voice that by nature cannot be driven into silence. Often the titles of the poem are several lines long and work quite well as poems on their own. When they are connected with the poems that follow we feel nothing but life and light even in the darkest shroud. Consider the title and opening lines of

THE MYSTERY FELT UPON READING
FOR THE FIRST TIME AN UNFOUND POEM
ASLEEP IN THE LONG DIVISION
OF AN ENDLESS SUMMER AFTERNOON

the never of the poem is its cloud
the center is left of the vertebrae
three quarters more intense than
the descent into the abyss of meaning
the poem's moon is a doorknob
shining vaporous absence of light
there isn't flower enough in time
nor verse that doubles back the sky



Ivan Argüelles

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MEETING A FRENCH ARTIST IN BALI

Trevor Carolan

Before another long Asian journey I am at home packing up. My mother calls: there's a documentary on the telly, *The Chieftains*, Ireland's great classical ensemble. I flick it on. At one point, Derek Bell the acclaimed Ulster harpist, now deceased, remarks on what he discovered through music, observing in a mystic reference that, "*Lord Shiva says, 'First of all, learn what it is you want to do, then you will have learned what it is that you like.'*"

I have always liked travelling. On a January afternoon I depart with my wife bound for Bali.

The route is awkward, five separate flights—San Francisco, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Denpasar. Warily, I recall that Captain Cook and his men took three years to reach these waters under sail. It could be worse.

Kwangshik has arranged to have a driver meet us at the airport when we land, a handy arrangement. We make our way without incident through Denpasar. Inside Ngyomen the driver's Japanese micro-van the night is sweltering. He'll take us to Sanur, ten miles away from the Babylon tourist-scene at Kuta Beach where, not long ago, two hundred Australians and other foreigners were murdered in a horrific disco bombing by Islamic terrorists. En route we pass the familiar scene of third-world market stalls, open-air noodle soup vendors, and shops lit by the customary single, bare light-bulb. The charcoal scent of cooking fires drifts in through open windows.

We settle in a compact guest-house run by a veteran Australian couple. Its eight airy bungalows are situated on a long, winding road lined with shop-front businesses. It's a walled compound with plenty of lush vegetation and a neat, small pool tiled deep blue with a couple of benches for stretching out and cooling off. Our spot is tidy: fan, small fridge for cold water and fruit, a shower room built of island stone. Incense and mosquito coil are already burning as we haul in our backpacks after a long journey. Shaking off the road dust, we crash early in sultry heat.

Breakfast is fragrant local coffee, fruit and good bread served on a covered teak veranda. The owners chat informally with a few guests and we meet a Dutch couple who travel to Bali every year. We arrange to join the Hollanders next day for a journey to the north of the island, about 90 km through the mountains.

From there we set off walking, *jalan-jalan*, knocking about the village that stretches along the road, passing restaurants large and small, clothing shops, internet cafes, a mix of boutiques and guest houses. We browse about, looking at prices, shops just opening up in the morning heat. Progressing further, we pass a large temple constructed of plastered, sun-baked bricks. Once the plaster falls away, everything looks old and weathered. But flowers and small offerings of flower petals and rice on banana leaf are left everywhere and in front of every shop; incense burns, mixing with the unmistakable smell of vegetable decay in tropic heat.

We're back in Asia.

The edginess hasn't really disappeared after the bombings, so we avoid crowds. The reduced trade has local sellers and transport drivers constantly nagging outsiders for their business and this grows debilitating, taking away from the beauty of Bali's superb natural landscapes. We follow a long road down to the beach and emerge upon a cluster of food hawkers. Our first day's lunch on the beach is noodle soup with fish-balls and satay chicken, \$3 each. We are helped in changing our money by a young Frenchman from Lyons. He has a Balinese wife and child and in Anglo-French *patois* explains that they are working on a way for him to stay here. We meander back along the water. Sanur isn't a great beach; the sand is crabbed with stone or coral, a little unkempt and the water is full of seaweed, but we get wet and take the sun between drifts of heavy cloud. Along the way, there is a small Hindu temple where cremations are held and the burning site is recently charred.

We come upon a new term used to describe people like ourselves—"Flashpackers." A spin on the old backpacker lifestyle we've followed for decades. It suggests an updated version that's ready for a bit more comfort—just a reasonable room in cheap, local digs with a toilet of one kind or another, and a shower.

Komang, the girl who looks after the veranda at breakfast each day is lovely. Her conversation is pleasurable, upbeat, filled with reference points from life on the island. She tells us over cinnamon coffee what qualities the Balinese regard as being attractive in a girl.

"But what's especially important?" I ask.

"*Chantique*...to be beautiful and simple," she answers. Several days after this, we find ourselves taking coffee and dessert one evening in a café called "*Chantique*."



Temple dancers in Ubud, Bali

North to Singaraja

We join our Dutch friends and their driver heading north, setting off through village rice-fields. Bali is near the equator, so there are only minor seasonal differences, and rice grows year-round. With regular tropical rains the fields are a quilt of vivid greens and shimmery water ponds. Flocks of ducks devour the insects that would eat the rice plants, rounding out the symbiotic nature of the fields with their narrow raised dykes that frequently give way to terraced-steps. Ducks are everywhere. Over the ages, the fields themselves have been ploughed perfectly horizontal to accommodate the *sawah*, wet-rice culture.

We drive on through deep country passing village processions honouring the Bali calendar's many sacred festivals, with singing participants dressed in their finest glimmery sarongs and flower garlands, and carrying holy *tee* umbrellas, trays of fruit, and with gamelan gongs and hand-drums. Driving into higher territory we come to Candikuning, a lake temple complex where another procession sets off as we arrive, and where a funeral procession will pass us heading in the other direction moments later. People here seem to drop what they're doing and join in spontaneously. Ceremonial ritual is intrinsic to everyday life.

Above Lake Bratan we stop to buy fresh fruit from a roadside stall, mangosteens and rambutans, and monkeys emerge from dense bush, arguing among themselves while begging for food. Carrying on through the mountains with breathtaking views of hillside rice-terraces we come to the coffee-growing area near Munduk. The driver suggests a stop for lunch at a bamboo-canopy café and coffee-roastery on a high peak before carrying on north. The terrain is like Darjeeling hills in the Himalayas. Coffee-planting makes perfect sense here, like tea there.

The decline in tourism since the bombings has hit the region hard. Life is leaner in the villages. We've learned of a rare Theravada Buddhist monastery here, however, so we stop to visit Brahma Arama Vihar. The temple is kept in tidy condition with its meditation halls and restful garden. I am struck by a quote from the *Kalama Sutra*, the Discourse Upon The Encouragement of Free Inquiry, posted for general perusal—"Study and Learn" it recommends.

At Ubud

Some days later we journey on to Ubud. Hot and sunny, it's a funky hill town set amid vivid green rice-fields and jungle streams. After the initial crush of the town core we find a place to stay with the atmosphere of an old Rajah's palace with lush water-gardens, breezy rooms, lovely views of the fields and butterflies. At \$40 a night it's a

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TWO FROM EKSTASIS

Candice James

This poetry book of couplets in the loose form of ghazal is a tribute to the many different seasons, emotions, and relationship that come to the forefront of the poet's mind and heart. Some are introverted meditations and some are overt statements, but always they deal with mindset of the poet in the early and late morning hours.

Some lines that particularly made me stop in my visual tracks to reflect and admire are as follows:

1. 'One degree of separation exists between bird and beggar'
2. 'There is a candle bending on the dining room table / a majestic bow after months of undue servitude'
3. 'Two bare bodies, walking around upright after the lovemaking, / still reaching for each other – no cover, no forgetting.' / 'Rain keeps me in, wrapped in my own dry skin; / his warmth of paper piled around me ready to ignite.'
4. 'In this world there is a light, in this light there is a door, in this door there is a crack and in this crack there is a dream.'
5. 'I drag you through my paragraphs. / You know you are the commas I rest upon.'
6. 'There are too many words in this room, / not enough seconds in a day to absorb this lucid work.'
7. 'I stumble off my pillow, / soon I am greeted by day-sleepers.' / 'The cats hunt loose threads, and anything that moves; / I chase after and early morning thought.'

I found this book very difficult to review, so thought the best way to review it was to pick my favourite lines to paint images and emotions in the mind of the reader/viewer: hence numbers 1 through 7.

Raine's excellent grasp of the English language and superlative use of it in her poetry is praiseworthy indeed. This book, over and above being thought provoking, was also an easy read which made it very enjoyable.

Vivid imagery, bold contrast and vibrant comparisons dot the landscape of the pages and paint this book to life. With a shark-tooth sharp needle the surreal aspects of God, Universe, and Soul are weaved with unique precision through the reality of earth, sky, water, fire and life. This book is filled with clever views of impossible metaphorical landscapes and horizons that whet the tongue of the mind for the promise of the feast to come.

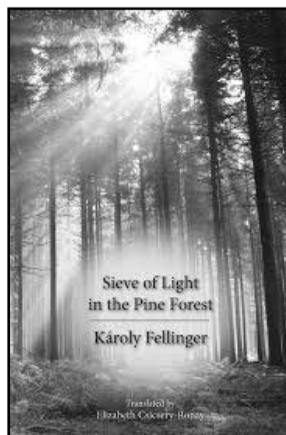
The first four lines in the poem "Almost" are fodder for strange needlings and bizarre happenings of sight, sound and penetration: 'While the moon uses the sun as a / flashlight, silence learns to play the harp / on the rays filtering through the gaps in the / shutters, a lancet becomes of vital importance'. The gorgeously smooth ride language takes us on in the poem "Photo" is as slick as a neon oil spill on curved glacier in the beginning lines: 'The grass outgrows death / it breaks itself of the habit / of course, this



A Year of Mornings
Andrea McKenzie Raine
Ekstasis Editions
99 pages, 25.95



Andrea McKenzie Raine



Sieve of Light in the Pine Forest
Károly Fellingner
Translated by Elizabeth Csicsery-Ronay
Ekstasis Editions
94 pages, 23.95

takes time / it outgrows life, like a cherished / Sunday suit'.

In the work "Silence" one has to love the personified essence of the word Eternity: 'Eternity is as silent as the grave / you can read everything from its lips' And in the poem "Uphill" the poet panders to the frail hope of humanity: 'Like an old woman carrying brushwood / mortality carries eternity'

And finally in the poem "In Galenta", the poet is in hospital hallucinating about death in vivid and otherworldly way: 'after all, everything seems so near, in the / background, a deathly pale wall-tile / incapable of lying takes shape.'

The elegant poetic language evidenced in this collection is champagne of the mind poured gently onto the satin sheets of the soul. Beautiful indeed.



Károly Fellingner

Candice James completed 2 three year terms (2010-2016) as Poet Laureate of New Westminster, BC and has been appointed Poet Laureate Emerita of New Westminster. She is author of 13 poetry books published by five different publishing houses.

BALI (continued from page 36)

spurge, but my wife has put up with me through thick and thin all these years and in gratitude I book us in for her.

In the pool after meditation and Tai Chi, I am wading in the cool water and observing the slow ebb and flow of rice-field life beyond. One of the guest-house girls arrives with flowers for the garden shrine, and with wonderful stillness offers incense and sprinkles water on the stone with elaborate, delicate gestures of her hands. Soon, a tall woman, Western, wearing a broad sun hat descends through the garden by the shady water and also begins playing Tai Chi. Few Westerners take the time to really learn, but she knows what she is doing. Later, I mention this to my wife.

The following morning, the scene repeats itself. After practicing Tai Chi, the woman sets up a paint-box and easel, working with watercolours. It would be ungracious to disturb her, but twenty minutes later my wife arrives with a tray of coffee, and in a few minutes strikes up conversation with the painter. They talk a while and gesture me over. The watercolour is of the garden, quickly done, capturing the vitality of the tropic growth. It's skillful work.

Justine, we learn, is a sculptor from Paris visiting with a friend. We admire her sketchbook: her studies of the old Singapore shophouses she encountered en route there are excellent. It's a shame our paths won't cross here much longer. Yet one day we might collaborate on something from our respective note-books, and as travellers have done since Roman times, we exchange addresses. I remember something perhaps of interest in my knapsack; an essay on Leonard Cohen I've recently published, a kind of writer's calling card. Worth a look?

"D'accord..."

Before too long passes we'll meet Justine again in France, then Hong Kong en route from India. She'll stay with us in Vancouver on her way to an indigenous mask-carving sojourn on Pender Island. In Brussels the opening planetary image of my documentary film at its premiere there will be hers. At the centenary of the Battle of the Somme we'll bow our heads together, then walk the slopes at Vimy Ridge in awe of Walter Allward's limestone national memorial resonant of Michelangelo.

In Canada, our children will mature and set off on travels of their own. We'll plan a retreat in a village near the border with Spain and Justine will be nearby. She'll build herself a new studio in the countryside and make nettle soup when we arrive. We notice that her atelier sign on the winding village road out of Ste. Jeanne d'Arc reads *Studio Chantique*.

Trevor Carolan's current work is New World Dharma: Interviews and Encounters with Buddhist Teachers, Writers and Leaders (SUNY Press, 2016). He writes from British Columbia, Canada.

DAVID BROMIGE (1933-2009)

Jack Foley

My friendship with the Canadian / Californian David Bromige goes back over 20 years, but it was never a deep, personal friendship. He was a literary acquaintance I liked and whose work I followed with considerable interest. I was introduced to both him and his work by Ron Silliman, who brought me to a reading. I was surprised to see that Robert Duncan—whose work I knew—attended the reading. Duncan swooped into the room with his great cape, overwhelming everyone—a star’s entrance—but he listened attentively and obviously enjoyed David’s work. David was open and friendly, but I wasn’t certain enough of my own work to claim him as an acquaintance: we didn’t exchange addresses.

David became associated with language poetry, but he was older than the originators of language poetry. He became friends with many of them. They were definitely what was happening at that time. I think his relationship to language poetry was partly personal—he liked the people who were writing it—but also partly professional. Language poetry was getting a lot of attention. By associating with language poets, David could share in that attention. But the language poets who became best known were theorists as well as poets, and David was in no way a theorist. His impulse was satirical, parodic, even smart ass, but not theoretical. When David published “One Spring” in *This* magazine, I believe that the editors felt that they were printing something that was both liberating and beyond their own current capacities—which was true. In *The New Sentence*, Ron Silliman clearly asserts that “One Spring” exemplifies the kind of thing language poetry is all about. The new sentence, writes Silliman, is “a sentence with an interior poetic structure in addition to exterior ordinary grammatical structure. That is ... why and how lines quoted from a Sonoma newspaper in David Bromige’s ‘One Spring’ can become new sentences.”

But language poetry became a style, a *kind* of writing which doesn’t sound or read at all like the sophisticated, Joycean, highly literary medium of Bromige’s work. The young people who were and are turned on by language poetry were not turned on by what David was doing. David the man and teacher is sometimes sentimentalized by his friends and students. But the work is edgy, problematical, anything but sentimental. Poems like “One Spring” and “My Poetry,” which—like certain passages in James Joyce—are made up entirely of quotations, place in question the person who is writing the poem. The original version of “One Spring” was published in *This* magazine. When David published the poem in his book *My Poetry*, he changed some of the names. When I asked him about that, he said it was for fear of being sued! These were real people he was dealing with.

Language poets were attacking and defining themselves against the poets published in Donald Allen’s 1960 volume, *The New American Poetry*. Many of the poets in that volume were attacking and defining *themselves* against “The New Criticism,” a body of writing from the 1940s which took irony and paradox as the center of the poetic work and whose central figure was the seventeenth-century poet, John Donne. Though David Bromige’s work does not stylistically resemble John Donne’s fierce musings, irony and paradox are nevertheless at the center of what he was doing. He is constantly taking aim at some kind of parental, authoritative structure. If he is a language poet, one

might regard language poetry as the Revenge of The New Criticism. “One Spring”—simultaneously naïve and knowing—begins:

One Spring

It hailed. 0.06 inches were precipitated where the instruments are kept. At least one driver found his windshield wipers clogging. High winds drove the hail into the orchards of apple, pear & prune. It hailed on the new Vacu-Dry plant, an independent, publicly-owned corporation, making instant apple-sauce for the government. During the following night, thieves walked off with the bus-bench.

Next day samples were brought to the inspector. The leaves were shattered & the fruit already indented. Though the sun shone bright, some wisps of high cirrus appeared shortly after midday.

Next day dawned clear & bright, & by the middle of the afternoon the thermometer registered 73 degrees Fahrenheit. That night the valley-bottoms were free from frost. Next day began well also, the sky a clear deepening blue, the light flickering off the eucalyptus leaves.

Bromige asked me once, “If you’re a language poet for a while, does that mean you’re always a language poet?”

*

In 1980, David Bromige’s book, *My Poetry* appeared. The title poem, a hilarious collection of quotations from reviews of Bromige’s work, is dedicated to Bob Perelman. It begins,

My poetry does seem to have a cumulative, haunting effect—one or two poems may not touch you, but a small bookful begins to etch a response, poems rising in blisters that itch for weeks, poems like ball-bearings turning on each other, over & over, digging down far enough to find substance, a hard core to fill up the hand. It’s through this small square that my poems project themselves, flickering across the consciousness, finally polarizing in the pure plasma of life. The reader grows impatient, irritated with my distancing style, coming at him in the rare book format, written under not one but two different kinds of dirty money, & knowing me to be an english teacher.

After David Bromige’s death, a tribute website was set up: <http://bromige.wordpress.com>

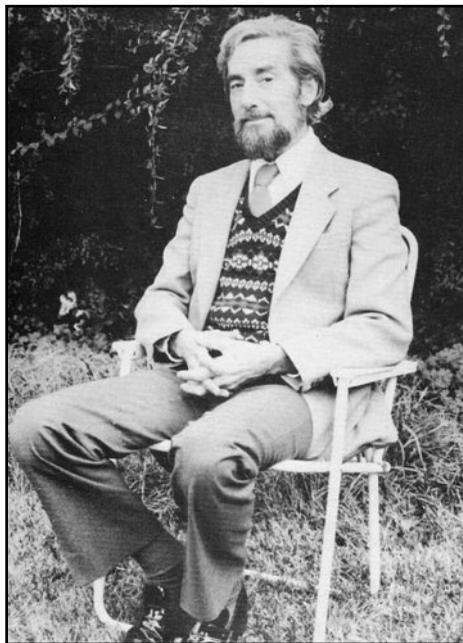
I wrote this in homage, using things people wrote on the website:

MY DEATH

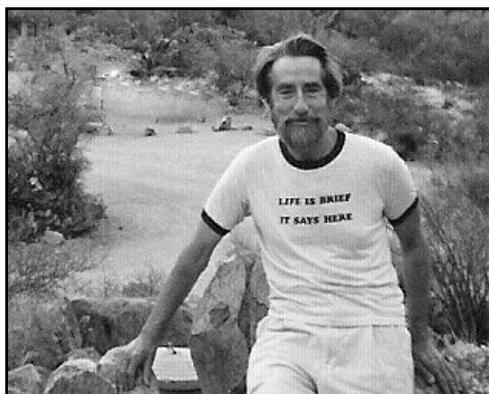
by David Bromige

Krishna & Ron are so very sorry. Ron met me 41 years ago (I gave a reading at the Albany Public Library with Harvey Bialy which Ron attended) and I was a wonderful & generous friend the entire time. David, ‘sturdy’ – like a rock or a tree.... Stephen heard me read in the city in the mid ’80s, wrote “Cracking the Code” for *The Difficulties* issue devoted to my work. Charles Bernstein loved me and my work and my death fills him with sorrow. William Knight is very sorry to hear of my passing. He met me on several of my visits to Vancouver to see Chris and to do readings. He remembers the quicksilver, the knife edge, the words that softly split his head open. And laughing with me later. Steve Tills just learned of this a minute ago—has been busy moving to a new home. Aside from his own father, I was pretty much the dearest and most generous man Steve will ever know. He will miss me like the dickens. I taught them all how to be alive and how

(continued on page 39)



David Bromige



David Bromige

daggers drawn. (p. 424)

Whenever I read something incredible in *A Peace to End All Peace*, such as the consequence of yet another treaty developed and signed in Europe, and then foisted on the Middle East—a treaty that led to more wars, I turn to the cover photograph on this fine book, and am reassured that the incredible often must be true, especially in the Middle East. David Fromkin was an unusual man, and an unusual scholar. His unusually long obituary in *The New York Times*, June 19, 2017, “David Fromkin, Author on the Middle East, Dies at 84” is a worthwhile glimpse at the career of Fromkin, who was both a careful scholar, and an expert on the Middle East.

If you find any of the above books valuable, I also recommend the following:

Imtiaz Gul: *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan’s Lawless Frontier*. (2010).

Ali Soufan: *Anatomy of Terror: From the Death of Bin Laden to the Rise of the Islamic State* (2017).

Lawrence Wright: *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (2006). One of the most informative books on the background to 9/11.

Lawrence Wright: *The Terror Years: From Al-Qaeda to The Islamic State* (2016).

James Edward Reid is a Canadian writer who lives in Ontario. He has been writing for the *Pacific Rim Review of Books* since 2010, and for *The Sarmatian Review* since 2007. His *Sarmatian Review* publications are archived at the *Central and Eastern European Online Library* at www.ceeol.com

ARGÜELLES (continued from page 35)

We are all familiar with the found poem – those unexpectedly poetic discoveries that appear occasionally and function beyond their intended use – but what is an ‘unfound poem’? and how is it asleep? How does the poet become aware of it at all? Perhaps that is the mystery and the long division of a summer afternoon that never ends. Perhaps it arrives from the day after time or before time, from Yeats’ two eternities. We are indeed in the “never of the poem” – its enchanting cloud. And even though “there isn’t flower enough in time” what we have in this dark but vivifying collection is enough to remind us that whatever happens when an individual dies, the life, the poetry, and muse behind it all forever remains.

Jake Berry is a poet, songwriter, and visual artist. His books include *Species of Abandoned Light* (Pantograph Press), *Blood Paradoxes/War Poems* (XPressEd) and *Brambu Drezi*. He lives with his wife and two cats in Florence, Alabama.

BROMIGE (continued from page 38)

to squeeze everything meaningful and fun and loving and real out of every moment we live. Gosh, he loves me. For Charles Bernstein, I was a prince of poetry and a wonderful friend and compatriot. “A Great Companion,” as Robin Blaser said. Curtis Faville didn’t know me but his wife took her first English course at Berkeley from me when I was still a TA in the Department there, pursuing my graduate degree. I was a juvenile diabetic, but lived to be 75. This alone is a feat almost beyond belief. He is sorry he never had the occasion to know me. George Bowering will always remember the poem I wrote in the cafeteria at UBC: “Borrowing from Bowering / is a neat / feat.” He just turned his tired old neck to the left and saw his shelf of Bromige books, and said thank goodness, and in his head I scoffed at the object of that verb. D.A. Powell said I was his first teacher. What one of us lacked, the other forgave. Tom Raworth said I will be missed. It’s a clear dawn there on the South Coast of England: sunlight on cream-painted Regency houses he looks past to arrive at the sea. And the light reminds him of the last time he spent with me, some years ago, when I drove him from Santa Rosa over to Camp Meeker where Val, the children and he had lived back in the seventies. He remembers the echo of our tread on the boardwalk of Occidental Fragments of memory. Ed Coletti says it rained untimely this morning early on in June when I disappeared.

Jack Foley is a widely published San Francisco poet and critic. Foley’s recent, monumental *Visions & Affiliations: A California Literary Time Line 1940-2005* has received international attention and is recognized as an important compedium of California poetry. He lives in Oakland, Ca and June 5, 2010 was proclaimed “Jack Foley Day” in Berkley.

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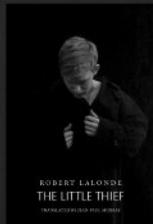
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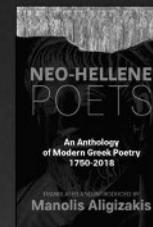
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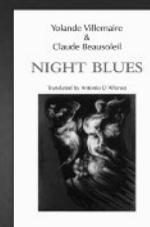
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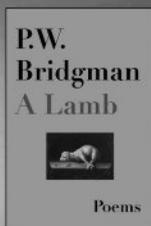
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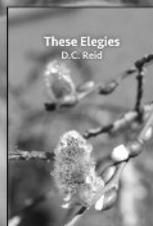


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