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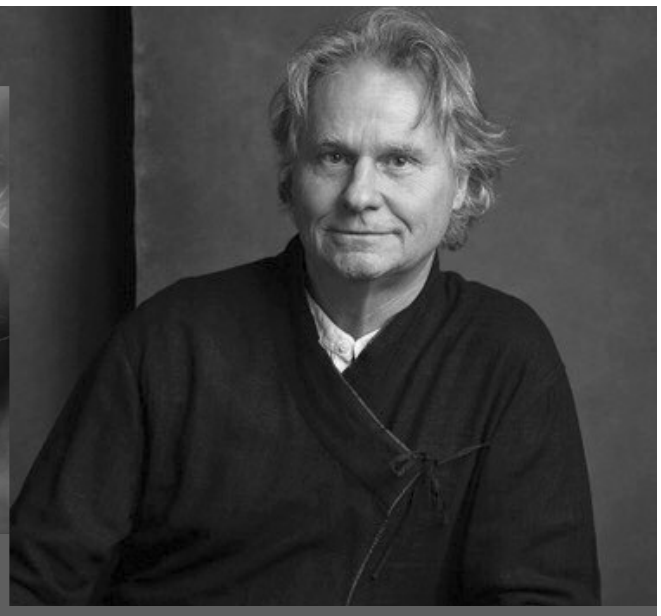

Patti Smith:
Year of the Monkey
Reviewed by Miles Lowry

Amanda Hale's
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An Interview
with Dr. Wade Davis
by Jesse Boyes

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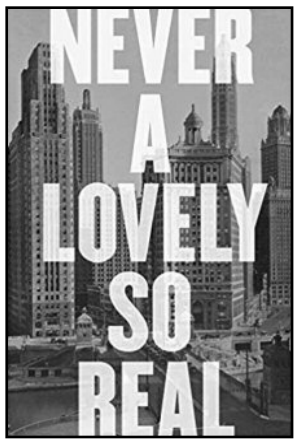
Claiming the Body of Nelson Algren

Charles Tidler

"A certain ruthlessness and a sense of alienation from society is as essential to creative writing as it is to armed robbery. The strong-armer isn't out merely to turn a fast buck any more than the poet is out solely to see his name on the cover of a book, whatever satisfaction that event may afford him. What both need most deeply is to get even."
– from *Nonconformity: Writing on Writing* (1996)



Never a Lovely So Real, The Life and Work of Nelson Algren
Colin Asher
WW Norton and Company
Can $53.95

The obituaries in the papers, May 10, 1981, regarding the heart attack death the day before of writer Nelson Algren in Sag Harbor, Long Island, tended to depict him as a deeply flawed has-been and bitter loner-loser – "bard of the stumblebum" said Leslie Fiedler in *The Partisan Review* – who had long ago lost touch with the American reading public and never got over it. Even the headline in the *The New York Times* opined "NOVELIST WHO WROTE OF SLUMS, DIES." There was confusion too about the circumstances when the Sag Harbor Police said they knew of no immediate survivors, which prompted the headline in another paper "BODY UNCLAIMED."

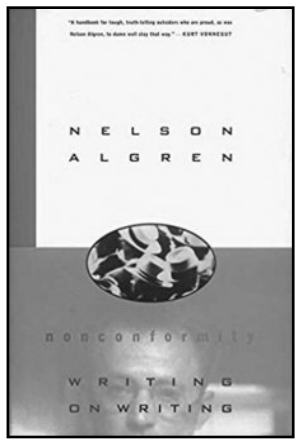
The night before in fact, Algren was tidying his tiny rented beach-house for a cocktail party he planned to host the next day. He had recently been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and along with old friends arriving from as far away as Chicago, he would be entertaining the likes of Kurt Vonnegut, Jill Krementz, John Irving, E.L. Doctorow, and Salman Rushdie. Harsh irony that he would so soon be dead and miss all the company, but not exactly following the game plan of a loner loser. His burial, alas, in a blustery wind at Sag Harbor's Oakland Cemetery, was on May 11. About 30 people were there, including Peter Matthiessen, Pete Hamill, Gloria Jones, and Linda Ronstadt. The playwright, Joe Pintauro, read a few lines from a Nelson Algren poem:

Again that hour when taxis start deadheading home
Before the trolley buses start to run
And snow dreams in a lace of mist drift down
When from asylum, barrack, cell and cheap hotel
All those whose lives were lived by someone else
Come again with palms outstretched to claim
What never rightly was their own.

And now along comes Colin Asher's *Never a Lovely So Real* (2019), the third full-length biography of Nelson Algren to appear, and the first to have had access to the complete 800-plus pages of his FBI file. Asher is a big fan and excellent scholar with high hopes his book will help to reestablish Algren as a major American novelist of the mid-twentieth century. The writing for the most part is crisp and straight ahead. The exegesis is sound and well researched. Asher hits all the high points: Algren's theft of a typewriter from a small college in western Texas that landed him in jail for a couple weeks in 1934; the two crackups, the suicide attempts; his righteously naïve quarrel with Hollywood and Otto Preminger over the celluloid gutting of his masterpiece *The Man with The Golden Arm*; his phony cardshark tough-guy persona; and of course the charged romance, charmingly rendered by Asher, and the nasty breakup with the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir. To a journalist on the night of his fatal heart attack, Algren said, "I've been in whorehouses all over the world, and the women always close the door. But this woman flung the door open and called in the public and the press."

* * *

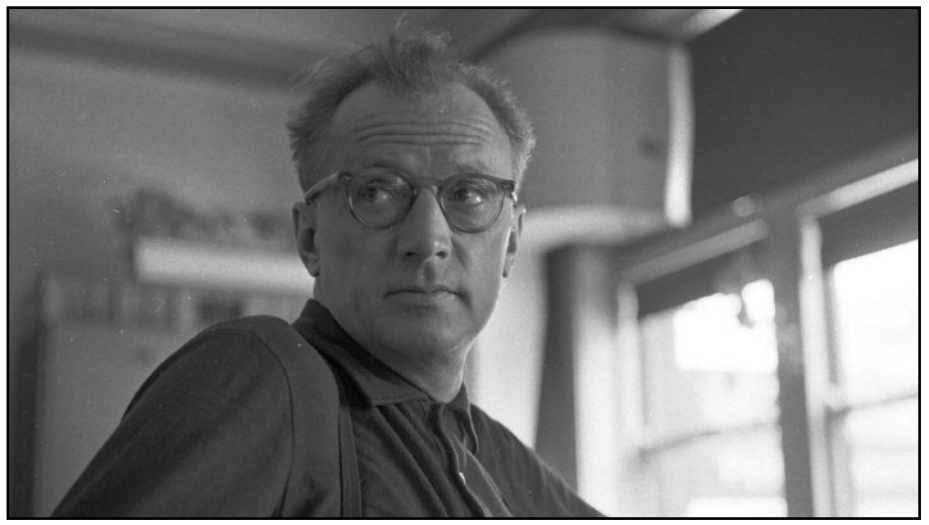
Nelson Algren Abraham was born March 28, 1909, in Detroit. He was named for his Swedish grandfather, Nils Ahlgren, a convert to Judaism who changed his name to Isaac Ben Abraham and declared himself a rabbi. Isaac parlayed a personal interpretation of *The Old Testament* into an exhausting, proselytizing quest, literally dragging wife and many children around the globe, crossing two oceans, four continents, from the American Wild West to Jerusalem's Wailing Wall, and finally to northern Indiana where he ended up a broken man begging his own family for a scrap of bread and a pallet on the floor. One of his sons, Gerson, Nelson's father, had no interest in such messianic folly and instead became an excellent carpenter and mechanic with a reputation as a hard-working man who mostly kept to himself. Gerson married Golda, the sharp-tongued mother of his children, two girls and then Nelson, the surprise. "Goldie" had nothing but contempt for her husband, and her three-year-old son was known to hide in a box in the backyard shed to avoid her. The family soon moved to Chicago's Southside, and Algren grew up on the edges of The Jazz Age, seeing Al Capone and hearing Louis Armstrong. Nelson delivered newspapers during the 1919 Black Sox scandal, mended tires in his dad's garage, and graduated in 1931 from the University of Illinois Champaign with a degree in journalism. It was the depths of The Depression with no prospects for him – or anyone – whatsoever.



Nonconformity: Writing on Writing
Nelson Algren
Seven Stories Press
Can $16.00

"At the ten-second warning to the evening's first preliminary, a newspaperman on the apron of the ring stood up to get his slicker off. He had the right arm out and was pulling at the left while watching a Mexican featherweight in the corner above his head. At the bell he left the sleeve dangling: to see a Pole with an army haircut come out of the opposite corner straight into the Mexican's left hand. The army haircut went back on his heels, stopped dead, and glanced unbelievingly at the Mex; then kept coming in."
– first paragraph, *Never Come Morning* (1942)

Long before the acid bitterness set in, long before his "who-me?-I'm-stupid" clown routine, before HUAC, before the increased FBI surveillance, his passport applications turned down again and again, before Doubleday abandoned him as too "red" to publish, Nelson Algren had written four outstanding books: *Never Come Morning, The Neon Wilderness, The Man with the Golden* Arm, and *Nonconformity: Writing on Writing*. For a couple of decades, 1935 to '55, beginning with the short story "A Bottle



Nelson Algren

of Milk for Mother", he honed and tooled a street-smart poetic prose woven of sweet bruisings and rancid daydreams, and all of it leavened with the deepest tissue of empathy. Algren never wavered from the principle that we go nowhere as a species unless the lowest person is also included on the journey. The writer's first and major task is to be a plea for the defense. Asked by *The Paris Review* in 1955 if he had consciously developed a style, he said "The only thing I've *consciously* tried to do was put myself in a position to hear the people I wanted to hear talk *talk*." If you cannot accept the violently shallow petty thief and cowardly braggart Bruno Bicek, the central protagonist of *NCM*, as a fellow human being, who the hell do you think you are?

Nelson Algren

> *"From the penthouse suspended silently so high above the winding traffic's iron lamentation, forty straight-down stories into those long, low, night-blue bars aglow below street-level, a lonely guilt pervades us all.*
>
> *"A loneliness not known to any ancestral land. To some other less cautious race conquering or lost. No other age, more distant and less troubled. No other time, less lonely and much longer. No other night-blue bars.*
>
> *"No other forest of the night, no other wilderness than ours."*
>
> – from *Nonconformity: Writing on Writing*

Like most writers, Algren wrote many drafts. Layers of drafts. Draft after draft. He would write a hundred typewritten pages and more, and then go back and rewrite the same hundred pages. Sometimes this made for a ragged gap of transition between paragraphs, consciously perhaps, but for the most part the drafts got thicker and thicker, like building a pinata, and the prose grew richer and more authentically firm with extended detail, story and character. He had no problem with rewriting a favorite story, telling it all over again, to grow richer and deeper in another context, or for another book. In a painterly sense, he worked more with the thick authority of a trowel than a watercolor brush. As a dramatist, he was working in the round. He would have loved a laptop.

As Thomas Pynchon once observed, Algren knew how many bars there were on a Cook County jail cell. He knew by rote the high and low comedy of police lineups. Any

Nelson Algren and Simone de Beauvoir

study of his oeuvre involves the genre documentary fiction. He could write for a hundred pages about the most private intimacies and brutal sociological politics of a Chicago whorehouse. Women talked to him. They trusted him. He never sold them out. This documentary strategy, Q&A, asking questions and writing down answers, was part of his education in journalism and soundly reinforced while working for the WPA in the '30s, when he turned out such gems as an oral history of Galena, Illinois. Algren's working method was closer to Alan Lomax, another writer incubated in the Dirty Thirties, the author, recorder and chronicler of *The Land Where the Blues Began* (1993), than it ever was to, say, the interior reflective voice of a Norman Mailer or Jack Kerouac.

Algren's prose can sound a little old-fashioned to our postmodern sensibility. But what's not to love about sentences clean as a bone: *"The flies on the screen door hadn't moved in a week." "Everybody had a pair of dice, and nobody had a dime."* (Both from *NCM*.) He was a romantic sentimentalist who never apologized for crossing that line.

> *"Algren: You want men and women to be good to each other and you're very stubborn in thinking that they want to be. Sentimentality is a kind of indulgence in this hope. I'm not against sentimentality. I think you need it. I mean, I don't think you get a true picture of people without it in writing.*
>
> *"Q: Go on.*
>
> *"Algren: It's a kind of poetry, it's an emotional poetry, and to bring it back to the literary scene, I don't think anything is true that doesn't have it, that doesn't have poetry in it."*
>
> – from *Conversations with Nelson Algren* (1963)

"You beat Dostoevsky," said Ernest Hemingway in reaction to having read *The Man with the Golden Arm*. Prominent writers who claimed to be influenced and/or helped by Algren include Russell Banks, Cormac McCarthy, Joseph Heller, Terry Southern, Don DiLillo, Thomas Pynchon and . . .

> *"At the end of the room there was a little negro band; one read on a placard: 'It is forbidden to dance'; but people were dancing. There was a lame man who waddled about like a duck: suddenly he started to dance and his legs obeyed him: he spun round, jumped and capered about with a maniacal smile; it seemed he spent his time here and danced all night. . . . A drunk asleep at a table woke up and seized a fat floozy in his arms; they capered around and danced deliriously. There was something of madness and ecstasy; so old, so ugly, so miserable, they were lost for a moment and they were happy. I felt bewildered, stared and said: 'It's beautiful.'"*
>
> – from *America Day by Day,* Simone de Beauvoir (1948)

Upon his death in 1981, I took the bait of the popular press of the day and wrote this poem:

Who lost an American?
Take a walk on the wild side.
Take a ride on the last carousel.
There's an old man dead on Long Island,
a body in a bodybag
with anonymous toe tag
on a cold slab in the morgue,
a body unclaimed.
Nelson Algren is his name.

Hey, over here!
Never come morning now.
Never come the man with the golden arm.
There's an old man dead on Long Island,
a two-fisted plea for the defense
in the neon wilderness
of a city on the make,
somebody in boots Chicago.
Nelson Algren is his name.

Over here!
There's an old man dead on Long Island
wearing the devil's stocking
with the last stitch through the nose,
but he won't be resting in peace
until Sally Alley weds her ding-dong Daddy,
Bicep lives to be twenty-one,
and Frankie dies at home in his bed.
Nelson Algren is his name.

Charles Tidler is a novelist, playwright and poet. Born in Ohio, he grew up in Tipton, Indiana, and attended Purdue to study poetry and philosophy. A Vietnam War draft resister, Charles became a Canadian citizen in 1976. His writing has won many honours and awards. He lives in Victoria, B.C.

An Interview with Dr. Wade Davis

Jesse Boyes

Wade Davis is a professor of anthropology, the B.C. Leadership Chair in Cultures and Ecosystems at Risk at the University of British Columbia, was the Explorer-in-Residence at the National Geographic Society from 1999 to 2013, and is a prestigious storyteller. Davis is a writer, a photographer, and a filmmaker. He holds a degree in anthropology, another in biology, and a PhD in ethnobotany, all from Harvard University. A passionate defender of what he calls the ethnosphere, his philosophical vision as a young man was influenced by such mentors at Harvard as the explorer and botanist Richard Evans Schultes, and social anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis, who he describes as being in the scholar-as-activist tradition.

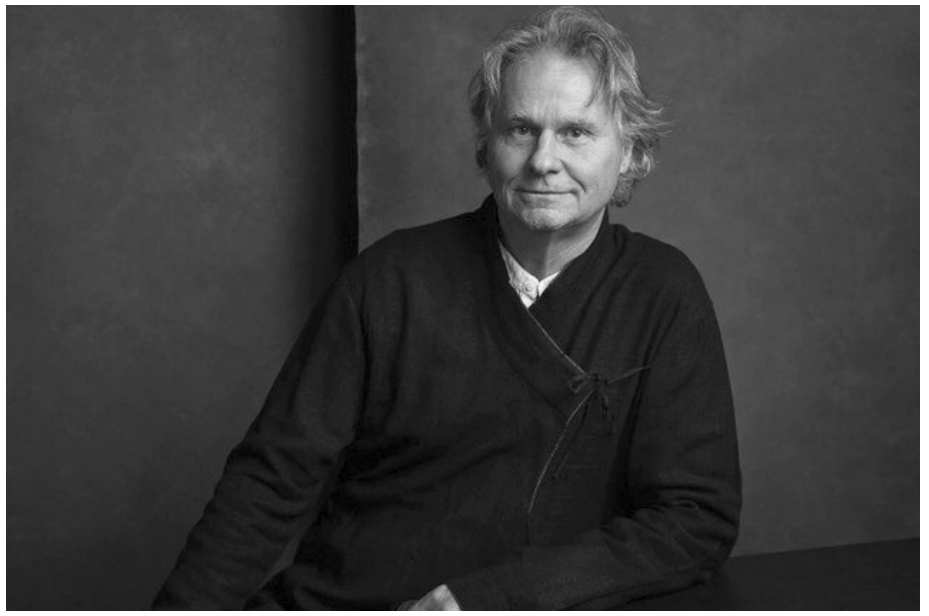
"Culture is ultimately about a body of moral and ethical values that we envelop every human being in to keep at bay the barbaric heart that haunts humanity…"

JB: You coined the word 'ethnosphere' when writing about the tragedy of vanishing cultures and languages. How did the idea of the ethnosphere come about?
WD: I was just looking for a kind of organizing principle to draw people's attention to the fact that, even as we lamented the loss of biological diversity, there was a parallel process of loss which was erosion of the cultural fabric of life or, you know, of the planet. The forces that were responsible for the impact on the biosphere were the same forces that were impacting the integrity of culture. I just coined that term to begin to get people to think of this interconnected web of life. I defined the ethnosphere as the sum total of all thoughts, dreams, ideas, intuitions, myths and memories brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness.

The interesting thing is that biologists and anthropologists used to be kind of at loggerheads. There was a famous moment—I write about it in a new book of mine—where the Dalai Lama was speaking for his last time on his first tour of the West in the late 1970s at Harvard. The same night, E. O. Wilson was introducing Norman Myers who had just written one of the first books anticipating the biodiversity crisis. That night all the students were across the way to listen to His Holiness. E. O. Wilson, this incredibly kind man and incredibly brilliant biologist, who would regret these remarks to this day, in apologizing for the sparse audience, said to Myers that even Harvard students can't get their priorities right and they'd rather be across the way to listen to that "religious kook" as he put it. Of course, what was going on then is not that Wilson is a bad guy, but it was typical of the chasm that existed then between biologists, who saw people as part of the problem, especially indigenous people, and anthropologists, who couldn't abide by what we saw as the misanthropic elitism of the naturalists. Now, of course, science, in the guise of genetics, has brought that all together. Science has come forward to actually prove the truth of the central idea of anthropology which is cultural relativism. We know that we're all cut from the same genetic cloth, we all share the same genius, race is a fiction; and if we all share the same genius, how culture decides to use that genius is simply a matter of choice—Which is kind of the fundamental idea of cultural anthropology. But that's now—back then it wasn't so clear.

To me it was important to come up with this idea of the ethnosphere to highlight this parallel process of loss. The symbol of that was the erosion of linguistic diversity and the fact that by academic consensus, half of the languages of the world weren't being taught to school children.

JB: Did Professor Richard Evans Schultes, ethnobotanist and one of your mentors, help inspire this idea?
WD: It wasn't really Schultes. I was very lucky that I had two mentors at Harvard; Schultes, of course, who indirectly I suppose, turned me on to the realm of plants. As a young person, that was very grounding because the theoretical elements of social anthropology were frankly beyond me, but there was something concrete and real about plants. Plants became for me, at a critical point in my young life, a kind of perfect conduit to culture, a way to understand and approach indigenous people. So I wasn't turning out, at the age of twenty, to study them. I was going there more in the spirit of an apprentice who goes to be at the feet of more knowledgeable mentors. I think that dynamic is one that indigenous people understand much more readily than someone who turns up at the age of twenty and says 'I want to study your sex life.' If somebody did that to us we'd probably call the police, right? So botany for me was very much a kind of conduit to culture. Intellectually I was much more influenced by the thinking of David Maybury-Lewis who was a great social anthropologist, but also very much in the tradition of scholar-as-activist. He created Cultural Survival and he



Dr. Wade Davis

thought more profoundly about culture than anyone I'd ever met or have met. He was a big influence. I no longer do ethnobotany, although plants are still a big part of my life and in all my books of literary non-fiction, plants always are a motif. I ended up actually being more the student or the child of David Maybury-Lewis than of Schultes, even though both men were very important to me.

JB: Regarding cultural relativism, does it mean different things in relation to multiculturalism and cultural diversity?
WD: Cultural diversity is just what the word says. Multiculturalism tends to refer to a policy whereby a nation state elects to formally, and in a sense, officially acknowledge itself to be made up of different voices of humanity, different backgrounds, different cultures of humanity. So, rather than celebrating an idea of a melting pot, where we expect everybody who turns up on our shores to, within a generation or two, metaphorically merge into one—one set of ideas, one language, one religion even—Canada, of course, in embracing multiculturalism as a policy has you turn to a very different metaphor, which is the metaphor of the mosaic.

Cultural relativism is something very specific to a way of thinking about culture through the anthropological lens, and the fundamental idea of cultural relativism is that the world in which you were born is just one model of reality, the consequence of one set of adaptive choices that your lineage made, however successfully, many generations ago. Whether it's a yak herder in the Himalayas or a Voodoo acolyte in Haiti, or a hunter in the Arctic, all peoples teach us that there are other ways of thinking, other ways of being, other ways of orienting yourself in social, spiritual, ecological space. I guess the fundamental idea of anthropology and cultural relativism is just the idea that the other peoples of the world aren't failed attempts at being you. They're not failed attempts at being modern. Every culture is a unique answer to a fundamental question: what does it mean to be human, and alive? When the peoples of the world answer that question, they do so in the seven thousand voices of humanity. You know, each culture has got something to say which deserves to be heard, just as none has a monopoly on the route to the divine. That's the fundamental idea, and in that sense anthropology is the antidote to nativism. It's the antidote to Trump. Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas' student, said the entire purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences.

Cultural myopia, the idea that my way is the real way and that everybody else who's not like me is a failed attempt at being me, or a failed attempt at being modern or whatever we say, that's actually been the curse since the dawn of consciousness. It's what's been the source of all conflict, right? Religious wars, cultural wars, you know—nativistic, nationalistic wars.

As the world becomes a more integrated place in so many ways, we really have no choice but to struggle to figure out how we're going to truly live in a pluralistic multicultural world where the issue is not the traditional versus the modern, but the rights of people to choose the components of their lives. The goal isn't to freeze people in time like some kind of zoological specimen or have us go back to a pre-industrial

past, it's to find a way that all peoples can benefit from the genius of the best of modernity, the best of science, without that engagement demanding the death of who they are as a people. Ultimately culture is not decorative; it's not the songs we sing or the prayers we utter or the clothes we wear. Culture is ultimately about a body of moral and ethical values that we envelop every human being in to keep at bay the barbaric heart that haunts humanity and has done so for all time. It's culture that keeps civilization intact. It's culture that allows us to make sense out of sensation, to find order and meaning in a universe that may have neither. It's culture that allows us, as Lincoln said, to "seek the better angels of our nature".

Culture is such a thin veneer over the barbaric heart of humanity; and that's not a hyperbolic statement. Look what became of the Germans in the 1930s, look what's happening in the United States as we speak, look what happened in Cambodia in the killing fields, look at Mao Tse Tung. None of these people set out to do what they thought were the wrong things. Mao in 1957 thought he was moving China forward, even if it did result in forty-eight million dead.

JB: Is that why your work highlights the vitality of story and myth?
WD: If you want to communicate the lessons of anthropology you can't do it through polemics or through politics. You really have to do it through storytelling. Narrative and stories change the world. I certainly think that, and that's what I am. I'm a storyteller, I describe myself as a storyteller—the medium might be film, it could be books, it can be public lectures or whatever, but fundamentally it's storytelling—telling stories through the lens of anthropology or history or culture. That's why I strongly believe in the activist tradition of anthropology.

JB: You tell an epic story in your book *One River: Explorations and Discoveries in the Amazon Rain Forest*. Many wonder, how did you develop the ability to write so enchantingly?
WD: I taught myself. It was a classic case of having no options. That's what I always say to young people: be an opportunist, not like a schemer. Put yourself in the way of opportunities where you have no choice but success and you suddenly find yourself achieving things that would've been beyond your imaginings a few short years before. I taught myself to write because I had to. I took the assignment in Haiti and went from being flushed with money to having no money; [of] the two main mentors or backers, one of them died, and one had a stroke within twenty-four hours. I peddled the idea for a book to a literary agent and then wrote two chapters that I thought were the best things since the Bible. I tried to send it back and he said try again. So I had to teach myself to write, and I did.

JB: Speaking of language, you've said that at the time of "the Neolithic Revolution—which gave us agriculture, the cult of the seed—the poetry of the shaman was displaced by the—"
WD:—prose of the priesthood.

JB: This sounds profound...
WD: There's a big difference between a shaman and a priest. A shaman is an individual who is concerned with the release of the individual's wild genius, right? This is why shamanic traditions use psychoactive substances. Ultimately the reason why psychedelics are so subversive is that: they're subversive! I mean, they're uncontrollable, and what happens is beyond. Whereas with a priest, his entire job is to actually socialize people into a congregation: a congregation which can be managed by the state. I mean that's what it is, right? The shaman's role is to either invoke some technique of ecstasy, so that he or she can individually soar off on the wings of trance to work their deeds of rescue, or to catalyze the individual spirit and release the individual for whatever purpose. It's the opposite of a kind of state sponsored religious ideology which, by its very structure, is designed to secure people to a certain way of thinking, generally to the benefit of a powerful orthodoxy and a powerful leadership.

JB: So, those plants that have been so subversive and difficult for our culture to integrate—
WD: Mmm…

JB: They're becoming more common knowledge. Psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, and others. Do you think there's a future for culturally sanctioned use of these plants in the West?
WD: I think it's already happening. It's fascinating how ayahuasca has gone from being a completely obscure thing when I was your age—I mean I could come back in 1974, tell someone I'd just taken ayahuasca, and they wouldn't have any idea what I was talking about—to now, of course; it's become not just common knowledge, but commonly used by people everywhere. That's within a generation or two.

I think that there's a resurgence of interest in the clinical applications of psychedelics which is long overdue. These substances have immense potential, particularly in therapy. In a way this is the genesis of the psychedelic movement. The reason that Leary and Alpert became so excited about LSD was that they were frustrated by the failures of their own profession. There had been a famous report that came out that said that—and you know Leary was a serious social psychologist— the report that he'd read said that no matter what the intervention in psychiatric or psychological challenges, a third of the people got better, a third got worse, and a third stayed the same. It called into question the entire utility or even the point of his academic discipline. Right at that moment, he discovered mushrooms and later LSD. Suddenly these substances, in cracking open the mind, struck him as the holy grail they had all been missing.

Because these plants and drugs were so inherently subversive, I always say that our parents said "don't take these substances, you'll never come back the same". That, from our point of view, was the whole point. They did transform one's life. That's why I always say that I wouldn't write the way I write, I wouldn't think the way I think, I wouldn't treat women as I do, I wouldn't understand nature, I wouldn't appreciate biology, I wouldn't understand cultural relativism—all this stuff was deeply impacted by my subjective experiences with psychedelics. So, in that sense, the parents were correct.

These things are powerfully subversive. A lot of what was set in motion in the 1960s, which led to a kind of schism in society to this day, in part is the impact of these substances. They were certainly not the only ingredient in a recipe of social change that, at the end of the day, did have us treating the Earth like it was some kind of mystical being. That was anathema to the orthodoxy of the Christian faith. It had us actually recognizing women as they went from the kitchen to the boardroom, people of colour from the woodshed to the White House, gay people from the closet to the altar. All these transformations were profoundly unsettling to some people in society. I think you can almost track the divide between the red and the blue, between the conservatives in the States and the liberals in the States. To some extent, it all goes back to the cultural divide of the 60s which included race, included gender, included conflict over a long and pointless war in Vietnam, but it also was sparked by the fact that millions of people ingested these substances and they didn't come back the same. That was not something that you could either embrace as something very positive, or see as being something very negative if you were fearful. That's why I think much of this nostalgia on the far right is for an America that never existed. It's like when people are uncertain about the future and find what's going on in the present disconcerting, they always invoke a kind of nostalgia for the past. Generally that implies nostalgia for a world that never existed.

JB: One of your graduate students, Laurel Sugden, is doing a big, long-term research project on the San Pedro cactus and its relationship to ancient Andean civilization. What do you think will come of this?
WD: First of all she's an intrepid traveller. She's already spent months and months in South America. Of all the sort of famous entheogenic plants, I've always thought San Pedro was the most interesting in the sense that its subjective effects are the most inspiring. We know that in the archaeological record, it was used by virtually every civilization in Pre-Columbian Peru. It may well have played some kind of catalytic role in the rapid spread of the prototypic civilization of Peru—Chavín—which beginning about 2,000 years before the Christian era, flashed across the Andes; less an empire than a religious idea. When looking at the iconography of their type of site, San Pedro is clearly shown in many manifestations, yet of all the plants or sort of preparations, such as ayahuasca, which gets so much attention, no one has gone into looking at San Pedro. With it we actually have a much deeper chronology, because it's found in the Andes, and it's found on the coast. It turns up in textiles and ceramics of coastal civilizations—Paracas, Nazca, and Moche, Chimu—every civilization where the material remains are there for us to see because of the dry and desert-like conditions. And yet there hasn't really been a serious study of the plant since 1978 when Douglas Sharon did his book *Cactus of the Four Winds*. That was a book containing some serious flaws, which Laurel will be addressing. I think that of all the psychoactive agents that can actually be useful in therapy, phenethylamines, like in mescaline, as opposed to the tryptamines in mushrooms or ayahuasca, have much more potential for therapy because they're much more benign. So, her thesis is not just kind of a sweeping look at San Pedro through history and through ethnography, but also in terms of its potential therapeutic use today. She's going to do a comprehensive study of the whole possibility of the plant, which is long overdue.

JB: Much of your interest in plants, language, and story ultimately comes down to how humans relate to the land and to each other, right? You've made a home for yourself in the Stikine Valley and put a lot of your time into protecting it from

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Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Michelle LaFlamme

The tragedy of Canada's missing and murdered women undulates like a sea serpent shattering lives and homes in its wake, perpetually haunting our streets, complicating countless courtrooms with grisly details and animating media frenzies. "The murdered" shift imperceptibly into the unliving and "the missing" claim the space of the undead, holding us deeply in the shadows of the questions driving our worst fears as we struggle to make meaning from this senseless brutality. The historical legacy of racialized violence haunts the imaginations of all women, most especially those of us who claim Indigenous ancestry. In *Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women*, the editors Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell and Christi Belcourt ask us once again to come to this valley of grief from a new angle by offering a compilation of insightful essays that clearly have given important solace to the writers themselves.

Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell and Christi Belcourt, Eds.
University of Alberta Press, 2018

In 2015, "The Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence Against Indigenous Women documented that fifty separate reports had been written on missing and murdered Indigenous women." Sickened by statistics and an apathy that has left multiple new cases unsolved, *Keetsahnak* is dedicated to "spirits of our relatives who continue to guide their families from the spirit world". The writers use the Cree word for the title which means "Our sisters" and is intended "to show our kinship with the women whose lives form the heart" of this volume. These essays demonstrate the strength and resilience of Indigenous women in offering various regional examples of women's communities coming together to address the issues of violence against women that bring forth new aspects to the conversation.

The work is divided into four sections: the first, "All Our Relations" offers voices from women on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, perspectives from social justice advocates, and accounts of the multigenerational impacts of police apathy, as well as personal reflections from women who still have missing family members. The second, "The Violence of History", offers a historical and sociological lens to the matter and importantly includes personal histories and draws the link between them and colonial violence. Again, like chapter one, this section offers personal and site-specific essays while theorizing on the larger concerns.

The third section is most courageous and hidden in that it delves into the violence in man camps and the disturbing phenomenon of lateral and non-lateral violence involving two-spirited and trans people, in addition to the missing accounts of violence against Indigenous boys and men including murdered and missing Indigenous men. The final section entitled "Action Always" offers a resilient thread of social justice activism.

Of particular note is the essay making the link between misogyny and traditional stories and how these normalize violence against women in Indigenous communities. In "Generations of Genocide", Robyn Bourgeois uses statistical data and historical analysis to unpack the ways in which the Canadian nation-state has benefitted from overwhelmingly positioning Indigenous woman in socio-cultural and legal context in ways that would support the colonial goals inherent in the Eurocentric patriarchy. Bourgeois concludes that "scholarly historical analyses make clear that the over-criminalization and under-protection of Indigenous women and girls has long been a pattern of the Canadian justice system."

Michelle Good's essay "A Tradition of Violence" asserts that "as Indigenous people and nations, we need to invest in our own solutions to violence in our communities." A historical overtone is offered when the author states, "[t]he Canadian state has been and continues to be deeply invested in violence in Indigenous women and girls to establish and maintain its national power." Good argues that "only decolonization and the regeneration of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination can hope to end this violence…violence against Indigenous women and girls is an issue of sovereignty and self-determination."

Christi Belcourt, Dr. Kim Anderson & Elder Maria Campbell

In "Honouring Women" Beverly Jacobs offers a very moving essay outlining her personal connection to the legal and social realities involved in doing advocacy work for this demographic. She outlines her own connection to missing and murdered women in her work and her connection to her own life and the spirits of the woman. Anecdotes from the oil fields are shared by Helen Knott in the uncannily titled essay, "Violence and Extraction" that manage to weave together an analysis of the connection between making a living, land, violence, sexism, and racism.

There is a through line in these essays that is expressed in the line "Every time I see a photo of an Indigenous woman or girl who has gone missing, I feel my spirit tighten inside of me." The author, like many in this volume, shares the visceral and affective impact of murdered and missing women. This is a vitally important part of this collection as the essays are cathartic for the writers and readers—an affective and holistic approach to writing about missing and murdered women that is threaded throughout the essays.

Other new Indigenous voices in this collection offer insights that shift paradigms. Alex Wilson's "Skirting the Issue: Indigenous Myths, Misses, and Misogyny" addresses the importance of "body sovereignty" in a powerful essay that addresses the underreported issue of the marginalization of trans and two-spirited in the larger discourse of murdered and missing indigenous women. These are difficult things to look at. Another difficult essay "The Moose in the Room: Indigenous Man and Violence Against Women" is written by Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson framing the conversation by asking the question "Why are we uneasy within the Indigenous community to discuss the levels of violence Indigenous men inflict upon Indigenous women?" Innes and Anderson draw a connection between domestic violence, statistics and settler racism, as well as "poverty, substance abuse, and dysfunctional parenting skills—caused by racism and colonial interventions." At the risk of perpetuating racism and stereotypes, these writers insist that we add this analysis of Indigenous violence towards Indigenous peoples to the analysis: more difficult things to look at.

My family has been deeply and indelibly wounded and we all miss my cousin, Vanessa Buckner who was a victim of the barbershop serial killer. To gain solace and understanding of this trauma I have been writing about this topic and dedicating work to the memory of my murdered cousin since 2006. The most recent distillation of my ideas is entitled, "Re-animating the Un-dead". I want to write about something else, I want to think about something else, but my life has been changed by the missing and murdered women in Canada: the undulating serpent, like a *weetigo*, is carnivorous and malevolent, stalking its victims and filling its rapacious hunger for our bodies. I seek

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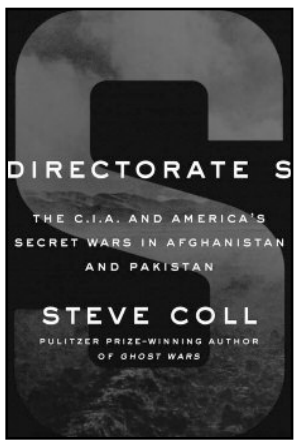
The Graveyard of Empires?
How Many More Graves Will It Take?

James Edward Reid

One of Steve Coll's earlier books (2004), *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, shed much needed light on an often dark area of the world. *Ghost Wars* also received the 2005 Pulitzer Prize. In 2008, Coll introduced readers to more of the Bin Laden family in *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*. At that time, I stayed clear of the introductions. Late in 2018 he published *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. *Directorate S* clearly presents an in depth, and sometimes incredible picture of the continuing dirty wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as an overview of what is left in some of the still habitable areas in these countries.



Directorate S: The C. I. A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan
Steve Coll

The USA, Pakistan, India, Russia, and other countries are all involved in this part of the world, to varying degrees and for different reasons. And troops from these and many other countries must now avoid new and deadly adapted weapons. Cell phones have provided new weapons for the mujahedin, the Taliban, and other local forces who are at war with each other, while each of them are intent on killing American, Canadian, British, Dutch, NATO, Russian, and other forces with new explosive devices.

Cell phones now provide the Taliban with hidden, deadly, and accurately timed bombs. The phones are wired to explosive charges, and hidden along heavily used roads. The Taliban then watch with binoculars from a safe and remote distance, until foreign troops are driving or walking past the buried explosive cell phone. Then the Taliban place a call to the cell phone, which detonates the explosives. The size of these deadly cell phone bombs varies, depending on whether they target foreign troops on manoeuvres, armoured vehicles, innocent people shopping in a marketplace, or the suburban residence of an enemy or enemies. War is always hell, but these remotely triggered cell phone bombs have changed the face of war in Afghanistan, and in other war zones.

Two years ago, in Toronto, I met a young Canadian man who had returned from service in Afghanistan. His left arm had been injured in the war, and he would never regain full use of this arm. The Canadian government had assisted him in his return to civilian life by finding him a job in British Columbia in a sawmill. I worked in a sawmill once. It is one of the last places where someone with one still functioning arm should work.

Directorate S is, of course, sometimes difficult reading. After all, Steve Coll is providing current and wide ranging history about an area of the world that has been long known, with accuracy, for Russia, Britain, and other ill prepared interlopers, as *The Graveyard of Empires*. How many more graves will it take? With the present scattershot and gormless administration in Washington, it is unlikely that anyone will ask or answer one of the most important questions about this war: "Where is the United States War in Afghanistan going?" *The Diplomat* asked this question two years ago in 2017. So far, no one has answered it. Steve Coll's fine and informative book is a good place to begin establishing more appropriate questions and some thoughtful answers. Examples of the current chaos in the White House may also be found in a few quotations from Bob Woodward's 2018 book, *FEAR: Trump in the White House*:

> "the constant disorder at the White House wasn't helping anyone…" (p. 145).
> "Everybody's trying to get me," the president ranted. (p. 165).
> "Trump's behavior was now in the paranoid territory." (p. 166).
> …the president had the understanding of a fifth or sixth grader." (p. 308).

The previous four quotations which appear in *FEAR: Trump in the White House*, are not rare examples, but typical of much of this important book.

Good maps of Afghanistan are very helpful while reading *Directorate* S. The

The secret war in Afghanistan

Wikipedia entry for Afghanistan provides maps of the country in 1992, 1996, 2011, and the end of 2001. Wikipedia, as well, provides the locations on other maps of major armed militias fighting for control of areas in Afghanistan in the above years.

The lead editorial in *The New York Times*, May 13, 2019, summarized part of the recent report of the special inspector general for Afghanistan in these terms: "The monthly average number of [enemy] attacks, more than 2,000, was up 19 percent from last November through January, compared with the monthly average over the previous reporting period, ending in October. ("The Unspeakable War," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2019, p. A18). How many more lives will it take?

James Edward Reid is a Canadian writer who lives in Ontario. He has been writing for 12 years for *The Sarmatian Review*, a triannual publication of the Polish Institute of Houston, at Rice University in Houston *The Sarmatian* deals with Polish, Central, and Eastern European affairs. His *Sarmatian Review* publications are archived at the *Central and Eastern European Online Library at www.ceeol.com*

KEETSAHNAK *(continued from page 7)*

new ways of making sense of the horror.

The essays in *Keetsahnak* outline historical, legal, cultural, philosophical, and psychological perspectives on the topic of missing and murdered women in Canada. Their power is in detailing the affective consequences of living in pain, grief, rage; simultaneously they offer strategic examples of resilience, legal challenges, and paradigm shifts. There is an immediate and personal tone to each essay that provides a transparency to the process and a depth to the volume, reminding us that we have all been affected by the horrors of this reality.

This is a serious and important read for anyone who has been touched by the tragic reality of missing and murdered women. The cover is a beautiful beadwork design on moosehide by Sherry Farrell Racette, and the essays take control of the analysis and conversation, yet are at once accessible and scholarly, making this book an excellent resource for university students taking courses in the fields of sociology, Indigenous Studies, Women Studies or Social Work. The editors close with a reference to the work being done at the community level through anti-violence coalitions, and it offers insightful analysis and critical appraisals, including a report on the process that lead to the publication of this important collection of voices.

Michelle LaFlamme is an educator who was born and raised in traditional unceded Coast Salish territory. Her indigenous roots are her Metis Mother and Creek Father. Her research interests include Canadian Indigenous literature and drama. She is a grandmother of two and rides horses in her down time.

A Refuge from Rage:
Milton Acorn and His Poetry

Len Gasparini

1.

I first met Milton Acorn at a poetry reading he gave in Windsor, Ontario in March 1973. I remember the date because it was his fiftieth birthday. He had been invited to read by a cadre of young activists who ran a small bookshop (with posters of Malcolm X and Che Guevara in the window) that specialized in national liberation literature. The shelves were stocked with such items as the *Peking Review*, Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, and other books and periodicals—all of a sociopolitical nature. Acorn's reading was a promotion for his book, *More Poems for People*. Sadly, the cover portrait of Acorn by Greg Curnoe was a grotesque embarrassment, as though it had been sketched on a wet napkin, in a tavern, by an unsteady hand. Anyway, the reading took place at a community center in the city's east end, in an industrial neighbourhood of frame houses, dingy taverns, and soot-blackened factories. It couldn't have been more in keeping with the strong, rhetorical spirit of Acorn's socialist poetry and his honest concern for working-class people. Moreover, it was the perfect setting to give his appellation "The People's Poet" free rein.

The audience on that evening was certainly a motley one. When I walked in a few minutes before Acorn was scheduled to read, I wasn't sure if I had stumbled upon a pep rally or was in the wrong place. Of the forty or so people present, there were women (some with children), girls in their teens, and neighbourhood dudes who wandered in off the street, curious to see what a poet looked like. There were a few workmen in work clothes; some pensioners; some students, and others just standing around looking nonchalant. I had expected to see the university's English faculty there, but only professor-poet Eugene McNamara had decided to attend.

The room itself was a gymnasium-cum-lounge with a barbell-dumbbell set and weight-bench in one corner. Acorn slouched against the lectern, his book in one hand, a cigar in the other. A billiard table stood behind him. He wore a plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled up at the elbows, blue jeans, and scuffed work boots. If truth be told, he looked like a lumberjack just in from the bush. The audience easily related to him, probably because he wasn't condescending or pretentious—like the literary type who clasps his book to his chest as though it were a sacred text. After reading the first poem, Acorn muttered something, tossed the book over his shoulder and recited his poems. I marvelled at his inimitable gesture. Memorized poetry is the surest way of signalling a love of language. It certainly grabbed the attention of the audience. They listened as he declaimed:

> Take a rain trip. Neither swallow it or smoke it,
> But stand out in the rain in shorts loin cloth or naked
> With every aperture of your body open
> And your thoughts a bubble from horizon to horizon.

This stanza of hexameter and heptameter near-rhyme line ends is a technical triumph. The proletariat had found an earthy kindred spirit in "The People's Poet," and quite a few people trooped out of the building with an inscribed discount copy of Milton Acorn's book.

2.

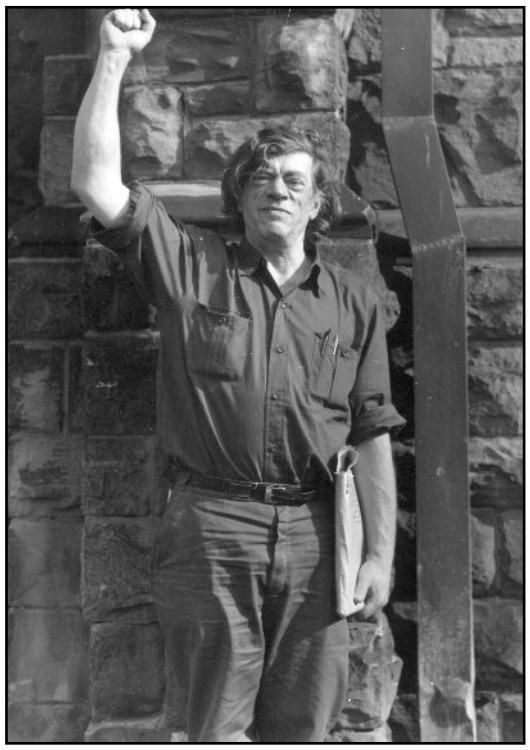
As time moves forward, and space and time become compressed, and societies become totally plugged into technology and seldom socialize in the flesh, I sometimes find myself wistfully conjuring up the past.

On a very personal, albeit droll note, this is what Milton Acorn had to say at the age of 48.

"I was born in a small province, Prince Edward Island, somewhere about the same time as Jack Benny. I am also Scots, Welsh, Portuguese, not in that order, and with some damnable English too…which I have spent my life denying. I simplify it by saying I'm a thousandth generation Canadian. There is such a thing and from it Canadians can take assurance that their nation really does exist.

"I worked as a carpenter for many years, but the alienated conditions in the trade (though I was a good carpenter) drove me to nervous breakdown. I in fact had published some poems while a carpenter; but the necessity (being a Canadian fully indoctrinated with the work ethic) of justifying my existence entailed me then becoming a good poet. I'm Old Left, merging on New—have sometimes been accused of being anarchist. The Allan Gardens Free Speech Fight, and *The Georgia Straight* are both in part my doing. Unlike most of the Canadian Left I can point to some successes; but what does that mean while millions starve? Nevertheless it has been that factor of success in my political work which has led to accusations of anarchism. In order to be a good Canadian Leftist you have to be a total failure.

"I was influenced in mid-career by Charles Olson's 'Projective Verse.' However I was equally influenced by my own study of poetic history, which revealed that the good poets wrote about the concerns which involved most people. Their highest concerns. Also I have studied imagery intensely, learning that the secret of imagery is looking at things with your own eyes. Also the line and the voice are much my concern. Also the void—not saying too much—leaving gaps and vistas down which the reader can look with his own magic eyes."



Milton Acorn

3.

My review of Milton Acorn's *The Island Means Minago* appeared in 1975. The Literary Press Group of Publishers reprinted it by permission of *Books in Canada*. Accompanying the review was a photograph of Acorn with dishevelled hair, swollen left eye, gap-toothed smile, and holding a stogie in his right hand. This is what I partly said:

The Island Means Minago is Milton Acorn's eighth collection of poems. His first, *In Love and Anger*, he self-published in 1956. Although not as prolific as some of his contemporaries, his books have made a lasting impact on Canadian poetry. His latest one is about Prince Edward Island—its history and its folklore. (A "pussycat name" for a province, he said, because the island was a British colony in the 1700s.) "Minago" is the name given to the island by the indigenous Micmac people.

> Indians say a musical God
> took up his brush and painted it,
> named it in his own language
> "The Island."

Acorn has interspersed old and new poems with dialogue, chunks of prose, a periegesis of the province, archival photographs, and a scene from an unpublished play, *The Road to Charlottetown*. There are passages of such lyrical, rhythmical, and rhetorical power that one finds it difficult to associate the unkempt poet in the photo with the finished craft of the poetry inside. Perhaps there is a reason for this in a stanza from "I, Milton Acorn," a poem influenced by Bertolt Brecht, but with more metrical variations.

> The spattered color of the time has marked me
> So I'm a man of many appearances,
> Have come many times to poetry
> And come back to define what was meant.

I could continue quoting Acorn's poems for pages, but his poetry is (or should be) well-known enough without me having to give it my critical approbation. *If he's not the best poet in this country right now, I'll break my typewriter.*

4.

Jackpine Sonnets was a masterstroke of a title for a book in which Milton Acorn prescribed freedom for the sonnet. Acorn himself told me about his idea for this unusual collection. We were in his room one evening at the Waverly Hotel near Toronto's Chinatown, talking shop. I'd brought a bottle of Hungarian red wine, and he was drinking three glasses to my one. I was supposed to interview him for a magazine. The interview never happened. (Milton dislikes formalities of any kind.) But I certainly learned about the irregular form, rhyme, and meter of the "jackpine sonnet," and even more about his politics.

First of all, Acorn's room was messy with books, magazines, and wastepaper. It reeked of cigar smoke, not to mention my cigarettes. But I didn't mind. A big Canadian flag draped one wall. There were three manual typewriters: Royal, Remington, and Underwood. When I commented on them, he said: "I use two for poetry and one for prose." Which made perfect sense to me. I mentioned that a songbird called the jackpine warbler nested in stands of jackpines in northern Ontario. Of course he knew this, but was impressed that I knew it too.

Acorn's lengthy introduction to *Jackpine Sonnets* is titled "Tirade by Way of Introduction." He states his case vehemently but partly tongue-in-cheek. "I do acknowledge that poetry is in a state of crisis and offer a partial prescription…" Then he veers off course. "Everyone knows I'm an ideological poet and my central ideology is Marxism-Leninism."

Politics aside, what should concern us are the joltingly innovative poems of this man. They add new dimensions to Canadian poetry, and give it a good sandblasting

Milton Acorn reads to the Grossman's gang in 1972

in the process. Also, he has taken the traditional sonnet and reworked it by dispensing with the fourteen-line straitjacket of its form and the different rhyme schemes of the Petrarchan, Spenserian, and Shakespearian sonnet. In other words, he has given it a freer form in the manner of Robert Lowell's unrhymed blank verse sonnets, and aptly named it after one of his favourite trees—the jackpine, "which can grow in any earth…and having no set form, it makes all sorts of evocative shapes."

These free form sonnets cover a wide range of subject matter, varying in mood, and swirling with life's "eternal state of fission." The imagery is rich with metaphor and topical allusion. Sometimes dissonant lines cast a flickering light of their own. The seventeen-line, revised sonnet "Rose in Absence" lyrically transcends any rationale of human love, giving it an essence that is at once fundamental and intensely personal:

> The orgasm doesn't end. This moment
> Is like mated swallows spinning strands of time;
> Miniature cyclones in my breath
> Where exhalations from two nostrils blend.
>
> There was a man who told me dialectics
> Contradicted mathematical laws.
> I should tell him love's equally wicked.
> In a love-gift, what the hell's lost?

To digress a little, I think critics and reviewers have overlooked Acorn's corpus of love poetry. Perhaps they've been sidetracked by his public image of a working-class nationalist and socialist poet, as well as his political poems. In truth, Acorn has written some of the best love poems in 20th century North American poetry.

There are other sonnets that suddenly explode like a pyrotechnic display full of sound and color shot with irony. "Hope Begins Where False Hope Ends" is one of them. "Love in the Nineteen Fifties" is another. Sometimes Acorn adopts a combative stance, as in "The Craft of Poetry's the Art of War." There is no mincing of words in this anthem: "Put on your hardhat of proletarian scorn; / And when you throw roses—never mind how sweet; / For sweet life's sake don't omit the thorns." In "No Music from the Bar," the last line strikes a chord for neurotics: "Sleepless in Toronto—home of the homesick"; though nowadays it would be the "homeless." The sociological element of Acorn's poetry is always just below the surface, like a reef.

Included in the book are two whimsical, socio-political tall tales. Although both are amusingly anecdotal, they tend to detract from Acorn's inventiveness in grafting

Milton Acorn is presented with a $1,000 cheque and a medal by fellow poets Irving Layton (left) and Eli Mandel (right) at Grossman's Tavern. The four-hour celebration was staged by friends who felt Acorn should have won the Governor-General's medal for I've Tasted My Blood.

new stylistic forms onto the old regular sonnet.

Finally, the Jackpine is both metaphor and metonym for poet and sonnet—poet tree, if you will. "It has a basic form, yes, but grows to any shape that suits the light, suits the winds, suits itself"—the same way Acorn suited the zeitgeist of the 1960s and 70s. However, suffice it to say that his political didacticism didn't help his poetry. Ideological poet? For shame!

As I was getting ready to leave, I wanted to quote someone whose name I couldn't remember, but who said: "Ideologies were invented only to give lustre to the leftover barbarism which has survived down through the ages, to cover up the murderous tendencies common to all men." But I didn't.

5.

In the late 1970s Milton Acorn was a tormented man—"self-tormented," said some of his friends. Acorn's behaviour sometimes skidded unpredictably in public—especially at poetry readings. This condition was attributed to his alcoholism and bouts of deep depression. His bohemian lifestyle also took its toll on him. (In many ways he reminded me of the American "Beat" poets of his generation.) He lived on the income from his writing, his disability pension, and the occasional Canada Council writing grant. For most of his adult life he was chronically impoverished.

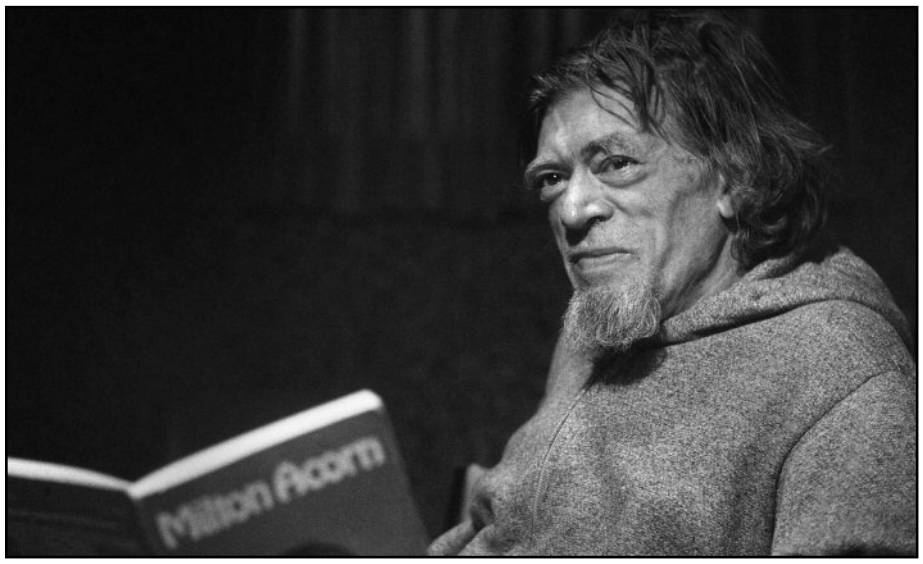
I can recall reading poetry with Acorn, Ted Plantos, Bronwen Wallace, Alfred "Lord" Rushton and others at the Church Street Community Center in Toronto back in 1979. It was a festive, disorganized, marathon affair, and the audience numbered about 100. Don Sedgwick wrote up the event in *Quill & Quire*, and singled out Acorn—not for his poetry but lack of propriety.

> "Milton Acorn, the "people's poet," caused quite a stir early in the program when he launched into a tirade aimed at his fellow poets. 'I teach poetry at three schools,' he bellowed, 'and listening to these poets, I recommend a number of them attend!' He added, 'You don't hire a carpenter if he can't work.' After an argument with a member of the audience who taunted him for his outburst, Acorn was finally persuaded to recite his poetry. 'I'm going to read a naive poem but not nearly as naive as some I heard this evening.' He stumbled through several poems, then left the stage in disgust."

How do we appraise the pros and cons of Acorn's behaviour? He took poetry

very seriously. It was his life work, his refuge from rage. He was the real thing: a true, hardworking, full-time poet. He didn't want to listen to poetry being anthropomorphized, euphemized, moralized, sentimentalized, tranquilized, trivialized…

I was glad my turn to read followed his exit.



Milton Acorn

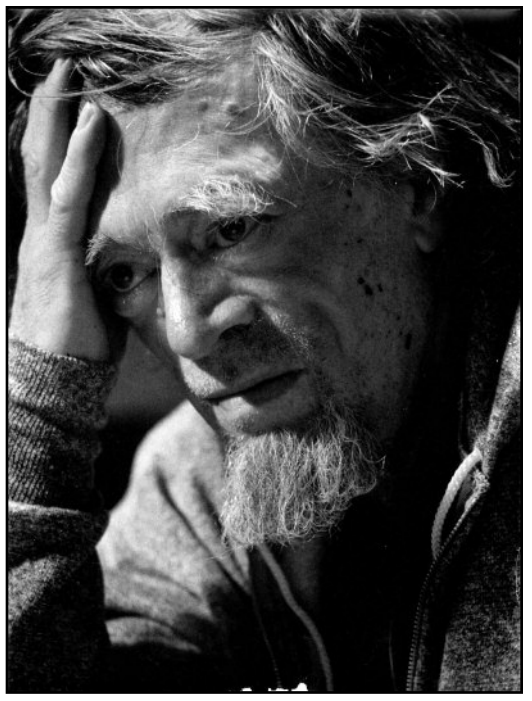
Notes:

According to James Deahl—Milton Acorn's friend and indefatigable Boswell, *More Poems for People* sold thousands of copies. Deahl is also Acorn's "unofficial" literary executor.

The Allan Gardens Free Speech Fight in Toronto refers to Milton Acorn reading his poetry to a large crowd in July 1962 to protest a bylaw that prohibited speeches in public parks and lead to serious debate over freedom of expression. Acorn shouted his famous poem, "I Shout Love," that ends with a battle cry: "Listen, you money-plated bastards. When I shout love, I mean your destruction."

Acorn was ticketed and fined by the police.

When I lived in Toronto (the Good) in the spring of 1961, puritanical blue laws were still in effect. Restaurants, movie theatres, department stores, etc. were closed on Sundays. Public entertainment and recreation were verboten.



Milton Acorn

The Georgia Straight was an "underground" newspaper that Acorn co-founded in Vancouver, B.C. in 1967.

"Projective Verse" was a project masterminded by teacher-poet Charles Olson and partly funded by Black Mountain College in the 1950s. Its objective was to free tight verse from its "closed" form, and project the poem like a projectile in an "open" field by using the "breath line," with short or long breath pauses, not counting caesuras, at the end of each end-stopped or run-on verse line. Because "projective" is also a psychological term, there was some confusion. A few faculty members and some students thought it was a new track-and-field event, or something related to yoga or deep breathing exercises. Vancouver poet George Bowering was so inspired by Olson's postmodern poetic theories, that he started a mimeographed magazine called *Tish* (an anagram of shit) devoted to examples of "projective verse." Enough said.

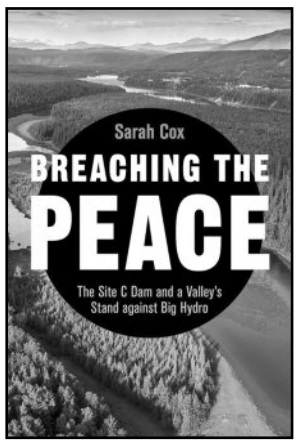
I first read "The Island" in *I've Tasted My Blood* (1969). Acorn revised this poem, adding an 8-line stanza to it. The new version appeared in *The Island Means Minago*.

Len Gasparini is the author of numerous books and chapbooks of poetry, five short-story collections, two children's books, and a one-act play. His collection of short fiction *When Does a Kiss Become a Bite?* was published by Ekstasis Editions in 2009. He has lived in Toronto, Vancouver, New Orleans, and Washington State, and now resides in his hometown of Windsor, Ontario.

Breaching the Peace: The Site C Dam and a Valley's Stand Against Big Hydro

Rose Morrison

Construction is now underway on the Site C hydro-electric dam project near Hudson's Hope on the Peace River in north-eastern British Columbia. As I write, BC Hydro has released this announcement: 'BC Hydro achieves major milestone with river diversion tunnel breakthrough.' In 2020 the river will be diverted through two tunnels to allow for dam construction. Rising in British Columbia's eastern Rockies, the Peace River travels south to the Williston Lake reservoir where it negotiates the site A hydroelectric dam, known as the Bennett dam. Flowing eastward, twenty-three kilometers on, it encounters Site B, the Peace Canyon dam, then continues into Alberta and travels north to join the Mackenzie River which runs through the northwest Territories before emptying into the Beaufort Sea.



Breaching the Peace: The Site C Dam and a Valley's Stand against Big Hydro
Sarah Cox
On Point Press, 2018

Breaching the Peace: The Site C Dam and a Valley's Stand against Big Hydro, is environmental journalist Sarah Cox's impressive first book. While she summarizes the chequered history of Site C from the mid-twentieth century plans of former B.C. premier W.A.C. Bennett to harness the B.C. Peace and Columbia Rivers for power generation, her stated focus is on the people of the South Peace Valley and their fight from 2008 onward to preserve their lands, livelihoods, environment and ways of living.

Site A, the Bennett Dam, was completed in 1967; the smaller Peace Canyon Dam was built in the 1980s. At that time, the BC Utilities Review Board decided that Site C was unnecessary, too financially risky, and environmentally unacceptable. In 2008 however, then B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell sent a letter advising residents of the Peace River Valley that Site C would go ahead. Cox relates that Campbell's later flamboyant fly-in to Hudson's Hope to announce the go-ahead of Site C was met by 60 local protestors holding 'Damn the Dam' placards.

Agriculture is an important sector in the Peace River region. Common crops in this, the aspen forest parkland, are oilseeds, grains, forage seed and forages grown for farm animal fodder; they all do well in the relatively short growing season and long daylight hours. Climate and soil properties are two major determinants of agricultural land capability. Along the benches of the South Peace River where land will be inundated by the Site C dam reservoir, there are specific sites where fertile alluvial soils and factors like local topography and field aspect moderate, for example, temperature and wind, resulting in microclimates where there are more frost-free days, and an ideal environment for growing a much wider variety of high-value crops. Cox describes such places as'… a northern garden of Eden with outlier species that intrigued scientists….' In a 2014 study, professional agrologists Wendy Holm and Eveline Wolterson endorsed what the farmers already knew; these special places are irreplaceable and should be preserved. Walterson, a soil specialist, describes the soils as 'incredibly rich and productive,' Holm is mindful of food security and climate change: 'We have this breadbasket sitting right here.' She notes that the Peace River is nearer to B.C. markets than California, which exports a lot of produce to Canada.

Sarah Cox

It is clear that Cox has taken time to get to know the people of the Peace Valley whose lives and environment are being disrupted by the Site C Dam; land expropriation includes 34 farms. Even though some of her descriptions of lives and landscapes seem idealized what rings true is that settlers and people from First Nations Treaty Eight communities are justified in their protest; and they are knowledgeable and well organized in their efforts to protect the diverse natural environment,

Aerial view of the Site C project

human rights, property rights, and Treaty Eight hunting, fishing, and traditional way-of-life rights. It is estimated that the Site C reservoir will inundate 5550 hectares of land, Apart from the land loss, there is evidence that flooding can lead to mercury contamination of fish, a natural consequence after sulphate-reducing bacteria have fed on carbon in submerged sediment and soils. (There has been a mercury warning in place since 1992 regarding fish caught in the Williston reservoir).

In late 2014 Christy Clark (B.C. premier 2011 – 2017) gave her final approval to Site C. Protestors filed unsuccessful lawsuits and held activities including a yearly 'Paddle for the Peace' event. In 2015, with BC Hydro about to start preparatory clear-cutting, residents conducted a camp-in at Rocky Mountain Fort, an old-growth forest location within Treaty Eight territory that is of archaeological, cultural and ecological significance. When a judge granted BC Hydro's injunction request, the campers packed up.

Premier Clark, who modelled her premiership on that of W.A.C. Bennett, the dam-builder, went into the 2017 provincial election vowing, 'I will get it [Site C] to the point of no return.' The new government, an NDP party coalition with three Green party members, paused Site C to review it. Cox ends *Breaching the Peace* with B.C. premier John Horgan's decision to complete the Site C dam, because too much money had already been spent on it; and it would cost 1.8 billion dollars to rehabilitate the site. Cox remarks that this cost equals the estimated cost, over the dam's life, of the complex procedure that will be used to transport fish past the dam using lifts, anaesthesia and ground transport.

Breaching the Peace: The Site C dam and a Valley's Stand against Big Hydro is well written and extensively researched. It sheds light on the Site C backstory, putting the stand and actions of local people into context with that of other protestors as well as the main proponents, B.C. government and BC Hydro. It is worth reading. There is a lot of information in this book, so its bibliography, index and chapter notes are helpful.

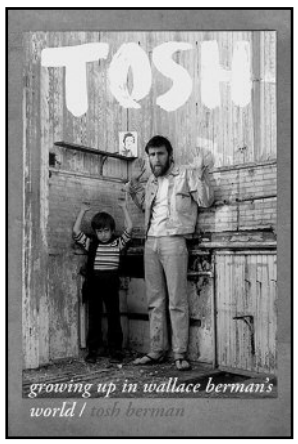
Peace River Valley residents were not the only Site C opponents; environmental scientist David Suzuki and Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, came to the Rocky Mountain Fort camp-in to add their support to the protest. Demonstrations against Site C were also held in Vancouver. Expert opinion echoed the concerns of locals and lay nature lovers who fought to save site-specific ecosystems such as tufa seeps. Biologists, ecologists and archaeologists who did on-the-ground investigations petitioned to conserve the area's biodiversity and irreplaceable natural and cultural sites. A joint Site C environmental review panel found that Site C would have significant adverse effects and that B.C. did not need Site C's energy within the planned timeframe. There were other objectors, including the Royal Society of Canada, Amnesty International, two hundred scholars who signed a Statement of Concern, the Union of B.C. Municipalities, and the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, who wanted the project reviewed independently by the B.C. Utilities commission. They were ignored. Ignoring expert advice and due process was not unusual for B.C. governments

(continued on page 19)

Son of a Genius:
Tosh Berman, A Life in Art

Colin James Sanders

Tosh Berman's memoir of his father, artist Wallace Berman (1926-1976), his mother Shirley, a muse for many, and his parents' circle of friends, represents a wonderful evocation of the memory and spirit of Wallace, and the history of an innovative period in the pre-real estate development phase of L.A.'s Topanga Canyon.

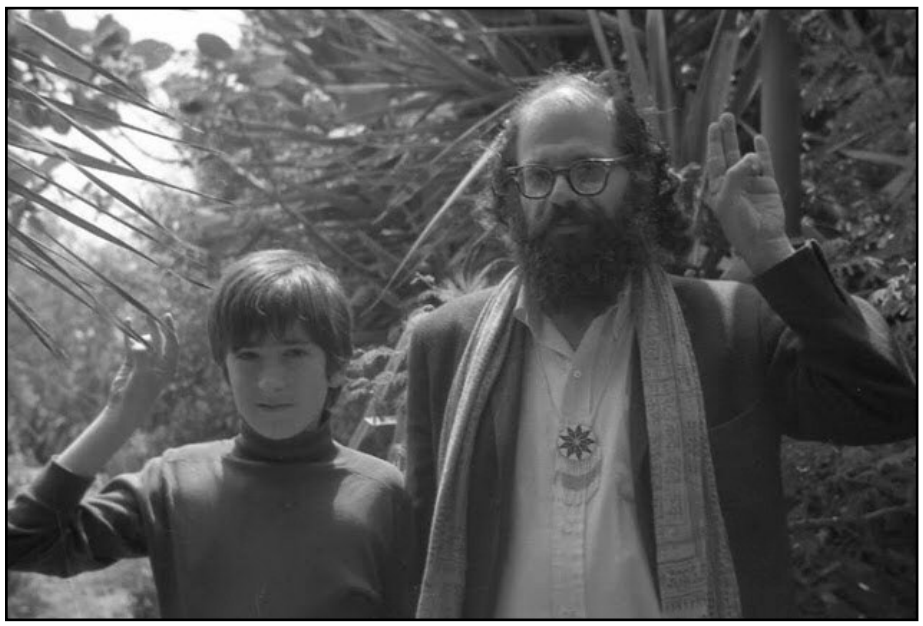


Tosh: Growing Up in Wallace Berman's World
Tosh Berman
City Lights Books, 2019

Wallace Berman, born on Staten Island, New York, in 1926, moved with his Russian Jewish mother to L.A. aged nine, not long after the death of his father. As a youngster, one of his closest friends was Sammy Davis Jr., and he attended the same high school as the infamous music producer, Phil Spector, now serving life in prison. Spector purchased Berman's collage, titled, "You Lost That Lovin' Feeling" (The Righteous Brothers/Phil Spector) from him in 1965.

In 1947, Berman, age 20, designed the album cover for Dial records' *Be-Bop Jazz*, a two-album compilation which included Charlie Parker. Berman attended the recording session with Parker, which was also attended by Billie Holiday. Later, James Brown would become one of his favorite musicians, and his collage, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" is testament to his respect for Brown's music. In his short life, Wallace became an iconic figure in West Coast art.

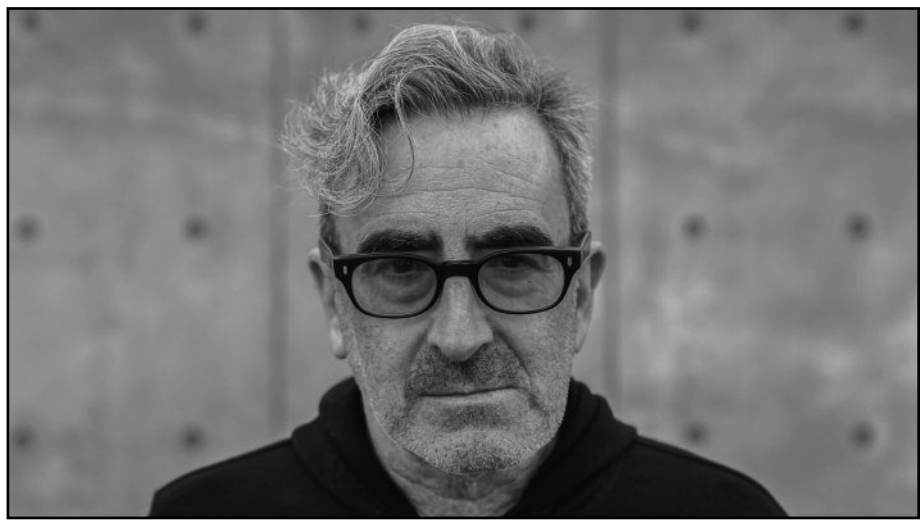
Tosh writes lovingly of his mother, Shirley, and his grandparents. Reading this book, it becomes clear that Shirley inspired and informed Wallace's art, and her financial contributions to maintain their family allowed Wallace to produce his many artistic creations.



Tosh Berman (left) gesturing tantrically with family friend Allen Ginsberg. (Photo: Wallace Berman)

Tosh recalls his parents did not pressure him academically, saying "…I don't believe Wallace ever had any vision of my future." Acknowledging, "One remarkable thing I did have in my favor was parents who surrounded me with books; my curiosity engendered a lifelong reading habit in me."

In the book *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and his Circle* (2015), Berman's friend, actor and film director (*Easy Rider*), Dennis Hopper, observed, "Wallace was always a mystery to me, and he was very glamorous…He was a quiet, gentle, humble person, and he had this strange aura about him that was removed, yet not hostile—he was a guy you couldn't really reach. I don't know anybody who didn't respect him, and



Tosh Berman (Photo by Christopher Ho}

we all deferred to him because he had a very spiritual quality. He was the guy. Wallace was the guru."

Berman would have disagreed with Hopper's description of him as a "guru." As remembered by his son, Berman was an unassuming, private, non-materialistic person who never voted, never owned anything in his own name, and the only piece of identification he possessed was a California driver's license. Tosh recalls his father made their furniture, and "I never knew a time when Wallace was not an artist."

Regarding literary history, between 1955-1964, Berman co-created nine issues of the journal, *Semina,* publishing friends like Diane di Prima, Allen Ginsberg, Alexander Trocchi, Bob Kaufman, Philip Lamantia, Robert Duncan, John Wieners, and art by George Herms, Jess, and others.

Remembering Robert Duncan and Jess, Tosh recalls, "Over the years, they gave me a lot of their Oz books." Of Duncan: "He looked just like a poet to me…His humor came off clearly, even to a kid like me. He was gossipy, yes, but with a sharp intelligence to his commentary."

Of Michael McClure: "…McClure was the prototype for the romantic poet. He would wear a chunky scarf as if it were naturally appended to his neck…Michael has a star-like quality." Wallace designed the poster for McClure's L.A. performance of his provocative play, *The Beard*.

Wallace hosted Andy Warhol, who filmed parts of his *Tarzan and Jane Regained…Sort Of* (1964) with Taylor Mead in the Berman home in Beverly Glen, Topanga Canyon. Tosh appears as "Boy" in the film. Dennis Hopper also appears in this Warhol film, and, in later years, Hopper himself gave Wallace and Shirley Berman a role (in the commune scene) in the film he directed and co-authored, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, *Easy Rider*.

Tosh recalls his family being invited by Toni Basil, who would later collaborate with John Lennon, David Byrne, David Bowie and others, to the dress rehearsal for The T.A.M.I Show (Teen Age Music International), 1964, and being introduced to Mick Jagger: "Mick rubbed the top of my head and said, 'Cute tyke.'" At the show, "My father also met Brian Jones, which was the start of a lasting friendship between them." Tosh recalls, "Whenever the Stones were in Los Angeles, Brian would come to the house to listen to records and drink wine all night." Tosh recalls hearing "Mostly jazz recordings, but also Glen Gould was part of the soundtrack for these late night meetings between Brian and my parents."

Another close musician friend of Berman's was Canadian Neil Young, then living in Topanga Canyon."Without a doubt, Neil Young was *the* artist of Topanga…As a young teenager, I always thought Neil was the king and the canyon was his kingdom. Topanga, in other words, was Neil-Land."

Tosh describes being invited by Young to his Topanga home to hear *After the Goldrush* (1970), which Young had originally written as a soundtrack for an unproduced film co-authored by Dean Stockwell and Herb Bermann, who had also

(continued on page 14)

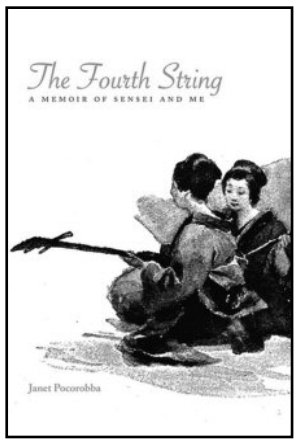
The Fourth String

Maryse Cardin

From the moment Janet Pocorobba has a shamisen put onto her lap in her teacher's tiny Tokyo flat, that's it, the world as she knows it ceases to exist. That instant changes everything, and she charts a new life course. She gives up plans, airplane ticket back home, and live-in boyfriend, to stay in Japan and study with this teacher.

In this candid memoir, Pocorobba recounts the years she spent in devotion to her teacher and to learning the intricacies of the shamisen — a traditional Japanese three string instrument famously difficult to play.

It's an intense teacher-student relationship and learning curve from the get go. Pocorobba is enlisted to perform on stage immediately following her first lesson. She quickly becomes a favourite, a loyal student who studies and practices with vivacity and dedication. Playing the instrument and studying under her teacher soon become all-consuming. She practices her fingers to the bone, and is on a constant trek to her teacher's home for more instruction.



The Fourth String: A Memoir of Sensei and Me
Janet Pocorobba
Stone Bridge, 2019

Traditional arts and crafts are taught in Japan in a strict protocol from generation to generation, teacher to apprentice pupil. Sensei, the Japanese word for teacher, means "one who came before." Pocorobba's sensei may have come before, but she's a maverick, living and teaching outside the traditional prescribed system.

Janet Pocorobba

Sensei teaches foreigners this traditional instrument— all but dying in popularity in Japan — in a bid to keep the art form alive. Pocorobba describes it as a "musical mission with foreigners." This mission feels in some ways like a message in a bottle thrown to sea in the hope it finds a recipient. She gives enthusiastically to these foreigners: free lessons and instruction, the use of her precious shamisens, opportunities to perform. Not all are as appreciative as Pocorobba. Some reward her by stealing her instruments.

Soon Pocorabba's entire life is enmeshed with her teacher's. The relationship gets messy and confusing for Pocorobba to navigate. She lives in an apartment sponsored by her teacher who weighs in on her romantic relationships, as well as all other details of her life. She feels jealous when the teacher takes on new favourites, afraid of losing her.

"Back then there was only Sensei and me. My immersion was total. It was the only way. And so the fact that everything in my rooms was hers was natural. There was little that I would acquire over the next few years that was not."

Pocorobba takes it all on as a salvation, a path to escaping her past and becoming someone else. She's in search of validation and greater life meaning. Years later, when the relationship sours to the point that she must re-empower herself and step back out bravely into the world, she writes:

"In my race to become an expert, a transformation had taken place, but not in the way I had imagined. Sensei did not bestow a jeweled, pope-like hand and anoint me. It had come from within, at great cost, and it had come out of my own past, even as I tried to escape it. My mistake was not wanting to change, but to be changed. Each mistake was obvious. Each was a teacher. Mastery lay not in mystery, in finding something what was not there, but in learning to use what was."

It's a story too about beauty: the music they play, the kimonos they wear, the traditions they uphold, also that of nature and the passing seasons. It's also a tale of these two women living in freedom. Pocorobba is free of all her former obligations, permitting her to dive into this world, to study and practice, to surrender to her teacher. Her sensei is also free, remarkable in a society where women's freedom is strictly curtailed by patriarchy and traditional ways. Sensei is free of the many constraints of a Japanese marriage. Free of the traditional obligations of her music lineage. Free to dedicate every moment outside of work to music, and to teaching foreigners her beloved music.

There's also great joy in this shared love for music and the shamisen. After sensei declares that playing the shamisen is all about spirit and heart, Pocorroba writes:. "She was right. Music had nothing to do with culture, with Japan even. It was a bond stronger than culture or family or blood, and she and I were inside it, drawn together by an invisible fourth string that hovered over the shamisen's three."

Maryse Cardin is a regular contributor to PPRB. Her previous article was "My Year of Dirt and Water."

TOSH *(continued from page 13)*

written with Captain Beefheart, for his album, *Safe as Milk,* 1967.

Stockwell, in 1977, would design the album cover of Young's *American Stars N Bars*, and collaborate with Young on his *Human Highway* film. Stockwell owned and played an old pedal organ which he gave to Neil Young, featured on many of Young's songs.

The Beatles' admired Berman, and a Stockwell photo of Berman appears on the collage cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) that was itself influenced by Wallace's collage assemblages. Tosh observes, with irony. "Approximately 32 million people bought *Sgt. Pepper's*, and I can't fathom that many people looking at Wallace's face. It's paradoxical: he liked to be invisible in a crowd, and yet there was, totally unfamiliar to the masses who bought the album."

In the summer of 1967, the Berman family visited London, England. Tosh recalls attending The Dialectics of Liberation conference with his parents, featuring speakers that included Thich Nhat Hanh, Allen Ginsberg, Emmet Grogan, William Burroughs, Stokely Carmichael, Gregory Bateson, R.D. Laing, and others.

This City Lights publication is a special one. With a Preface by actress and poet, Amber Tamblyn, who years ago raised money for medical treatment required by poet Diane di Prima, this is a book about relationships and inter-connections between Wallace Berman and so many creative others that moved within his orbit. Wallace Berman died young, hit by a drunk and stoned driver, a well-known Topanga Canyon drug dealer, whose lawyer was Robert Shapiro, later one of O.J Simpson's lawyers. Berman succumbed to injuries, dying in the early hours of his 50th birthday. In a travesty of justice, the person convicted of his death was released following three months of a six month sentence.

Tosh Berman, under his imprint, Tam Tam Books, taken from the film, *Princess Tam Tam* (1935) starring Josephine Baker, has published writers as diverse as the founder of the Situationists, Guy Debord, and the infamous French gangster, Jacques Mesrine, amongst others.

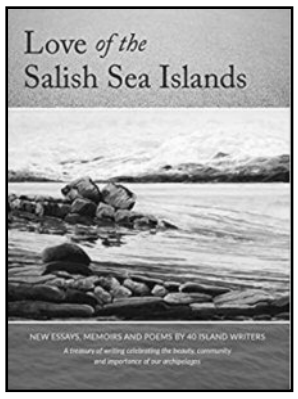
In this intriguing, intelligent, heartfelt testimonial, Tosh gracefully, brings his father alive bearing witness to his father's inimitable spirit.

Colin James Sanders is a foundational contributor to PRRB. He writes from Gibsons, B.C.

Love of the Salish Sea Islands

Paul Falardeau

The islands that populate the waters of the Salish Sea, an area that takes its name from its Indigenous people and encompasses the area between the east coast of Vancouver Island and the mainland of B.C., are a genuine archipelago. Here is a magical place of outsiders, free thinkers and other eccentrics, a haven for those looking to leave behind city life. It is a vanishing dream. The Georgia Basin, of which the Salish Sea is a part, is considered one of the three most endangered eco-regions in Canada. In *Love of the Salish Sea Islands,* a new collection from Mother Tongue Publishing, publisher Mona Fertig has assembled a veritable who's who of island writers to chronicle this time and place on the Salish Sea Islands. In light of the imminent danger facing this unique cultural and biological ecosystem, this work feels essential. The writers here capture a taste of the Salish Sea and its inhabitants, human and non-human in a way that is sure to enchant both islanders and those who still only dream of one day living on one of these fleeting paradises.



Love of the Salish Sea Islands
Ed. Mona Fertig
Mother Tongue Publishing, 2019
215 pp. $23.95

The islands of the Salish Sea are as unique as they are multiple. Lively communities here combine settlers, indigenous peoples and a natural world that is both stunningly unique and endlessly present. These islands act as a refuge for people who are different from the norm of the mainland and the mainstream. The composition of the work that makes up *Love of the Salish Sea Islands* is varied, mirroring the complexity of the islands, with writers sharing their reflections on island life in memoir, essay and verse. Accompanying their words are oil paintings of Salt Spring artist, Nicola Wheston. In its physical presence alone, *Salish Sea* is beautiful and inspiring. The breadth of its approaches to understanding what is truly unknowable about life, place and community here, nonetheless presents an effectively rounded view of the islands.

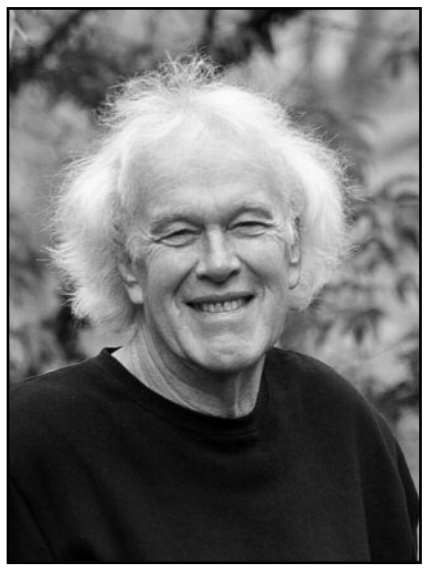
Artist Nicola Wheston

One small snag, as contributor Chris Arnett points out, is that, "you don't have to look far to see that there is a dearth of Salish voice in this volume." Perhaps, as he suggests, this is representative of the current ethnography of the islands. It would have been nice to hear from a few more Indigenous voices, with no slight to Fertig or the many fantastic authors whose work is included here. The quality of their words speaks for itself, but it is a small burr of irritation that that this absence exists. To their credit, contributors do note this, like Arnett, and others pay homage and respect to the first peoples of the Salish Sea. The work of indigenous writer Taiaike Alfred, "Temosen," opens the collection and is not only a powerful, reflective work, but sets the tone of reverence and reflection that dominates the book. "I think we go to the island so we can experience being Indigenous in a place where there is no constant and overwhelming human-formed reminders of how very difficult it is to be Indigenous," writes Alfred, while reflecting on his time hunting with his son on Tumbo Island, which they rename Temosen, in a silent act of decolonization. "We're drawn to… it as a space where we can transgress and escape the regulated feeling of the places we have to live our lives every other day, free to live out in a small way our own imagined Indigenous selves."

The idea of being "free to live out… our own imagined selves" presides over the text as each writer in turn puzzles the undefinable magic of the Salish Sea and the undeniable draw of its Islands. Ann Eriksson, a biologist, reflects on her time on Galiano, Retreat, and Thetis in "Inspiration Island." Though her academic understanding of the islands is evident as she lists names for the different species of plant and animal surrounding her, Eriksson's interest in the island gradually shifts from scientific to emotional. The text drips with passion in lines like, "love took you there. Built you a home where you'd be content to die of old age, rocking in a chair on the deck watching the sun sinking scarlet behind blue-grey mountains in the distance." The narrative that begins in an evocative second person and builds to an affecting climax, before it suddenly snaps into a sober first person, re-rooted in a present where Eriksson, now labouring under a heavy sense of loss, worries about the tenuous fragility of the place she is connected to so deeply.

Often, folks coming to the Salish Sea are running away from something. Be it loss or consumerism, the waters here seem to have a healing quality about them. In "Swimming in the Salish Sea", Maria Coffey writes about her accidental arrival in the Salish Sea, and how her time swimming in the waters there cured a deathly fear of deep water that she had earned a decade early after nearly drowning near Morocco. For Coffey, "swimming became a spiritual necessity," and for many the reality of the islands is more about water than rock.

Poet Peter Levitt writes, "The sea is all distance, a love/ without end or true horizon,/ and yet these waters make a home,/ circling rocky coasts." His poem, "Orca Wedding," remembers his arrival to Salt Spring Island, and the blessing bestowed on he and his partner by a pod of Orca whales. Another poet, Zoe Landale remembers peering out a porthole, "at seventeen, naked" inside the belly of a boat. Now fifty years on, she examines the foundation of her commitment to the place, "The softness of the morning slots you home/ in a way that you don't understand. Your heart twists like a key/ turns in a lock: what just happened? Back at the porthole,/ you touch your fingertips to lips, blow a kiss to the shore, say, *I'm going to learn/ this coast. Wherever I wake up, I'm going to know where I am.*" Again and again, writers note the otherworldly visual of bioluminescence, a chemical reaction that serves as a defense mechanism for plankton known as dinoflagellates. The Salish Sea is prime territory to see these microscopic animals emit light. Christina Johnston-Dean describes her first encounter off Gambier Island, "Ecstatically I watched the swirl of light created as my hands moved through the water and splashed droplets forward and skyward." These lights can be so bright as to allow reading and they can make the underwater world seem to mirror the starry sky above. "Filled with awe," Johnston-Dean continues, "I became more mindful of how precious it is to live in the moment."



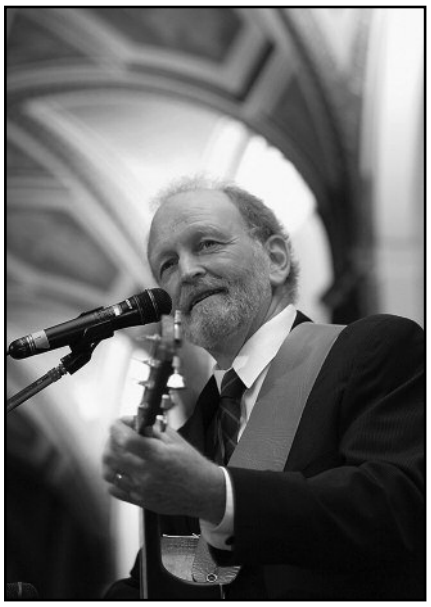
Des Kennedy

It's not only the healing waters of the Salish Sea that draws people to the islands, but the way in which the islands themselves are small examples leftover of how the world once thrived. Des Kennedy, who bought eleven acres on Denman Island for the stunningly low price of $6,500, also stayed there for fifty years. In "The Inadvertent Genius of Young Love," he writes about the lessons he has learned from living back to nature there. "The guileless young love that drew us here has aged into a richly textured affection. Love for a place of exceptional beauty and safety and peace," he proclaims with deep reverence:

> For the great privilege of being gradually enticed into a lifeway orchestrated by the turning of the Earth and the passing of seasons. For quiet days spent in touching intimacy with other life forms all around us. For the creation of true community, bringing together gifted and eccentric characters, new people and old, learning to coalesce not for personal gain but for the common good, for the sake of the earth, providing opportunity for those who come after us to perhaps experience one tiny microcosm of what a better world would look like.

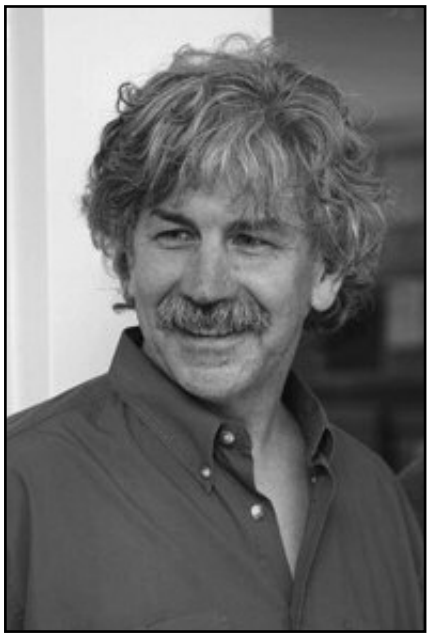
Besides becoming a poet, award-winning journalist, broadcaster and environmental activist, Kennedy and his wife have turned their eleven acres into gardens that have been featured in books, magazines and calendars. Though islands and sea alike

inspire, their fragility is never far from the page. Like Eriksson and Kennedy, novelist William Deverell notes that, "it's a struggle to preserve the islands of the Salish Sea from those whose vision of them is clouded by dollar signs." He also suggests that many old-timers feel a stress that comes from balancing conservatism with sustainable growth.



Valdy

The singer-songwriter, Valdy, coined the expression "islands are arguments surrounded by water." When it comes to tickling out the finer points of community on an island, this expression rings true. As Stephen Hume points out, these islands are palimpsests, a term borrowed here to describe the enigmatic nature of the island's past and the hope for utopia on the complex and often complicated islands. A palimpsest is "parchment on which a previously erased or obscured text can be read through what's been written over it." A fitting description for the many layers of the Salish Sea Island's history that Hume describes as a series of palimpsests, "an awareness of otherness, of dimly apprehended revenants, of older narratives that slowly surface through the glossing of history." This patchwork of people and events has not made fostering engaged and progressive communities here easy, but they have nonetheless thrived. Katherine Palmer Gordon suggests that Valdy's words do in fact ring true, and many islanders seem to need to argue to breath. She does not think this is born of hatred, but of a stubborn kind of love for their home.



Rex Weyler

Late in the collection, Rex Weyler, notably a founder from the early days of the Greenpeace movement, has a standout piece called "Blue Dasher." In meditative fashion, a small image reverbates outward until the author's reflections on its minutiae reveal deeper and deeper readings. In this case, Weyler studies a dragonfly, a Blue Dasher sitting beside a lagoon on Cortes Island. He begins by touching on the evolution and biology of the insect, its marvelous eyes, and the fascination humans throughout history have held for it. Eventually, this becomes a reflection on how Indigenous and settler naming conventions vary and how their overlapping histories have provided some strange place names in the Salish Sea—and more than a few controversies. Weyler then launches into a discussion of the irony that a place like this has been errantly named after the bloodthirsty colonizer, Hernan Cortes. He suggests a rename to *Clytosin*, from an original Salish name for the island's lagoon, meaning "water on both sides." These islands are layers of stories laid down by the Indigenous folks who originally inhabited them and again by the waves of settlers who have come here to find refuge, healing and rebirth. Now they are one of the few places that we can still call magical, without any cynicism. Whatever draws people here, has also driven them to protect and preserve this place, but its future still hangs on a knife's edge. As Weyler sagely observes, the dragonfly is old, "he had his moment in the living miracle and may not have the energy to fly." Not everything lasts. Here is a warning: if we are not careful, these islands and this sea may soon perish. It is also a reminder of humility. Like the dragonfly, we only have a short time in this place. We ought to enjoy our life in places like these, because we too will soon be submerged into the palimpsest. We must choose to live well and respect those who came before, what they built; we must consider those who will come after us, and what we may yet build up for them.

Paul Falardeau is a poet and writer living in Vancouver, BC. He enjoys gardening, reading and cooking. Having worked as a journalist and brewer, he now finds himself teaching English in his city's secondary schools.

DR WADE DAVIS *(continued from page 6)*

industrial developments.
WD: Well, I haven't been so successful. I tried.

JB: I've wondered what's happening there now.
WD: You can look up a couple of things I've written recently. There was something in *The Narwal* just a month ago. The Red Chris mine, on Todagin Mountain, is just the most egregious example of corruption that I know of in all my lifetime in growing up in British Columbia. I think it's extraordinary that it never got more attention. Almost a billion dollars of tax money spent to essentially subsidize one mine that employs three hundred people for twenty years. All set in motion by a government beholden to the owner of that company. I mean it's so corrupt, it's behind imagining, but it doesn't seem to have gotten much traction. The problem is that Canadians like the idea of the North, but none of them go there. It's very difficult to get Canadians to think of anything that exists outside of the major cities.

JB: How can readers in the Fraser Valley act on the advice which you've quoted Gary Snyder as saying…
WD: Stay put?

JB: Yes.
WD: Yeah I think that that's a wonderful idea, fidelity to place. That's one of the things we can certainly learn from First Nations. Even when the Red Chris mine went ahead—not five kilometres from our lodge—I promised my daughters and I promised my friends that I would never abandon the valley.

The advice I have for young people is something Peter Matthews said, which is that anyone who thinks they can change the world is both wrong and dangerous. What he meant by that is obvious. He had in mind people like Mao and Hitler and Pol Pot. None of these people thought that they were doing the wrong thing, right? But look what the consequences were of their megalomania and their zeal. Another way of looking at it is that you do have an obligation to bear witness to what's going on, which is what one does as a writer. At the heart of that comment is a Buddhist notion that life is not about a destination. The destination is a state of mind. The pilgrim is not focused on where he or she is going to get to. It's a process of transformation, the goal is a state of mind. What I mean by that is that if you think of life as a series of encounters that you're going to win or lose, you run the risk of becoming disillusioned and embittered in the wake of a series of, quote unquote, losses. If you expect there to be a moment, which is something that is sort of instilled in us through the Christian faith, where good is somehow going to triumph over evil, and you set your life up with a mission—a kind of Sir Galahad mission to be the force of good—well, you really run the risk that you'll become exhausted and disappointed. The truth is that you'll never vanquish evil. When Lord Krishna was asked by a disciple why there is evil in the universe, he said "To thicken the plot". In other words, the Buddhists have a very different idea, as do the Vedic scholars. It's, you know, evil exists, and instead of thinking I'm going to triumph over evil which is sort of a Christian idea, it's more healthy to think of it in terms of "Okay, I've got a choice: what side do I want to be on? The side of darkness or the side of light?" If you recognize that in choosing for example the side of what Christians might call righteousness, or the side of light, or pure thought, love, and compassion in the eyes of the Buddhist, it doesn't mean you're going to vanquish evil. You're just deciding what perspective and what place and point of view you're going to occupy in your life. The advantage of this is that it allows you to continue. In other words you don't become disillusioned; you have no expectations.

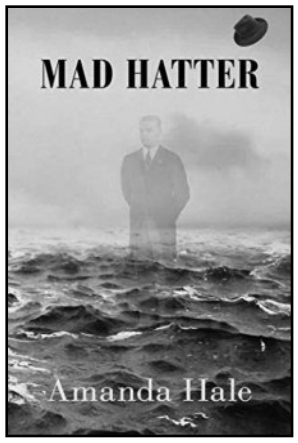
The British Columbia government allowed what I think is demonstrably a series of egregious acts of systemic and grotesque corruption which led to the destruction of the biggest wildlife sanctuary in British Columbia. I don't let that bother me anymore. It happened. I did what I could. It happened. That's not a copout; it's a way that I can conserve my energy for the next fight, because there's always going to be a next fight. It's like a young author who published their first book, or a student who gets their PhD, or a kid who graduates from college as if the graduation marks an end-point as opposed to a beginning. Life is an ongoing process. One works, all the time. I'm now writing my twenty-third book and it's just as difficult as the first, but I can be doing this because I no longer think about the first twenty-two. I'm here in the moment, working right now on what I hope will be a beautiful thing.

Retired magician and beginner gardener Jesse Boyes writes from B.C.'s Fraser Valley. He can be found looking for thirsty succulents.

MAD HATTER

Carol Ann Sokoloff

Amanda Hale has a challenging family story that she wisely chose to write as fiction. Few of us can say we really know or understand our parents, even if we spent the majority of our lives with them. But the author's father disappeared when she was very young and it has taken Hale, an English-born Canadian poet and novelist, decades to grapple with this mystery. In the course of exploration she uncovered a disturbing chronology dating from prior to World War II where her father found himself on the wrong side of history. Like many in the British upper classes, Christopher Hale was an ardent supporter of Oswald Moseley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists. Christopher Hale had been ensconced in his family's thriving hat business until his increasing zeal for the British Union caused him to desert a comfortable life with his refined wife Cynthia and their children to take up an increasingly fanatical mission.



Mad Hatter
Amanda Hale
Guernica Editions
462 pages
2019

Told from multiple points of view, *Mad Hatter* is a sensitive and poetic inquiry into the nature of family, misguided idealism and conditions in the United Kingdom leading to and during the stressful wartime period. Hale uses her own personal story as a spotlight on the forces at play in Britain and in Europe during this critical period. It is a delicate subject and one applauds both the author and publisher for daring to tackle it. While today we shrink from the notion that Britain came close to accepting an appeasement of Hitler and Nazi Germany, it must be remembered that at the time anti-Semiticism was acceptable and many of the privileged classes were keen to have Hitler subdue what they considered to be the scourge of Communism. The author's treatment of her father strikes a precarious balance, showing Christopher as 'mad' (hence the title) while still having empathy for this person whom she portrays as considering himself a pacifist, a warrior for peace.

Mad Hatter employs multiple voices to unfold it's complicated tale and for the most part this approach is seamless as the narration slips from first to third person in rotating chapters. Indeed, there are several narrators. There is an objective narrator who writes in the third person and shows us Christopher, starting at the time of his first detainment on suspicion of siding with the enemy, once Britain has declared war on Germany in 1940. It also show us his relations with Cynthia. his refined, supportive and increasingly mystified wife. This objective narrator follows Christopher through various captivities and into regained freedom and the return to family life. But the Christopher who returns has changed, has taken on a yet more fanatical mission and this narrator tracks his break from the family and his actions until an eventual apparent suicide.

But there is another narrator and this one speaks to us in the first person. Hers is an italicized voice that transcends time, that speaks from both the present and the past. We meet this voice on the first page, speaking prior to her own conception as the child of Christopher and Cynthia Hale.

"The head of our family was missing, drowned they say…" Hale writes. *"I lived in his body before I became myself… His presence lingers like the perfume of a woman long after she has left the room. This perfume is memory – my memory of unconditional love for the man I scarcely knew."*

This italicized voice intermittently interrupts the narrative throughout Part One of *Mad Hatter*, to comment, shed light or reflect upon events. Events such as her own conception and birth as Katie, the youngest child of the family, conceived on Christopher's first visit home after his initial detention.

The most engaging voice in the novel, however, belongs to the young Irish housekeeper, Mary Byrne, whom one suspects the author most bonded with in early childhood. It is Mary, who speaks to us also in the first person, in a lilting Irish brogue, who cares for the children, keeps Cynthia company during her husband's absences, who watches and listens and intuits a dark atmosphere disturbing the calm appearance of a privileged lifestyle.

> "If you could have stood beside me at the window that day and seen the Master tossing Birdie up in the air, Cynthia pushing Charlotte on the swing, and Jimmy sweeping at the grass with his cricket bat, you would have thought they were the perfect family, but you would have been wrong. All you had to do was watch those children in their Magic Circle. It was not play they were at but something desperate and dark with a terrible innocence about it."


Amanda Hale

It is from Mary that we learn about Cynthia with whom she develops a close relationship, about the household and its ghosts, about the strange Master, about how someone Irish feels caught up in a British war climate, about children and their feelings and needs, and about the heart and the search for love. Mary, whose own brother is engaged in the war effort, gradually understands the truth of Christopher's politics and eventually is let go after an uncharacteristic outburst in which she calls him a Nazi.

With the most likeable character jettisoned from the narrative, Hale begins Part Two of the novel, again with the italicized narrator's voice assuring us that Mary will reappear and that she herself, now in the voice of the youngest child Katie, will continue the story. So in Part Two Katie shares the unfolding episodes of Christopher's unhingement and flight from the family and of the ways in which Cynthia and the children cope. As promised Mary Byrne reappears and in the end a surprising connection between these close characters is revealed

The use of various voices is perhaps an ingenious approach to sketching the details of a truth that is largely unknown. Drawing on her own memory, family lore and the little evidence that exists, Hale uses this device to flesh out with masterful storytelling the experiences and inner awareness of a variety of richly-detailed characters in an intriguing historical period. The objective narrator that observes the mysterious Christopher is a steady voice throughout the book. The child who loves and misses Daddy and longs for a return to family stability is also well expressed. But it is Mary with her Irish lilt and humble origins, her common sense and loving nature, that makes the story sing.

While the multiple voices help the author tell this difficult tale, they occasionally present challenges for the reader. The opening with the disembodied voice of the author pre-conception, is somewhat oblique and one suspects was written last and perhaps needs to be read again after finishing the novel to fully comprehend. But on the whole the writing is stirring and evocative, the characters come to life with deft strokes of imagery and dialogue. And even Christopher, whose motivations can't fully be comprehended and whose ending neither the author nor the reader can be certain about, becomes someone we care about.

Mad Hatter touches on several fascinating subjects from this time period, many of which re-echo in our own. Matters of class, culture, idealism, fanaticism, the nature of the family, the role of women, the vulnerability of children and the suffering of all parties engaged in the climate of war permeate the novel. All these elements come together, as the different voices, in this well-told story of an extraordinary time – a remarkable effort which deserves to be widely read.

Carol Ann Sokoloff is a poet, author, editor and jazz vocalist/songwriter. She has published several books including *Eternal Lake O'Hara* (poetry and history) and *Colours Everywhere You Go* (for children); and produced *Let Go!*, a CD of jazz standards and originals. She is based in Victoria, BC, where she teaches popular continuing studies writing programs through the University of Victoria.

He Sings the New Body Electric

William Kuhns

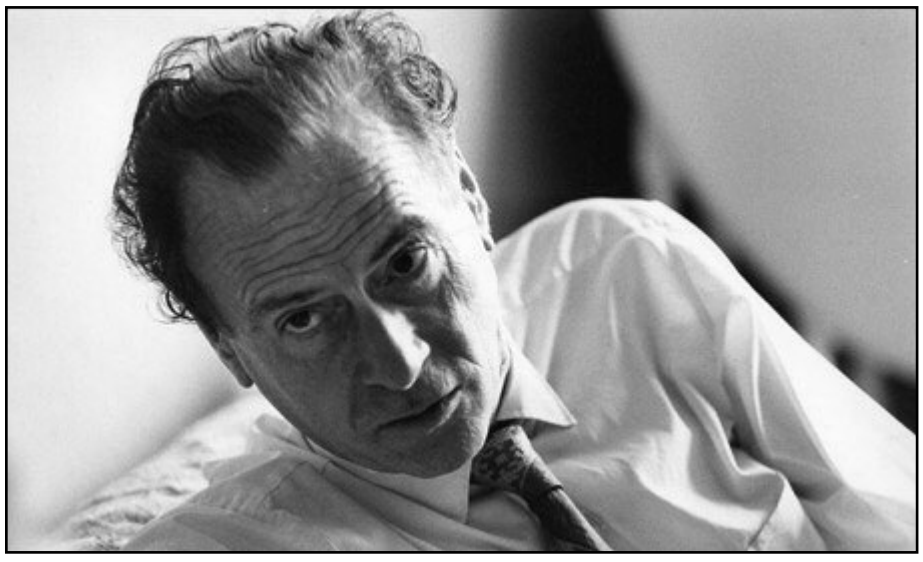
A frequent beef against Canada's most eminent thinker, Marshall McLuhan, since his death in 1980, has been that he left behind no firm legacy — no school of followers, no organized means of updating his thinking to apply to newer developments. That claim can now be roundly contested. McLuhan was foremost a poet. As Norman Mailer said of him, "He could only think in metaphors," The one possible legacy for great poets is to inspire later poets. And this we find, most salubriously, with the newly published, magnificent prose poem on social media, *The Charge in the Global Membrane.*

The Charge in the Global Membrane
B.W. Powe
NeoPoiesis Press

If you had ever paused to ask what would McLuhan have made of social media, I urge you to read B.W. Powe's *The Charge in the Global Membrane*. It's a deep dive into the world of social media, by a poet who channels McLuhan with audacity, grace and vivid perception.

Powe, an established Canadian poet and essayist, author of 15 books, knew McLuhan intimately. Powe belonged to the graduate class of six interrupted by McLuhan's massive stroke in September of 1979, and permanently curtailed by the great man's death 15 months later. Powe has shown himself to be one of McLuhan's ablest memoirists and analysts, through essays such as "Marshall McLuhan: the Put-On," and particularly his monumental study of McLuhan-as-teacher, alongside that other iconic English teacher at the University of Toronto in the 1970s: *Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye — Apocalypse and Alchemy* (2014).

Powe has designed *The Charge in the Global Membrane* as a roadmap to older generations, and a plea to younger ones whom Powe calls the Net-gens. *The Charge* is part personal diary, part extended meditation, part lyric poetry. Prismatic in concept and form, the book has discarded chapters, chapter titles and page numbering. Typography glides in and out of changing fonts. The sole breaks are the arresting full-



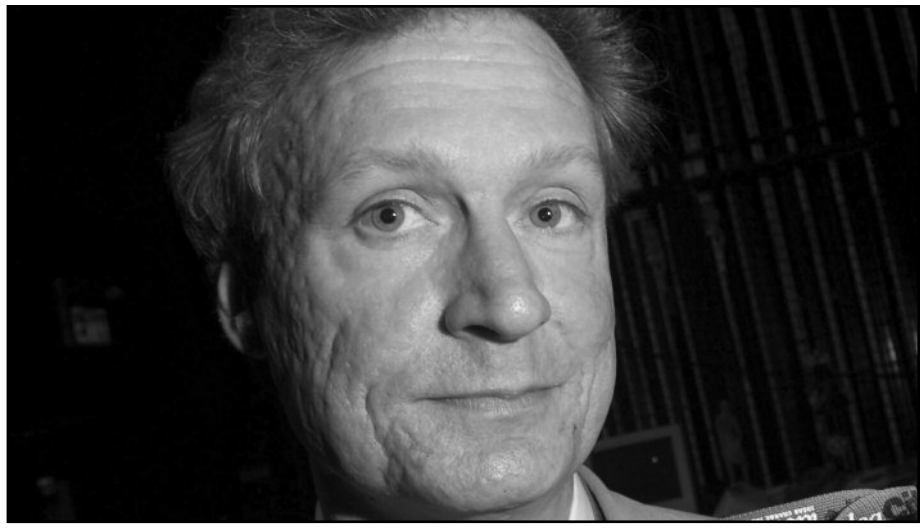
Marshall McLuhan

color photographs by globe-trotting Marshall Soules, depicting street art by young artists: almost entirely young faces, themselves uncompleted, masked, hooded in iron, scratched-over, faces hidden, defaced, and defiled, much like the earliest promises of social media.

Powe's treatment of social media strikes and revisits many McLuhan's themes. These themes, mostly developed by McLuhan in the 1970s, may be unfamiliar to readers of *Understanding Media* (1964) and *The Media Is the Massage* (1967).

"Communication isn't transportation, it's transformation," McLuhan announced. Social media makes that point stick more acutely than TV ever did, particularly after revelations of the role of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica in the election of Donald Trump. Here is Powe on living in a deeply transformative time:

> The Donald J. Trump political-entertainment phenomenon is a crucial moment in the worldwide pulse; he embodies crises in the communication's charge, and he channels and symbolizes enraged reactions to its flux.
>
> [Trump's] appearance is a moment of spiritual and moral emergency in the webs of universal sensitivity and impressionable consciousness. Why? How? He takes us close to the hyper-evolutionary terror, the destructiveness that tears at us when we fear we're losing a sense of purpose and of selfhood.
>
> Reflecting more on Gaia and the communications' envelope, on how quickly our minds and sensibilities have transformed in the membrane's evolutionary jumpstart…



B.W. Powe

McLuhan insisted that by living at the speed of light we become disembodied, and when we lose our bodies we forego our earlier sense of identity, leaving us exposed to anxieties that rouse dread and provoke violence. Powe echoes and amplifies those themes.

> Democracies become vulnerable in such skittish conditions. People feel harassed, battered, but also tuned out, blasé. Who'll stop the reign of speed? Some say, "Who cares?" The faster things go, the more events flick into ephemeral caricatures. Speed feeds numbing out and fatigue, the sense that things are over-heated and over-saturated.
>
> Rapidly morphing conditions don't allow for easy adaptations. People are susceptible to crack-ups and breakdowns in perception, turnovers of anxiety and the heightening of awareness.
>
> Journalists and editorialists scathingly speak of the crisis of "Dumbing Down" in the electronic news domains. Truly what's at play is a…form of Traumatic Stress Syndrome – "Numbing Down," we should call it.

There is one McLuhan passage that most acutely evokes social media. It's likely the passage that provided Powe with his title. In it, McLuhan wrote

> In a world in which we are all ingesting and digesting one another there can be no obscenity or pornography or decency. Such is the law of electric media which stretch the nerves to form a global membrane or enclosure.

Note how McLuhan balances "decency" with "obscenity" and "pornography": suggesting that under electronic conditions, our devils and our angels jostle like people jammed too tightly in the lineup to exit a plane.

Powe keeps this paradox alive throughout *The Charge*, endlessly see-sawing between the gloried and the ghastly, the transcendence-seeking and the trolling:

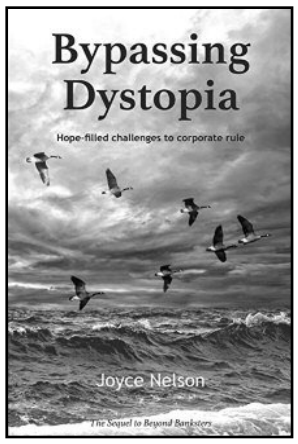
> The paradox: loneliness and connectivity merge when our locations are everywhere and nowhere in the membrane's worldwide womb.
>
> "Troll emotion" may mean too much emotion or no emotion at all. Posting a "Laugh" could be joyful and derisive at the same time.

(continued on page 39)

Bypassing Dystopia

Rose Morrison

Bypassing Dystopia: Hope-filled Challenges to Corporate Rule is Joyce Nelson's sequel to her 2016 book *Beyond Banksters*. Happily, familiarity with *Beyond Banksters* is not prerequisite to the understanding and enjoyment of *Bypassing Dystopia*. Also, it is convenient that although chapter topics are consecutive, each chapter can stand on its own. Not only does Nelson examine and explain the adverse effects of rampant neoliberalism, she joyfully documents recent, effective activities of ordinary people "kicking back" against practices that benefit the extremely rich while increasing the chasm between that elite group and the poor. Nelson has made a "dirty dozen" list of aspects she believes to be pertinent to "trickle down theory" neoliberalism. She discusses several of these facets in *Bypassing Dystopia.*



Bypassing Dystopia: Hope-filled Challenges to Corporate Rule
Joyce Nelson
Watershed Sentinel Books, 2018

Large energy projects such as the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion (a project to twin the existing pipe so that almost three times its volume of "dilbit" can be piped from Alberta to tidewater in British Columbia) require large amounts of capital. Nelson begins *Bypassing Dystopia* by investigating "the money behind the money" and relating how this is in a state of change. This pipeline project, proposed by then-owner Kinder Morgan, was approved by the federal government; but by neither the current British Columbia NDP-Green party alliance government, nor half the B.C. populace. Nelson notes that, along with a large number of public protests and some work disruptions, the 150 signatories of the First Nations' Treaty Alliance Against Tar Sands Expansion proved to be a formidable opponent to Kinder Morgan's plan. Following Treaty Alliance meetings with Desjardins Group, Desjardins temporarily suspended investments in new tar sands pipelines. Similarly, in another 2017 example of ordinary people voicing strategic objections to unsustainable mega projects, Montrealers mass-protested in front of pension fund Caisse de Placement et Depot du Quebec, demanding that the pension giant divest itself of all investments in fossil fuel extraction. After a less than satisfactory IPO, and fearing more risks, reviews and hold ups, Kinder Morgan paused all but essential Trans Mountain Pipeline work.[1] Nelson notes that around the world, cities and other organizations are considering divestment of their oil and gas stocks. She quotes *350org.* founder Bill McKibben commenting "… overnight, the battle to save the planet has shifted from political to largely financial."

Cedar George-Parker addresses the crowd as protesters block an entrance to the Trans Mountain's property in Burnaby, BC. (Photo: Darryl Dyck/Canadian Press)

Nelson notes that large sums withdrawn from fossil fuel investments have few places to go; most Canadian banks are heavily invested in fossil fuels.While credit unions might be ideal because of their local accountability they cannot currently be insured for large enough sums. She discusses the growing support for public city banks with charters that incorporate both human and environmental rights. Such banks could save taxpayers millions of dollars in interest. Nelson sees such novel alliances as one route toward bypassing the dystopia that attends extreme neoliberalism. Some of the other interesting topics presented in this book of eighteen succinct chapters are: quantitative easing, tax havens, the cashless society, and continental water sharing.

Quantitative easing (QE), explains Nelson, is basically money creation by a central bank; ostensibly to shift the economy in a desired direction. Having tracked the practice in several countries since 2008, she concludes that the benefit of QE has gone to the very rich. Such "magic money trees," she writes, "have not only been used to subsidize climate disaster, but also to exacerbate inequality …" Her research reveals that QE millions have not "trickled down," they have gone into stock markets and real estate. What's needed, say some of her sources, is "People's QE" money that would go into the real economy.

Joyce Nelson

Across the globe multinational companies have been eroding national tax bases by moving their profits into tax havens. Nelson is particularly critical of all the loopholes that Canadian money can slip through; one source claims that Canada leads the world in the number of tax treaties and agreements that allow multinational corporations to escape the taxman. Nelson is, however, positive that the situation can be changed *if* there is a swift and sufficient push from the Canadian public.

A cashless society may seem convenient to those who have bank accounts and credit cards; but it can be crushing for those who do not; and for businesses that sell inexpensive items for cash. In "Resisting the Push for a cashless society," Nelson gives examples of the dire results of moving swiftly to no cash, especially when retirement of the lowest denomination coins or banknotes are attendant to this switch. Ralph Nader, writes Nelson, describes forced cashlessness as "corporate captivity and coercion." Security can be another problem; clients' personal and / or financial information is sometimes breached.

Water supply is an increasing concern; and The North American Free Trade Agreement commoditizes water. There have been many objections to the in-progress Site C Dam project on British Columbia's Peace River. Beside the dam's adverse environmental, social and cultural effects, the author presents the probability that the completed system will be one more step toward easing bulk shipment of Canadian water to the United States.

Nelson ends her book by recommending that Canada's "most sensible current economic goal" should be the return of the Bank of Canada to its mandate of providing interest-free loans for federal, provincial and municipal spending on social and other infrastructure. *Bypassing Dystopia: Hope-filled Challenges to Corporate Rule*is an important book that lives up to its title. It is well written, well researched, and well worth the read.

A soils scientist, Rose Morrison is a frequent contributor to PRRB.

Note:

[1] Since then, the Trudeau government has bought the trans Mountain Pipeline to ensure that the expansion project goes ahead; and the National Energy Board has re-approved the project, calling it "within the national interest" while acknowledging that it will do environmental harm.

BREACHING THE PEACE *(continued from page 12)*

in regard to Site C. In 2015 the Clark government's Cabinet sidelined the Agriculture Land Commission and removed 4,000 hectares from the Agricultural Land Reserve for Site C development. Dismissed ALC chair Richard Bullock then joined the Paddle for the Peace protest; 'This land can grow anything,' he said. '… Let's not cover it with bloody water. That's a sin against humanity ….' Former BC Hydro president and CEO Marc Elieson has been speaking out against Site C since he and his board discarded the project in the 1990s, due to the great financial risk and the project's unacceptable environmental effects.

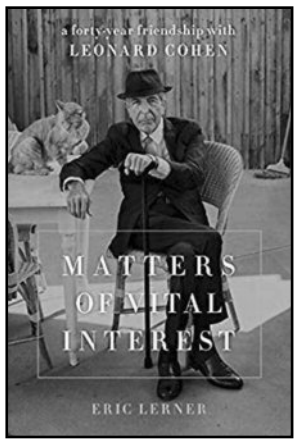
Much of the world has moved past mega-dam projects, acknowledging that there are less harmful and less expensive forms of energy generation. The World Bank stopped funding such developments in the 1990s. British Columbia is not just 'stuck-in-a-rut' with its past-its-best-by-date Site C project; it is digging a bigger hole by rejecting the large, short-term cost of halting the mega-dam and trying to remediate the site. There is no sum of money that can justify or mitigate the adverse human and environmental effects of completing Site C. *Breaching the Peace* makes it apparent that Site C was born of political ambition; and it has been nurtured by denial and arrogance.

A soils scientist, Rose Morrison is a frequent contributor to PRRB.

Matters of Vital Interest

Joseph Blake

When Leonard Cohen died in November, 2016, screenwriter, producer, and novelist Eric Lerner lost a lifelong friend. Lerner met Cohen in 1977 at Rinzai Zen Center in L.A. *Matters of Vital Interest* is his sensitive story of their friendship. It's a warm, funny, deeply moving account of the years Lerner spent with the intensely private artist.



Matters of Vital Interest: A Forty-Year Friendship with Leonard Cohen
Eric Lerner
Da Capo. 292 pages $35

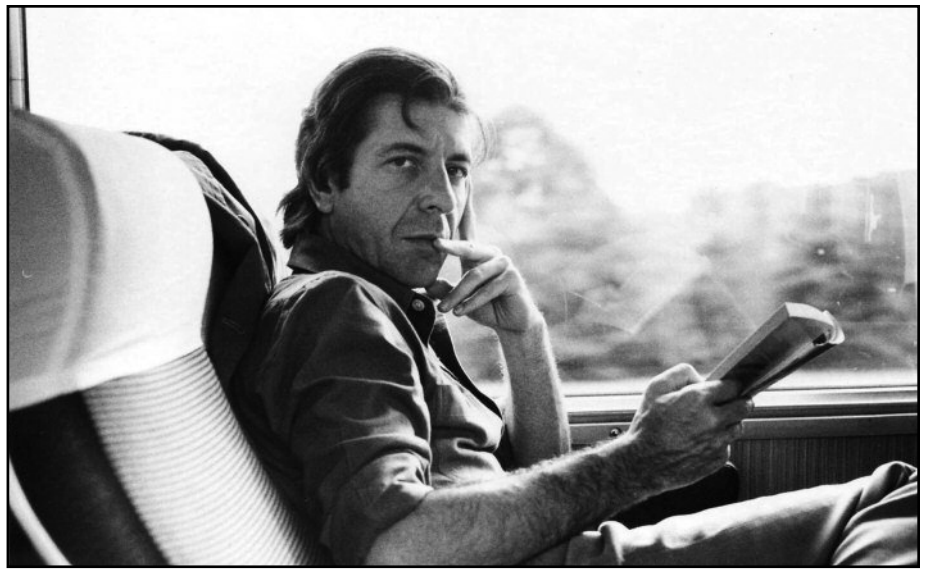
The two men bonded over their shared Jewish heritage, a deep spiritual quest and Japanese-born Rinzai Zen master Joshu Sasaki Roshi, and a love of sex. Despite their age difference, the men were confidants. They shared a two-family house in a shabby L.A. neighborhood for years. Cohen also shared his frustrations with myriad music business obstacles, his attempts and failures at love, and other "matters of vital interest."

Lerner captures the man behind the legend with his endearing memoir of playful male bonding and part-time fatherhood. He offers a vision of a shy, charming, complicated, and singular man.

Lerner's Cohen wanted to be remembered as a good father, a man who "enchanted his children." The author describes a poet "whose utterances deflect any further inquiry into his own heart and mind." He calls Cohen "an ethereal being" whose "vital energy resided above his shoulders."

The friendship's narrative includes the crushing loss of all of Cohen's mismanaged music business assets. The theft sent him back out on the road for late-season triumphant tours that ironically defined his career. Lerner claims that throughout Cohen's life in music, he sang and played only to support his ex-wife and two children. It's a complex and moving portrait of an artist and a friend. Lerner seems to keep a respectful, observant distance, breathing room despite the emotional closeness of the two men. Lerner is not a passive narrator. The two friends' self-effacing humour and occasional, lacerating pain is in full view, and Lerner seems to learn much from his famous friend.

"He knew I was heading into the same difficult waters he was treading, fighting the



Leonard Cohen

riptide and the undertow," Cohen's friend writes.

In the book's penultimate title chapter Lerner writes, "In a sense the most important element of our lifelong conversation—stringing one pearl of discovery after another on the fragile necklace of our understanding—even more important than the subject under discussion or the conclusion we arrived at, was the tone we listened for in each other's voices, the tone that reassured us of our essential agreement. The tone was heartfelt about our lives yet heart-less, funny but it's *no joke, man* even though it was! It was a fucking joke! The joke was on us of course, but not too bitter, spicy rather, a tone of irony, if you can appreciate the irony in these things, which of course we did, at least most of the time."

Now, I'm going to put on some Leonard Cohen recordings beginning with his last, *You Want It Darker.* I need to hear Leonard's voice too.

Joseph Blake is a founding contributor to PRRB. He writes on music from Victoria, B.C.

Is It Still Good To Ya?

Joseph Blake

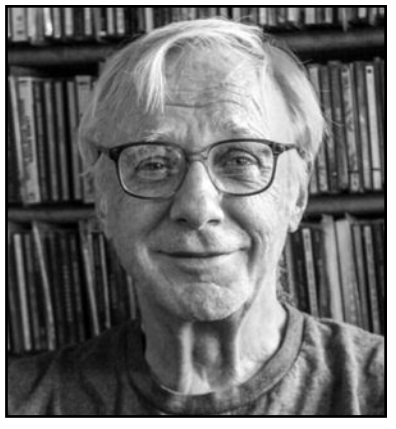
Robert Christgau, the self-proclaimed Dean of American Rock Critics, was a constant in my life for most of the 50 years of reviews and essays collected in *Is It Still Good To Ya?* His monthly *Village Voice* column, Christgau's Consumer Guide and that seminal underground newspaper's annual Pazz and Jop Critic's Poll compiled by Christgau turned me on to African music back when a Christgau A grade inspired me to send for a mono LP copy of John Storm Roberts' collection of urban African dance records, *Africa Dances.*

Christgau's journalism also convinced me to buy the Stones' *Exile on Main Street*, King Sunny Ade's *Juju Music*, Kate and Anna McGarrigle's records, and the New York Dolls' punk debut LP. For this and so many more, I am eternally grateful.

Subtitled *Fifty Years of Rock Criticism 1967-2017*, this recently published anthology includes four dozen examples of Christgau's Village Voice columns from 1974-1985, plus authoritative, wry work published in *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *Billboard,* and his current contributions to *Vice* magazine's web weekly, *Noisey*.

Is It Still Good To Ya?
Robert Christgau
Duke Univ. Press
443 pages U.S. $24.95

Despite his A-to-F marks and his academic title, Christgau is never boring or stodgy. His informed perspective ranges from Dionysus to rap with an understated passion for music and life's complexity. His enthusiasm is always contagious. Christgau's pop music history stretches from the origins of the gramophone to chain gang blues and black gospel, rent parties and big band dance hits to Elvis, The Beatles, and beyond. Christgau's juke box sermons contain multitudes. He taught music history and writing at NYU from 2005-2016 and has written eight books including 2015's memoir *Going Into the City: Portrait of the Critic as a Young Man.*



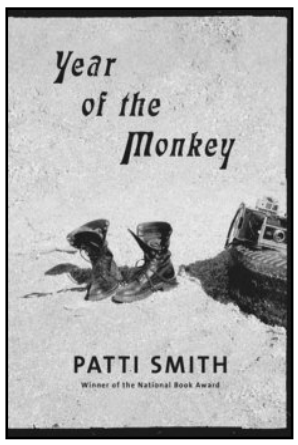
Robert Christgau

This book's subjects range from Louis Armstrong to M.I.A. It includes thoughtful obituaries of Bowie, Prince, Leonard Cohen, Bob Marley, and Ornette Coleman. His profiles of musical anthropologist Harry Smith, jazz greats Thelonious Monk and Billie Holiday, a handful of African music avatars, and a couple of smart pieces about my favourite, Bob Dylan, are punctuated with equally illuminating stories about soul music greats like Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke,

(continued on page 39)

Year of the Monkey

Miles Lowry



Year of the Monkey
Patti Smith
Knopf Canada
192 pages, 2019

In Patti Smith's latest book *Year of the Monkey*, poetry, prose and photography meet in the dreams, journals and polaroids of this passionate visionary. Life as an ordinary citizen often merges with her life as a gifted performer allowing for an on-the-road lifestyle and occasionally a drifter's existence. Falling under the spell of the Monkey in the Chinese zodiac, Patti Smith has crafted a present time memoir full of mysteries and revelations, one that thrives on innocence, chance and luck. As the Monkey year approaches she learns that her great friend and supporter Sandy Pearlman has fallen into a coma. Facing the worry and waiting of the hospital visits she becomes restless and travels the Pacific coast dividing her time between the real-life motels and coffee shops she inhabits and newer mysteries born of the literature that has become her life-blood.

With prose stretching through occult boundaries and spiritual yearning she somehow remains rooted in a "ham and eggs'"America filled with ominous signs and signals of decay. The restorative power of words and the great writers she cherishes come to the rescue again and again as she traverses another America. This time she is at the mercy of the presidential campaign that brings her country through the year of the Monkey into the Dog year and the doom and gloom of a despotic leader.

In *Year of the Monkey* Smith dreams of the labyrinthine places we must go to become more human. Her heartaches are romantic challenges to the ethos and her ability to travel through time and space seems to allign with the poet's desire to shift consciousness at will. Family, lovers and friends and many who have passed away come to life in her delicate recollections. Brought to the edge of these remembrances we are given a brightened image, a transparency held up to the sun revealing its true colors. In contrast, her monochrome polaroids seem to be calling the mundane into a sacred space shaded by the same hand. Here they inhabit a particular place between a happy accident and the moment where words are not possible.

In the process of completing his final book an ailing Sam Shepherd enlists Smith

Patti Smith

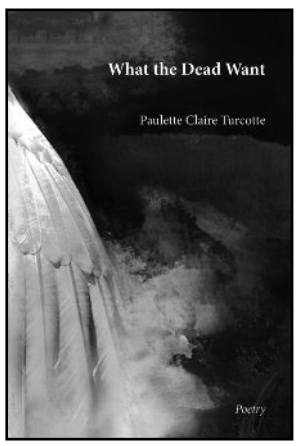
as his accomplice, reading the text to him as he edits. It's a role that harkens back to their days as companions in times sensitively chronicled in her National Book Award winning, *Just Kids*, the story of her early days with Robert Mapplethorpe. One gets the feeling that with Sam she plays a role she knows is hers alone, the two at work living in the whispers between thoughts. When she stares down at his tattoo she remembers her own, made on the same day.

A dream journal, self portrait and literary exploration,*Year of the Monkey* finds Smith tramping familiar territory, alone with the ever-present past and the new-found friends of everyday places. Here, Rimbaud's "I is another" is the rule and the real journey is the one within. It's the kind of book that might get discovered at a bus station, a reader-worn paperback accidentally left behind by an ernest enigma bent on inspiring future generations to see the truth in dreams.

Miles Lowry is a sound and visual artist, writer and director. His books include *Slow Dreams* and *Blood Orange: the Paul Bowles Poems*.

What the Dead Want

Krysia Jopek



What the Dead Want
Paulette Claire Turcotte
Ekstasis Editions
169 pages
2019

The poems in *What the Dead Want*, Paulette Claire Turcotte's debut full-length book of poetry, are richly multi-textured; gathering a chorus of disparate, often disassociated voices that span ancient times through contemporary experience: the ghosts of the dead, the poet's own personal, emotional vision and transcription of the material and spiritual world. In this stunning 168-page book of poetry, literary and visual artist Turcotte weaves her poems together in three sections, "Remembering and Forgetting," "Letters from the Asylum," and "Songs of Love and Death." Her hauntingly beautiful visual art adorns the book's cover and interlaces the three sections, or "movements," of poetry. All is present in the articulation of the absent, the lost, the abandoned, those in pain, those who no longer have a voice. *What the Dead Wants* offers the reader a eulogistic experience of witnessing the dead, the death in life, our coming to terms with our own mortality and spiritual identities; the essential reclaiming of the immortality of our souls that art makes possible.

Turcotte dedicates the collection of poems to her two deceased grandmothers and to Sister Kathleen Lyons, a Jungian analyst. The poems are in conversation with them, with all the dead, with history, and with the living, those who are left with their memories of the dead and the knowledge of the transitory nature of our conscious experience in the material world. The poems also inhabit the unconscious world, the Jungian collective unconscious, and the reality of dreams. The stunning preface to "Part One: Remembering and Forgetting," written in prose poetry ends:

> *When the waves smack the rock, there is a precise moment, just before the wave turns back on itself, that is like the moment of death. It is like the death between the inbreath and outbreath, that split second when there is no breath, where the breath is deciding whether it will stay or go. That is what humans feel and this is what gives them anguish. There is an ancient memory in humans that is connected to this ebbing and flowing. All life comes and goes here. This is why I love the sea. It gives and takes. It arrives, and leaves. // As lovers do.* (15)

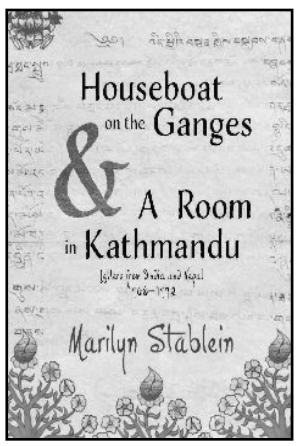
What the Dead Want also pays homage to the kinetic life of language, a presence in our consciousness, a medium that is native, ancestral, cultural—yet foreign at times; meanings are often cloudy, obfuscated by resonant, subjective language and linguistic, poetic construction. The poetic prose preface of "Letters from the Asylum" begins with

(continued on page 37)

Asian Travel Accounts from the Higher Heights

Trevor Carolan

Some time back when writing letters to friends and family was a virtue, not a burden, and setting forth on a long journey to distant places was an adventure with a degree of risk, not a canned package holiday option booked online—well, there was Marilyn Stablein, dusty backpack and pen in hand. If you'd been drinking tea Asia-side with Allen Ginsberg and the *Krittibas* poets in College Street, Calcutta, or shopping for *tangkas* at Durbar Square in Katmandu, you might have seen her wandering past—a genuine dharma bum, if ever there was one.



Houseboat on the Ganges & A Room in Kathmandu
Marilyn Stablein
Chin Music Pub
132 pp. U.S. $16.95

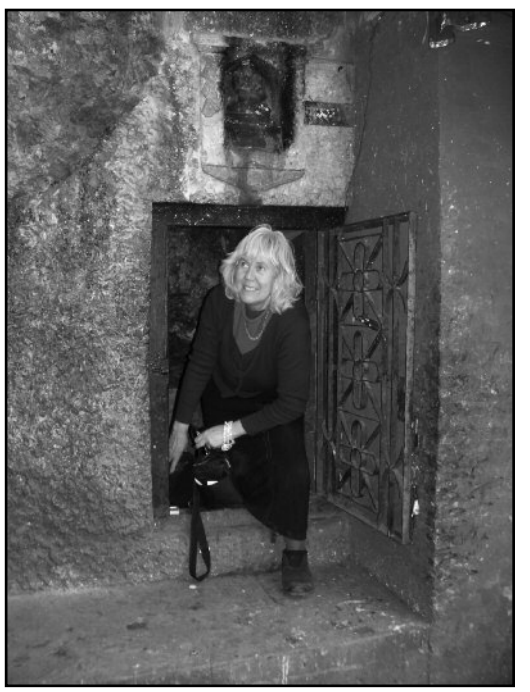
Raised in the San Francisco area, Stablein grew up exposed to the Pacific Coast's early East-West hybrid culture. Her new book is a rich reminder of the avatars of the early and mid-1960s who were engaged in the consciousness-raising efforts of those memorable times—Alan Watts and his Sunday lectures on KPFA, Paul Reps with his little anthology gem *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, and Suzuki Roshi who was popularizing Zen meditation and Buddhism in the Bay Area. Add watching *The Apu Trilogy* films of India's Satyajit Ray, and reading Kerouac's *On The Road,* and you have the basic formula that inspired a determined cohort of young Westerners to get beyond what their own culture and head out for Mother India.

In 1965, Stablein landed in London as a young woman in her late-teens. In quick time she acquired a liking for the city's old Indian affiliations—the curries, the jewelry, the harvest of books available there on Indian philosophy and on women travelers who'd ventured way off the grid in Asia—Alexandra David-Neel, Freya Stark, and others. By '66 she decided to make the long journey that was then evolving among long-distance travellers. There was a vivid precedent: unconsciously or otherwise, most followed in the footsteps of the American poets Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger. In 1962 that trio accompanied by Ginsberg's boyfriend Peter Orlovsky had met in Bombay and set forth on an epochal adventure throughout the sub-continent. Four years after them, The Beatles emulated the Beats in heading for their meditation teacher's ashram at Rishkesh in the Himalayan foothills. In doing so, they further broke trail for a steady stream of trekkers who'd follow, your agent here included.

It's helpful to remember that it was a different world back then. The London-Delhi-Katmandu run was a long, slow, culturally informative route; it led through the Balkans, Turkey, old Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. You took the fabled "Magic Bus" from London all the way, or freelanced. The rage and anger against the West of our present times was not a factor: Kabul during the long, peaceful reign of the much-loved King Mohammed Zahir Shah, for example, was a favourite honeymoon and rest spot among travellers, renowned for its hospitable people and its intoxicating recreational possibilities.

Stablein recounts washing ashore in Bombay for some reading in *The Upanishads.* Repairing to the Himalayan hill-station of Dalhousie, she began cultivating an interest in the spiritual and artistic traditions of India, Nepal and Tibet. When her three-month visa expired, she simply stayed on and the years ticked by; it would be seven years before she returned to North America. *House Boat on the Ganges & A Room in Katmandu* is an epistolary record of those years, crafted from the letters she wrote home, 1966-'72. Consider: you're a very young West Coast woman who gets to live apart from the turbulent, countercultural Sixties Revolution, effectively missing it all *here*, by living over *there* in one of the entire generation's incubatory, spiritual seed-pods.

Not that Stablein "missed it" exactly: one of the fundamental spiritual exercises of the Sixties period was a pilgrimage to India. Accordingly, Stablein's letters report news of a flow of important Sixties insight seekers who arrive along the same dharma trail that Stablein and a small cluster of other pioneers had been inadvertently establishing. Her book details fascinating anecdotes where the young American girl who's gone troppo is meeting and hearing about Ram Dass, Bhagavan Das, Timothy Leary, Tsultrim Allione, and many others. Her Ram Dass tale alone will keep Stablein dining out with friends for years.



Marilyn Stablein exiting a poplular cave shrine in Kathmandu

Stablein is no mere name-dropper. She was in Asia to learn. The number of precious Himalayan teachers, especially Tibetans, she was able to meet, study with, acquire wisdom and inspiration from, is breathtaking and she delivers meaningful reports of her encounters with H.H. the Dalai Lama, Kalu Rinpoche, Dudjom Rinpoche, Tarthang Tulku, Sogyal Rinpoche, Chogyam Trungpa, and others—an intellectual regiment of towering accomplishment. As a painter motivated to understand and practice religious mandala painting herself, she also meets the deeply admired European converts to Tibetan *Vajrayana* Buddhism, Lama Anagarika Govinda and his wife Li Gotami, who provide her with depth instruction. The transmission lineage doesn't come any better. And there are other personalities who make appearances: Joseph Goldstein of the *Vipassana*/Mindfulness worlds, Robert Thurman, Tenzing Norgay the first Sherpa climber of Chomolungma/Mt Everest with Edmund Hillary, novelist Kirpal Singh, founder of the Hare Krishnas A.C. Bhaktivedanta, and Hindu teacher Neem Karoli Baba.

While not yet twenty-one she writes, "I learn more by just living here and travelling than I did in a crowded Berkeley classroom watching a professor's lecture via short circuit television." You bet! Throughout her journeys she packs in the core information and concerns that are the basic conditions of existence for any long-distance voyageur and pilgrim. Landscape portraits, health concerns, details of where you can stay, what the festivals are like, the living conditions in local flats, *dak* bungalows for travellers, and so on. It's her human portraiture that really works though. A quick sample from Varanasi, 1967:

> *"Yesterday we met an ex-surfer from Malibu, a tall long-haired blond guy who wanders around India dressed as a sadhu. He was bathing in the river, eyes closed deep in meditation when I first spotted him, the only fair-skinned bather in a mass of fanatical Ganga worshippers. I invited him in for tea which he readily accepted.*
>
> *We reminisced about home and the pleasures we missed: jazz, coffee shops in North Beach, foods like avocados and artichokes. His Hindu name is Bhagavan Das."*

Be Here Now devotees of Ram Dass, who gave us that wonderful phrase, will recognize Das as the wanderer who introduced Ram Dass to his own root teacher Neem Karoli Baba, who emerges as Ram Dass' guru, Maharaj-ji.

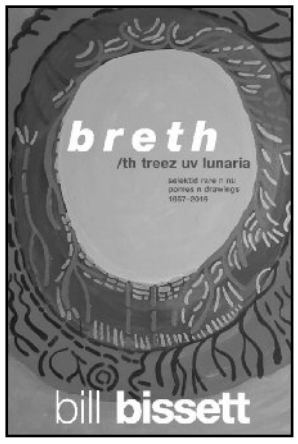
Those eager to learn more about Indo-Tibetan insight traditions will find a harvest of knowledge worth having in this book. Stablein writes with an unaffected authority. After travelling with Tarthang Tulku and his wife and receiving instruction, she offers crisp, enlightened remarks on meditation and mindfulness—not "McMindfulness 2019", the industry, but the real deal. A few chapters later, she offers a visiting Zen monk's perspective on the same topics: both instructive, yet subtly different. Balancing the wheat with the chaff, readers will also learn in a letter to her mom of the difficulties in finding decent ladies knickers and bras in the Great Motherland. Next, she'll be

(continued on page 30)

Bill's *Breth*: Tending the Wild

Scott Lawrance

"*At some point I would be intrigued about how wildness was also secreted in language, and a way back to the village began to form in my heart.*" – Martin Shaw



breth / th treez uv lunaria: selected rare n nu poems n drawings 1957-2019
bill bissett
Talonbooks, 2019

At last count, bill bissett has published about 74 books (at least according to "th kreetshurs who live btween realms uv consciousness say 74 n thos xcelent beings dew alot uv work like that.") So the recent publication of *breth/th treez uv lunaria: selected rare n nu poems n drawings 1957-2019* (2019, Talonbooks) functions as an excellent compilation of bill's work over the past six decades!!! Feel free to imagine this text as Volume One of a *collected works of bill bissett*, a possibility contemplated and currently hibernating. The range of this publication ensures that any effort to respond will be partial.

The first poem in the book gives some way in to a possible theme: "mor thn i evr realized at first breth had i/ bin heer b4 that was my qwestyuning/ feeling". This remarkable collection makes a space in which we find ourselves again, re-membered, returned again to an animated cosmos, revealed by and shaped by both word and image. (I am reminded of Duncan's line, "often I am permitted to return to a meadow".) Interestingly, while the work has a universal, even "kosmic" feel, it is also quintessentially Canadian, inhabited by moose, raven, and a distinctly northern bestiary, informed by decades of travel and life in both cities, towns and back-country of this nation.

bill takes some effort to point out that this collection developed "organically", as befits work that largely eschews the grammatical-syntactic and lyrical flavour of much current writing. It is not constructed, "chronological 4 me ths way creates a mor fluid flow uv th pomes n let th pomes speek 4 themslves not thru organizing labels or categoreez let th labeling bring othr offrings all th guiding lites." Unlike most "collected works", which proceed according to a definite order, usually chronological by either date of creation or publication, ***breth*** presents a vast corpus of work that is organized much differently. (Although the interested reader or scholar can readily track the exact original source of book, magazine, or recording in the thorough "archive" appendix of the text.) This "organic" presentation is analogous in many ways to the work contained herein.

bill bissett

In terms of style and method, bill's practice differs significantly from that of poet and cultural anthropologist, Gary Snyder, the work of both seems grounded in a notion of "the wild." As Snyder puts it in his essay, "The Etiquette of Freedom", a definition of wild comes close to a description of the Chinese notion of *Tao*: "eluding analysis, beyond categories, self-organizing, playful, surprising, impermanent, insubstantial, independent, complete, orderly, unmediated, freely manifesting, self-authenticating, self-willed, complex, quite simple. Both empty and real at the same time. In some cases we might call it sacred."

There exists a strong synchrony between this "East Asian" complex and the works gathered together here – a wonderful collection of a wide range of works – forms with which bill has conversed: poems, concrete poems, drawings, and sound poems. (We miss his music and painting!) In conversation recently (with myself and Cathy Ford) bill was adamant that he was always (!) both a poet and a painter.

The volume offers excellent opportunity to witness and track both the lineages which bill honours and the many dialogues and conversations with fellow explorers of language and image, ranging from the sound poetry of Dadaists like Kurt Schwitters and Hugo Ball, the concrete poetry of bp Nichol, John Furnival and Ian Hamilton Finlay (his significant contribution both in Canada and internationally deserves fuller treatment), the bop prosody and spontaneous prose of Jack Kerouac, the magical symbolism of Lamantia, the "continuous nerve movies" of Philip Whalen, the mammal physicality and eroticism of Michael McClure, the cut-ups and fold-ins of Burroughs and Gyson, and the "first thought, best thought" of Ginsberg and Trungpa, and of course, fellow visionary, poet/painter William Blake! This volume will surely be of assistance in supporting a fuller treatment of such correspondences in the future.

In an interview, bill once recounted how various professors counselled bill on the importance of finding "his voice", which would enable him to become a poet of significance. In reply, he explained that he had five or six of them and wasn't about to marginalize any of them. Some poems feature a single voice, yet one of the great pleasures of this text is the opportunity it provides to notice, revel in, and celebrate the simultaneity and continuity of this community of "voices", some of which speak in languages unknown and mysterious. Reading his work (and perhaps even more so) or hearing bill read, we see/hear these voices emerging. The calligraphy of the poems on the page also engages us, inviting a complexity of bodily response in a rebuttal of a standard and unchanging orientation to the typed page.

To enter the field of the text is a journey of decentering. The poet, "maker", is no longer a central, ordering principle, refusing in multiple ways an imperial position. bill's stance in relation to what he hears when he listens, is at once respect, and awe; his openness to the world reveals the intertwine of the erotic and sacred. bill, while touted as an unconventional poet, is nevertheless a very traditional servant of Eros, of love in all its guises and we find, running within and beneath these poems, a current of loss, of longing, a search for true and lasting relationships, with all the attendant joy and grief. The human realm is a wild one, inter-being with all of the flesh of the world. This work tends the wilderness, offering a path and a practice to return us to "the body where we were born".

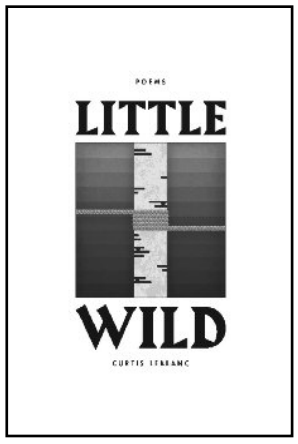
> Listening/hearing: respectfully responding.
> Calling th spirits in feedin th spirits
> With what they love song nd th things of our fingurs
> Calling for their help now & giving them food that's all
> Its evur bin about.

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

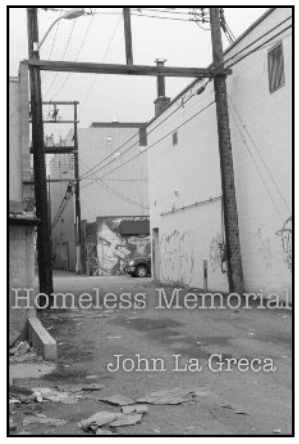
Two Poetic Debuts Tackle the Lesser Seen in Western Canada

Paul Falardeau

The colonization of the country of Canada has robbed both indigenous and settler folks of the traditions that once grew out of this land. This holds true for Canadian literature, whose writers have struggled to find an identity, sifting through the various immigrant and Indigenous narratives amidst the imposed canons of French and English rulers and a dominating American influence. This complex history, and diverse peopling has created challenges that many Canadians still face today. However, as this legacy begins to unravel, and writers begin to explore their country's checkered past, space for a diverse range of stories is becoming the hallmark of our national discourse. Writers such as Anita Rau Badami explore diaspora, Evenlyn Lau's brutally honest work in memoir and poetry has explored the many meanings of otherness, and an undeniable surge of Indigenous writing from Eden Robinson and Cherie Dimaline to Cole Pauls, is driving the rediscovery of Canada's original voices. Canadian literature is becoming a rich mixture of the many small and unique people and places that make up our country. Yet, there are still winners and losers in a colonial legacy. Two poets' recent debuts give credence to that idea, exploring the consequences of our societal trajectory, shining light of segments of our country that might at first glance seem mundane—or that might not ever get a first glance.



Little Wild
Curtis LeBlanc
Nightwood Editions
80 pp. 2018



Homeless Memorial
John La Greca
Ekstasis Editions
134 pp. 2018

Curtis LeBlanc, from St. Vincent, Alberta explores the resonance of the often toxic normativity of a small town in northern Alberta. Elsewhere, John La Greca, of Vernon, BC writes from that city's streets, exploring the invisible world of the homeless, and the larger world through the eyes of the people it has forgotten. Both works explore the alien and familiar and the confluence of the two that is undeniably human.

Curtis LeBlanc

A Little Wild is Curtis LeBlanc's sparkling debut. It centers on his hometown of St. Vincent, Alberta, a hamlet about halfway up the province and not far from the Saskatchewan border. The picture in your head is not far from the truth: big trucks, Oilers fans, crops of canola, and oil money, but what LeBlanc offers the reader is much deeper. After all, at what cost do these things come? What lies beneath the threads of toxic masculinity, substance abuse, violence and resource extraction that seems to be woven into the very fabric of a place like St. Vincent?

What LeBlanc begins to reveal is that there are prices to be paid—a human toll—for Albertan riches. He does an excellent job pairing the stark beauty of the northern prairie with its often conservative inhabitants. In one instance, watching fireworks on a picturesque trestle bridge, where the only light is, "red and white Catherine Wheels/ scorching the sky over Seven Hills./ Those distant cracks colour the boredom/ of adolescent boys and girls leaning/ into each other and another long July." He and a friend are threatened with having their throats slit and bodies tossed to the dry riverbed below by two drunken passersby: "no one would know who to point the finger at."

The violence that permeates LeBlanc's work is not just drunken threats: a horrible accident leaves a child's dog hanging from a playground slide, a haunted house harbours the spectres of divorce for young children, a litany of friends end up dead. In St. Vincent, partying too hard is just as dangerous as working too hard. LeBlanc shows the reader just how rigid life can be in a small town. If death is ever present in *A Little Wild*, toxic masculinity is the horse it rode in on. Even as the residents of the small town work themselves to the bone and or writhe in boredom and unfulfillment, no one seems to be able to address their hurts honestly. The second of three parts to this collection is a long biographical poem about Kelly Langenburg, a member of the Oilers' Stanley Cup winning dynasty of the late '80s. The central placement of such a figure of traditional manliness in this collection anchors its place in the psyche of the townspeople. He is hardworking, stoic, and ambitious and he seems to stand unsupported and unwavering. In the meanwhile, LeBlanc and his friends drink and drive trucks to skinny dip, and the darkness is staved off, but not spoken of. In the excellent, "Sonnet for the Driveways of Our Childish Years," he eulogizes innocence lost early in childhood to violence and self-isolation:

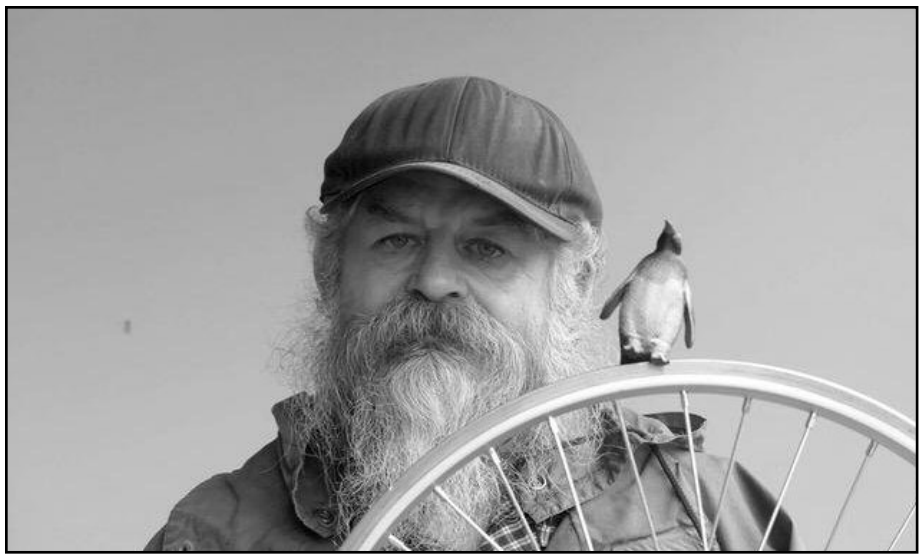
All the tennis balls that our Gretzky curves
couldn't guide past the taut rubber screen
of a Shooter Tutor cratered the garage door.
Personal moons for the parties we missed,
where some young men made the porch-like climb
to violence. When I was sixteen, I knew a kid
who got his face stomped on the curb, lost two
front teeth on the concrete foot of his own front lawn.
We heard stories like that every day, dribbled down
the driveways of this northernmost America.
Shaq's hand burned into our basketballs, dishing
high-fives to the pavement, eclipsing our palms.
Forced outdoors by our fathers and mothers,
we learned to forget each other and be alone.

In the many fine poems in this collection, LeBlanc's own inner self eloquently boils over onto the page. Having moved to Vancouver, the shadow of his hometown plays indelibly and ineffably on his work. The collection ends with a call from his mother. His Grandmother has recently passed and mom updates him on the family. Back home, nothing seems to change, "Grandpa has not stopped chewing cigars and blowing/ snow from the sidewalk to the boulevard/ strip, until it returns, from above/ or elsewhere, like an ache that goes/ and comes, to the concrete again."

Not terribly far away, in the southern interior town of Vernon, BC, John La Greca has written his first collection, *Homeless Memorial.* Like LeBlanc, La Greca writes about hidden pain, but here it is not a pain that he hides from himself. At 64, La Greca is homeless person and he has been living this way for most of his life, struggling with OCD, schizophrenia and a troubled childhood. Yet with the help of a few patrons, including the painter, Sveva Caetani and the writer Harold Rhenisch, La Greca has been able to collect work from a lifetime of writing into this unique collection.

Like Leblanc does with small town Alberta, La Greca both subverts and confirms one's expectations. "Our greatest poet of the streets," his output is cogent, thoughtful and introspective with a unique viewpoint of Vernon and the world. Yet, he is also relentlessly frank, unwilling to ever coddle the privileged, whether they be passing him on the street or are his own readers. Sometimes his work takes a turn that may not sit well in a politically correct society, but being too uptight as one approaches a work like this would be to miss the point, "Some six-year old kid/ Looked at me in the library." He starts one poem. "I gave him the finger./ He smiled back at me./ I think I made his day."

La Greca is pissed off, and doesn't try to hide it. At one point he even suggests he might not have anything to talk about if he weren't angry. As a child, he lived in the household of an abusive father. Already poor then, La Greca soon moved out and became homeless before finishing high school. A client of government social agencies since he was thirteen and diagnosed with everything from OCD to Schizophrenia, he



John La Greca

still spends much of his days and nights on the streets of his hometown that are quickly becoming flooded by the spreading opioid epidemic. Though he is clearly angry, his anger is righteous, mostly, and in a life where one many soon abandon everything unnecessary to survival amidst this desperate setting. Contrary to that, Le Greca is well-read, a fount of strength, compassion and insight.

The characters that populate *Homeless Memorial* stand in soup lines, dumpster dive and stick rigs in their arms, amongst other sometimes violent or abhorrent behaviours, but they are truly, purely human. La Greca's words beautifully capture this, pairing the rougher moments with those that are more tender, such as an intimate encounter: "The night would begin/With me smiling into your eyes./ It would pass/ Into the cool of morning/And we would sigh/As our hands parted/ And our finger tips/ Regretted the distance/ The day would bring."

Those moments seem fleeting amongst the hurt on Le Greca's back and all around him. He captures this with equally frank, but caring eye, such as in the titular poem, and the collection's deep well. "Homeless Memorial" ought to become regular reading for the mainstream of Canadians. In it, La Greca chronicles different homeless folks he has known, how they came to that life, and the way they inevitably get caught there. At the same time, La Greca weaves the narrative of how the rest of the world views these people. Looked down upon, or used for social or political gain, it becomes clear that most people don't see La Greca and the others in his world as human; that they are not worth saving. As the town's drug problems deepen, and salvation always seems to come with a catch, the general public seems more interested in policing homeless folks than offering help. Ultimately, as the poem ends, La Greca leaves his reader with more questions than solutions.

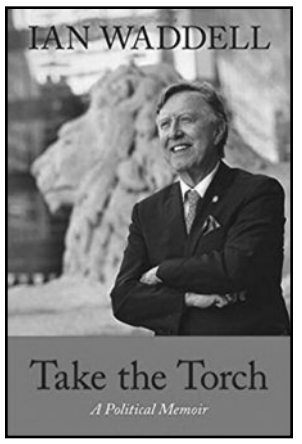
Though more a realist than a pessimist, even the name *Homeless Memorial* seems to imply that these poems are more a remembrance for the disenfranchised than a solution to their plight. If that is the case, there are few who could do it so well. Not only does La Greca have the requisite life experience, but he is skillfully elegaic in his poesis. Though his public education was cut short, he is none the less well-read, his work is replete with references to everyone from Virgina Woolf to Baudelaire to Irving Layton. His style is ruthless, individual, and unflinching in his criticism of the society that has forgotten him and so many others as grist for the mill of capitalism. Ultimately, what so many of these folks need is to be heard and so be understood and cared for. Often it is the case that the worst trauma of the homeless is that they have no voice and therefore no chance to escape. John La Greca, for one, has not given up on that. He ends his book with "Power Lines:"

Littered across all the telephone poles
That make up the tenderloin of Vernon:
A reward poster of five thousand dollars
For the return of jewelry, no questions asked.
A burn-out approaches me as I laugh at the poster.
Poor, bloody rich people who can't nail down their possessions.
The burn-out says: "You could have some party with that!"
I look at him with the contempt I can only muster saying
"Party! Fuck! I'd leave Vernon." I don't quite think he got it.
A five thousand-dollar gift from the gods on the hill
Is an escape clause you should accept.
Isn't it?

Paul Falardeau is a poet, teacher and journalist living in Vancouver, BC.

Take the Torch

Jan Drabek



Take the Torch, A Political Memoir
Ian Waddell
Nightwood Editions
256 pages, 2018

The story of Ian Waddell comes pretty close to one's conception of a renaissance man–a lawyer, former federal as well as a provincial legislator and documentary filmmaker.

He is a pretty good writer, too. In 2002 he has published a mystery called *A Thirst to Die For* and now comes this very readable memoir of his political days. First elected to the House of Commons in 1979, he represented various Vancouver ridings until 1993. (In 1989 he was even a candidate to succeed Ed Broadbent as leader of the New Democrats). Three years later he was elected to the provincial legislature and later served as a minister responsible for bringing the Winter Olympics to Vancouver and Whistler. He is also considered as a major force in bringing the billion-dollar film industry to British Columbia.

Born in Glasgow, Waddell came to Canada as a boy. He got his BA and LLB at the University of Toronto, a teaching diploma at the Ontario College of Education, and later an MA in International Law at the London School of Economics. In the end, one cannot but conclude that his education was quite adequate.

Ian Waddell

Somewhere along the way, he seems to have been bitten by the socialist bug and moved to the left—which in British Columbia under the often-stifling Social Credit rule was not that hard to do. Later, as an NDP member of Canadian Parliament he presided over the famous "duck compromise", whereby the exhibiting of roast duck in the windows of Chinese restaurants in Vancouver was allowed to continue, if made safe from bacteria proliferation by the use of overhead heaters.

In short, even if Waddell doesn't quite measure up to the full definition of a renaissance man, he certainly measures up to the definition of an extraordinary one. Whether playing a key role in protecting British Columbia bears, in attracting the Winter Olympics to Vancouver and Whistler or generally speaking up for the underdog, over and over again he has exhibited a great understanding for human folly, coupled with an extraordinary sense of humour.

Waddell worked as crown counsel for the City of Vancouver and later as a director of the Community Legal Assistance Society, but his story really begins with his being appointed counsel to Justice Tom Berger's Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Authority. One day Berger walked into his office to ask him to work with him.

Waddell writes:

I wasn't sure what to say, but eventually stammered, "Tom, I don't know anything about the North."

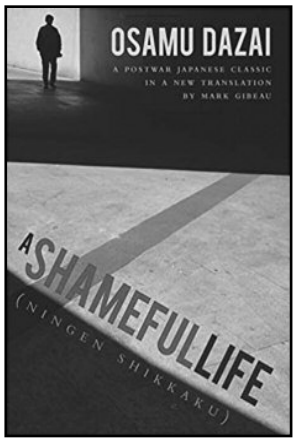
Berger smiled and looking at the vast pile of documents, said, "We'll

(continued on page 26)

A Shameful Life

Trevor Carolan

Osamu Dazai is a name familiar to anyone interested in modern Japanese literature. His writings are emblematic of the work of Japan's pre- and post-WW II generation: it's important to remember that Japan was then Asia's most modern nation. Whereas Yasunari Kawabata is known for his ambiguity and almost mystic atmosphere, Yukio Mishima for the violence of passions, and Jun'ichiro Tanizaki for his painstaking social portraiture, Dazai's work is saturated with existential despair. Dostoevsky's influence permeates his work. Like the Russian master's, Dazai's self-inflicted tragedy goes all the way.



A Shameful Life
Osamu Dazai
Trans. Mark Gibeau
Stone Bridge Press
142 pp.

Dazai was born in 1909 to a land-owning family in the north. He entered Tokyo University in 1930 and studied European literature and Marxist criticism. Western cultural influence on Japanese writers at that time was profound, akin to the influence of Sino-Japanese poetry on English language poets from Pound onward. Unstable emotionally, Dazai began dropping out and associating with rough elements. His adult life was dissolute and he suffered from a suicidal impulse. For Canadian readers especially, I'd suggest comparison with the late-Calgary poet Murdoch Burnett. Talented, entirely devoted to literature and to the models he chose—the Beats—Burnett wore his similar tragic mien like a cloak: cigarettes, booze, addiction, chaotic hours, a constant yearning for a higher, pure poetic peak. Both men took their own lives: Dazai in a lovers' double-suicide by drowning in 1948; Burnett from an overdose of pills in 2015.

Each of these writers was oddly angelic to those who knew him.

Osamu Dazai

Dazai was fortunate during his prolific writing period in finding encouragement from the senior novelist Ibuse Masuji (*Black Rain*), who became his mentor and helped him to publish. Though deeply conflicted—two women killed themselves with Dazai in separate suicide pacts—his reputation as a writer of dark, introspective fiction is secure. His surviving daughter is the respected novelist, Yuko Tsushima. (Burnett, in contrast, was never taken up by the CanLit establishment, but remains an Alberta legend.)

A Shameful Life is a *roman à clef,* that's a fictionalized version of certain events with the names of characters changed. In Dazai's novel, the narrator purports to have discovered a series of journals and three photographs of their author, Yozo, who is represented as an anonymous anybody. Yozo relates through his journals how he has had never truly known hardship due to his respectable, privileged family in the countryside. As the narrator delves deeper into the journals, he discovers that without any good reason their author has consciously led a life of non-achievement. From an indifferent education, he has moved through phases as a literary waster, boozy skirt-chaser, architect of a failed suicide pact, and as an on/off-again communist when it suits him. Dazai the novelist is writing a "This Is Your Life" script about himself.

Early on, Yozo alleges, "It seems that I will end my days having never understood anything at all about the lives of human beings...I fear my idea of happiness is completely at odds with everyone else's…"

He writes that as a young man in school he lived in fear of others; by way of survival he became a "scamp." His method was to play at being an "eccentric clown," and he excelled in making others laugh. This, he relates, was one of the causes that led to his "life of shame." The phony comic guise kept him out of harm's way, and as a harmless character himself, it also brought an unexpected bonus: "To women, I was a man who could be trusted with the secret of their love."

This capability with women evolves into exploiting and abusing that trust. When he is also revealed as a cheat by a classmate, Yozo runs, deciding that living in "a foreign place" will be easier than his hometown. Ultimately, he winds up in the big city and meets Horiki, "a real, live city scoundrel." Claiming that he is forced to live in a world that he cannot comprehend, Yozo's introduction by Horiki to liquor, cigarettes and prostitutes become "wonderfully effective ways to banish [his] fears of people, if only temporarily."

Yozo dabbles in communism and attends secret meetings. The attraction is hardly political; rather, he admits to an outsider's love of the "illicit", of being regarded as a pariah. He also becomes aware of his "guilty conscience" over his growing dissipation. This will now become his faithful companion as he struggles to paper over the cracks in his persona that are manifesting themselves to others—namely women and those who give him their trust. His appetite for low company and shiftless living becomes progressively self-destructive,

Horiki, his master in anti-establishment conduct, ridicules Yozo and his self-reflections, asserting that his own debauched behaviour is that of nature, and that "the pathos of nature" is their teacher. It's a complete inversion of Japan's traditional point of view. As for the communists, he dismisses them spitefully, observing that "their mission is to research production, but mine is to research *consumption*."

Having dismissed both Japan's traditional culture, as well as the immediate post-WW II temptation of a Red future—Yozo comes to view the leftist zealots he associates with as morons living pathetically paranoid lives. But unable to see another option for himself, Yozo sinks deeper into a no-exit situation, even as he declares that "a desire for freedom" is building within him. Dazai's novel was published in 1948 after Japan's utter destruction in the war, and as Japanese society crawled out from the ashes under U.S. Occupation. In similarly shaky circumstances and with the walls closing in on him, Yozo somehow finds the resources to try another disreputable "way." Morphine addiction presents itself and the result is to simply speed up the crash.

We can read Yozo's addiction and dissipation as a metaphor for Japan's post-war angst, or its adoption of consumerism, but it's difficult to escape the sheer nihilism of Dazai's protagonist. What is unusual is that Dazai's work continues to enjoy such popularity in Japan. Ultimately, Yozo is bailed out by his family and repairs to a sanatorium that is in reality an asylum. From there it's a dilapidated bungalow on the coast with an aged servant. Good family and money are useful, as ever.

Dazai's novel is unrelentingly bleak. Charles Bukowski and others have plumbed much the same terrain, but the joylessness here is unique, yet still strangely readable. It's a grim portrait of post-war ennui and failure of nerve. The translator Mark Gibeau does a fine job and notes Dazai's wordy, labyrinthian sentences. That's when it clicked for this reviewer—Dazai's obvious parallels with Malcolm Lowry. The volcano of privileged existence still looks to be the very devil for writers like these.

Trevor Carolan's new work is *In Formless Circumstance: Poems from the Road and Home* (Ekstasis).

WADDELL *(continued from page 25)*

learn."

"Okay Judge, when do I start?" asks Waddell.

"Tomorrow you go to Yellowknife," was the answer.

Later as an MP, Waddell describes his disagreements with Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney, but also proudly reports how the Queen on her visit to Canada admired his kilt. Never at loss for an aptly placed bon mot, he has certainly enlivened proceedings both in the federal parliament and provincial legislature. What's more, he comes across in this book as a *mensch*–a caring person with a sense of humour and concern for humanity as a whole.

Would that there were more of them!

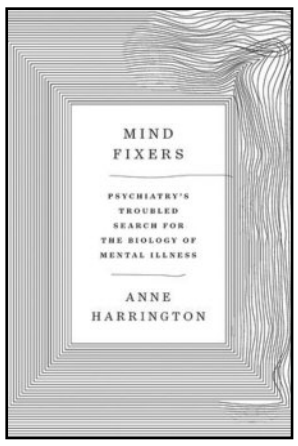
Perhaps the only criticism of this volume has nothing to do with its author, but with its publisher: it is hard to believe that a biography of such a consequence lacks an index.

Jan Drabek is a prolific author and served as an ambassador in Africa and Europe with the Czech Republic. He writes from Vancouver.

Righting the Brain

Richard Wirick

Anne Harrington is a historian of science at Harvard, one of the best chroniclers of the history of psychology and psychiatry, especially the latter's move from nurture to nature in the post-War decades. The latter necessarily entails a revisionist thesis, an analysis of the movement away from Freudian-dominant paradigms to a biological basis for much of what we have come to call "mental illness."



The Mind Fixers: Psychiatry's Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness
Anne Harrington
Norton: 369 Pages

Like philosophy, the psychiatric disciplines tend to proceed as reactions to preceding systems. Freud's theories of childhood traumas, archetypes and wish fulfillments arose in response to 19th century biological theories of mind, many of them detritus from the eerie dark ages of that period's "science" of human behavior. Fleiss and others who influenced Freud also repelled him with their primitive theories of organic causation in brain processes and disease. But the swing from to organic causation of "disorders" was a kind of excess stroke of the pendulum. The "bio-thesis" coincided with deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals, with counter-cultural (R.D.Laing, Adam Phillips, Alan Watts) attacks on "establishment psychiatric power," and with the American Psychological Association's takeover by clinicians re-arguing mental illness's probable tissue, chemical, and electrical basis.

The postwar return to biology, Harrington argues, has been pretty much an academic and clinical success, but not without a lot of resistance and theoretical bumps in the road. There is a settled framework now for the two main types of illnesses as biological and pharmacologically co-constructed phenomena, and not psycho-dynamic, socially created processes or entities. A lot of this arose from changes in the leadership and direction of the National Institute of Mental Health, and some of the work of Thomas Insel. The Diagnostic Handbook of Mental Disorders or DSM—one psychiatrist dubbed it his "favorite work of fiction"—also had a lot of pages to fill and a lot of chemistry and molecular structure to explain.

Anne Harrington

One of the problematic side effects of the foregoing was an obsession with managing dopamine and serotonin levels, which in turn transformed the pharmaceutical industry into the bete noir of "big pharma" and its notorious direct marketing of psychotropic drugs to consumers first in print, then in broadcast media. Though tens of millions of people began prescriptions of drugs to control behavioral hormones and molecules, the question remains whether we truly, epistemologically learned anything new about types of consciousness emanating from negative changes in physical brain states.

* * *

Harrington is not seeking to lessen dispensation of "mind drugs," which can actually involve a dizzying number even for a single patient. One psychiatrist of my acquaintance notes how a scrip is often given for each (sometimes overlapping) symptom: 1-2 antidepressants; one benzodiazepine (tranquilizer); one mood stabilizer; one anti-psychotic or "boost" agent like Abilify; one stimulant; and one or two sleeping aids. Especially with respect to the anti-depressant SSRIs (serotonin re-uptake inhibitors), some astute writer patients have come to wonder whether their personalities come from a nature/nurture mix or, rather, the shelves of their crowded medicine cabinets. There has to be, Harrington agrees, an end to the complete medicalization of human suffering. But drug companies, in their assistance in taking the patient constituency from neurosis to "regular unhappiness," have no interest in their doctor-clients under-prescribing, and shareholder value is shareholder value. (Note the recent scandals with the Sackler family's Purdue Pharma, sued in over thirty states for overprescribing opiates.)

Harrington answers her own question by proposing a de-centralization of psychiatry from biology, and a positioning of medication as one path among options, as well as alternative modalities such as talk therapy that preceded most modern psychopharmacology. She calls for what could be labelled a psychiatric pluralism, the blending of alternatives into a single, focused, and—most importantly—patient-friendly set of realistic goals. The book remains, however, a fix on a historical context, a readable and free-flowing synthesis of mind/brain medicine and an admission that for all its progress it is still largely a process of trial and error, of what Karl Popper called conjectures and refutations. Her history nicely deconstructs what scholars like Nikolaus Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached have denoted the emergence of "the neuromolecular conception of the self." These notions dovetail interestingly with recent work in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. It partakes equally with concepts of personhood and their commencement in time, as well as the problem of other minds. She does this all with a sensitivity to understanding "the actual diversity of the suffering they [drugs and therapies] seek to alleviate. In this sense she appreciates humans not just as neurological beings, but also as metaphysical ones, and knowing subjects aware of their ontology and seeing their existence not just as a unity of physical effects but as a unity of their concerns.

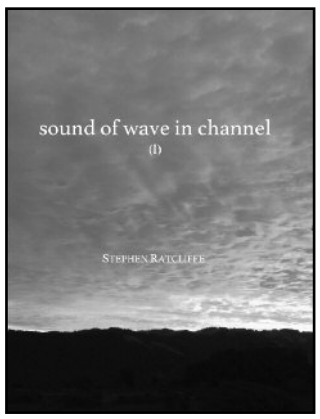
Above all, Harrington is a master narrator. She combines anecdotal episodes—often from high levels of organizations like the NIMH and APA—with everyday case histories of suffering, "ordinary and not-so-ordinary" unhappy consumers of medical services. The book moves, as any good history should, from the individual to the universal, weaving complex science and personal history together with a readable, engaging fluency. Of particular note is Harrington's ability to take the ideological Freud-biology skirmishes and set them squarely in the context of several specific forms of disorder, namely schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder. This book will serve as a useful historical reference for mental health practicioners, a guide to current therapies for the most prominent disorders, and an invaluable contribution to the history of ideas.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

SOUND OF WAVE IN CHANNEL

Orchid Tierney

On March 25, 2014, poet Stephen Ratcliffe recorded the entirety of his *c o n t i n u u m* collection—one thousand poems in all—in a single marathon session at the Kelly Writers House, University of Pennsylvania.[1] Totaling nine hours, twenty-five minutes, and seven seconds, the recordings are a feat of bardic endurance for both the poet and the audience. Even without visual cues, we can discern that the poems, *prima facie*, are audibly similar, connected by variations of recurrent phrases such as "sound of wave in channel," "light coming into sky above still black / ridge," and "red-tailed hawk calling / in foreground." The drama of *c o n t i n u u m* lies in these minute iterations of localized observation. The red-tailed hawk might give way to the "quail walking across bricks / in foreground" in one poem and the "towhee calling from field / in foreground" in another. These subtle changes are not incremental in scale, but they are meant to reflect the quiet everyday rhythms of a natural world in which multiple human and nonhuman agencies intermingle.



sound of wave in channel (I)* and *(II)
Stephen Ratcliffe
BlazeVOX [books]
2018. 512pp. $25ea

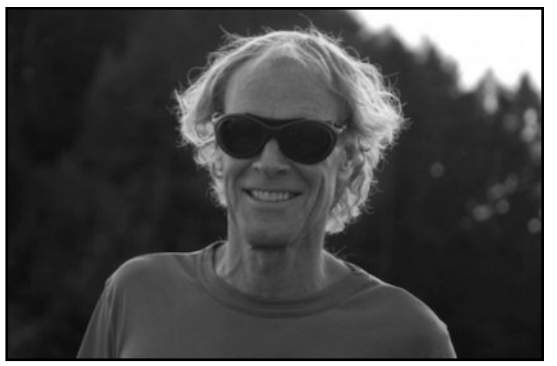
It is easy to miss the full weight of these microscopic variations in the PennSound recordings, but they are certainly legible in the collection's PDF, which is available online at Eclipse Editions along with the other books in Ratcliffe's ongoing project of one-thousand page poems.[2] Beginning with *HUMAN / Nature*, *Remarks on Color / Sound*, and *Temporality* in 2011, *c o n t i n u u m* was published in 2013 and followed by two more books, *sound of wave in channel* and *w i n d o w*, in 2016 and 2019 respectively.[3] Of these books, if they can be described as such, *w i n d o w* demonstrates the biggest stylistic shift since *Remarks on Color / Sound.* In this most recent expansion of the project, each poem contains four couplets, compared to the single tercet and three couplets that dominate the previous books. (Although *HUMAN / Nature* is the exception. The poems in the first book are typically thirteen lines long.) In 2018, BlazeVOX published *sound of wave in channel* as two hefty books, totaling 512 pages each. And quickly comparing the Eclipse PDF with the BlazeVOX copies, there are few, if any, discernable differences between them. The most overt change is the book design. BlazeVOX's books I and II have similar cover photographs, depicting a ridge and/or bay, presumably the same one shot at different times between astronomical and civil twilight, presumably taken in Bolinas, California, where Ratcliffe is based and which, presumably again, is the subject of inquiry in his on-going, decade-long project.

I mention these dry details off the bat because the operating logics behind this large-scale project is repetition, but it is repetition without monotony and similarity with lovely difference. *sound of wave in channel* is a sequence of environmentally aware poems that interrogate the murky processes of perceiving sameness in the natural world while also witnessing the changes that terraform the ambience of the environment in subtle ways. Mercurial and transitional objects and substances are therefore cardinal in the world of these poems. Concretely, images of fog, light, darkness, and shadows figure dominantly, while the poet's inner reflections on systems, distances, relations, visibility, time, and structure process the perception (and reception) of these objects and others. In 10.14, for example, Ratcliffe writes

> light coming into sky above black plane
> of ridge, first bird chirping on branch
> in foreground, sound of wave in channel
>
> relation between the object
> and event, reflection
>
> of impossible element, line,
> surface indeterminate
>
> pale orange sky above shoulder of ridge
> gull flapping to the right toward point (I 24)

Or in the final poem in book II, which also happens to be my favorite:

> 6.26
>
> light coming into fog against invisible
> ridge, waning white moon next to leaves
> in foreground, sound of wave in channel
>
> reverse copies of subject
> and, followed those
>
> element in picture, which
> just picture, optic
>
> grey white cloud above shoulder of ridge
> whiteness of gibbous moon across from it (II 510)



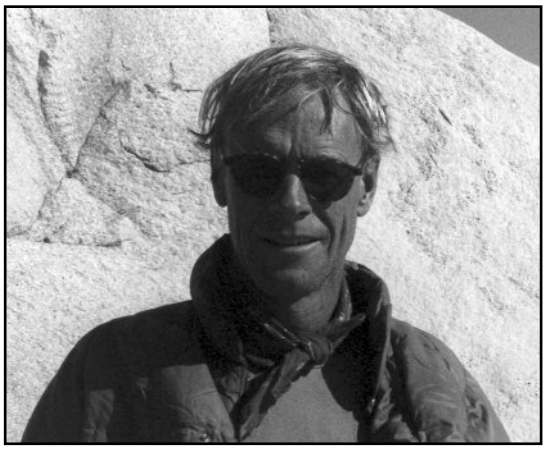
Stephen Ratcliffe

Light isn't necessarily an illuminating object in *sound of wave in channel*, but it does invoke questions about optics and the ability to apprehend the world at large through our senses. The environment of these poems accretes inflection and reflection of the ecological continuities and disturbances that are registered only by the poet's dedication to document them as they are felt, witnessed, and perceived. Whether it is the light of the sunrise or the waning moon, we might ask, What is this object for the poet? What does it mean? What are the sensory limits for interpreting it? Ratcliffe's light could be figurative or representational, but it also feels highly impressionist as if it were a painting. And as each poem progresses, we are left with these accumulative impressions of the Bolinas surroundings that foster a fluvial ambience: "being in the world not that is, one thing another / 'exactly,' changes fragment / of this, 'impression'", writes Ratcliffe (I 258). Elsewhere: "impression of details, pen/ and ink depending on / which ventured, thought of/in terms of" (II 426). These are poems imagined somewhere within the terminator point of human perception.

In her blurb, Etel Adnan describes both books of *sound of wave in channel* as "a 'mega poem' of cosmic interaction," although these poems also strike me as curatorial, archival, and partial rather than amalgamative, total, and exhaustive of the poet's observations, interpretations, and adjusted perceptions. "I've been working 'serially' for a long time now," as Ratcliffe wrote in his email interview with Jeffrey Shrader between 2008 and 2009.[4] And true: these are serial time-based poems, operating on the logic of durations and constraint. But seriality also feels too generic, too broad a term to apply to an ambitious project as intellectually engaged as this one. It Is not *just* serial in scope, each poem following sequentially, one after another. Rather these poems are mindful of cyclicism and compass. "[C]urvature a measure of time," writes Ratcliffe, "everywhere a point of difference parallel to axis" (I 41). And: "time the structure of space, / curvature ("spatial") / possible, a field described / as usual," (I 104). This is perhaps where "the cosmic interaction" intervenes in Ratcliffe's poems, for space-time—and the passage of light within that cosmic structure—are grappled with and translated into a microcosmic poetic scale.

Formally and structurally, the poems in *sound of wave in channel* remain immutable throughout the two books, and the repetition of this form (a tercet followed by two indented couplets, followed by another aligned couplet) allows the subtle changes of language to puncture the veneer of ecological similitude. The sound of wave in channel is not the same sound in one poem to the next, because the passage of time is the difference that makes a difference. And despite their structural and typographical similarity—all these poems are set in Courier—the Bolinas landscape is remarkably busy with motion and exceedingly loud with animal sounds. Familiar nat-

ural bodies and substances populated the wilderness: "upturned curve of moon by branch / in foreground" (I 1), "shadowed bamboo leaves moving / in foreground" (I 159), "cloudless blue white sky above shadowed ridge" (I 277), "fog against shoulder of shadowed ridge" (II 151), for example. Avian citizens also sweep across the expanse: "cormorants flapping across toward point" (I 280), "line of pelicans gliding toward horizon" (II 348), and "gull gliding across toward the horizon" (II 452). The poems are measured with wild animal movements.



Stephen Ratcliffe

The title, *sound of wave in channel*, may very well gesture to a literal channel in the Bolinas but, given the stress on dynamic animal sound effects in the poems, it could also refer to the deep sound channels found in oceanic waters, where the speed of sound is at its slowest and the low frequency warbles of whales can travel long distances. In an associational reading, these poems are not only fields for creative intellectual inquiry, but a sound channel for real time-based experimentation. It is not surprising then the poems constantly identify different avian vocalizations that emerge from the wildness.[5] Although generally minimal with punctuation, commas register the percussion of breathing that echoes Charles Olson's projective verse. "[B]reath is man's special qualification as animal," writes Olson. "Sound is a dimension he has extended."[6] Ratcliffe's world, however, bursts with intelligent animal and non-animal musicality. Not only are we privy to "the sound of wave in channel" but also the "song sparrow calling from branch" (I 254), "golden-crowed sparrow's oh dear" (I 431), "golden-crowed sparrow's dear me" (I 432), "quail calling Chi-ca-go" (II 42; emphases in original), "hummingbird chirping from branch" (II 100), "crows calling on branch" (II 189), and "red-tailed hawk calling" (II 405). Intelligent vocality is not only man's special qualification as an animal, but avian agents are also uncanny with their quasi-human sounds. We can infer that the human observer is not divorced from this environment but integrated as an animal themself into this world of intelligent animal breathings. Take, for example, the following two successive poems from book I:

3.29

light coming into clouds above shadowed
buildings, birds calling back and forth
in foreground, sound of cars in streets

now from first follows that
here too, since where

then, changing, field where
there follows view of

grey white cloud above shadowed wall
shadowed bare branch slanting across it (I 190)

3.30

light coming into sky above black plane
of ridge, jet passing above pine branch
in foreground, sound of wave in channel

between time and light seen,
view that of painting

memories of motion, perhaps
what visual otherwise

grey white sky above shadowed building
bird standing on branch across from it (I 191)

These two sequential poems feel true to James Schuyler's proclamation that "Each / day so different / yet so alike."[7] Only: the more things stay the same, the more they change. While birds occupy the human world, they also share it with mechanical avians, the jets, that pass overhead just as the "sound of wave in channel" merges with the "sound of cars in streets." The human presence, whilst not directly visible, is legible in the traces of civilization left in the wilderness for benefit of the birds. Whether it is the "blue jay landing on post" (II 469), "shadowed bird standing on feeder" (II 361), or a "bird landing on redwood fence" (II 241), avians and humans co-share this wilderness.

Contextually, *sound of wave in channel* fits with similar projects that are invested in a poetic practice of observing the quotidian. Although shorter in scale, think, Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day* (1982), Ron Silliman's *BART* (1982), or Harryette Mullen's *Urban Tumbleweed* (2013). Although there are substantial differences between their respective commitments to integrating observation with art and/or poetry, *sound of wave in channel* shares their patient attention to the mundane events unfolding in everyday life. In 4.2, Ratcliffe writes

light coming into sky above still black ridge,
two birds slanting toward branch
in foreground, sound of wave in channel

later above all attention,
made it possible to

view, following curvature
of space, spherical

pale blue whiteness of sky above ridge
white line of wave breaking in channel (II 59)

Paying attention to the world means bringing that world into action. In "Attention Equals life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture," Andrew Epstein argues that for many contemporary writers, poetry is a powerful "method of paying attention" to everyday life. A poet today, he suggests, "can also be more of an ethnographer, a collector, an archivist, an observer or witness, a curator of language, data, and material."[8] And this line of thinking leads me back to my earlier claim: that *sound of wave in channel* is curatorial, archival, and partial rather than amalgamative, total, and exhaustive of the poet's observations of everyday life. But Ratcliffe is also an attentive interpreter of the natural data he collects. Perception is not only about becoming aware of our sensory inputs, but also attending, organizing and transforming them to partially apprehend the quotidian world. And I think this interpretive thrust in *sound of wave in channel* is one of the collection's many strengths, for it does not make claims to observe a truthfulness native to the wilderness. Rather these poems—this project of deep perception—asks us to interrogate the limits of our knowledge: How do we see? What little do we see?

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3 Ratcliffe's blog is also entitled *temporality* and includes poems from that series and onwards. See: Ratcliffe, *temporality,* http://stephenratcliffe.blogspot.com.

4 "On duration: Stephen Ratcliffe in conversation with Jeffrey Schrader," *Jacket 2*, edited by Julia Bloch, October 20, 2011, https://jacket2.org/interviews/duration.

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6 Charles Olson, *Selected Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1966), 25.

7 James Schuyler, *Collected Poems* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 177.

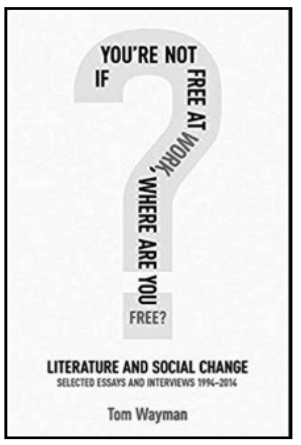
8 Andrew Epstein, *Attention Equals Life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 35.

Orchid Tierney is an Assistant Professor of English at Kenyon College. She is the author of five chapbooks. Her collection, *a year of misreading the wildcats*, is forthcoming from the Operating System in 2019.

If You're Not Free at Work Where Are You Free?

Joel Robertson-Taylor

Work and working culture are by and large unrepresented in artwork. Tom Wayman's *If You're Not Free at Work, Where Are You Free?* is a collection of his essays and interviews that addresses daily lives in the quotidian, and the necessary depiction of these through art—literature in particular.



If You're Not Free at Work Where Are You Free?
Tom Wayman
Guernica, 2018

As a man who worked both blue and white-collar jobs, and an activist in local education and union movements, Wayman provides informed insight into the issues that come from a lack of honest representation of real life—that is, common life in work and education. The consequence, he explains, is that working life has remained relatively unchanged since the unionist movements: "When we see the workplace not as an unchanging, naturally occurring hierarchy, but instead regard the job as a social location not yet reached by the historical expansion of democracy, a vast range of possibilities for the organization of daily work can be considered."

How poignant this topic is; not only because this era is marked by increased automation, upheaval within long-standing industries, and the politics that have harnessed both as pressure points to press against. Climate change, whether on the tip of one's tongue or the back of one's mind, is causing tectonic social shifts and political rifts. Industry of the resource extraction, refining, and production sorts, the kind that makes up about a fifth of Canada's GDP, is a notable exacerbator of climate change. Yet, many of these conversations are divorced from one another in mainstream media and art. The relationship between wellbeing and health, and work, is also rarely discussed. Though the nation is a modern democracy, the workplace is far from it.

Wayman speaks about work culture broadly, as experienced individually. In "To Be Free Full-Time," he asks, "If we are treated as though we are half-witted or a child during the hours each day at our jobs, how can we suddenly transform ourselves into reasonable, rational adults the moment we climb into our car or board the bus after work?" Democracy should not cease at the workplace entrance. Yet, citizens are told to be pro-freedom until they put on the employee hat, from which point on until the hat is removed at the end of a workday, they are subservient, expected to be childlike, with very little to contribute beyond the narrow focus they fill. Noting this, it is hard to believe that work-life has not changed beyond gradual changes, making many fields safer and softer. And Wayman is not merely suggesting more accommodating employment.

In "Every Page", Wayman continues this charge, writing with sociological insight and precision, but with clear intention, stating that the democratization of work (a major part of the social environment not yet "colonized by democracy") must be the revolution's focal point, and should be such because it transcends status, identity, or experiences. As it stands, work writing (and representation in media by and large) will continue to lack a significant audience because the chief role of entertainment media is to lead people away from considering their lives.

The collection's longest piece, "Avant-Garde or Lost Platoon?" shifting away from work specifically, hits on the Ivory Tower Zeitgeist's baby, postmodernism. Wayman effectively calls it a trojan horse of conservative ideals—not necessarily willed by its practitioners, but in form—and decries its body of literature as impenetrable, often downright nonsensical. Some of its most recurring hallmarks being contradictions, falsehoods, inconsistencies, and the assurance that not one thing can be fully true. He writes, "Regarding as the only worthwhile writing that which must be approached as a puzzle to be solved… is not a route to encouraging people to discover literature's pleasures and insights." In this, Wayman directs attention to the heavy use of jargon, seemingly intentional obfuscation, and "idiosyncratic redefinitions." It all works together to establish these postmoderns as an elite maintained by the inaccessibility of their club. With sharp and precise description (a critique of postmodern literature itself) Wayman discusses how this paradigm wrought confusion in communication, asking

Tom Wayman

"...who benefits when comprehension of an art form, or of a critical discussion of that art form, is narrowed to an academically trained cohort assigned to, or willing to, attempt the interpretation of deliberately obscure writing?" It is a sharp crack against contemporary alphabet soup-composed poetry.

Wayman's essays and interviews are provocative because he is able to explore a topic not frequently discussed, creating a sense of excitement and interest. He addresses his views with thoughtfulness, and a degree of optimism: "though many members of our species remain in physical and/or mental bondage, the slow tide of history has buoyed an always-increasing number toward a life free of subjection to kings, priests, and arbitrary authority of every sort." And if that is the case, work culture will realize a disruption, alongside its portrayal in art.

Joel Robertson-Taylor's previous contribution to PRRB #23 was *Two Roads Home.* In 2018 he was named top university newspaper editor in Canada.

STABLEIN *(continued from page 22)*

discussing the human mechanics of the mighty Kumbha Mela religious festival at Hardwar, the largest human gathering on the planet. What is surprising is how often her writing will resonate with the same woman's authorial perspective on such events that the late, great poet Joanne Kyger offers in her *Big Strange Moon, the India Journals.* It's a wonderfully refreshing, sometimes quirky, slant on travel territory that has customarily been dominated, when covered at all, by male writers.

By 1970, Stablein relates that she has been given a Tibetan name. She comments on the growing number of foreign students in Delhi who have come to learn traditional disciplines such as yoga, dance, or meditation. They live like her, frugally, respectfully. Ironically, "The Indians, on the other hand," she writes, "are the opposite. They're interested in modernizing and buying televisions, refrigerators and motorized vehicles."

Perhaps as a result of what she has now grown capable of seeing and interpreting, Stablein's letters to her parents begin to convey a heartfelt, compassionate nature. Her world-view expands to include their thoughts about her mission, for that's what it has become. By the time she is living in Katmandu, she is ready for deeper initiation into Tibetan art, and also love with her Columbia scholar who enters the tale. After some teaching, then marriage, and the expected arrival of her first baby, the wheel of the dharma has fully turned for her and it is feasible for her to think of a return to the U.S.

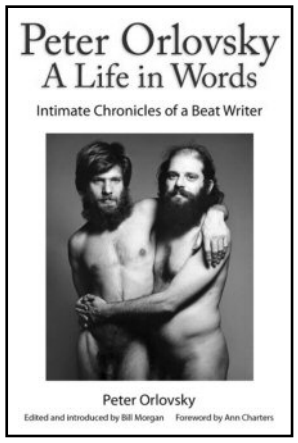
This is one of the most engaging travel books about Asia in years. Stablein has previously given us a number of excellent books recounting various aspects of her years in Asia, and both her *Sleeping In Caves* and *The Census Taker* are unique explorations of life along what has come to be known as 'the dharma trail' in Asia. If you love reading about travel in Asia; if you have interests in the development of Buddhist and Asian insight traditions in the West, Stablein's latest is as authentic and unpretentious an account as you'll find in the shop. *Recommended.*

Trevor Carolan's new work is *In Formless Circumstance: Poems from the Road and Home* (Ekstasis).

Peter Orlovsky: In His Own Right

Colin James Sanders

This collection of letters and journal entries by poet Peter Orlovsky (1933-2010), edited and introduced by Bill Morgan, establishes Orlovsky as an intriguing person in his own right. Having met poet Allen Ginsberg in San Francisco in 1954, entering into a relationship arrangement which endured until Ginsberg's death in 1997, Orlovsky was often marginalized within the Beat pantheon. The *Foreword* to this collection by Kerouac biographer Ann Charters is instructive in situating Orlovsky amongst the Beats. Interestingly, Charters met Orlovsky on a "blind date" in March, 1956, in San Francisco. In a letter to his mother, Orlovsky exclaims, of Charters, "There's a big blue eyed mystical looking, nineteen year old girl here who likes me and I her, so the world's a little bit like heaven now."



Peter Orlovsky: A Life in Words: Intimate Chronicles of a Beat Writer
Bill Morgan, Ed.
Paradigm, 2014

Orlovsky struggled for decades with substance use, yet when he was well he led an activist existence. Drafted in 1953 during the Korean conflict, Orlovsky, a pacifist, "…was marked out as a potential subversive by his communist-inclined reading matter", and in an interview with an army psychiatrist, remarked, "An army with guns is an army against love".

Orlovsky often recited his poetry publically and performed alongside Ginsberg, frequently playing banjo and guitar. He appeared in the films, *Pull My Daisy* with Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso (1959), and in *Me and My Brother* (1969), a film about his brother Julius' struggles with mental illness: both films were created by the late Robert Frank. Orlovsky, a Buddhist, also taught at Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, and one of his early poems was included in the ground-breaking anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960), edited by Donald M. Allen.

It is remarkable how many letters to his mother, Kate, are included in this collection. Orlovsky's mother, and his siblings, were important to him, particularly his brothers Julius and Lafcadio, both of whom suffered and struggled throughout their lives with mental illness, being frequently institutionalized. At one point in this collection Orlovsky brings Lafcadio, age 15, to live with him in San Francisco, enrolling

Peter Orlovsky and Allen Ginsberg

him in grade school and seeking psychiatric assistance for him. At other times, Orlovsky would become involved with Julius, insisting that Julius not undergo lobotomy, and signing him out of psychiatric institutions. In later years, deranged by drug use, Peter could also be cruel towards his brothers.

In his early years, Orlovsky travelled widely. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, he travelled in Mexico, North and East Africa, the Middle East, India and Europe. This collection contains letters and journal entries tracing his life from his visit to William Burroughs in Tangier, his stay in Paris with Gregory Corso and Ginsberg, and his travels in India with poets Joanne Kyger and Gary Snyder.

Orlovsky read widely. In a letter to Ginsberg, he writes from a library: "Have been looking [up] everything on Vladimir Mayakovsky that could get hands on – and will do so about [Sergei] Esenin…", adding, "haven't been writing like I said I would, instead reading. His material included Celine, Edgar Cayce, Dostoyevsky, Henry Miller, and Rimbaud's *Poems*. Writing from India to his Mother, Orlovsky reflects, "Am interested to hear from [sister] Marie [that you are] reading *Catcher in the Rye*…and although it's

Peter Orlovsky

alright as a book I don't think it compares to Celine's two books about his life and travels and early family life."

Throughout his writing Orlovsky references persons as varied as Percy B. Shelley, Thomas Wolfe, Alan Watts, Karen Horney, Einstein, Nietzsche, Yeats, and Spengler. In a journal entry from Jerusalem, he writes, "I am here in the old birthplace of Christ, fine fellow and many others all resting in peaceful graves…", and observing, "I am reading the *Koran* and it seems like fairy tale…much to fear if you do bad."

Orlovsky was well-connected. Friends and acquaintances who appear in this collection include Diane di Prima, Diane Wakoski, Frank O'Hara, Ed Sanders, Irving Rosenthal, Leroi Jones/Amira Baraka, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, Herbert Huncke, John Wieners, and painters Robert La Vigne, Joan Mitchell, Brion Gysin, and others.

Regarding William Burroughs, in a letter to his mother from Morocco, the poet commented "Bill [Burroughs] is very good man a bit loony and nervous and strange things come out of his head, but he's harmless and actually very sweet and kind, extremely so, you would like him very much." About Kerouac he could claim, "Poor Jack Kerouac. He be alive now and oh so strong and clear-headed if he took pot instead of sucked alcohol glass." Regarding Kerouac and his best-pal Neal Cassady, he observes, "Jack and Neal would be alive today if they were students of meditation…"

Ginsberg once declared that "Peter was considered in 1959 by William Carlos Williams to be the most gifted lyric poet of all the poets that were associated with the Beat Generation". Orlovsky's poems appear deceptively simple, both whimsical and often surreal, insightful and humorous. A few examples—

- "There is still a misty net of who is nuts and who ain't / I know I am madder than anyone here - "There was a taxi cab funeral / one taxi cab dead"
- "Please come in, / come in, / I said to the door"
- "It's dangerous to put flowers/On your baby when/Cows are around"
- "There is more to sorrow / than loneliness –"

Poet and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti, after asking Orlovsky for years to submit a poetry manuscript, published his *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs* in 1978.

In his journal, November 27, 1957, Orlovsky reflects, "There will come the time I will die and on that day I have a feeling I am going to be very happy…" Days earlier, visiting Baudelaire's grave in Paris, Orlovsky asked Ginsberg, "…shall we be buried next to each other?" Orlovsky died at a hospice in Williston, Vermont. His ashes, along with a third of Ginsberg's ashes, were buried together at Shambhala Mountain Center, Red Feathers Lake, Colorado.

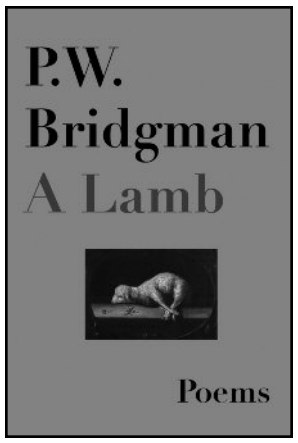
Notes:

- Orlovsky's papers are archived at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin
- See Simon Warner, *The Guardian*, Peter Orlovsky obituary, July 4, 2010.
- *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*. (Ed.) Bill Morgan New York: Grove Press, 2017.

Colin James Sanders is a foundational contributor to PRRB. He writes from Gibsons, B.C.

A Lamb

John Swanson



A Lamb
P.W. Bridgman
Ekstasis Editions
120 pp. $23.95

This is a dark book, a parade of lost souls.

And yet. It is a parade watched over, created, shepherded by a poet with a big and growing heart, each lost soul seen, accepted with compassion, not judged, not condemned.

As Roger Keyes reminds us so eloquently in *Hokusai Says:* "It matters that you care / It matters that you feel / It matters that you notice / It matters that life lives through you." And Bridgman is poet who cares, deeply. Love and loss achingly portrayed, with no hint of the sentimental or maudlin. These are narrative tales, some wistful, some incendiary. And as a theme through the book, the lamb "is a powerful symbol in many cultures". It resonates with the blood of the lamb as a redeemer, sacrificial animal, and as a mundane symbol of smallness. Echoing the poem "A Lamb— So gentle / so, so small / and yet".

The Wistful

From "Lych Gate and Yews: A Tableau Vivant":

> She continues, haltingly, about the teasing,
> about school girls saying that the yew trees
> have been planted in churchyards all over England,
> for centuries, to keep cows like her
> well clear of the altar
> and, thus, the marriage bed.
> Her sobbing returns,
> but quietly.

The heart aches, after all these years, and the cruel young boys in the back seat of the car, so used to mocking the bulk of their maiden great-auntie, are in tears.

From "Derry Vin Santo":

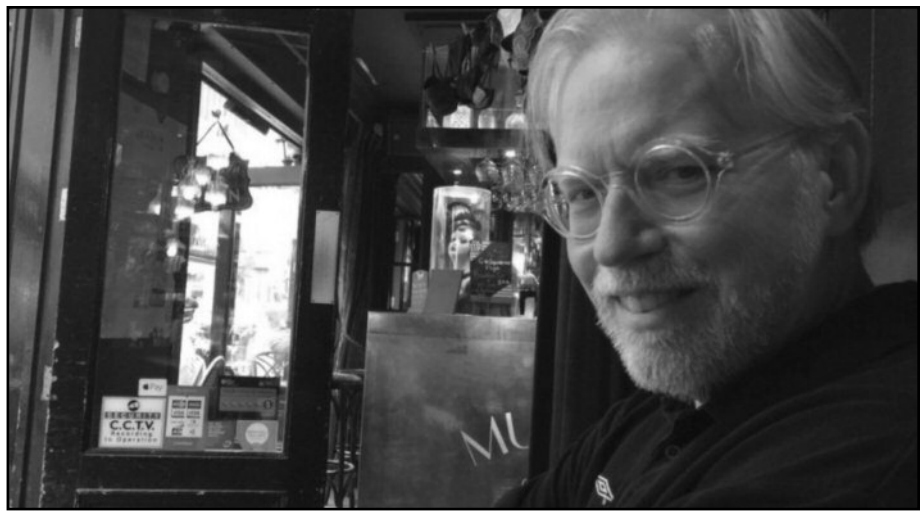
> To Isabella who, in that moment, before ever a word
> was exchanged between us, slipped her steeplechaser's
> harness over the untamed muscle of my boy-heart,
> cinched it up tight, slapped the reins and bolted.

Isabella, who married the town bully and as the boy-heart finds out at the end of his life, has suffered abuse and misery at his hand. Oh, had he had the courage...

The Incendiary

From "No Writers Were Harmed in the Making of This Whiskey":

> I.
> "Now here's a fine, square-shouldered whiskey for you.
> You'll like this one."
> Giving Art a nod, Jack twists the bottle cap slowly
> and with exaggerated care,
> like a sapper extracting a fuse cylinder
> from an unexploded artillery shell…
> It is eleven-thirty in the morning…
>
> The brothers toss back two whiskeys in quick succession.
> They bang their glasses back down hard on the table…
>
> It's a merciful release to have the women out of the house,
> getting their hair done in the next town.
> "It would be no trouble for us to keep an eye on the wee 'un,"
> Jack had said to Kathleen and Fionnuala. "No trouble at all"…



P.W. Bridgman

> II.
> Losing interest in his cartoon,
> Téadóir sets off for a wander,
> a red plastic ball clutched in his hand.
> The telephone rings…
>
> He keeps on, more loudly: "Ello, Ello!"
> But there is no waking Granda Jack—
> or Uncle Art, whose cigarette has burned
> a glowing red hollow in the kitchen table.
> The smoke from it joins the greasy fug
> that is beginning to rise up from the blackening bacon
> in the pan on the cooker…
>
> "Uh-oh!"
> This time it's his red ball.
> Having slipped his grasp, it now
> bobs on the surface of the water in the toilet,
> just out of reach…
>
> With a mighty effort he reaches gamely again for it—
> The boy overbalances, tips forward and tumbles in,
> face first, the full and unforgiving weight of his body forcing
> his head beneath the surface of the water
> and holding it fast there,
> a nautilus in a porcelain shell…
>
> III.
> Kathleen, Fionnuala and Valeria revel in their
> unknowing freedom… They laugh
> and chatter while, as the afternoon fades,
> Kathleen drives them all home from the hairdresser's
> …to Knockcloghrim where…
> like an unexploded artillery shell,
> the end of the world awaits their return.

We feel this "unexploded artillery shell" unburying as the poem drags us to its lethal conclusion and the nightmare of the future being created.

The Elegiac and the Epiphanic

In some poems there is a classical remove, a formal structure and language that gives small defeats an elegiac quality.

From "I Am Only Temporarily a Tie Salesman (A Barbed Lamentation in Sonnet Form)":

> I am only temporarily a tie salesman.
> If there were a God I would be driving that Buick.
> "You gotta smoke, Lionel? Thanks. I owe you one."
> If I don't make quota, honey, I'm fucked. This ain't Lubbock.

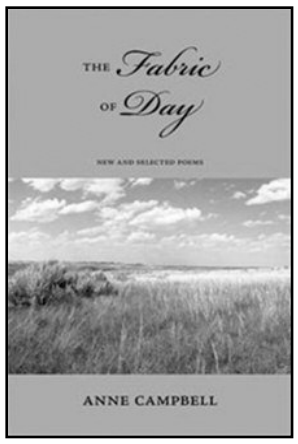
(continued on page 33)

The Fabric of Day

Antonio D'Alfonso

This piece should have been written some time ago. And then again no. There is no proper time to write about a book. Books don't come with an expiry date stamped on their covers, as the Industry would like us to believe. There is something dismal about watching book after book slide down the funnel of forgetfulness, oblivion.

Anne Campbell's collection, *The Fabric of Day*, is not one we will soon forget. Individual books are salvos sent and salvos received. Selected Poems and Collected Poems are treasure troves for readers to return to when they need to converse with the author face to face; these collections are important not so much for their offerings of memorabilia as much as the secrets made public through and in between the lines that unfold throughout the years composing a poet's career (if career is the proper term to use when speaking of a poet).



The Fabric of Day: New and Selected Poems
Anne Campbell
Thistledown Press, 2017

Campbell introduces her book as though her work formed some kind of emotional diary kept during her intellectual journey. She mentions the presence of recurring images in her selection: there are images and phrases that reappear in the most unexpected places. Considering that the voyage begins in 1983 and ends around 2017, it is not surprising that Anne Campbell returns to the sentimental spots and literary spaces she feels most comfortable in.

Anne Campbell

In 'The Beginning', she writes: 'My body is my soul the place where spirits enter and rest. My body is my beginning, spirit enfleshed'. I told myself, 'Ok, with such terms this poetry is a spiritual journey.' And yet in the poem 'The God of Encounter', she reminds us that 'It was not mystical, the experience…'

Concluding that these poems do not constitute a theological adventure, that is, Anne Campbell might hint at spirituality or religion sparingly, ultimately these themes are not her main concern, the readers must then turn their attention to her echoes and duplications, as the poet herself confesses in her introductory note.

Substantially the shape of the poems can be divided into three categories: prose poetry, flush-left short verse, and dancing lines swaying through identitations of various lengths. What is expected rarely occurs. The semantics are non-linear. The rhythmic scat is dyslexic. The lines reflect a nervous imagination. 'The well//draws me//knowledge//to the fall'.

This fall, the break from what was (the immigrant avowal: Croatian, babushka) to what is. And what is? 'What is this/constant memory/what metaphor is here//memory of an absence//no memory of a move//…I absent myself/absinthe myself//falling//letting go//One (that one would be me)/to find the part of oneself felt/missing/feeling the self, one used to be//gone//absence as a clearing//being with the stranger I am//becoming.'

The above is a combination of words and lines extracted from thirty-four years of writing. The result is telling. Reiteration, recurrence, echolalia, of course, but there is also interrelatedness, progression, cohension.

'Time reminds//she is there//the fabric/of day.'

This sudden appearance of strands recalls Philippe Haeck's image of *Nattes,* the first book Haeck wrote in the early 1970s, and which I read and then translated in the mid-1980s, when I first met Anne Campbell. This is not name dropping. I wish to acknowledge the origin of this metaphor for texts viewed as fabric, weaves, mat, plaits.

Anne Campbell has woven words and verse into a material that demonstrates the becoming of self. Now this is surely unique. After three decades of poetry many would expect to find at the end of the book the focused portrait of a poet. Anne Campbell, the agile weaver, whispers that this is not so. The fabric remains fragile, and the mending never completed. The work is on-going, never-ending.

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

LAMB *(continued from page 32)*

It was so much better when I was in shoes.

At times Bridgman sits in a corner of a dark pub, hospital room or smoke-filled kitchen observing, listening, reporting in the cadence of the story and place. And the many places where the tales occur adds to their universality. We may have no experience of the vernacular of Northern Ireland but we understand it when we meet it. We feel the authentic voice of the characters as they struggle with the life they have been given.

At other times he speaks as the persona of the poem. In "Door Into The Light: August 1973" he talks about his relationship to his father, who is the "boss" of the paper mill where he is working as a summer student. Bridgman calls it "a Dark Satanic Mill"—drawing on his classical sensibility, here he references Blake's poem "Jerusalem". We don't know if this experience is autobiographical or imagined, but he inhabits the young man's epiphany so convincingly we cannot believe it is not his own:

> …the big black gears, dozens of them
> lining the east side of Kraft Machine No. 1…
> suddenly become beautiful
> and I cannot take my eyes away…
>
> I take in not only the rough beauty of
> Kraft Machine No. 1 but the imprint
> of his hand on that beauty.
>
> And in that moment—
> with the big gears turning,
> and me, still so unformed,
> leaving for the day awestruck—
> he became bigger than God.

The book ends with a love poem, one that sneaks up on us, allaying the human frailties we are captive to:

> Is it not a great and joyful mystery that,
> in our shapeless world with all its artifice,
> an earthbound deity—no mere apparition
> but an *embodiment* who wears glasses,
> savours anchovies and sometimes forgets to close the fridge door—
> *[precious details!]*
> should be living with me now in Green Dolphin Street?

A wonderful, essential book that sings to our sorrows, cloaks our mysteries, celebrates the fierceness of our young love and the joy of appreciative love that survives and grows later in life.

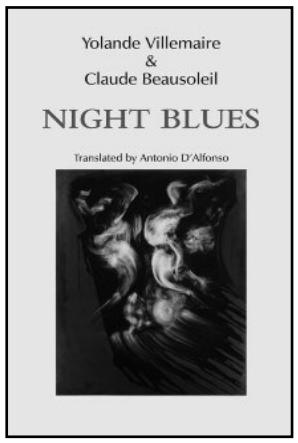
John Swanson's book of poems and street photographs, *an almost hand, beckoning*, will be published by Blurb Books in the fall of 2019.

La Francophonie: Three Books/ Four Poets from Québéc

Eric Spalding

This review considers three books written by well-established Québécois poets. These works are all translated from the French by Antonio D'Alfonso, himself a poet with many publications to his credit. All three books are published as attractive quality paperbacks by Ekstasis Editions.

Night Blues is comprised of two poems that, as the title suggests, have in common a focus on the night and on sadness. The first poem is by Yolande Villemaire, while the second is by Claude Beausoleil. These two authors are together in a book as they are in life; indeed, they have been close friends and more since the mid-1960s. I've read two novels by Villemaire, the experimental *La Vie en prose* (1980) and the more reader-friendly *Vava* (1989). I still think about the latter book from time to time. It's about a woman who deals with her *mal de vivre* by trying out a diverse array of therapies, workshops and retreats. It's also 707 pages long. From this long book, we turn to *Night Blues* and Villemaire's "Violet Night" (2013), that numbers 500 words spread out over 21 pages. In this poem, the Guide of the Lost Ones exhorts the poet to challenge herself and realize her full expressive potential. I appreciated the evocative depictions of nature in the work, as when the Guide says, "Let, let this violet night stud you with stars/poet/let its sacred geometry twinkle an instant/let it diffuse in space."



Night Blues
Yolande Villemaire and Claude Beausoleil
Translated by Antonio D'Alfonso
Ekstasis, 2018

Yolande Vilemaire

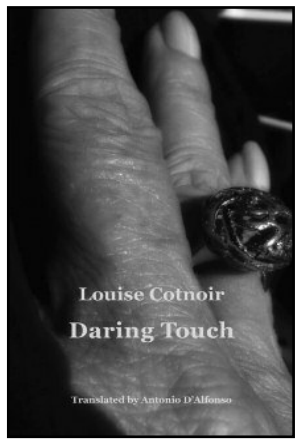
Claude Beausoleil

Louise Cotnoir

In the longer "Jack & Billie in the Blues of Night" (2013), Beausoleil imagines a conversation between writer Jack Kerouac ("and his visions") and singer Billie Holiday ("and her passions"), uniquely gifted individuals whose alcoholism led to their premature deaths. Beausoleil writes, "you are talking in this bar/not fearing censorship/Billie and Jack and the blues/in shadows merging." Through repetition ("*on the road on the road*") and a gradual accumulation of details, the poet respectfully conveys an impression of these two artists' works and lives.

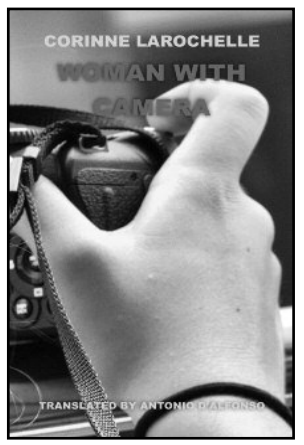
Daring Touch incorporates two books by Louise Cotnoir, *The Audacity of Hands* (1987) and *Tell Me I'm Imagining This* (1996). Cotnoir's poems are meticulously written. You sense that she has pored over every word, arranging them into a harmonious whole. At her best, Cotnoir can communicate an entire story in a few lines: "Her smile widens/He devours it with his eyes/Afraid to lose her/Terribly alone so soon." Yet even after several readings, I found it hard to unlock any particular meaning from many of the poems. Was the translator to blame? No, he wasn't: I found some the poems equally hermetic in their original French. For instance, what to make of the book's opening lines? "Woman, keep the darkness in mind. Entrenchment on your forehead smashed. I say darkness, the perspective of what is blows out, of what none can no longer hurt. Bewildered, crazy."

Corinne Larochelle



Daring Touch
Louise Cotnoir
Translated by Antonio D'Alfonso
Ekstasis, 2017

After a while, I allowed myself to experience the poems as I would a dream, opening myself up to different moods even when I did not perceive any overarching logic. At one point, the poet took me to a beach, and I felt what it was like to actually be there. At another, she took me down a city street in Italy. Also, *The Audacity of Hands* often mentioned body parts and fluids, sometimes to sensuous effect, while *Tell Me I'm Imagining This* had music as a recurring theme. I think that *Daring Touch* would be of particular interest to the poetry enthusiast who likes a good challenge.



Woman with Camera
Corinne Larochelle
Translated by Antonio D'Alfonso
Ekstasis, 2018

Corinne Larochelle's work, through its mix of free verse and prose poetry, is comparable to Cotnoir's, but it is more accessible. It helps that *Woman with Camera* (original pub. in French 2011), draws inspiration from specific photographs by Diane Arbus (1923-1971). Unfortunately, the list of photographs in the French-language original is missing from the English translation. Arbus is known for her sympathetic portraits of the marginalized and downtrodden. In her book, Larochelle compares her to a butterfly collector. She imagines this native New Yorker combing the streets in search of unique specimens to seize with her camera: "She spots everything: solitude, strangeness, a woman and her oversized hat, a man and his loneliness, grief on bone's end." In this manner, what the photographer captures in images, the poet captures in words while giving her readers a sense of the rough neighbourhoods frequented by Arbus.

Through *Woman with Camera*, Larochelle draws a sympathetic portrait of the artist, from her hopeful beginnings ("Baptism day/in Washington Square Park/for my brand new Pentax") to her tragic end ("My thoughts go to your friend who found you in your bathtub/Gashes deep on your wrists/Your skin shriveled in red water").

It is to the credit of translator Antonio D'Alfonso and Ekstasis Editions that they are making French-Canadian poetry available to an English-speaking audience. Each of these three books opens the reader up to new worlds of thought and feeling.

Eric Spalding was born and raised in Greater Montreal to a French-Canadian mother and Scottish father. He now lives in Surrey, BC.

The Silence

Linda Rogers

Exile is a condition and a brand. Exile Editions, a publisher that moves beyond boundaries to examine the isolation of refugees from ordinary life and political boundaries, whether in speculative fiction, art or outlier poetry, has released *The Silence*, the first book of fiction by Karen Lee White.

The Silence
Karen Lee White
Exile Editions, 2018,
paper, 170 pages plus
disc, $21.95

The Silence, an experimental book, is a spirit quest on and off the page. Its' author, who moves between the realities of settler and Indigenous life herself, tells the story of Leah, a mixed-blood songwriter compelled to the North Country, where she examines her footprints in a landscape of snow. Her medium is the silence in which the Creator speaks and the careful listener hears. Leah's narrative, broken by song and mist-infused landscape paintings, defines the open parameters of dreams.

It may be no man's land, where random shots are fired and hungry coyotes lurk in the woods, but for a spirit voyageur, it is an appropriate challenge. Leah is armed with song and genetic information. She surrenders herself to becoming a bridge over troubled water, crossing a treacherous arc over cultures and definitions of being, as she considers her own role in the Indigenous Renaissance while surrounded by the cries of species under siege.

Leah, for whom sexual attraction is the metaphor for congenital compulsion and death by drowning, steps into to the dangerous possibility of losing her footing and we share the peril. Her characters, a beloved uncle, sister-friends, sacred animals and Haywire, her star-crossed lover, walk on parallel paths, their journeys interrupted by sex and violence breaking the silence with groans and gunfire that threaten the aspirant choir.

The songs/poems/ spells that accompany the text and are appended in a CD that features two of the White Sisters, Karen and Leslie Gentile, are footprints that document Leah's horizontal rapture. Their locus maps a spiritual pilgrimage to the source, where Leah will learn who she is and what matters: family and the traditions that keep it together, even over impossible distances, until she reaches her spirit home.


Karen Lee White

Leah's quest is for the note that heals and she finds it in the silent lives of animals that give birth and die while stalking survival in the wild. Seen as a film with flashbacks, the buried past rendered in her diary, her narrative moves from past to present along the corridors of life and death, the story shared by every sentient being.

Although *The Silence* is an impressionist work, White's vivid frames are not defined by the gentle pastels of impressionism. Her most powerful segments are natural segues from this world to the next, Leah's dreams, where spirit animals emerge from the woods to guide her to a higher consciousness.

Her intense sexuality is more than that. She wrestles angels for the right to transcend whoever she is in the here and now to become holy, a medicine woman fluent in the language of healing, which may be the deep structure of language, virtual silence.

Along the way, the reader is startled by colour eruptions in the dome of many-coloured glass, the death of spirit creatures lurking in the periphery of human contact, the taste of wild meat, the songs of a startled narrator, who attempts to define her life in terms of nuisance grounds, the places where secrets and garbage are buried in snow.

As Leah savours the tastes that remind her of her connection to the human family and cultural knowledge, so is the reader immersed in cultural learning.

> Bush tea. The little bag Haywire had gifted her with at the end of the potlatch. The way leaves were redolent of wild places and mountains. Leah brewed a big pot, anticipating the lightly smoky taste. She settled back on the white couch, blowing on a steaming cup of amber liquid, releasing the fragrance of the land she loved.
>
> She closed her eyes. Memories were kindled and fanned.

Comfort lives in the familiar as we reach for the unfamiliar. These are the connections we long for in the uncertainty of fractured community, the amulets that we hope will protect us from loneliness and alienation: tea, tobacco, and too often, sadly, opiates and alcohol. We are all under siege: humans, animals, forests and oceans. The plague rises from the subconscious, and, just as Leah is stalked by the demons that come in dreams and waking life, so are the animals in her living sleep. Coyote, the predator, is the metaphor that haunts her and her weaker brothers and sisters in the chain of life.

> A half-hour away, where low golden light now weakly touched
> the tops of trees, the calf tremoured one last time, stilled.
> Coyote caught the scent. Trotting tail up, he made ready to
> scavenge an easy prey.

In the corridor that connects life to death, what we call the journey to the light, there is heavenly music, the sacred narrative revealed between notes that Leah longs to hear, a drumbeat of belonging. She knows the triggers for those connections are phenomenal details that nourish the soul. These are the things we leave behind but carry with us in memory. She paints this picture so poignantly that her story becomes a sound walk to peace, the journey's end and its' beginning.

> In perfect silence
> rivers fall
> winding south
> down, down
> still down through lush green,
> over rock,
> gathering the flavours of the land.
> flowing
> miles and miles
> finally home
> to the sea.

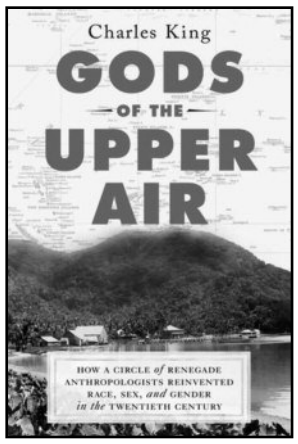
Leah's song returns to the place where life began, according to Darwin and Indigenous legend, and where it, hopefully, never ends.

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

Ethnology's Rivers & Tributaries

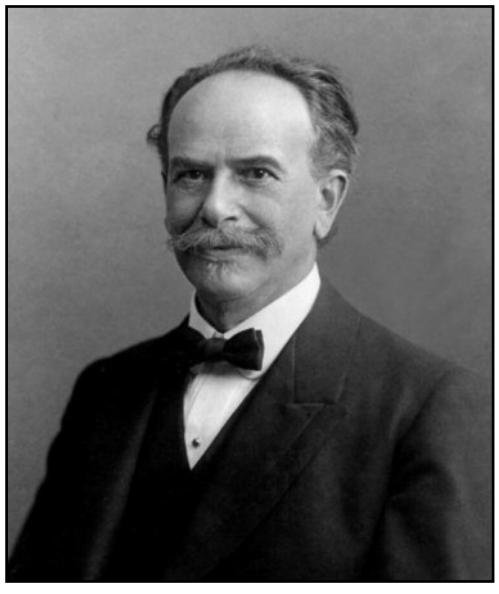
Richard Wirick

It does not get much better than this in a profile of the history of ideas and disciplines. King traces the vast and quite positive influence of Franz Boas, the towering Prussian-Polish anthropologist who virtually invented anthropology's cultural branch when he fled Hitler to set up camp at Columbia and Barnard in the twenties. The man started out by being culturally embattled for his left-wing politics, shoved up to a remote section of the humanities building near Butler Library to keep him away from impressionable fellow faculty members. But his history of various civilizations had established him as the guru of early ethnology, an unlikely subject for a product of the "Prussian schoolmaster" (whose sternness and cruelty led Thomas Mann to lay Twentieth Century wars at the footstep of such a figure's influence), but who indeed (Boas) carried facial scars from fencing with swords on Berlin playgrounds in his grammar school days. Boas started penniless in the U.S., an outcast Jew who refused the professions and merchant mantles of his fellow co-religionists. But as King points out, by the 1930s, almost every cultural anthropology department in American (and foreign) colleges was chaired by one of Boas's PhD students. This writer worked in the library of Kroeber Hall as a Berkeley undergraduate, Arthur Kroeber being Boas's very first doctoral acolyte.



Gods of the Upper Air
Charles King
Nan A. Talese/
Doubleday, 370 pages

As Louis Menand has pointed out, Boas kept his creation—anthropology—in the solid corners of a hard science. He was an empiricist, who "collected facts, and was not inclined to theoretical speculation." "But he thought," Menand goes on, that "the basic fact about human beings is that the facts *about them change,* because circumstances and environments change. This is why field work was the *sine qua non* of his practice—to gauge the combinatory engine of genes, environment and culture, researchers had to be out in the muddle and muck of the primitive atmospherics of one's subjects. His student Ruth Benedict did very little field work among the Zuni, the Kwakiutl and the New Guineau highlanders she studied, and after only a few trips to Samoa Margaret Mead stopped visiting or even considering new data. The great Continental father of cultural anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss, did hardly any field work after his study of West-Central Brazilian river natives. These brilliant, but somewhat armchair naifs of Boas's classrooms and influence, began to make ethnography resemble crypto-colonialism, the Western 'scientist' telling the native's own story without talking to or observing his subject.


Franz Boas

Boas was blessed by acolytes of genius, four in particular. The first was Benedict, whose sometimes sloppily reasoned comparison of disparate cultures ('Appollonian' or group-identified Zunis as opposed to ecstatic, 'vision-quest' Plains Indians) in *Patterns of Culture* had a staggering influence—really a foundational one—in the discipline. His second prize student was Margaret Mead, whose Samoan studies of pre-marital sex among South sea island cultures ruffled the feathers of genteel, armchair academic ethnologist. Ellen Deloria was the third ("All my best students are women" said Boas). No anthropologist better understood and documented the languages and customs of upper Plains Indians, particularly her native Oglala Sioux, than did this dynamic, inexhaustible Teacher's College transplant. As soon as she was out of Oberlin, Boas heard tell of her language recordings, summoned her to N.Y. and his graduate programs, and the result was the classic 'Dakota Languages', a combination of essay studies and Smithsonian recordings that form the groundwork of Native American language investigations. She took the Boas mantle across the street to Barnard to spearhead his influence among female college students, who further branched out and carried the gospel to all corners of academia.


Charles King

Boas's third prize student was the Harlem Renaissance author Zora Neale Hurston, who showed, as an African-American novelist, Northern readers a way of life somewhat at odds with the growing integrationist mentality which she did not entirely share. Hurston's work was—though not traditional 'anthropology'—was most representative of Boas's influence. The idea behind her novels was that we cannot see our way of life (our "culture") from the inside, just as we cannot see our own faces. The culture of the "other" serves as a looking glass, as Benedict put it in *Patterns of Culture, "The understanding we need of our* own cultural processes can . . be arrived at by a detour." The outward focus was what we needed to understand the correspondences and similarities of a foreign culture with our own's qualities of mind. But in looking past the mirror we hold up to ourselves and directly at the others' lives, we grow our laboratory of specimens, deepen our grasp of what culture is.

And what is that most laden of terms? Benedict wrote of it as "coexisting and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself out of the raw materials of existence." The idea was to assess which practices were core and which were peripheral, isolating the ones that produce for a people the kind of society they want and are most adept at perpetuating.. So the anthropological mirror described above has a moral purpose. Sometimes the unusual in another culture gives us a better idea of the flux of markers in our own. We see how repellant practices can become acceptable with a certain depth of understanding. Noting that Mead's first book jacket for *Coming of Age* featured a topless adolescent girl, she wanted us to see the tribal and arbitrary as possibly having a reasonableness we can come to take for granted. The seminal next-generation anthropologist Clifford Geertz, writing about Benedict, said this was "portraying the alien as the familiar with the signs changed."

These early explorations of how and what culture "is" gave rise to what it yielded as a true instrument of analysis of a people. If we see it as a lens through which we view a social group, then we are trapped in generalizations and making possibly unfounded conjectures about a 'Navajo consciousness' or a 'Kyrgyz consciousness." It will sometimes be hard to find differences among groups if this inter-subjectivity, with all its commonness with other perspectives erasing distinctions, becomes the dominant metaphor. On the other hand, once one distinguishes a group's culture from its social structure—which positivists like Geertz attempt—then culture becomes tossed-off epiphenomena of tribal structures, something that only glosses the underlying etiology of forms of life. Another potentially dangerous weakening of the term's usefulness—aimed often at Levi-Strauss with his rigid taxonomies of cooking and genital classifications—is that the ethnologist weakens her vision by seeing a culture as a frozen specimen, stuck in time's rictus for we students to study.

Boas's answer to this was to see cultural practices as existing in a constant flux, much as perception appeared to Whitehead in *Process and Reality.* Culture for Boas was "diffusion," or what he called "the spread of changing forms and practices across space and time." Deloria also rejected isolating her Sioux "talking boxes" in the time and place of their gathering. She thought that Sioux culture was nothing if not the way it was *presently* lived, with its combination of pre-white settler customs and 20th-Century ways of life, including the horribly diminished lives of Indians in the reservation system.

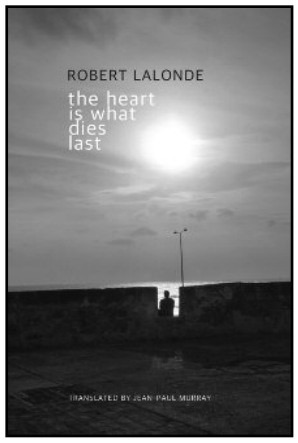
King of course does not miss the notion of "culture" now in our gender-exploratory and politically, culturally divided country. The differences between the Red and Blue state's views of things—from an outsider's perspective—goes back to Boas's first discoveries that cultural traits were plastic and not immutable, that they are not naturally predetermined, and that variations within groups are greater than variations between groups. (Note this concept's deft refusal to rigify and 'hard science' differences

(continued on page 39)

Mother, Mother

Eric Spalding

In *The Heart Is What Dies Last,* French-Canadian author Robert Lalonde profiles his own mother. As it happens, three authors whom I admire have also published books about their mothers. Québécois writer Gilles Archambault, in his terse and melancholy style, reminisces about his own late mother in *Un après-midi de septembre* (*An Afternoon in September*, 1994). Richard Ford's *Between Them: Remembering My Parents* (2017) is composed of two loving and respectful essays, one about the author's father and another about his mother. And Paul Theroux, who is of French-Canadian descent on his father's side, details his problematic relationship with his mother in his autobiographical novel *Mother Land* (2017).



The Heart Is What Dies Last
Robert Lalonde
Translated by Jean Paul Murray
Ekstasis Editions

Of these books, Robert Lalonde's most resembles the latter, as his own relationship with his mother is quite complicated. Indeed, throughout Lalonde's book, we witness mother and son speaking at cross purposes. Their constant misunderstandings are a key motivation for Lalonde to leave home at a young age and to only contact his mother sporadically thereafter. It is only when she is a senior citizen that the author's attitude starts to soften and he spends more time with her.

The main narrative of the book focusses on the mother's 92nd year. At this stage, Lalonde is visiting her regularly in her nursing home. Her health and lucidity are deteriorating, and the author does what he can to help. Lalonde complements the present-day visits with numerous flashbacks to his early life with his mother. These flashbacks are not in chronological order, but together they illuminate who she was and what she meant to him. In this look at 1950s Québec, the reader gets a glimpse of a hardscrabble and isolated way of life where women had limited opportunities.

Lalonde's mother grew up in a big Québécois family, the third of ten children. She was prone to anxiety, a trait that her son inherited. She liked to stay close to home and never ventured farther afield than Quebec City. She was illiterate for most of her life. As a consequence, the original French version of the memoir alternates between two modes of writing. When Lalonde narrates or speaks in the novel, the language is standard French. When his mother speaks, however, the language is the popular form of Québécois speech known as *joual*. The translator has done a good job of rendering the original novel in plain English, and he wisely chooses to have the mother also speak in plain English. I write "wisely" because for the translator to use a populist form of English would not have conveyed the reality of *joual* to the reader and in fact would have been a distraction. For example, the translator has the mother say "Come inside, it's raining buckets." Admittedly, this phrase is colloquial, but it is closer to the standard French "Veux-tu bien rentrer, il pleut à verse" than to the mother's actual request, "Veux-tu ben rentrer, y mouille à *scieaux*!"


Robert Lalonde

In 2016, the book was made into a feature film, which I paid to watch on YouTube. The same nursing-home visits between son and mother are at the heart of the movie, and there are numerous flashbacks, also arranged non-chronologically. However, to increase dramatic tension, the movie adds some fictitious touches. For instance, the author wins a Governor General's Award for his book. The mother, now a sprightly 82, asks her son to poison her—she does not want to descend further into dementia, but she does not want to commit suicide by herself either. The dour son agonizes over his mother's request for a good part of the movie. In addition, there is a mystery involving the son's father, one that his mother has never spoken about with her son. Lalonde touches upon this mystery in his memoir, but the movie places much more emphasis on it.

In the closing chapter of his book, Lalonde remarks that he initially tried to profile his mother in the early days of his writing career. In retrospect, he believes that the timing was not right because he resented her too much back then. He hopes that, in *The Heart Is What Dies Last*, he has painted a more evenhanded portrait, one that his mother would have approved of. I believe that Lalonde has succeeded in achieving this goal.

Eric Spalding lives in Surrey, BC. If he ever wrote a book about his parents, it would most closely resemble Richard Ford's.

WHAT THE DEAD WANT *(continued from page 21)*

"*the Harvesting of Words: verbs, nouns, speech, lexes, lanugae, graffiti—yes"* (67). In this middle section of Turcotte's triptych, the poet meditates on language, the poet's medium, and the making of art, literary and visual. In the third section of the poem "things that do not happen," Turcotte writes of "light" that "spreads quickly—a touch equivalent to language, rolled away from my recollection and dropped into the fog of distant memory, this was madness, eating holes in my flesh" (21).

The theme of madness is threaded through the book. Section 10 of "Benediction (30 days in the asylum)" reads, "I am a muscle, an eel, a fish, I am a heart, a woman / the lunatic forum for the marginalized" (81). The persona of *What the Dead Want*, though lyrical is not merely the personal "I" of the poet; the identity of the poet, as evidenced in these lines. Throughout the sequence of poems, the identity of the poem shifts, taking on many forms to speak on behalf of the dead, the mad, the marginalized, those burdened with sorrows, laden with age and memory. In "visions at the edge of time," the persona proclaims,

> I am a blind woman entering the landscape at sunrise,
> reaping a harvest of light. Against all this, there is a sanctified
> plentitude, a eucharist, nefarious gods dizzy with mead, running
> through the catacombs of the heart where the saints are still in hiding.
> and the dark angel still squats over the lava fields. (137)

Questions also figure prominently in *What the Dead Want*; the poet asking the reader provocative, open-ended questions. "Part One: Remembering and Forgetting" ends with, "what happened in the garden? / what of the sleeping child? / will she waken? / will she remember her name?" (64). In "the voice," the poet asks


Paulette Claire Turcotte

> and who counts the exiles, wanderers, the maimed and cornered,
> the hungry, who counts the children drowned at sea
> who, who names them, who marks their watery graves,
> who counts the dead children in the cold cities, the northern
> provinces, dead by their own hand

(continued on page 38)

Cantata in Two Voices

Fran Bourassa

Cantata in Two Voices
Jude Neale and
Bonnie Nish
Ekstasis Editions, 2018

There's something intriguing and mysterious about reading a poem with two authors and not knowing which of the two writers wrote what line. At the same time, there is a generosity in it, a selflessness.

As a reader, once we get past the irritation of our inner voice asking who, which one, who owns, who made and let go of ego, we also become part of the song that is not I or me but we and us. The writers Jude Neale and Bonnie Nish did not begin this experiment alone. They searched out other voices, choosing epigraphs from writers including Robert Hass, Louise Gluck, Billy Collins, and Li-Young Lee among them; poets I know, and ones I need to know.

Basing their exchange of lines upon individual epigraphs, the song of these two women weaves a tapestry of connected thoughts and feelings. Neale and Nish ensure it is a beautiful one. This is the way they chose to go—with those who have been there previously, leading the way, shining the light. And why not, haven't women been weaving their voices in concert forever? Each poem with its epigraph is a signpost to where we are headed. The tone of the voice is carried like a harmony into the poem with the epigraph as the solo: the voices of the chorus lift it up—at times not as background, but as a new understanding, or a new set of hands to shoulder the image forward, onward and sometimes higher.

For example, with an epigraph from Li-Young Lee's "Have You Prayed?"—'*When the wind turns and asks, in my father's voice / Have you prayed?',* Neale and Nish reach in response, stating,

> I have answered too many questions
> as the wind blows through the house.
> I have bent low on my knees,
> an origami body folded in with suffering...
> "Only You"

Jude Neale

There is something ancient and holy in the call and response style that at moments brings this work to another level like a shout into the darkness and, yes, like a reply. In "City Suite" built on a line of Mark D. Dunn's "The Famous Wish Deciphered as Lightning", they conclude,

> I hear the stone faced
> church crack open
>
> with the tolling of the bells.

Well into this Cantata of poems we began to hear two distinct voices – of heart and mind. One voice, cerebral, needs to wrap her head around the subject and make sense of it. The other, a painter's, who comes with her magic touch to colour the negatives, to bring them all to life. In "Rebirth", inspired by Robert Hass' "After Goethe", with its '*In the mountains, stillness*', we read:

> Now I can open and bloom
> and spread out into the dusk,
> where Lupines and Indian Paintbrush
> carpet the scree.
> Slashes of purple-throated
> Fireweed snatch at my breath.
> Night begins to fall
> and everything silent
> holds me.

Or there is this beautiful hummingbird image in "From Basket to Treetop":

Bonnie Nish

> But we can't
> fly open-mouthed
> from basket to treetop.
>
> hauling fragrance and the blur
> of summer colour
>
> behind us like a flag.

The foreword to this Cantata notes how "This is a completely unique collection of poems, written by two experienced poets and based on the words of other writers." That's a fair appraisal. In a few of the poems it can sometimes seem as if the poets get in each other's way a little, or sometimes do not quite meet up; these poems need more time to get in step. It may be due to the nature of the project and the strict deadline Neale and Nish imposed on themselves for completion—to write a 50-page book over the course of 50 days. Though a challenge of this kind is daunting, it is not unrealistic, and Neale and Nish present us with evidence of what serious poets can accomplish.

Fran Bourassa is a Canadian poet, performer and feature writer. Her claim to fame is being told she is overly sensitive. See *fbourassa@hotmail.com*

WHAT THE DEAD WANT *(continued from page 37)*

> what is the color of hope
> of absence (90)

In the third section of What the Dead Want, "Songs of Love and Death," the persona attests, "there is no / forgetting, and memory waxes brilliant, what is it to ask water for life/ of the saviours of God? And words, words pulled from the dark/ become a clear and intimate rite" (120). This "rite," the reader's experience of the poem that unfolds in time like music, is the rite of passage that ends with aesthetic catharsis, spiritual awakening.

What the Dead Want offers readers a beautiful, yet haunting read; an experience of the sublime rendered in the poet's medium of language, woven with the language and imagery of dream, memory, and emotional experience. Turcotte gives voice to the dead, the missing, the marginalized, those filled with sorrow and terror who struggle to create hope through art. It's a beautiful collection of poems that leaves the reader wanting to see what Turcotte publishes next.

Krysia Jopek is the Founding Editor of Diaphanous Press and the author of *Maps and Shadows* and *Hourglass Studies*.

POWE *(continued from page 18)*

Notoriously, for many, social media have become synonymous with the people who abuse the membrane the most, the "'hackers, satellite-cable radio hosts (shock jocks), trolls and blog-satirists and their dark posts." Powe writes that "Abuse-Hate Messaging is another sign of dark judgments and click-opinions coursing into our lives." He speaks of those who rouse dark energies at length, particularly their use of "fake news":

> We see the recasting of history and records to suit a purpose, and the poisonous verbal outpouring they call "truth-telling."

McLuhan anticipated fake news when he said that news is more artifact than art, and wrote, "The line between factitious and fictitious disappears."

There are many ways that *The Charge* channels and reawakens the mind of McLuhan. One of the most notable is Powe's use of aphorism, punching the mind awake in a succinct phrasing of a complex truth. Among my favorites:

> The migrations of data and souls are our frontiers.
> Opening a book, you opened yourself.
> [T]he wilderness is often called our heartland…
> Paranoia is the reverse side of acute sensitivity.
> These are the dynamics of becoming headlong, gathering in the momentum, wedded to what is happening not just to you or me, to us or them, but wholly to we.

As the last line suggests, Powe hints at a grand paradox of social media: that by dividing us, somehow these media are doing even more to unite us.

Powe reawakens McLuhan in other ways: in his restless search for metaphors and fresh perspectives from which to capture every aspect and nuance of social media; and, stunningly, in his adamant refusal to impose value judgments, sharply evident in his treatment of the ascendancy of Donald Trump. Most acutely – more than I've found in McLuhan – Powe stresses that these new media are taking us somewhere that, as a species, we have never been before.

"The global village and theatre and the Circus Maximus were subsumed into the vibrant membrane," Powe writes, suggesting te membrane will one day prove the embryo of a grand unknowable. Elsewhere Powe says:

> The charge carries the spark of Creation, the second Big Bang: the firing-up of technological expansion through electrification and the resultant accelerating streams and impulses of data-energy.

In all, *The Charge in the Global Membrane* does for social media what, in 1964, McLuhan's *Understanding Media* did for television: announcing not only the potent effects of a new medium but opening minds to its larger dimensions and historic – some might say post-historic — role.

I should add that there is one passage in *The Charge* that goes well beyond McLuhan, a lyric poem in which Powe treats the role of social media in rousing the #MeToo movement. The poem, with its heart-breaking rhythm between a grand theme and a single woman's agony, is given several pages. Its opening lines:

> Now listen to the howl
> To the Silence Breaking
> #MeToo Her Personal is Communal Cry
> Sofia Shekinah breaking chains holding her down.

The #MeToo lyrics remind us that if, in McLuhan's writings, the global village once found its drumbeat, with Powe's *The Charge in the Global Membrane*, the global village finds its oft-stuttering heartbeat.

In 1966 Susan Sontag described McLuhan as an indispensable guide for comprehending that turbulent era. McLuhan, the great pattern-spotter, brought unsuspected coherence and a sense of historic reach to the tumult of that time.

"This is the story of our moment," Powe writes early in *The Charge.* Not the least of the book's achievements is to give distinctive shape, sense and coloration to a time that many would agree with the Italian essayist Roiberto Calasso to be the "Unnameable Present."

William Kuhns, screenwriter, playwright, novelist, and author of 16 books, is currently writing *The BioGRAPHIC Marshall McLuhan*. In 2006 he and Eric McLuhan published Marshall McLuhan's *The Book of Probes* (Gingko Press).

CHRISTGAU *(continued from page 20)*

Etta James, and Chuck Berry. He includes insightful columns on the Spice Girls, 'NSync, Backstreet Boys, and Lady Gaga. Nirvana, The Ramones, The Go-Betweens, even The Moldy Peaches get the Christgau treatment. It's all great fun and often inspiring. One of my favourite offerings is the chapter "Ten-Step Program for Growing Better Ears."

1. Don't give up now.
2. Have a few drinks- smoke a joint, even.
3. At the very least, lighten up willya?
4. Forget about soothing your savage beast.
5. Repeat three times daily: The good old days are the oldest myth in the world. Or, alternately: nostalgia sucks.
6. Go somewhere you think is noisy and stay an hour. Go back.
7. Grasp this truth: Musically, all Americans are part African.
8. Attend a live performance by someone you've never seen before.
9. Play your favorite teenager's favorite album three times while doing something else. Put it away. Play it again two days later and notice what you remember.
10. Spend a week listening to James Brown's *Startime.*

There's more good stuff like this in *Is It Still Good To Ya?* Highly recommended.

Joseph Blake is a founding contributor to PRRB. He writes on music from Victoria, B.C.

ENTHNOLOGIES RIVERS *(continued from page 36)*

within a terribly divided 2019 American political climate, while at the same time rejecting all forms of racism and ethnic prejudice.) With these illusions of what culture is not (but has been claimed to be) out of the way, the old nature-nuture debate does not seem as acute as it was. Nature gives us the raw clay that caused Geertz to say that it is *human* nature to have culture, and for the collective consciousness of a people to identify with it. Lesser animals are presumed to learn to "know" how to live by adaptation. People are more world-creating; as the philosopher Dennett says, "the mind makes up the world." Our human consciousness progressed to where we are allowed to *choose how to respond* to our environment. To the Mayans, a pyramid-topped hill was a door into the house of the gods; to an Amazon land developer it is something to bulldoze out of the way, and both of them are 'correct.'. "We can't rely on our instincts; we need an instruction manual, and culture is the manual" (Menand again). We discover it at the same time we are creating it. It is the pure product of our imagination, laid over the interconnected imagination of others; somehow it coheres into a fabric, a pattern hardened in the crucible of time.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

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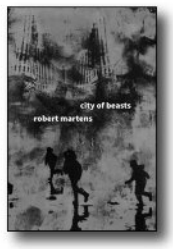

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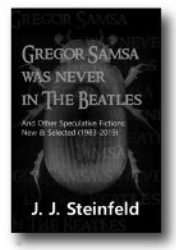

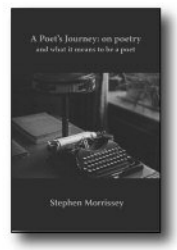

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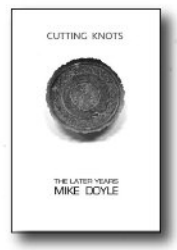

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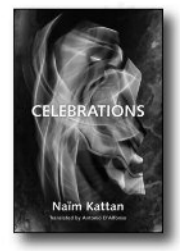

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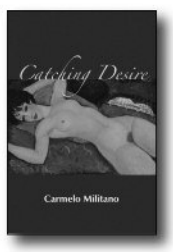

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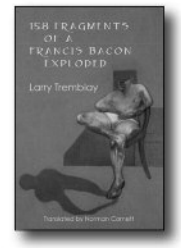

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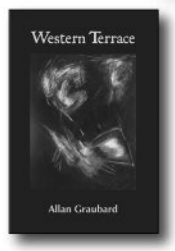

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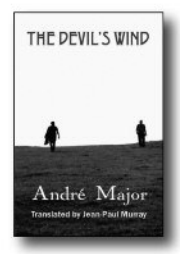

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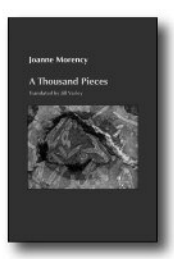

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